

Dietrich Reinhart's Thoughts on SJU Sesquicentennial

Afterword by Dietrich Reinhart, OSB: Saint John's @ 150

When I came to Saint John's as a freshman in 1967, the campus was filled with brand new buildings by Marcel Breuer, the Ecumenical Institute and Minnesota Public Radio were in their first year, the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library in its second, and alumnus Eugene McCarthy was running for president. Saint John's was the most exciting place I had ever been. It opened up to a large world and invited a deep reckoning with human needs. I discovered a group of monks who read books and listened to classical music, who loved conversation and who befriended me. I got to know Prof. Heininger who straight off drafted me into the Mike Shop, Fr. Tom Thole (then Titus) whose room was the heart of Ground Benet, my boss Fr. Vincent who drew me into all manner of projects to support the teaching of history, Bill and Pat VanCleve who opened their house to a small group of students for a Lenten series of discussions, and Br. Willie who wandered the buildings at night making sure all was in order. (None of us was sure what he could see, but he came to know us inside out!)

In 1971, when I joined the monastery, the last novice received by Abbot Baldwin, I came to know the heart of Saint John's, monks of great individuality each with a different take on the Saint John's story, lay colleagues each with a passion for a particular part of Saint John's, alumni from all generations making journeys, often solitary, back to campus as part of life stories I could only imagine, and friends from all parts of the compass coming to experience the life we can so easily take for granted.

I never dreamt I would one day serve as president. I simply showed up. I wanted to help consolidate what had gone before, to be part of Saint John's stretching to meet the needs of a new age. I focused on whatever task was at hand, discovering generous collaboration at every turn. To the extent I have led, it has been within community, not above it. This is the story of lots of people touched by Saint John's. We don't think the world owes us anything. We are in awe of what has been given to us. We just show up. We pull together. And we make a difference.

Saint John's has always been a "work in progress" created by people who show up. The signature characteristics of Saint John's -- monastic life in a new culture, college preparatory, residential liberal arts and graduate theological education, liturgical renewal, ecumenism, an unabashed reckoning with gender, collaborative ministry, cultural preservation, art and architecture, the Bible as inclusive tool for renewal and common purpose -- were not present, full-blown, at the start of things. They were created because courageous people saw new needs in the broader world, most often anticipated them, endured opposition, and pulled together to make new things happen. It is this tradition of transformation to meet the deepest needs of others that drives the story of Saint John's. And that story is not over.