



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



A Tribute to Father Gregory

One of the outstanding Headmasters of Saint Louis Priory School, Father Gregory Mohrman, O.S.B., '76 served the School in this capacity from 1995 to 2005, and so his tenure as Headmaster was longer than that of any other Head of the School except founding Headmaster Father Timothy. There is no way even to begin to describe all the good he did, all the lives he touched, in those ten years. But I would like to draw attention to three areas in which his leadership of the School was especially noteworthy and will have especially long-lasting consequences.

The first area is that of relationships with and among the boys, and interpersonal relationships in general in the School. Father Gregory has been an outstanding "boys' Headmaster". His gift of rapport with the young, and his capacity for wise guidance of them were evident from the beginning of his Headmastership. He was able to combine an easy familiarity with the boys, a true friendship and familial relationship with them, with at the same time a modeling of and insistence upon the highest standards of conduct, moral and spiritual life, and academic work, and so he was outstanding at bringing out the best in boys. This same excellence in interpersonal relationships soon showed itself with respect to the faculty as well, and all the constituencies of the School: the governance of the School, alumni, parents, past parents, friends of the Abbey, and so on. When Father Gregory came on as Headmaster, there was in the School a spirit of seriousness, hard work and achievement, but there was also a good deal of tension: of boys in relation to the faculty, of faculty in relationship to the administration and governing bodies, and so on. One would have described the School then as a very good school, but not as a particularly happy school. Ten years later, the picture has changed dramatically: without any lessening of the high standards of achievement and performance, the School is a much, much happier community, with people knowing where they are, feeling appreciated, confident that there is transparency in all the operations of the School, and at the same time feeling healthily challenged to achieve at the highest standards.

The second area in which Father Gregory's leadership of the School has been especially fine is his work as perfecter of the program of the School. During his Headmastership, the program of the School has expanded remarkably in the areas of the Fine Arts, of student services, of chaplaincy, of athletics and student activities, and of technology and media services, and the administration of all these areas has been strengthened. At the same time, the program has retained its excellence in all the core disciplines. Moreover, early in his Headmastership, with many pressures on him to move in a contrary direction, Father Gregory decisively and definitively reaffirmed the classical orientation of the curriculum as a whole, and upheld the centrality of Theology, the Classics, and the disciplines



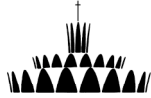
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of Christian humanism as the indispensable and unalterable core of the School's unique program, essential for a Catholic and monastic school.

Then the third area of outstanding leadership: that is the promotion and the deepening of the *Benedictine* character of the School and of the education which it gives. If Father Gregory himself were asked what his chief contribution as Head has been, I expect this is the area he would mention, although with his characteristic self-deprecation, which would not even allow him to notice the first two areas I have mentioned. Certainly the School has always been Benedictine in character, but until the time of Father Gregory this character was maintained and promoted primarily by "osmosis", by the influence on ways of thinking, behaving and working which stemmed from the monks and lay faculty and administrators who had worked closely with them. But beginning in the mid-nineties, this way of maintaining the Benedictine character of the School was no longer sufficient, what with the increasing percentage of lay faculty and administrators, and the much wider range of family backgrounds in terms of familiarity with the monastery from which the School was drawing its students. There was a growing need for an explicit articulation of what it is for a school and an educational program to be Benedictine. Father Gregory has done more to meet this need than any other Headmaster the School has had. His great foundational and seminal idea -- so powerful not least because it can be grasped readily and deeply by others and used fruitfully by them in their own areas of concern -- is that a Benedictine school is in essence very analogous to a Benedictine monastic community, and *is* indeed a Benedictine community, but a *lay* Benedictine community, and that therefore the Rule of Benedict can be used most appropriately and most powerfully as not only the foundation document of the School, but also as its "operation manual" in every area of its life. This one insight alone would have made him one of the outstanding Headmasters of the School. We are all familiar with the many ramifications of this idea which emerged during Father Gregory's tenure as Head, such ramifications as seeing a Benedictine Headmaster as, most fundamentally, an abbot and pastor of the School; as seeing the calling of the School community as the calling to be a community in which everyone -- students, faculty, administration, parents, alumni, etc. -- takes as his guiding principle in relationship to all others: "See Christ, be Christ"; as seeing *Lectio Divina* as a fundamental form of prayer for boys and all constituents of the School community; and so on. I predict with confidence that this articulation and implementation of the Benedictine ideal in our School will be one of the most longlasting consequences of Father Gregory's leadership.

What a fine ten years it has been! It would be very hard indeed to see them come to an end, did we not know that Father Gregory will now be moving on to positions of still greater responsibility in the Abbey and its Family as a whole, and that he will continue to be very much a presence in the School, and very much an ongoing former and promoter of its Benedictine spirit.



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“Well done!” we say to Father Gregory. “Well done, and thank you, and may God reward you and bless you!”

*Thomas Frerking, O.S.B.
Abbot*