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A LIFETIME OF LEADERSHIP

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Sr. Ann Ida was sitting in the lobby reading. Rumors of her punctuality had proven to be true. She had invited me to lunch at the Motherhouse in Dubuque and suggested I arrive by 11:45 a.m. When I got there at 11:30 a.m., thinking I was too early, Sr. Ann Ida greeted me warmly. She wore a simple blue suit and spoke in a calm and soothing manner. I immediately felt at ease.

President of Mundelein College in those critical years before and after Vatican II; champion of the great social movements in American in the second half of the twentieth century; scholar in the fields of education and philosophy; faithful Sister of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and generous daughter of the Catholic Church; Sr. Ann Ida has touched the lives of innumerable people. It can be said without exaggeration that she has inspired both Catholics and non-Catholics alike, not only by bringing a human face to the teachings of the Church, but also by being a powerful force in helping people discover their full potential. Hers is a story which can awaken in men and women an awareness of the gifts they, too, can offer to the world.

The Early Years

Sr. Ann Ida Gannon, baptized Genevieve, was born on April 2, 1915. She was the third eldest of six children, five girls and one boy. Her grandparents on both sides of the family were Irish immigrants who came to America in the mid-nineteenth century. The Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded in 1843, arrived in the United States at almost the same time. The BVM mission was to honor the sacred childhood of Jesus through the education of children, and they soon became known for their ability to adapt to the needs of the people they served. In time, the social activism of the BVM community and Sr. Ann Ida's passion and energy would become inextricably connected.

Sr. Ann Ida grew up in post-World War I America, living with her family in Rogers Park on the north side of Chicago. She attended St. Jerome School (which was staffed by the BVMs) and Immaculata High

School (which was sponsored by the BVMs). It was a markedly different time in the Catholic Church. As Sr. Ann Ida tells it, it was a time when the decrees of the Council of Trent, as presented in the Baltimore Catechism, were taught to young and old alike. It was a time when pastors expected their congregations to acknowledge the infallibility of the Pope, whenever he spoke, no matter the topic. Questioning the Catholic Church was rare. The emphasis was on sin and obedience rather than love and creativity while innovation was looked upon with suspicion.

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Growing up in the Catholic Church, Sr. Ann Ida usually attended daily Mass at St. Margaret Mary's. An English translation of the missal was available, but rarely used. The rosary was said out loud, except during the Sanctus and the Consecration when everyone paused for the sounding of the bells and participated together in moments of undivided reverence. The Catholic Church was perceived as a well-ordered church. In the minds of most Catholics, it had the truth, accurately transmitted through popes and bishops

and authoritatively preached by the local pastor. Even while the Church, in many cases, was still framing religious answers in response to Martin Luther's thesis (1517) and fighting the controversies of the distant past, faith was still viewed as constant and unchanging, and therefore, secure.¹

Post World War I America, on the other hand, was facing its new role as a world leader and lacked the stability enjoyed by the American Church. While the roar of the Twenties gave the impression that a new era had just begun, where it was leading was still unknown. Underneath that optimism, America was still a troubled nation despite its military and financial strength. Segregation was the law in the South and a de facto reality in many places in the North. Anti-Semitism was prevalent,

¹ Sr. Ann Ida Gannon, "The Abiding Dream of the Post-Conciliar Church," Women in Leadership Archives, Mundelein A-V Collection, IPS Leadership Series, tape, June 18, 1990, box 1.

even in the Catholic Church. Women, who had just won the vote in 1920, were still placed in an inferior role to men who were considered to be the “head of the household.” There was also a prejudice against Catholics, which was one of the factors behind Governor Al Smith’s loss to President Herbert Hoover in 1928. All of these undercurrents in American society played an important role in the issues that Sr. Ann Ida would confront later in her life as president of Mundelein College.

In the meantime, though, during her years at Immaculata High School, Sr. Ann Ida played the clarinet in the newly formed school band in 1929, and in the orchestra the following year. She also joined the basketball team, became a reporter and assistant editor of the school newsletter, and served as the senior class treasurer. In 1931, as Sr. Ann Ida recounted, Immaculata High School administered a classification test to all of its students. Produced by a professor at the University of Ohio, the test was designed to gauge the impact of students’ talents and to see if the students were achieving at their full potential. Sr. Ann Ida tied for first place with the score of 90. Since the other student was a senior, and she was a junior, Sr. Ann Ida was given the higher rating.² Realizing her full potential and helping others to do the same became a driving force in Sr. Ann Ida’s life.

Sr. Ann Ida began to discern her call to join the BVM community of sisters during her high school years. After graduation, despite being offered a scholarship to Mundelein College run by the BVM sisters on the north shore of Chicago, she went to Mt. Carmel in Dubuque to enter the BVM community. From September 8, 1932 until March 19, 1935, she lived at the BVM Novitiate Center of the Motherhouse. During that time, she was formally received into the BVM order on March 19, 1933, and given the name Sr. Mary Ann Ida Gannon. When, in the 1960s, the Second Vatican Council afforded her the opportunity to return to her baptismal name, Sr. Ann Ida decided not to do so because her professional and religious ministry had been established as Sister Mary Ann Ida Gannon. She did, however, choose to eliminate the name Mary.

As was the practice for religious women in the 1930s, Sr. Ann Ida was moved about the country as the BVM superiors discerned. Her first assignment was Our Lady of Victory grammar school in Waterloo, Iowa

2 *The Immaculata News*, March 1931.

where she taught fifth and sixth grades from 1935 to 1936. The following year she was transferred to St. Ferdinand grammar school in Chicago where she taught second through fifth grade for four more years. The next teaching assignment, in 1940, led Sr. Ann Ida to St. Charles Borromeo grammar school in Chicago where she taught fifth grade. Having received much of her undergraduate studies while in the novitiate, Sr. Ann Ida continued her studies, attending De Paul University, taking correspondence courses, and going to summer school at least one summer at Mundelein College. When she earned enough credits to graduate, she returned to Clarke College late one summer and took a comprehensive examination in English, which was her major. As a result, she was able to get her degree in English from Clarke College and was sent to St. Mary's High School on Chicago's west side. At St. Mary's she taught English, mathematics, and religion. During her years at St. Mary's, she also completed a Master of Arts in English at Loyola University. Her master's thesis, "An Analysis of John Collop's *Poesis Rediviva*," explored this seventeenth-century English philosopher's views on medicine and religion.³

The BVM order quickly recognized Sr. Ann Ida's intellectual gifts. In 1947, she was sent to St. Louis University to study philosophy. Her doctoral thesis was titled, "The Active Theory of Sensation in Plotinus and St. Augustine." Her thesis pioneered a relationship between Plotinus and St. Augustine which had been previously ignored. Since then, numerous scholars have confirmed that relationship.⁴ In 1951, her studies were capped off by spending eight months in Rome as the companion to a sister whose research required material in the Vatican Library. That fall, upon her return to the United States, Sr. Ann Ida was sent to Mundelein College to head its Department of Philosophy. Located on the far north

3 John Collop was a seventeenth-century English physician, philosopher, essayist, and poet. His *Poesis Rediviva*, written in 1656, was a collection of his poems which ranged from his commentaries on medicine to his reflections on religion.

4 Major works which followed her thesis were: *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man*, A.D. 386-391, Robert J. O'Connell, (Cambridge, Ma., Belknap Harvard Press, 1968); *The Light of the Mind; St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, Ronald H. Nash, (Lexington, Ky., University Press of Kentucky, 1969); *Augustine on the Body*, Margaret R. Miles, (Missoula, Mt., distributed by Scholars Press, 1979). Cf. *From the Circular Soul to the Cracked Self: A Genetic Historiography of Augustine's Anthropology from Cassiciacum to the Confessions*, Daniel Austin Napier, (Vrije Universiteit, 2010), dspace.uvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/16368/1/dissertation.pdf.

side of Chicago and bordering Lake Michigan, Mundelein College was a private, Catholic, all women's institution established by the BVM order in 1930, and dedicated to the rigorous education of all women.

Sr. Ann Ida took me to the second floor where the sisters were gathering for lunch. The cafeteria was modern and airy with a wonderful view of tree-topped hills. As we took our place in line, she spoke to the other sisters, introducing me to those we met, and asking about their health, their families, or their latest projects.

I had to keep reminding myself that Sr. Ann Ida was ninety-six years old. She moved with confidence and was quick to respond to other people's needs. I watched her come to the aid of a sister who was having difficulty maneuvering her walker.

Forward Thinking

As it turned out, Mundelein College was the place to be for a woman who loved learning and was alive with new ideas. In 1951, the energy of Mundelein was fueled by the vision of the BVM sisters who, unlike most Catholics and many religious orders of that era, realized that the winds of change were blowing, and that the Catholic Church in the future would be significantly different from that of its most recent past. Sr. Ann Ida was excited by these possibilities and eager to face whatever might come. Early signs of change could be seen in the promulgation of three important encyclicals by Pope Pius XII, the first two being known as his war-time encyclicals. Central to both of them was the belief that the Catholic Church develops over time and draws on modern scholarship to aid in its self-understanding. Written with great care, these encyclicals indicated a radical break from the static concept of history used over the centuries

by the Church, and underscored the importance of higher education.⁵ Sr. Ann Ida pointed out how radical these encyclicals were to Catholics of the time by recounting that eight years prior to the wartime encyclicals, the book, *The Mystical Body of Christ*, written by Msgr. Fulton Sheen, was criticized for having a Protestant title.⁶

In 1950, however, a fourth encyclical was promulgated. Entitled, *Humani generis* (Of Humanity), this encyclical addressed a number of theological errors and was interpreted by conservative theologians as a retraction of the wartime encyclicals, and was used as a basis for opposing any changes in the Church. Sr. Ann Ida, in one of her lectures, spoke about that interpretation and reminded her audience that Fr. Fenton, a leader among conservative American Catholic theologians, claimed that *Humani generis* attributed infallibility to all papal encyclicals, a position which would be rejected by nearly all Catholic theologians today. Still, Pope Pius XII saw no contradiction between his encyclicals. In his mind, they were all about the need for updating the teachings of the Church.⁷ In Sr. Ann Ida's eyes, these actions at updating showed that he was the harbinger of what was to come, and that the BVM order, despite claims by some conservative theologians, was fully in keeping with the vision of the Holy Father.⁸

In September 1951, Pius XII voiced his opinion on the importance of higher education when he addressed the First International Conference of Teaching Sisters in Rome. While his announcement came as a

5 The wartime encyclicals, promulgated in 1943, were *Mystici corporis Christi*, (The Mystical Body of Christ) and *Divino afflante Spiritu*, (Inspired by the Divine Spirit). The first expanded the notion of who is a part of the Church, and therefore who is saved. The second accepted modern textual analysis as valid for understanding the Bible, and gave prominence to the Greek and Hebrew texts over the Latin translation known as the Vulgate. The third encyclical, promulgated in 1947, was *Mediator Dei*. This encyclical declared a number of changes in the liturgy which, in many cases, harkened back to previous eras.

6 "The Abiding Dream of the Post-Conciliar Church."

7 He began this updating when he restored the Chinese Rite in 1958, and appointed Third World clergy both as priests and bishops. The Chinese Rite was developed by the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) to adapt the Catholic liturgy to the Chinese culture. After being initially accepted by Pope Paul V in 1615, it was condemned by Benedict XIV in 1742. The significance of its restoration was the acknowledgment of the importance of cultural adaptation in liturgy, and idea confirmed by Vatican II.

8 "The Abiding Dream of the Post-Conciliar Church."

surprise to some religious orders, the BVM order was pleased. Since the end of World War II, increasing the number of sisters with advanced degrees was a consistent priority by the order. Upon learning of the Holy Father's challenge, Sr. Mary Josita Baschnagel, the Mother General, called for a nationwide meeting at the Motherhouse in May 1952 "to deliberate with me and the councilors on the question of the study program of our young religious."⁹ Sr. Mary Josita stated her intentions as a discussion of "our weaknesses and our strengths and ways in which we might improve our present program and lengthen the period of religious formation and intellectual development before assigning our young sisters to the demands of the classroom."¹⁰ The BVMs chose to collaborate with other orders of vowed religious in the United States on how to best integrate the development of their young sisters' spiritual formation with their professional formation.¹¹ Because of the BVM community's progressive vision and constant efforts, the junior sisters, soon to be renamed scholastics, arrived at their teaching positions with greater knowledge in their fields of study and a broader understanding of their mission.¹² In the face of an American culture that sought to return women to the home after years of working for the war effort, and the writings of conservative Catholic theologians who warned people against the danger of change, the BVM community fostered an approach to education of women for leadership in both the world and in the Church.

As the head of Mundelein's Department of Philosophy, Sr. Ann Ida furthered these efforts. In 1955, the Eighth General Chapter of the BVM community (1955), established a special committee tasked with exploring theories of education for the young religious and planning the appropriate curriculum for the sisters. Sr. Ann Ida's work on this committee afforded her the opportunity to hear Msgr. John Ellis, Professor of Church

9 Sr. Ann M. Harrington and Prudence Moylan, Ed., *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 125.

10 *Ibid.*, 126.

11 *Idem.*

12 Prudence Moylan, "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," in *Challenged by Coeducation: Women's Colleges Since the 1960s*, ed. Leslie Miller-Bernal and Susan L. Poulson (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 78.

History, speak at the Catholic University of America. In his presentation Msgr. Ellis excoriated the anti-intellectualism he saw in American society in general, and in the American Catholic Church in particular. He argued that the clergy were lacking in any depth of learning, especially in the humanities and the liberal arts, and that the Church needed to not only improve the education of its clergy, but also to provide higher education to the laity at Catholic institutions.¹³ His words were seen as a direct challenge to all Catholic bishops and educators.

Despite the negative reactions he received, Msgr. Ellis' writings echoed what Sr. Ann Ida and the BVM community had known and been developing for years. Sr. Ann Ida saw the critical link between women taking on leadership roles and receiving a first class education. She recognized the impact of his argument for her students at Mundelein and for all Catholic women. His words strengthened her commitment to educating and nurturing outstanding women leaders. Sr. Ann Ida recalled his lecture and the subsequent controversy as the first of three key events which gave direction to her work as president of Mundelein College.¹⁴

Walking side by side, Sr. Ann Ida gave me a tour of the Motherhouse showing me rooms with furniture kept in pristine condition. We settled into a book-lined parlor reminiscent of the nineteenth century. At one point in our conversation, she handed me a folder with a list of her activities, almost day by day, from the time she became president in 1957 to the late 1990s. Later, while reading through her list, I was struck by the magnitude of her work at Mundelein and other institutions of higher learning.

Listening to her stories, I was intrigued by the fact that despite her position as president of Mundelein College and her national acclaim among educators, she has maintained an acute sense of sisterhood with the other members of her community. Interviewing members of her community, I learned that she is known to be an excellent baker. Chocolate cakes are her specialty.

13 C. Z. Chambers, "The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975," (Ph.D. diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1977), 37-40.

14 "The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975," p. 36.

Mundelein: Pioneering Innovation and National Influence

Sr. Ann Ida assumed the office of president at Mundelein College on August 8, 1957.¹⁵ At the time, Mundelein was the largest Catholic women's college in the United States and the first self-contained campus with a skyscraper and an observatory. Shortly after accepting her appointment, Sr. Ann Ida learned that forty-eight BVM sisters would be arriving as students in need of housing while the BVM Scholasticate was being built across the street. According to Sr. Ann Ida, those early days were a time of ordered chaos. "Those were the days when you would deposit something in a room for safe-keeping and return an hour later to find the door removed and the furniture in the corridor."¹⁶

In the midst of this constant flux, Sr. Ann Ida began to lead Mundelein into the future. As one of her first initiatives, she insisted that a Department of Theology be established. From her own graduate experiences, she knew that advanced courses in Catholic theology were typically restricted to men, almost all of whom were either priests or seminarians. Given her fervent belief that higher education in all fields of learning, including theology, was necessary for women to thrive in the postwar world, Sr. Ann Ida was determined to make this department a reality. With this in mind, she arranged for Sr. Carol Frances Jegen, BVM, to be assigned to Mundelein for the 1957-58 academic year.

Sr. Carol Frances had just received a master's degree in theology from Marquette University. She had been studying philosophy at St. Louis University, like Sr. Ann Ida had, when the BVM order sent her to Marquette. For the first time ever, women were allowed to study theology at Marquette, but only during the summer. Apparently the appointment to Mundelein came as such a surprise to Sr. Carol Frances who, upon her arrival at Mundelein, refrained from taking her belongings out of the cab. She believed the assignment was a mistake. Sr. Ann Ida had to leave Holy Hour to inform Sr. Carol Frances that she could indeed remove her belongings and that she would be given further information about her

15 In 1958, Sr. Ann Ida was the Superior for approximately 80 sisters. The offices of Superior and President were officially separated on August 15, 1963 when Sr. Mary Emily was designated the Superior and Sr. Ann Ida was reappointed as President.

16 "The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975," pp. 53-54.

assignment the next day. From the tone in her voice, Sr. Carol Frances understood she would be working for someone with a strong personality, a trait she deeply admired.¹⁷

By 1961, the theology department had grown significantly and began to offer a summer course to seventy-five BVM sisters teaching high school religion and to fifteen diocesan priests.¹⁸ This course became the foundation of Mundelein's graduate program in theology. In her typical

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forward thinking fashion, Sr. Ann Ida quickly realized the potential within the department and decided to not only bring Catholic theology to the BVM community and other religious orders, but also to the Catholic laity and members of the Protestant and Jewish faiths. Courses for non-credit students were soon added and lay women of all faiths began receiving an education in contemporary theology. On Saturday mornings, McCormick Hall was packed with over two hundred women gathered to hear lectures by some of the most noteworthy theologians of the day.¹⁹ These lectures, unlike the more intellectual abstractions common in American seminaries, addressed issues of peace and social justice. The series continued in the 1970s, adding speakers from Pax Christi, an organization committed to creating peace through nonviolence, and Bread for the World, an advocacy group to end world hunger.

But in 1957, less than three months into Sr. Ann Ida's first year as president of Mundelein College, the Soviet Union launched the satellite,

¹⁷ Interview with Sr. Carol Francis Jegen, BVM, December 13, 2010.

¹⁸ "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 79.

¹⁹ On November 12, 1964, the world renowned theologian, Paul Tillich, spoke on his book, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*.

Sputnik I, and the landscape of higher education was radically changed. According to Sr. Ann Ida, this was the second of the three major events that shaped the direction of her presidency. Looking back on it now, after seeing the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, it is hard to capture the emotional impact of the Sputnik launch and the threat that followed in its wake. Until that day, the majority of Americans, including most physicists, thought such an accomplishment was beyond the resources and capabilities of the Soviet Union. For the United States to be completely wrong in this matter raised the question as to whether the government was wrong about how great a danger the Soviet Union really was. The Sputnik launch directly challenged the supremacy of American technical know-how, and a growing sense of fear, humiliation, and confusion spread across the country.²⁰

The shock of this event not only caused a panic among pundits and politicians; it fueled a crisis in education and gave fire to the need for greater access to higher education. This unleashed federal funds to Church-related institutions for the study of science and foreign languages. Sr. Ann Ida took immediate action and acquired government money to sponsor special summer programs for teachers of French in Mundelein's renewed Language Department.²¹ Federal grants were also used to build a language laboratory with individual student booths, the first of its kind in the State of Illinois.²² In addition, after attending the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges in 1959, Sr. Ann Ida returned to Mundelein convinced that a dormitory, planned by her predecessor, could also be constructed using federal funds. As a result of her initiative, Mundelein received a low interest loan, and Coffey Hall was built in the fall of 1962.

The third major event in 1957 that shaped Sr. Ann Ida's presidency came through a phone call. The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association asked if Sr. Ann Ida would be willing to lead Mundelein through an experimental accreditation

20 Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade—And After: 1945-1960* (New York, Random House, 1960), 309-310.

21 "The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975," p. 37.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

process. This new process, unlike the more traditional ten-year reviews Mundelein had received since its original accreditation in 1937, would involve the cooperation of both administration and faculty and would include visits from an esteemed team of educators. This self-study would help Mundelein identify its strengths and areas for growth, would call for the updating of its mission statement, uniting everyone in working toward a common end. Divided into two time periods, 1957 to 1962 and 1962 to 1967,²³ this process would fuel new ideas and greater responsiveness to student needs for years to come.

Such a challenge, Sr. Ann Ida realized, would affect the entire institution—teachers, students, and administrators. She said yes without hesitation. In her mind, the future of Mundelein was not going to be the comfortable finishing school prevalent in American society during the first half of the twentieth century. Nor was it to be a school to train women as secretaries, another popular perception. Instead, Mundelein was to be a place that dared its students to be whatever they wanted to be, to achieve beyond their own expectations. As Sr. Ann Ida later explained, “One way in which Mundelein can fail a superior student is to eliminate from her total college experience any situation in which she must realistically face the fact that she may not succeed with her usual ease.”²⁴

That December, Mundelein began preparing for the self-study. One of the requirements was to publish the professional rank of each faculty member in the college catalog. This would be the first time that a BVM sister would learn of her ranking. Prior to publication, Sr. Ann Ida slipped an envelope under the door of each sister’s room explaining her rank and offering an invitation to meet together if there were any questions. Sr. Ann Ida was gratified to learn that the sisters were pleased with this step toward professionalizing their roles. A study of college salaries was also undertaken. While Mundelein showed that its salaries were average for a college of its size, salaries at institutions of higher education across the country had seen little improvement since 1951. These preparations were just the beginning of an intense institutional analysis.

23 “The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975,” p. 48 and pp. 71-72.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

During the spring of 1958, the visiting team, led by Dr. Lewis Mayhew of Michigan State University; Fr. Philip Moore, CSC, vice-president of the academic affairs at Notre Dame; and Dr. Howard W. Richardson, president of Franklin College, engaged the administration and faculty in an aggressive self-examination. Initially, administrators and faculty cited the need to expand the size of the faculty, to increase the percentage of faculty who had completed doctoral studies, and to subsequently raise salaries. To that end, Sr. Ann Ida, having already been sending sisters from Mundelein to pursue their PhDs in a variety of subjects, redoubled her efforts in this matter as well as in raising salaries and increasing the size of the faculty. A need for more support staff and a residence hall for students was also identified.²⁵

Another outgrowth of the self-study was the redesign of the semester system. In order to deepen student learning, Mundelein changed its academic year from a semester to a trimester calendar of three ten-week terms. With fewer courses in each term, students could concentrate more intently and still earn the same number of semester hours for the year. A core curriculum was also added to distribute basic requirements over the four years. In reference to the trimester, Professor Prudence Moylan wrote, “The faculty envisioned this as a capstone experience that would enable students to integrate their liberal arts education.”²⁶

The spirit of the self-study also led to greater self-direction among students and to the development, in 1970, of an experimental program known as Mandala. Guided by a faculty adviser, Mandala students designed their own course of study. This program, along with the creation of the Degree Completion Program for women who had discontinued their education, allowed for the existence of traditional and non-traditional curricula on one campus. Over the years, both programs proved to be successful. It should be noted that two students in the Mandala program chose to pursue majors outside existing academic departments. One sought a major in gerontology and the other a major in play writing. As a result, however, the one went on to become a leading gerontologist

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

26 “A Catholic Women’s College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College,” p. 83.

while the other became an Emmy-winning producer.²⁷ The Degree Completion Program also expanded to include weekend classes for working women and men. Without a doubt, the results of the self-study exerted a lasting positive influence on both students and teachers alike.

Not only did this self-study change the academic life at Mundelein, but it also encouraged Sr. Ann Ida's own professional growth. This came about when Dr. Mayhew advised her that being more visible on

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the national scene, which at that time was dominated by large male-run institutions, was of primary importance. As a practical suggestion, he offered the idea of her becoming active in national organizations like the Association of American Colleges,²⁸ and the American Council on Education. Sr. Ann Ida saw the wisdom of this suggestion and became an active member of both organizations. In 1969 she was elected chair of the AAC. She was only the fourth woman and the first religious sister to serve in that position. In 1973 she was elected chair of the ACE. Though Dr. Mayhew did not suggest that she become a member of the

North Central Commission, which did not include women at the time, Sr. Ann Ida became a member. In 1968, she was the first woman to serve as a member of a self-study visiting team. In 1971, she was elected to the Executive Board of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, and from 1974 to 1978 she served first as vice-chair and later as chair. She was also elected to the Board of Directors of the North Central Association in 1973 and by 1978 was made an honorary member. Today, due in part to Sr. Ann Ida's example, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education has more than 200 female members.

²⁷ *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, p. 235.

²⁸ In 1995 the organization changed its name to the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Sr. Ann Ida's commitment to her own professional growth resonated deeply with her views of Mundelein students and alumnae at the time. Sr. Ann Ida believed in listening to the students on campus and also hearing the needs of the alumnae. She frequented the student cafeteria and dormitory common areas, letting students know how much she cared about them and encouraging them to pursue their dreams. Through their voices, she learned that a change in attitude toward women was taking place in America. Women were looking for ways to break out from their relatively isolated lives and finding opportunities to exchange ideas. Following their lead, Sr. Ann Ida applied for a grant to attend an institute for new college presidents at Harvard University in the summer of 1958. There, she was able to discuss her experiences and exchange ideas with presidents from educational institutions large and small, public and independent. Even though the institute brought presidents together from across the country, Sr. Ann Ida was one of only two women. She and Sr. Marie Louise, O.P., of Albertus Magnus College in Connecticut, were also the only two presidents representing Catholic institutions.

While at Harvard, Sr. Ann Ida was strongly encouraged to join a variety of committees and boards. In no time at all, her ability to see issues clearly, to anticipate problems, and to balance different perspectives made her someone who was constantly sought out for membership on national boards and committees. As one BVM sister explained, "In many cases she was not only the first woman, but also the first Catholic. She rarely said no to these requests because she wanted to move forward the women's movement." In the years ahead, Sr. Ann Ida's contribution to higher education would be recognized by many institutions. In May 1968, she was awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. This was the first honorary degree presented by the conservative Luther College to a Catholic.²⁹

The success of the self-study required Sr. Ann Ida to maintain a sense of balance in her endeavor to ensure all voices were heard. From the start, she understood the dangers involved in breaking new ground in education, but she also saw the need to explore new ideas if Mundelein students were to truly develop to their full potential. As one sister who

29 "The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975," p. 67.

worked with Sr. Ann Ida explained, “She always looked at both sides of an issue, and she always had a plan. This does not mean she always reached a consensus even though she sought broad representation of opinions. She even had students on the faculty council.”

Sr. Ann Ida also liked to challenge the BVM sisters to expand their horizons once they arrived at Mundelein. Much like Sr. Carol Frances, Sr. Joan Frances Crowley, BVM, was surprised to be assigned to Mundelein in mid-year to teach history. At the end of the 1961-62 academic year, she was called to the parlor to speak to Sr. Ann Ida, and was surprised again when she was asked to be the Dean of Residence at the new Coffey Hall. She tried to decline the appointment, but Sr. Ann Ida calmly yet firmly assured Sr. Joan Frances that she could handle the assignment, thus ending the discussion.³⁰

In addition to her strength of character, Sr. Ann Ida possessed a quiet determination, as captured in the photograph on display today in the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership. The picture was taken in January 1967. Despite warnings of an impending snow storm, Sr. Ann Ida ventured outside. Only after a tenacious struggle through stalled traffic, which blocked the one-way streets, and through blinding snow which threatened to bring her progress to a halt, did she finally arrive at the studio. Seated before the camera, she took a deep breath and smiled. People who see that picture today see a woman of peaceful dignity, undisturbed by her trek there or the prospects of a long and treacherous journey home. Her quiet determination would serve her well as she faced the challenges that lay before her.

From this self-study, Mundelein College changed its self-understanding. The mission statement of 1938 to 1962 described the role of Mundelein: “to equip successive generations of young women, through intellectual, moral, and religious training, for intelligent, well-poised living, for social and civic leadership, and for service to Church and State.”³¹ 1962, the objective of Mundelein College became the development of the “personal resources of each individual student” and in accordance with the encyclical of Pius XII, to “prepare man for what he must be and for

30 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, pp. 155-6.

31 Women in Leadership Archives, Mundelein Collection, folder A, 2, 2.

what he must do here below, in order to attain the end for which he was created.³² This shifted the goal from helping women become effective servants of Church and State to helping women become the person God has created them to be.

The profound changes that grew out of the self-study and the excitement that it raised among faculty and students did not go unnoticed. Reflecting on the accomplishments Mundelein achieved, the Director of the Danforth Foundation Commission wrote, “I consider the Mundelein self-study, initiated by Sr. Mary Ann Ida, the president, and directed by Dr. Norbert Hruby, the vice-president, one of the more significant things that has been done in American higher education in the last decade. This has been a remarkably well planned and thorough study. I know of only one or two other colleges in the United States that have undertaken institutional analyses that could be compared with that of Mundelein . . . Mundelein is also to be congratulated on using the results of its study as a basis for major changes in its educational program. The revisions that have been undertaken should, in my judgment, assure Mundelein students better liberal education than they might expect to get in most institutions.”³³

Sitting with Sr. Ann Ida, I noticed how graciously she responded to my questions. This did not come as a surprise me. She is very attentive to other people’s feelings, careful not to offend or to dismiss their ideas. Her gentle approach always puts people at ease.

When I mentioned that I had the pleasure of interviewing her old friend, Rabbi Herman Schaalman of Temple Emanuel, Sr. Ann Ida smiled warmly. Mundelein developed a rich relationship with Temple Emanuel when many in the Church still held negative views toward the Jewish faith. Rabbi Schaalman chuckled when he told me that he didn’t recognize her when she first stopped wearing her traditional BVM habit.

32 Idem.

33 Manning M. Pattillo to Robert J. Leuver, CMF, Editor, “U.S. Catholic,” 16 June 1965, Chicago, Mundelein College Archives.

Mundelein: Creating Closer Ties to the Jewish Community

In 1958, the beginning of Sr. Ann Ida's second year as president, another event far from Chicago was shaking the Catholic world. Within months of his election, Pope John XXIII astonished Catholics and non-Catholics by announcing to the world that there would be an ecumenical council to update the Catholic Church in response to the "signs of the times."³⁴ Theologians who held Pope Pious XII's encyclical, *Humani generis*, to be a repudiation of any change in the Church were shocked to learn that John XXIII did not agree. Sr. Ann Ida described the Second Vatican Council as the beginning of an unnamed phase in the history of the Church, a phase that recognized the end of a Christian culture and the development of a world culture. She praised John XXIII for moving the Catholic Church beyond its self-understanding as a closed citadel. She often referred to the Second Vatican Council as a gift John XXIII gave the Church—a gift that taught Catholics to listen to the many voices of the Church, including the negative ones, and to be mindful of the dangers of staying imprisoned in the past.³⁵

With the dawning of a new day in the Church, the BVM order took a leading role in bringing the decisions of Vatican II to the world. Sr. Ann Ida quickly found herself at the cutting edge of these new policies. Guided by her vision of a more inclusive Church, Sr. Ann Ida ushered in a series of dramatic changes that reflected the wisdom of Vatican II. Among these innovations were the establishment of a development department; the creation of the Mundelein Center for Religious Education; the continual improvement of Jewish-Christian relations; the promotion of studies in peace and justice; and the founding of the Hispanic Institute.³⁶ Mundelein's commitment to the Hispanic community expanded in 1964 with what became the Annual Conference of Catholic Inter-American Cooperative Program. Attuned to Vatican II's efforts at liturgical reform,

34 The admonition that the Church must read the "signs of the times" first appeared as an important feature in contemporary theology with the encyclical of John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth), April 11, 1963. Its importance was heightened by its inclusion in Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," *Gaudium et spes*, December 7, 1965.

35 "The Abiding Dream of the Post-Conciliar Church."

36 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, pp. 106-107.

Mundelein was the first Catholic institution in Chicago to host a demonstration Mass in English, as distinct from the traditional Latin Mass.

In addition to working for causes within the Catholic Church, Sr. Ann Ida worked to improve inter-religious understanding and bring Jewish and Catholic communities closer together. Holding Jews in contempt had become so prevalent in the mid-twentieth century that many Catholics saw no contradiction between that contempt and Christian piety. Sr. Ann Ida, however, felt differently. In the first of many initiatives, she invited Dr. Hans Adler, a renowned writer and Holocaust survivor, to speak at Mundelein. She also participated in a conference co-sponsored by the Religious Education Association of Metropolitan Chicago, of which Sr. Ann Ida was a leading member, and the American Jewish Committee. The purpose of the conference was to analyze textbooks published by Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish presses and assess the degree to which religious bigotry was being inculcated through the use of these textbooks in parochial schools.³⁷ In 1962, when the National Conference of Christians and Jews held its first National Institute in Washington, D.C., Sr. Ann Ida was included among its select group of distinguished members. Hoping to further this work on a national level, she was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Religious Education Association in 1963. She would later serve as the first woman president of that association.

Closer to home, Sr. Ann Ida participated in a lecture exchange in an effort to strengthen the bonds between Chicago's Catholic and Jewish communities. She discussed Catholic theology at Temple Emanuel while Rabbi Herman Schaalman of Temple Emanuel came to Mundelein to speak on Jewish theology. Out of these exchanges, a sense of cooperation and friendship grew between the institutions, the students, and their leaders. The solidarity between Mundelein and Temple Emanuel was publicly demonstrated when approximately 200 sisters, led by Sr. Carol Frances Jegen, BVM, walked from Mundelein along the busy Sheridan Road to Temple Emanuel. This memory still moves Rabbi Schaalman to tears.³⁸ Sr. Ann Ida also spoke at Temple Sholom, Chicago; Sinai Congre-

37 "The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975," p. 65.

38 Interview with Rabbi Herman E. Schaalman, April 12, 2011.

gation, Chicago; Temple Beth-El, Rockford; Beth Am Synagogue, South Shore; Temple Jeremiah, Winnetka; and many more.

This growing relationship between Mundelein and the Jewish community went even deeper when one of the Jewish women attending a Jewish/Christian dialogue suggested that Christians and Jews should pray together. From this suggestion came the first Seder shared between Mundelein and Temple Emanuel — and the start of a lasting tradition.

**Sr. Ann Ida's
visionary leadership
and commitment
to the Jewish
community was
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the Second Vatican
Council.**

Sr. Ann Ida further strengthened this mutual appreciation by including Jewish professors as faculty. One notable academic was Dr. Byron Sherwin, an author and lecturer who taught Jewish mysticism and spirituality. Another was Rabbi Sherwin, who later became the vice-president and academic dean of Spertus College of Jewish Studies in Chicago.³⁹ Moreover, in 1967, when Mundelein reformed its charter, a process fully supported by Sr. Ann Ida, the new charter allowed for the first lay man and person of the Jewish faith, Lee Schooler, to be elected to the Board of Trustees.⁴⁰

Sr. Ann Ida's visionary leadership and commitment to the Jewish community was fully endorsed by the Second Vatican Council. The declaration, *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Age), explained that because "Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be obtained, especially, by way of biblical and theological inquiry and through friendly discussions."⁴¹ To ensure the longevity of these inter-

39 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, pp. 12-113. In 1993, Spertus College of Jewish Studies was renamed Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

40 "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a U "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 80.

41 *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., (Newport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1992) vol. 1, 741.

religious programs, Sr. Ann Ida kept Mundelein's mission statement relevant in order to reflect "the ecumenical energies of the Second Vatican Council and the recognition of the principles of religious freedom, as well as of the changing status of women in U.S. Society."⁴² In 1985, when the Archdiocese of Chicago planned to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, members of the Jewish community asked that it take place at Mundelein College. Sr. Ann Ida, in cooperation with Cardinal Bernardin, made this happen.

When I asked Sr. Ann Ida about the 1960s, her expression became serious. Having been appointed president in 1957, she had the challenge of leading Mundelein through a series of historic events that threatened to tear the country apart. Sr. Ann Ida described that era as a time of transformation as well as immense conflict over racism, sexism, and the war in Vietnam. Then she reminded me that these challenges also brought to America a series of important insights which has led to a deeper self-understanding.

Mundelein: Leading for Change

America in the 1960s is often described as a time of great turmoil and distrust. Hippy communes were formed by those who chose to drop out of mainstream society because it was seen as hopelessly corrupt. The Civil Rights Movement marched through the south, enduring hatred and injustice, while the Black Panthers introduced a new form of militant politics in the north. Feminist protesters challenged gender roles to an extent never known in American history. Antiwar demonstrations, seen every night through the power of television, made people wonder if the country was falling apart. Mundelein was not immune to the turmoil. All of those forces galvanized on campus and demanded that Sr. Ann Ida be a leader of profound wisdom. Anything less would have been disastrous.

⁴² "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 83.

Given the considerable hostility toward the African American community that permeated the country, Sr. Ann Ida wanted to forge new understandings. The Supreme Court had recently ruled in *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) that the “separate but equal” policy of public schools was unconstitutional. In Chicago, however, neighborhoods were still racially divided and African Americans were often forced to live in substandard housing and attend schools that were still separate and still unequal. To make matters worse, Chicago Catholics were as prone to racism as anyone else. Msgr. John Egan, a social activist in Chicago, captured this tension when he wrote, “Sad as it is for [me] to report, the truth is that many of our own people are energetic in their support of racial segregation. Chicago’s worst race disturbances have taken place in the city’s Catholic neighborhoods.”⁴³

Sr. Ann Ida knew that Mundelein’s response to racial inequity needed to be dramatically different. In 1958, Sr. Ann Ida was honored to give the welcoming address to the first national conference of the Catholic Interracial Council. Building on that enthusiasm, the following year Mundelein sponsored an Institute on African Affairs to explore the role of the United States in Africa.⁴⁴ By the mid-1960s, the Civil Rights Movement had gained momentum. On March 23, 1965, eight faculty members, which included seven BVM sisters, one lay faculty member and twenty-eight students boarded a bus for a twenty-hour ride to Selma, Alabama, where earlier in the month peaceful protesters had been brutalized by the police in what became known as Bloody Sunday. Inspired by the BVM community’s commitment to social justice, and given the wholehearted support of Sr. Ann Ida, the Mundelein delegation joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and thousands of others on a protest march from Selma to

43 Monsignor John J. Egan, “A Report to the Archbishop, General Picture of Chicago and the Present Situation.” box 51/1, “John Egan Collection” Notre Dame Archives, Notre Dame. It was well known that Monsignor Patrick Molloy of St. Leo, then the largest Catholic parish in the country, freely used racial slurs and was unwelcoming toward Black Catholics. Nevertheless, in response to Monsignor Egan and Cardinal Meyer, Fr. Molloy joined forces with Egan and the Organization for the Southwest Community. Though the OSC improved the living conditions of African Americans in Chicago, it did not get consistent support from Catholic clergy.

44 “The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975,” pp. 59-60.

the state capital at Montgomery.⁴⁵ Together, they walked fifty-four miles in solidarity with the African American community. The BVM sisters, it should be noted, were the only religious sisters to walk the entire way and later testified before Congress about their experiences on the march.

Closer to home, Sr. Ann Ida accepted the opportunity to launch Upward Bound, a federally funded summer program designed to prepare minority high school graduates for college. Mundelein was one of the first colleges to host Upward Bound and led the way for other institutions of higher learning to follow suit. Chicago's current Cook County Clerk, David Orr, spent the summers of 1967, 1968, and 1969, teaching American history to inner-city girls as part of Mundelein's Upward Bound program.⁴⁶ He later returned to Mundelein as a history professor, and taught there for ten years.

By 1968, however, a year that would be emblazoned on the minds and hearts of all Americans, the struggle for racial equality suffered a tragic loss. Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, and the hopes and dreams of millions were shattered. In response to his death, Mundelein College United Black Students Association (MUCUBA) was formed with the aid of a group of Black Panthers from Northwestern University.⁴⁷ While angry protests spread like wildfire after the assassination of Dr. King, MUCUBA students remained incommunicado. When they emerged two days later, they staged a protest at Mundelein that demanded attention be paid to the racial inequities on campus, and threatened to divide the students along racial lines.

Diane Allen, a sociology major and founding member of MUCUBA, described the racial barriers on campus, as stated in the Mundelein newspaper, *The Skyscraper*, "Black music was not played at mixers. Weekend trips to colleges were planned for colleges that had few black students. Humanities III, the music appreciation course, included no black composers or musicians."⁴⁸ To raise awareness of their cause, African American

45 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, p. 172.

46 *Ibid.* 190-191. In 1979, David Orr ran for alderman in Forty-ninth Ward, the Rogers Park area. He won that race. A little over ten years later, he was elected Cook County Clerk.

47 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, p. 86.

48 *The Skyscraper*, October 4, 1968.

students elected to stop speaking to white students and faculty members outside of the classroom. Reflecting on this time at Mundelein, Sr. Blanche Marie Gallagher, BVM, chair of the department of visual arts, noted that while “many white students supported the black students in their practice of separatism, it was a painful experience for students and faculty.”⁴⁹

As president, Sr. Ann Ida was quick to respond. She brought all the students and faculty together in Galvin Hall and invited MUCUBA to present their concerns. Given her talent for honoring all sides of a situation, she listened thoughtfully and attentively as the students spoke and used diplomacy to soothe the rising tension among students and between students and faculty. By the end of this meeting, Sr. Ann Ida negotiated an agreement with the students allowing for certain accommodations and the easing of racial tensions. As a result, MUCUBA was given a place in Piper Hall for a union of their own; and were given room 100 as their own dining room.⁵⁰

More important than the individual concessions was the spirit of understanding shown by Sr. Ann Ida. Diane Allen “paid great tribute to President Ann Ida Gannon’s understanding and support as she and her black sisters throughout the country began to find their voices in protest against a racist American society.”⁵¹ Reflecting on the protest, Sr. Ann Ida wrote, “Through the black student’s demands it was as if a very bright light was shown on our existence here at Mundelein ... the real task is to look within ourselves, to understand the meaning of racism and to leave Mundelein as changed persons. As president of Mundelein, I thank the black students.”⁵²

The following spring, Mundelein faculty voted to increase the proportion of minority students — African Americans, Native Americans and Hispanics — by at least ten percent in the incoming class.

Sr. Ann Ida’s ability to honor multiple perspectives served her well in her efforts to foster gender equality on campus. In the 1960s, a new consciousness toward the role of women in American society was emerging. This consciousness was given great impetus by Gloria Steinem and

49 *Mundelein voices: The women’s college experience, 1930-1991*, p. 86.

50 *Mundelein voices: The women’s college experience, 1931-1991*, p. 86.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

52 *Random Notes of Sr. Ann Ida (1957-75)*, p. 6, dated May 26, 1970.

Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*. As leading feminists, they argued that women were being forced to choose between a career and marriage.⁵³ Sr. Ann Ida believed firmly in improving women's place in American society, but she disapproved of the extremist language many feminists used. She chose to take a more moderate yet unwavering approach which she found to be more effective in opening doors of opportunity to women. Her stance, however, did not prevent her from bringing to Mundelein such vocal promoters of women's equality as Congresswoman Bella Abzug who, along with Friedan and Steinem, founded the National Women's Political Caucus.

Throughout this time, Sr. Ann Ida continued to point out that furthering gender equality would benefit both sexes. During her tenure as president, several lay men took on prominent roles, including Dr. Norbert Hruby, who was appointed the first vice-president of the college in 1962, and Daniel Cahill, who was hired as the Public Relations Director and became vice-president in 1965.⁵⁴ Sr. Ann Ida saw these appointments as an essential development for all women's colleges. Dr. Michael Fortune, one of the first men to teach at Mundelein College, saw his appointment in the same light. He observed her efforts at gender equality as coinciding with that of Vatican II which saw the role of feminism as an important development in the industrialized world, thus establishing gender equality as an important part of Catholic theology.⁵⁵ Dr. Fortune wrote, "I found Sister Ann Ida Gannon to be a most creative and insightful woman who placed Mundelein at the center of a movement initiated by the Second Vatican Council."⁵⁶

Sr. Ann Ida continued to point out that furthering gender equality would benefit both sexes.

53 Betty Friedan was also the founder of the National Organization for Women.

54 "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 81-82.

55 *Gaudium et spes* (The Constitution of the Church in the Modern World) 8.

56 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, p. 227.

By 1968, however, the question of admitting male students became unavoidable. Loyola University's Lakeshore campus lifted its restrictions on female students in 1965. Two years later, Mundelein joined an association of small coeducational colleges, Central States College Association (CSCA). The combination of these two events led quickly to men requesting entrance into Mundelein. Sr. Ann Ida was now faced with the delicate balancing act of including male students while still maintaining Mundelein's identity as a women's college. Even as the Board of Trustees amended the articles of incorporation to allow for male students, Sr. Ann Ida let it be known that the intent of this amendment was not to make Mundelein a co-education institution in the full sense of the term. She knew well the role of women's colleges in enabling young women to become leaders, particularly in a society that was still ambivalent about gender equality. To that end, the Women's Study Committee was inaugurated at Mundelein in 1971 and led to the creation of an interdisciplinary study on women issues.⁵⁷

When questioned about these developments, Sr. Ann Ida, who seemed to always have pertinent facts at her fingertips, liked to point out that the BVM order was founded when "neither pious societies nor secular governments were interested in educating women."⁵⁸ As such, Mundelein enrolled students regardless of their religion. Sr. Ann Ida was proud of her community and its consistent history of standing at the forefront of change, particularly where social justice was concerned.⁵⁹ "Every aspect of a [woman's] college ...," she wrote in 1973, "witnesses to achievements for women in governance, faculty, academic achievement, student participation."⁶⁰ From 1965 to 1971, Sr. Ann Ida was the chair of the Illinois Commission on the Status of Women. She would also become an ardent supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Known nationally for her leadership abilities, Sr. Ann Ida was appointed by President Nixon to the Presidential Task Force on Women's

57 "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 86.

58 Interview of Sister Ann Ida Gannon by Mel Bellair, WBBM radio station, April 1969. Women in Leadership Archives, the Mundelein College A-V Collection, box 1.

59 *Idem*.

60 "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 86.

Rights and Responsibilities in 1969. This task force was designed to address the severe shortage of women in government. As one of the eleven women and two men on the task force, Sr. Ann Ida welcomed this opportunity to not only bring more women into positions of responsibility in government, but to also bring the issue of gender equality into the mainstream of American society. Within four years, the number of women in top government positions had quadrupled and an oral history project was initiated to capture the groundbreaking work of this task force and the men and women behind it.

From her work on the Presidential Task Force, Sr. Ann Ida was invited to be part of the Secretary of the Navy's Advisory Board on Education and Training (SABET).⁶¹ In this new capacity she made recommendations on the educational and training programs used by the Navy, reviewed the role of women in the Navy, and advised the Navy on the best ways to integrate women into the service. As a member of SABET, Sr. Ann Ida was the first religious sister, and probably the first woman, to ride in a military submarine.

Before the 1960s were over, Sr. Ann Ida's leadership would be tested once again, this time on the political front. The widespread social movements of the 1960s, known for raising the issues of racial equality and women's rights, soon became immersed in the controversy over the Vietnam War. In January 1968, Communist forces in Vietnam executed the Tet Offensive, named for the Lunar New Year celebration Tet Nguyn Dan. It was the first military effort on the part of the Communist forces that showed their ability to execute a military offensive on a grand scale. Although they were ultimately defeated, the Tet Offensive came as such a surprise to the American public that it became a turning point in the country's attitude toward the war. The Vietcong could no longer be dismissed as a small group of dissidents, and the war could no longer be described as a series of minor skirmishes.

Many of the students at Mundelein sympathized with the antiwar demonstrators that were on college campuses around the country. Al

61 Sr. Ann Ida was a member of SABET from 1975 to 1980. Women in Leadership Archives, unprocessed material, box 6.

Lowenstein of Americans for Democratic Action had spoken at Mundelein prior to the Tet Offensive. He advised the students, in no uncertain terms, not to support Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan or President Lyndon B. Johnson in the upcoming presidential election.⁶² He saw President Kennedy's policies shortly before his assassination as indicating his intention to withdraw military forces from Vietnam, and President Johnson's policies as an acceleration of military action. While President Johnson was able to pass into law many of the bills President Kennedy could not, particularly the civil rights legislation, President Johnson's leadership led the country further and further into this self-destructive war. Lowenstein's address in the fall of 1967 was a foretaste of antiwar conflict that would erupt on campus.

Sr. Ann Ida reacted with both compassion and restraint as she worked with students and faculty to find a proper response to their anger over the war. In April 1968, the Mundelein Student Mobilization sponsored an all day teach-in to observe the "international student-faculty strike of classes day."⁶³ The purpose of the strike was threefold: to call for an immediate stop to the war in Vietnam, to end racial oppression, and to abolish the draft. As stated in the Mundelein newspaper, *The Skyscraper*, the purpose was not "that students and faculty should cut all classes, but rather that they should devote the day to antiwar activities."⁶⁴ Tensions increased that April when Mundelein students were among the demonstrators at a protest broken up by the Chicago police. Just two months later Robert Kennedy was assassinated. As an ardent opponent of the war, his death came as a shock to the nation. The deaths of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, both in the same year, heightened the conflicts between political factions and fueled extremists on the Right and the Left.

The following fall Richard Nixon won a closely contested election. During his campaign he stated that "new leadership will end the war,"

62 Lowenstein, who had received a J.D. degree from Yale Law School in 1954, began the Dump Johnson movement along with Midge Miller, a 1960s activist for women's rights. Lowenstein was a congressman from 1968 to 1970.

63 *The Skyscraper*, April 26, 1968, vol. xxxviii, no. 18, p. 1.

64 *Idem*.

but he refused to reveal his plan.⁶⁵ He claimed that such a revelation would endanger the negotiations that were taking place. Once in office, President Nixon initiated a program of intensive bombing of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos from March 1969 to May 1970. The bombings failed to end the war, and the intensity of the antiwar demonstrations dramatically increased. Meanwhile, attempts at addressing the war from a Catholic perspective became even more difficult, and even more necessary, when members of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a group of demonstrators at Kent State University. Four students were killed and nine were wounded. Protestors called for the closing down of colleges and universities all over the country until the war was stopped.

Many students and members of the faculty at Mundelein agreed with this plan. Sr. Ann Ida's reaction could be characterized as nothing less than grace under pressure. She called together all the students and faculty members to meet in Galvin Hall. Those present still speak of the extreme trepidation that permeated the room. It was more intense than anything they had ever known at Mundelein. Sr. Ann Ida conducted the meeting in a spirit of composure and dignity even as she showed her awareness of the tragedy at Kent State. She knew that firmness was needed for Mundelein to come through these times and remain true to the BVM community's longstanding belief in promoting both justice and peace.

Following the example of Chicago's Mayor Daley, Sr. Ann Ida told all those present that she would not adjourn the meeting until there was a solution. After many hours, and many angry words, an agreement was finally reached. The faculty would approach their students and would ask them what they wanted to do. Students could either attend classes in the usual way, or, as a protest against the war, they could study away from the classroom and still receive guidance from their teachers. This gave students the freedom to express their opinions in their own way without infringing on the rights of the other students or being deprived of the education Mundelein had to offer. Because of her successful resolution to this crisis, Sr. Ann Ida was asked to speak to the faculty at Loyola University Chicago so that they could achieve a similar compromise.

65 "A Catholic Women's College Absorbed by a University: The Case of Mundelein College," p. 84.

In Carolyn Zucco Chambers' thesis, *The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975*, she captures Sr. Ann Ida's visionary leadership and summarizes the underlying principles

Sr. Ann Ida continued to emphasize the responsible role women must begin to accept in contemporary society, be it religious or lay.

that led to her successful presidency: "encouraging new ideas"; selecting outstanding people to aid her, supporting "a very qualified faculty to continue on the road to excellence"; and transforming "the traditional authority of the president, to a college community involved in the decision-making process."⁶⁶ Dr. Chambers praised Sr. Ann Ida for leading Mundelein through times of great change. "As President of Mundelein College, she had the title. As a scholar, she had the philosophical acumen to deal with the knotty issues presented by the changing order of the Church. She was called upon to disseminate the concepts of *aggiornamento* not only to the BVM

Congregation, but also to the women religious of this country. Sr. Ann Ida continued to emphasize the responsible role women must begin to accept in contemporary society, be it religious or lay."⁶⁷

The shifting sun filled the parlor with a golden light. Sr. Ann Ida shared with me her memories as co-chair of ERA Illinois and expressed her disappointment in the failure of Illinois to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Her regret, from what I could observe, was not only due to the shortage of votes, but also to the spread of misinformation which led to its defeat. As

66 Reporters often asked Nixon about his "secret plan," a term which Nixon never used, but also never rejected, leaving to people's imagination what "new leadership will end the war" meant.

67 *The Presidential Years of Sister Ann Ida Gannon BVM, Mundelein College, 1957-1975*, pp. 86-87.

a scholar who was meticulous in dealing with intellectual issues, she found the blatant use of false information as a sad and unfortunate element in political controversies.

Beyond Mundelein: Advocating for ERA

On July 18, 1975, Sr. Ann Ida officially retired as president of Mundelein College. Her presence at the college had become somewhat of an institution. Many of the faculty members and students could not imagine Mundelein without her. Sensitive to this perception, Sr. Ann Ida began telling people a year ahead of time that her term as president was coming to a close. An element of denial permeated the campus and left many in shock when the day finally came.

Remaining in residence at Coffey Hall, and later Wright Hall, Sr. Ann Ida made a concerted effort not to be seen as being in charge or demanding any special attention. She consistently presented herself as a proud member of the Mundelein community, and the BVM sisters with whom she lived. She offered assistance to her successors when asked and tried to support them in any way she could, but she avoided giving the impression that she was leading the school. In interviews with several BVM sisters, they all shared how Sr. Ann Ida stood with her community and always sought to share what was common among them rather than what might have been unique to her.

This did not mean, however, that Sr. Ann Ida opted for a leisurely retirement. From 1976 to 1977, Sr. Ann Ida became the co-chair of ERA Illinois. In 1971, the ERA passed in the House of Representatives and the following year it passed the Senate. Supporters of the ERA thought the long awaited amendment would soon become law. They did not foresee the difficult ratification process that lay ahead. The Constitution requires that three-fourths, or thirty-eight of the fifty states, ratify the amendment. A Supreme Court decision in 1973, however, shocked many in the country, including most Catholics. That year, the court ruled that the right to privacy under the Fourteenth Amendment extended to a woman's decision to have an abortion. The outrage created by the Court's decision influenced people's attitude toward the Equal Rights Amendment. Phyllis

Schafley and other political conservatives, many of whom were Catholic, united together and formed an anti-ERA organization called Stop ERA.⁶⁸

Illinois soon became a battleground. It was one of the final states needed for ratification.

Despite the objections of many Catholic conservatives, Sr. Ann Ida saw the importance and the appropriateness of this amendment on both theological and legal grounds. She chose to take a more moderate stance as co-chair of Illinois ERA. “As one who has supported the ERA for ten years, and as one who strongly opposes abortion, I took the co-chairmanship to help prove they are two completely different issues ... I felt that as a woman who holds a moderate position on the ERA — not strongly against it on any grounds and not militantly for it on any grounds — as a Catholic, I should speak up.”⁶⁹

Sr. Ann Ida believed the ERA was more than just a women’s right issue. The amendment granted full equality to both sexes. As she explained in an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, “I am for the ERA because it truly reflects the ideals of this country and, had it not been for common law, it would have been part of the first constitution. Four types [of people] were omitted — slaves, men of no property, bondsmen, and women. The first three have been granted full equality under the law. Not women.”⁷⁰ She went on to say, “We are the leading democracy in the world, and we owe it to developing countries an example of full recognition of the rights of all persons under the law.”⁷¹

Other objections to the ERA included the fear that women would be drafted into the military. In an interview with WJOL Radio, Sr. Ann Ida reminded the interviewer that Congress did not need the ERA in

68 Phyllis Schlafly, who has lived most of her life in Alton, Illinois, is a vigorous defender of conservative political ideologies. Part of her opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment was her seeing links between it and the endorsement of same-sex marriage [Phyllis Schlafly, “A Short History of the E.R.A.,” “The Phyllis Schlafly Report,” September 1986].

69 *Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 1976.

70 Sr. Ann Ida was referring to the English jurist, William Blackstone (1723-1780), whose commentaries on English law, written between 1765 and 1769, was considered the primary interpretation of English common law, and was integral to the writing of both the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

71 *Chicago Tribune*, June 24, 1976.

order to draft women. It could do so under existing law. As a consultant to the Navy and a member of SABET, Sr. Ann Ida was well aware that less than ten percent of the military actually see combat duty. She also knew that under the existing regulations women were being excluded from veteran benefits. Responding to the question that the ERA was too open-ended, Sr. Ann Ida explained that any right can be misused and that it is up to the courts to protect society against such misuse. At one point, a caller to the station began making sexist remarks. In her typical fashion, Sr. Ann Ida listened and then responded politely, but sternly. She explained to the caller that sarcasm was not a way of taking a discussion seriously and therefore had no place in a thoughtful discussion.⁷² Despite all her efforts, however, the ERA was never ratified.

For anyone who may have had the notion that religious sisters lived quiet lives, set at a distance from the strife which confronts most people, you may be surprised by the number of social issues Sr. Ann Ida faced and the variety of experiences she had. How many people have worked on a government task force, rode on a military submarine, sat on a police board, and spoken before audiences ranging from conservative Lutherans to liberal Jews?

72 WJOL Radio, 1977, "Call in on The Equal Rights Amendment: Sister Ann Ida." Women in Leadership Archives, Mundelein A-V Collection, box 1.

Sr. Ann Ida's Legacy: Honors and Tributes

In the years after ERA Illinois, Sr. Ann Ida was honored to serve on countless boards, including Northern Illinois Gas, WTTW Chicago Public Media, WFMT Chicago radio, St. Louis University, DeVry Inc., The Newberry Library, The Chicago Police Board, and Scott Foresman Publishing. She also chaired the committee of the Office for Women in Higher Education and the committee on Quality Assurance of the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning. In addition to serving on the Bishops' Committee on Education, Sr. Ann Ida continued to teach philosophy at Mundelein College. She was an esteemed guest lecturer around the country on philosophy, religion, and education as well as on the role of women in contemporary society. She spoke at institutions both religious and secular, Catholic and non-Catholic, Christian and Jewish.

She also received numerous honors. In 1982, Sr. Ann Ida was asked by the Office of the Governor to chair the Governor's Committee on Women. Concerned for the political balance on the committee, Sr. Ann Ida, who saw herself as a Democrat, suggested that a Republican be named.⁷³ In 1983, she became the second recipient of the Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Leadership Excellence which recognized her life-long commitment to higher education and the common good. In 1987, she was honored to speak on the role of bishops at the Invitational Colloquium on the Church and the Universities hosted by the University of Notre Dame. In 1988, she received an honorary degree from the Keller Graduate School of Management. In 1990, she became the Scholar-in-Residence at the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University.

Over her lifetime, Sr. Ann Ida has consistently brought together a whole spectrum of people and encouraged them to develop their talents to the fullest. In 1973, for example, St. Louis University began a new policy of inviting members of the student body to serve on the Board of Trustees. Because Sr. Ann Ida was a member of this Board and because the board members were seated in alphabetical order, Sr. Ann Ida found herself next to a young Jesuit scholastic named Michael Garanzini. In 2001, Fr. Garanzini, S.J., became the president of Loyola University

⁷³ Barbara Proctor, the founder of Proctor and Gardner Advertising, was named to the Governor's Committee on Women. She referred to herself as an Independent rather than as a Republican.

Chicago. Looking back on their meeting, Fr. Garanzini reflected on how blessed he was by that coincidence. Sr. Ann Ida has been a great mentor to him, not only during his time at St. Louis University, but throughout his current presidency.

Fr. Garanzini's predecessor described the same blessing. In 2000, at Sr. Ann Ida's eighty-fifth birthday celebration, Fr. John Piderit, S.J., explained that having her as a mentor had guided and shaped his presidency.

Her gift of seeing the potential in people was matched by her generosity in finding other people who could help unleash that potential.

With a smile, he spoke of her thoughtful approach and how she would always tell him that he didn't have to do things her way, no matter how strongly she felt. He admired her commitment to life long learning, particularly as she contributed to his own. Inspired by her example, Fr. Piderit wanted to commit the Jesuits to being in solidarity with women as part of their commitment to justice.

Similarly, Dennis J. Keller, co-founder and retired Chairman and CEO of DeVry, Inc., a global provider of higher education, remains deeply grateful for Sr. Ann Ida's guidance. She advised him during the North Central accreditation process for DeVry, Inc. In reflecting on her character, he described Sr. Ann Ida's exceptional skill in bringing people together for their mutual benefit.⁷⁴ Her gift of seeing the potential in people, he believed, was matched by her generosity in finding other people who could help unleash that potential. Her selflessness always emphasized the good of the other person over any benefit to herself. This spirit, he underscored, is what was passed on to people. Even after Sr. Ann Ida was no longer on the board, the remaining members frequently asked themselves, "What would Sr. Ann Ida do?"

In writing about the role Sr. Ann Ida played in the life of those who attended Mundelein, Sr. Ann M. Harrington, BVM, explained: "What

⁷⁴ Phone interview with Dennis Keller, July 13, 2011.

does become clear in hindsight is the impression left by excellent, qualified women faculty and administration. The name of Sister Mary Ann Ida Gannon, BVM, who was president of the college during the entire scholastic years, comes up again and again. Many found her interest in the scholastics both heartwarming and refreshing. Her extemporaneous talks, her compassion and kindness, her warmth, her charisma and wisdom, her brilliance and vision, and her ability to run the college are some of the ways she is remembered.⁷⁵ The youngest member of the Presidential Task Force on Women's Rights and Responsibilities, Dr. P. Dee Boersma, also remembers Sr. Ann Ida as "kind, reserved, coherent, and determined. She brought to our attention the ramifications of women's issues... [she] gave voice to women without voices."⁷⁶

Sr. Ann Ida's eyes sparkled when she spoke about the Gannon Scholars Leadership Program. "It is very dear to my heart," she explained. Helping people achieve their dreams is a constant theme throughout Sr. Ann Ida's life, and the Gannon Scholars Leadership Program allows young students to develop their potential.

One of Sr. Ann Ida's many talents is the ability to offer people opportunities to grow and flourish and to do so in a way that respects the dignity and individuality of each person. The Gannon Scholars and the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership embody her vision.

Carrying Sr. Ann Ida's Legacy into the Future

The idea for a scholarship program began during Dr. John Richert's presidency at Mundelein (1983-85). The goal was to nurture and develop women in leadership roles. When Dr. Richert shared his idea with Sr. Ann Ida, she readily approved. Each year, four to five incoming students are selected

75 *Mundelein voices: The women's college experience, 1930-1991*, p. 137.

76 Phone interview with Dr. P. Dee Boersma, January 17, 2011.

for the program by current Gannon Scholars. The Gannon Scholars Leadership Program works to instill the qualities of leadership that Sr. Ann Ida exemplifies. The emphasis is on service, understanding multiple perspectives, studying the role of gender in today's society, and creating a more just and equitable world. When she was still residing at Mundelein, Sr. Ann Ida met with the scholars regularly to share her insights on leadership and offer them encouragement for the challenges they faced in society. Over the years, Gannon Scholars have organized—and continue to lead—programs that offer academic support to struggling high school students, provide assistance and support to local families in need, and create unique opportunities to celebrate Women's History Month.

The establishment of the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership carries Sr. Ann Ida's legacy into the future. The center, in keeping with the heritage of Mundelein, works to educate women leaders and inspire new responses to women's concerns. Consistent with the social activism of the BVM order, the center strives to create systemic change in the world. The idea for the center was first developed by Sr. Carolyn Farrell, who, as interim president of Mundelein College, was active in the affiliation process. She saw the center as a way to foster women leaders in the Church and society. When she presented the idea to Fr. Piderit, she suggested that the center would also serve to help heal the pain Mundelein alumnae experienced in the affiliation process. Given the mission of the center, Sr. Carolyn felt it was only logical that the center be named after Sr. Ann Ida, who she described as "a fine model for all of us."⁷⁷

Today, the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership, a Center of Excellence within Loyola University, prepares women to lead in every sector of society by promoting innovation and inter-disciplinary research to shape leadership for the 21st Century. It also sponsors the Women and Leadership Archives which works to preserve and promote the contributions of women for the betterment of society. Both are deeply committed to celebrating and enriching the lives of all women — students, faculty, and community members. Sr. Ann Ida's passion and accomplishments serve as a constant inspiration. The Center is currently endowed by many generous benefactors who support the Gannon Center's mission.

77 Video of Sr. Ann Ida Gannon's 85th Birthday, April 2, 1995, Women in Leadership Archive, Sr. Carolyn Farrell Collection, box 22.

The success of the Gannon Center for Women and Leadership reveals the depth to which Sr. Ann Ida's gift for developing the potential of all women has been carried forward by former Mundelein students. It also reveals the love and respect people have for Sr. Ann Ida and her pioneering efforts at expanding and nurturing women in leadership roles. In her own reflections, Sr. Ann Ida writes, "As it moves into the future, the Gannon Center will extend its influence beyond Mundelein College, Loyola University Chicago and the United States to inspire women throughout the world who are struggling not only to achieve their rightful place in society but also to use their gifts in bettering this world."⁷⁸

Sr. Ann Ida walked with me to the door of the BVM Motherhouse. Standing there thoughtfully for a moment, she remarked, "Next September 8, I will reach the 80th anniversary of my first entrance into this community. There have been many changes in the world since then and many changes in the BVM way of life. But our dedication to the service of others and our mutual support of one another has remained strong and loving."

Walking to my car, I thought about all the lives that have been changed, enriched, and restored by Sr. Ann Ida — and all the lives she continues to touch. I am grateful to add my name to that litany.

⁷⁸ Quoted www.npo.net/job/2009-11-17/8643, confirmed in a conversation with her on June 20, 2012.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Aguirre has postgraduate degrees in both ministry and theology, specializing in the history of the Catholic Church. He has been a frequent lecturer at the St. Steven's Symposium of the Archdiocese of Chicago, has taught Church History for the Archdiocese's permanent diaconate program as well as for Loyola University. In addition, he has written short stories and plays which focus on religious themes.

Through the research I did for this short biographical piece, I was amazed at both the depth and breadth of her accomplishments and experiences. Meeting her at the Mt. Carmel Motherhouse, I was touched by her warmth and generosity, by her quick mind and sense of humor. My hope is that this work has captured her gracious personality and dedicated service which is an inspiration to men and women alike.