

## **Profiles of the Laymen and the Monks Who Formed the Earliest Nucleus of the Monastery and School**

### **The Laymen**

The St. Louis group began with four key players:

- J. Gerard Mudd, M.D.
- Mr. Fred M. Switzer, Jr.
- Mr. Bill Weld
- Mr. Henry Hughes.

Dr. Mudd was instrumental for two reasons. First, he was keenly interested in an excellent Catholic school. As a well-educated and successful man himself, he appreciated the value of education. He had graduated from Canterbury School, a Catholic boarding school in Connecticut, which had been founded in 1915. That school was run by Catholic laymen and had a resident chaplain. Second, Dr. Mudd was a major benefactor who contributed enormously to the building projects, especially the church. In fact, his father had built the chapel at the Jesuit retreat house (the White House) in St. Louis, MO. Through his interest and generosity, Dr. Mudd was in a sense continuing two lines of family tradition.

Mr. Fred Switzer was the catalyst. When he joined the group, things began to happen quickly. As a savvy attorney, he knew how to get things done. For instance, before even approaching Abbot Herbert Byrne of Ampleforth, Mr. Switzer had purchased the property for the school. In this way he demonstrated seriousness and commitment. Even little things were no problem for him. There is the anecdote of the tickets. When the monks first arrived in New York City, their hostess apologized profusely for being unable to procure tickets to the Broadway musical *My Fair Lady*. "There simply are no more tickets." As she was explaining this, Mr. Switzer slipped away to make a phone call. Fifteen minutes later he returned, telling the hostess that he now had three tickets to *My Fair Lady* for that very evening. Such stories about Fred abound. He got things done. For this reason he was elected President of the group.

Mr. Weld was proud of the monks and felt an allegiance to them. His ancestors had been Recusant Catholics. Throughout the penal times in England, his family had kept the Catholic faith. So in the very beginning Mr. Weld befriended the monks. Fr. Luke likes to tell the following story. At their welcoming reception in St. Louis, a generous benefactor handed him a check for \$10,000. Having never handled a check before, Fr. Luke was quite baffled.

"What do I do with this?"

"Put it in the bank."

"Where is that?"

"In Clayton."

"Do we have an account?"

"No."

Overhearing this conversation, Mr. Weld approached Fr. Luke: "I'll be here at 10:00 tomorrow morning, and we'll go down to Clayton and deal with that check." From then on Mr. Weld was a great friend to the monks. He served as Vice President of the group.

Mr. Hughes was an enthusiast. Coupled with his training as an attorney, he was able to accomplish a lot. The school library, for instance, was his project. In a short amount of time, he amassed a full, lean collection. Many of those musty old volumes are actually little gems which are still read today. In so many other ways Mr. Hughes dedicated his time and energy. His never-ending passion and commitment were contagious, propelling the founders through the hardest of times. He was the first Secretary and Treasurer of the group.

### **The Monks**

Although Abbot Herbert of Ampleforth did not have a lot of spare manpower, he mustered a top-flight crew:

- Fr. Columba Cary-Elwes
- Fr. Timothy Horner
- Fr. Luke Rigby

Fr. Columba was appointed Prior of the Monastery. He had a penetrating gaze and a great charisma that attracted others. As a leader he was not so much organized and methodical as he was intuitive. He had such a keen sense of what needed to be done that he could seize opportunities as soon as they presented themselves. What is more, he and Mr. Switzer worked together with great concord. When Fr. Columba had done his founding work in St. Louis, he was recalled to Ampleforth and lent to Glenstall Abbey to found yet another monastery, this time in Nigeria. Today, both of Fr. Columba's monasteries are thriving.

Fr. Timothy was to be Headmaster of the School. He had so many qualities to his credit: enormous intelligence, experience in high positions of complex organizations, a deep Catholic faith, and an abundance of energy. Educated at Oxford, he was a master of Latin and Greek. During the whole of World War II, he served as an officer in the Royal Artillery in Southeast Asia. As a Benedictine monk, he truly believed in education as a ministry. Fr. Timothy built the School from the ground up. He basically began with a barn divided into four classrooms. Somehow, he attracted great numbers of applicants to a School that did not yet exist – four times as many as he needed. To sell this upstart School to the American colleges, he made a whirlwind tour of all the major colleges and universities across the country. The results of his efforts are reflected in the college list of the first graduating class, which included Georgetown (8), Yale (3), Harvard, MIT, and Brown. In his prime Fr. Timothy was a dynamo.

Fr. Luke was to be a leader of a different sort. The best testimony to this comes from popular opinion. When Abbot Byrne was discerning whom to assign to the St. Louis project, many of the monks at Ampleforth quickly nominated Fr. Luke. Not only did the monks hold him in high esteem, but the parishioners at his weekend parish so loved him, too. He was known for his dedication, compassion, and humility. He was a great people person. Abbot Byrne made him the Business Manager. He would be responsible for working closely with many many laymen on matters of finance, procurement, and construction. When Fr. Columba returned to Ampleforth in 1967, Fr. Luke was appointed Prior. He served until 1973 when the monastery gained its independence. But then the monastic community elected him Prior. He served until 1989 when the monastery became an abbey. But then the monastic community elected him Abbot. Again and again people reaffirmed their confidence in Fr. Luke, asking him to lead and serve them for a 28-year stretch. Amazing.