

# SULPICIAN SUPERIOR GENERAL



Rev. Ronald D. Witherup, PSS

Rev. Ronald D. Witherup is Superior General of the Society of the Priests of Saint Sulpice. He served on the faculty of St. Patrick's Seminary from 1986 to 1997, as Professor of Sacred Scripture, Academic Dean, and Vice Rector.



SOCIETY OF ST. SULPICE

During my eleven years on the faculty of St. Patrick's Seminary, three elements stood out. The first was the dedication of the faculty and staff, who were a mixture of Sulpicians and non-Sulpicians, whether diocesan or religious priests and sisters, or lay people. It was marvelous to see that the faculty were fully engaged in the ministry of priestly formation.

A second element was the gradual transformation that took place during that decade. As an "Easterner," the diversity I encountered in the Bay Area was a breath of fresh air. When I arrived at St. Patrick's, the seminarians were mostly white Anglo-Saxons. Rather quickly, that began to change as more and more Latinos, Asians (especially Vietnamese, but also some Chinese and Koreans), Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders entered the seminary, in part under the growth of these populations at St. Joseph's (Minor) Seminary in Mountain View, which the Sulpicians also operated. This dynamic called for numerous adaptations in the seminary program, including the introduction of various language programs. Certainly, the impact on seminary formation was significant. On the one hand, this diversity reflected more accurately the diversity of the Catholic population in the Bay Area and in the Western U.S. in general. The presence of so many different cultural groups in the seminary helped faculty and seminarians together to learn more about cultural diversity. It also, however, raised many challenges in the academic arena, as faculty had to learn how to teach to a diverse student body in a more effective way. This transition was not always

easy, but I admired the way the faculty engaged the issues and revised course curricula to meet the new challenges it provided.

The third element was the impact that the Sisters who staffed the kitchen had on the entire seminary community. When I first arrived, that community was the Little Sisters of the Holy Family from Sherbrooke, Canada. They spent more than ninety years serving the community at St. Patrick's through their prayers, and their management of the kitchen and laundry. They had their own distinct Québécois style, and when they left, one wondered if we could ever replace them. Almost miraculously, the arrival of the Oblate Sisters of Jesus the Priest from Mexico City through the efforts of the rector, Fr. Gerald Coleman, solved that issue! Their presence at St. Patrick's since 1994 has been a singular grace for the entire community. The commitment of both of these religious communities of women shows the importance of working together for the good of the Church. To end more than 118 years of Sulpician history is a sad moment for the Society of Saint Sulpice and for the seminary itself. I give thanks to God, however, that the Sulpicians were able to make a significant contribution to priestly formation in the Bay Area.

*"To end more than 118 years of Sulpician history is a sad moment for the Society of Saint Sulpice and for the seminary itself."*