

Midwest Bits and Pieces

July 1, 1992

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE PRESIDENT IS A PH.D. STUDENT AT UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

DAYTON, Ohio -- Brother Richard Gilman is not your typical college student. He enrolled in the University of Dayton's doctoral program in educational leadership last fall to prepare to become president of Holy Cross College, a two-year liberal arts Catholic college that sits across the street from the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind.

When the 48-year old Cleveland native takes over the post on August 1, he will launch an \$8-million capital fund campaign for the private college and work toward doubling the school's enrollment to 1,000 by the year 2000.

But not on Tuesday afternoons. That's when he'll jump into his car to listen to "some wild music to clear the mind" while making the four-hour commute back to the University of Dayton, where he'll finish two night classes this fall. He's planning to take comprehensive exams next summer and carve out time the following year to finish a dissertation.

"I do sleep--sometimes in class even," he jokes.

"My schedule is pretty ambitious at the moment. It's been intense," concedes Gilman, who finishes three summer classes June 16 before jetting to LeMans, France, for the month long chapter meeting of the Congregation of Holy Cross. He's one of the 65 elected delegates from around the world.

While other doctoral students this summer are writing papers and wondering what the job market holds in store, Gilman juggles class work with hiring a new admissions director for the college. "I know what I'm going to do with the doctoral work," he says. "For me, it's ordained."

Still, Gilman never dreamed of becoming a college president. "My goal was to be an outstanding teacher," says Gilman, who began his career as a mathematics instructor at St. Augustine's College in Ghana, West Africa.

From 1974 until 1991, he served in various roles at Archbishop Hoban High School in Akron. During his six-year tenure as president and principal of the parochial high school, Gilman nearly tripled the schools' endowment from \$400,000 to \$1.1 million and helped boost the school's enrollment by 13 percent while "attracting a diverse student body of inner-city and suburban kids." Gilman's track record sparked the interest of the board of trustees at Holy Cross College, and he was asked to apply for the presidency. In the school's 25-year history, the post has always been filled by a Holy Cross Brother, of which Gilman says there are approximately 1,000 worldwide.

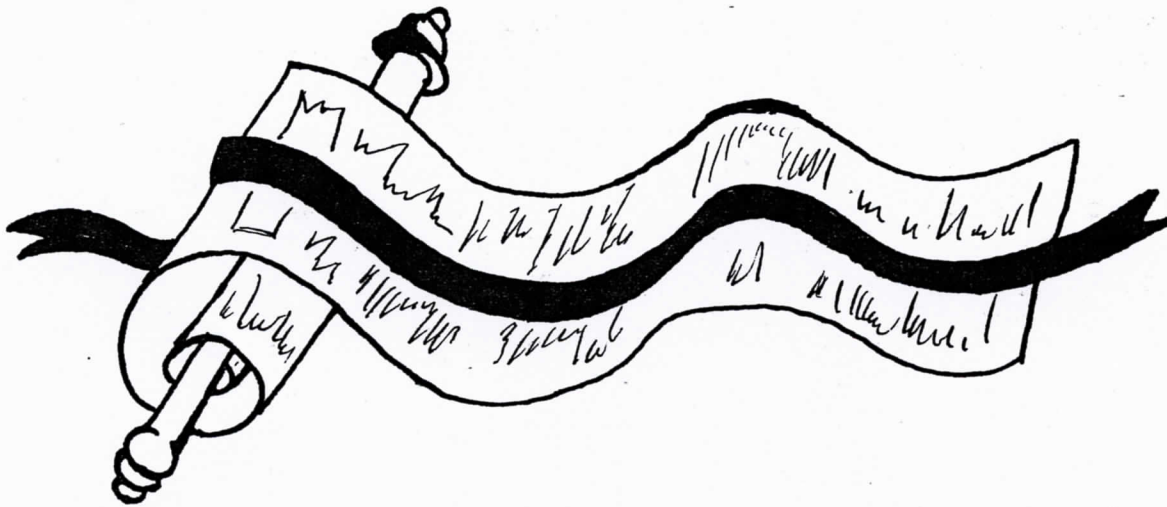
"I look forward to seeing if my success at Archbishop Hoban was an accident or whether I can replicate it," he says with a smile. "When I was named president-elect of the college last summer, I told the trustees I wanted to spend a year preparing. The University of Dayton's Ph.D program is not designed to tell you how to be a college president. Rather," he says, "it teaches you how to be a leader."

Gilman believes that distance education, instruction provided via satellite and computer networks, may be the wave of the future for small colleges seeking a niche in the highly competitive student recruitment market. He's tentatively planning to write his dissertation on the topic.

"Using the electronic means available really doubles your productivity," Gilman says. "I use my computer for everything--from library research to making contacts through electronic mail with people all over the country."

Realizing the challenge of juggling his simultaneous roles as a college president and a doctoral student in the fall, Gilman has ordered a laptop computer with a modem and fax capabilities. He'll be able to conduct college business in Dayton, or on the road. Says Gilman, "I don't anticipate too much downtime."

(News Release from the University of Dayton, June 2, 1992.)



The Good News
VOICES FROM THE EDGE

Brother Bruce Lescher, C.S.C.

From 1987 to 1990, I had a most haunting experience. During those years I made a weekly trip from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco's Tenderloin, a district of drab hotels, cheap apartments and many street people.

It was a longer trip than the ten miles across the Bay, however. It was a journey from one world to another: From classroom to the streets, from books to the hard knocks of life, from the neat and orderly library shelves to the chaos of poverty. From the center to the edge.

The people who came to the Thursday morning Bible study at the Tenderloin Reflection and Education Center on Golden Gate Avenue appeared to be a motley group indeed. But all confronted God's word with an honesty that I don't find so often in university classrooms or local churches...

On her good days she was "Archangel Michael." On her bad days she was "Devil Michael." I never heard her real name. She lived on the streets; I don't think she had a "squat" where she stayed most of the time. She would disappear from the Bible study for months at a time, then one day show up. She seemed to move from town to town and (I think) from man to man, though she didn't talk about her lifestyle.

More than most of the people in the Bible study, she often seemed disconnected from reality. When she had the floor, she would ramble and rage in random fashion. Since most of us had abundantly evident flaws, we patiently tolerated her monologues ("there, but for God's grace, go I"). When she was finished, we would go back to the subject at hand.

But one day she taught me a lesson about Jesus that I will never forget.

Archangel Michael usually referred to Jesus as "It." This was especially true when she talked about the crucifixion, and she talked about the crucifixion a lot. "They hung It on the cross; they scourged and killed It." So one day we asked her, "Michael, why do you call Jesus an 'it'?" "Well," she said, "No one would treat a human being that way!"

Her words pierced me to the heart! She had a stunning insight into the way in which Jesus had been dehumanized, reduced to an object by his torturers. Reduced from a human being to an "it." No torturer ever treats his victims as persons made in the image of God.

But what personal tragedy lay behind this insight? Clearly, Michael herself knew the bitter experience of "it." She knew what it meant to be treated as a non-person, certainly as a target of social stigma, perhaps as an object of sexual abuse. In either case, she was an "it." And her pain was so great that she could not talk directly of herself. She would either launch into an incoherent monologue (as incoherent perhaps as her life?) or talk about a Jesus who had the same experience (and maybe offered her some redemption?)

I think of her when I feel myself reducing the poor to objects, and I do this a whole lot more than I would like to admit. Objects of charity or objects of scorn or objects of pity are objects just the same. They are not people with good points and bad points, with hurts and joys, and most of all with names. One thing objects never are: they are never friends.

Come to think of it, she really was an archangel to me. Like Gabriel, she brought a message to shake me out of my complacency, to remind me of what it means to bring Jesus to birth in this world. And like Michael, she leads me now in battle against Satan in my temptation to treat "you" like "it."

"Jerry" is Jerry David Miley. That's his real name. He is the group's poet, carrying his latest creations in his backpack. With his beard and horn-rimmed glasses he looked very much the San Francisco poet. When I knew him, he lived on the streets, but there had been times when he stayed in an apartment. Sometimes he would be gone for a few weeks, hitchhiking to and from Portland, where his parents lived.

As far as I knew, Jerry had no psychological or substance abuse problems. He freely chose his itinerant life-style. He chose to live at the edge because he was a poet, because from this marginal position he could see the things he wanted to write about. Life in the center would probably kill his soul.

Jerry was one of the gentlest people I've met. I always felt relieved to see him walk into the group because he exerted a calming influence when tempers began to flare. He treated everyone with respect and even courtesy. He was well read, freely making references to literature and philosophy. Poet that he was, he liked to read aloud the passage under discussion.

The tricky thing is, Jeffrey didn't really look different from anyone else in the group. He faced much the same prejudice that they faced. Many of his poems dealt with the dehumanizing treatment the homeless receive at the hands of others. Here on the edge he felt that sharp judgment of those of us in the "center", but he himself wished us only good. Here are some lines from one his poems, entitled "Nazi Cross".

I want both of us to live
lives of decent plenty
I want you to smile.
I want you to see me smile.
I want a faint star to reveal first
light
Not a cheap homeless coldness.
I want your coat to be warm
hanging in a closet in a good
room
with rain on a closed window
and the rent paid.

Those of us at the center he wished well, but he knew that often we wished that "people like him" would just go away. When I do so wish, I try to wonder if the person before me is another Jerry, a gentle spirit who has chosen to dwell at the edge, where to him life seems saner than it does in the "center." And when I read the Gospel I do have to wonder a bit if maybe he isn't right after all.

