

# *Communities of the Word*

STORIES OF THE CHICAGO PROVINCE



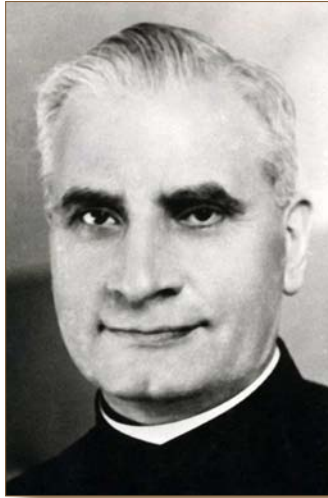
## **THE PERRYSBURG STORY, 1956 – 1993**

*Mr. George Irish*



### **THE FOUNDING**

During the General Visitation of 1949–1950, Superior General Father Aloisius Große-Kappenberg urged the Western Province, headquartered at Techny, Illinois, and spreading from Ohio all the way to the Pacific Northwest, to open two new minor seminaries in order to recruit more vocations.<sup>1</sup> A letter from the Superior General confirms this directive.<sup>2</sup> A second letter written by the Superior General on August 23, 1954, addressed to the U.S. provincials reads in part, “Serious efforts should be made to found another minor seminary.”<sup>3</sup> A further letter of August 23, 1954, addressed to Western Provincial Father Lawrence Mack, carries this idea forward:



Superior General Aloisius Große-Kappenberg, 1947-1957.

The Western Province should feel the more impelled to do more than [has been done] until now in recruiting new vocations. The Western Province should always have at least two minor seminaries. We presume that the new buildings in the East will not require so much money that the Western Province has not sufficiently left soon to start opening a new high school. [*sic*]<sup>4</sup>

A letter to the Superior General, written on September 6, 1954, on the matter of the minor seminary asked whether the new seminary should be in the Midwest or the Far West, and asked which section of the country the Generalate preferred?<sup>5</sup> The reply of September 16, 1954, states, "It pertains to the Provincial and his Consultors to find out where the best prospects are and then to report their findings to the Generalate."<sup>6</sup> The letter also referred to plans for a new seminary in the Far West.

On September 30, 1954, a map representing the increase of population in the Midwest between 1941 and 1950, and the distribution of the Catholic population in the same area were sent to each of the three seminaries of the province. Each envelope contained the same comparative study on growth of the Catholic population and growth of total U.S. population, as well as the comparative study on the distri-

bution of Catholic population and distribution of national population, both published by Sales Management Survey of Buying Power. The accompanying letter read as follows:

Kindly post the two attached maps on the Fathers' bulletin board with the following notice. The direction of the Superior General that this Province build a new Mission Seminary should be carried out as soon as possible. The location of this new foundation is an important decision, which must be made soon. Suggestions as to the place where we should try to settle will be highly appreciated.

The same maps and a similar letter were brought to the attention of the priests and Brothers in the Divine Word parishes and also were sent to the Generalate on November 15, 1954.

Moved by the reasons given below, when referencing the letter sent to the Generalate on November 18, 1954, the Provincial Council decided to seek permission to open a new mission seminary near Toledo, Ohio.

On November 9, 1954, Father Lawrence Mack drove to Toledo and was the guest for the night of Monsignor Raymond Scheckelhoff, diocesan director of the Propagation of the Faith, who hailed from the same parish as Father Mack: Holy Family Parish in Ottawa, Ohio. Monsignor Scheckelhoff was very sympathetic toward the plan of a new mission seminary in the Diocese of Toledo and arranged an appointment for the provincial with Bishop George Rehring of Toledo.

The bishop suggested that Father Mack visit Mother Vincent de Paul of the Ursuline Nuns in Toledo, and ask whether the congregation would consider the sale of the property and buildings of Nazareth Hall Military School at Grand Rapids, Ohio. The bishop stated that the Sisters wished to sell the property.

Father Mack proposed the matter to the Mother Superior. She replied they had considered the sale and invited Father Mack to inspect the buildings without telling the Sisters the reason of the visit. The Sisters showed Father Provincial through the building, which he found rather crowded and dark for seminary purposes. This turned out well since on December 30, 1954, Mother Vincent de Paul sent a telegram stating that the congregation would not consider a sale of Nazareth Hall.

Later it came to light that the bishop wished the Sisters to sell Nazareth Hall in order to obtain funds for a new high school for girls in Toledo. When the Sisters who lived at Nazareth Hall, especially those connected with its foundation, heard of the plan to sell the school, they strongly opposed the idea. When the purpose of Father Provincial's visit to the school had become known, the Sisters understood why he had been so "nosey"—as they put it—when visiting.

A number of pastors of the diocese had been visited in the quest for property. The first to be visited was Father Matthew Clancy of Swanton. He was very encouraging; a few months later he was the first to ask that the members of the Society of the Divine Word help in his parish over weekends if the Society settled in the diocese.

Father Mack told Monsignor Scheckelhoff of the Society's desire for about 200 acres with good farmland and a building site with rolling hills on a body of water, within a radius of about 25 miles from Toledo. He replied that the only possibility for such property lies along the Maumee River between Perrysburg and Grand Rapids. He recommended that Father Provincial visit Francis Westhoven, a farmer in the area who knew the territory well. He once studied for the priesthood and had a brother who was a Passionist priest.

Father Mack visited the Westhoven family and was introduced to Donald Westhoven, son of Francis and a real estate agent. The Provincial explained to Mr. Westhoven and his partner, Mr. Henry Suydam, what kind of property was desired. Later it was learned that when Mr. Suydam, a non-Catholic, heard of the requirements—about 200 acres with good farmland and a building site with rolling hills and a body of water, within a radius of 25 miles from Toledo—he threw up his arms and said, "That's impossible." He was told to continue the search, and that many prayers and sacrifices were being offered for this intention.

Father Mack had been introduced to the aged and saintly mother of Francis Westhoven, who lived alone and spent practically all her time at prayer. When the plan for the new seminary was explained and her prayers were requested, she enthusiastically promised to spend much time every day at prayer for this intention. It is noteworthy that she died very near the day, if not on the day itself, on which the bishop granted written permission to open a new mission seminary in the Diocese of Toledo.

In visiting the area around Toledo, Father Mack found the land west of the city very flat. The Michigan state line falls just north of Toledo, and the land to the east of the city is flat, ending in marshland along Lake Erie. The winter winds blow off the lake on the coast east of Toledo and are damp and cold. The ideal area was found along the east side of the Maumee River, between Perrysburg and Grand Rapids, 15 to 25 miles from downtown Toledo. The area was scenic with rolling hills and flat and good farmland beginning a few hundred feet from the river. The hills along the east bank of the Maumee overlook the valley to the west of the river. (A favorite drive for the people of Toledo on Sundays is up one side of the Maumee River as far as Grand Rapids or Napoleon and down the other side back to Toledo.) A seminary along this route would soon become well known. This also would be a fine location for a flower nursery, which had proved so profitable at Techny.

On November 11, 1954, Father Mack returned to Bishop Rehring to report on his findings. The bishop stated he was much in favor of admitting the Society of the Divine Word into the diocese, but wished first to speak with his consultors so that if the Society settled in the diocese, the members might have the good will of the clergy. He added that the meeting of the consultors could not take place before December.

At that November meeting with the bishop, Father Mack asked if he might speak about the project with friends among the diocesan consultors. His Excellency replied, "Do whatever you think will promote the plan." Monsignor Anthony Gallagher at Maumee was approached and seemed favorable. Monsignor Carl Reineck at Delphos received the news enthusiastically.

The Provincial Council sent a letter to the Generalate on November 18, 1954, requesting permission to seek property for a new seminary in the Diocese of Toledo. The following reasons were given:

The second greatest concentration of Catholics, after New York and Pennsylvania, is in the Great Lakes states. The large number of Catholics in Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota are within reach of Techny, East Troy and Epworth. [The Provincial Council at the time had no indication that the General Council was considering closing Epworth.]

The greatest growth of population in recent years has been on the eastern seaboard, not part of the Western Province [i.e., the present Chicago Province]. The second largest growth has been along the Western Coast, but the number of Catholics along the Pacific was comparatively small, and the far greater number of them was in California, not part of the Western Province.

As to the Mountain states, among them Colorado and Utah, the national and Catholic population was rather small. Furthermore, the far greater number of Catholics was in the southernmost states, outside the Western Province. The growth of population in the Mountain states, especially in the northern part, has been very slow.

Also for other reasons, the Provincial Council did not favor a new minor seminary at the time on the West Coast or in the mountain states—namely, the long distances to travel and the unwillingness of the students to go as far as Techny or Conesus for the novitiate.

### **A GREAT CONSIDERATION—CATHOLIC POPULATION**

It should be noted that the third-largest growth in population at the time had been in the Great Lakes region. This was particularly true once the St. Lawrence Seaway was completed through to the Great Lakes. The increase was quite rapid.

The opinion of the Provincial Council was that any new minor seminary should not be more than 20 miles from a fair-sized city, because the hoped-for vocations and benefactors would be close by. Also to be considered was the easy availability of doctors, dentists, hospitals, libraries, transportation in general, and shopping.

After considering the studies on population, a number of Divine Word priests were asked their opinion. Some 20 of these suggested a new minor seminary in the vicinity of the corner of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. This would place the new house in the Diocese of Toledo. Of course, there was also the consideration of the friendly reception that the Society had from the bishop and priests of the diocese.

This seemed to be a natural choice as the city of Toledo with a population of some 320,000 was growing rapidly, and there were but two established religious communities in the diocese. This contrasted

with both the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to the south of the region and the Archdiocese of Detroit to the north. Each of these well-established archdioceses had a fair number of religious communities within their territory.

Considering Toledo as the center, there were any number of small and larger population areas in the surrounding states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.

Some had objected that a seminary at Toledo would be too near Girard, Pennsylvania. A mission house 20 miles from Toledo would put the new seminary about 250 miles from Girard. Others noted that the rich possibilities to pursue a vocation in the area of southern Michigan, central and western Ohio, northern Kentucky, and northern and central Indiana was often a deterrent for young men to go as far as Girard, Techny or East Troy. Father William Hunter, provincial of the Eastern Province, had been recommending a house at the junction of Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio for years. Recently he had spoken to Father Mack, saying that he thought Toledo would be a good location for a new foundation.

As noted above, the letter to the Generalate of November 18, 1954, requested permission to pursue the establishment of a new mission house in the Diocese of Toledo. The bishop was willing to grant his permission for the Society to do so. On November 30, Superior General Große-Kappenberg wrote,

In the last meeting of the General Council your memorandum on the prospects of a foundation in the Diocese of Toledo has been considered, and we quite agree that you should proceed with your endeavors to obtain the permission of the Bishop to start a Minor Seminary.

On December 15, 1954, Bishop Rehring wrote a letter granting formal permission to the Society to open a preparatory seminary in the Diocese of Toledo in the vicinity of Grand Rapids, Ohio. "Should there be reason for establishing the Seminary at another site, I shall be pleased to speak to you about it at our mutual convenience." Father Mack announced this permission as a Christmas gift to the province.<sup>7</sup>

On January 5, 1955, Father Mack, Provincial Councillor Father John Musinsky, Provincial Treasurer Father Arthur Melcher and Fathers Joseph Tenover and Robert Studeny drove to Toledo to

inspect possible locations along the Maumee River. The group stayed with Monsignor Scheckelhoff. All went about in lay clothing in order to keep their plans as quiet as possible. Mr. Michael Gaul, an architect from Chicago, joined the group in Toledo in order to assist in evaluating the different properties.

The Fathers went with the realtors and architect to visit the proposed locations: the Dunbar farm of 275 acres on the west side of the Maumee about five miles south of Grand Rapids; the property at the fork of Routes 65 and 110 just north of Grand Rapids; the Dodge property of 80 acres on the west bank of the Maumee about eight miles south of the town of Maumee; the Asmus property of 40 acres on the east side of Route 65 about eight miles south of the town of Maumee; the Ritter farm on the east side of Route 65 one-half mile south of Fort Meigs and the George France property. Later it was learned that the new Route 25 was to cut through the middle of the Ritter farm. Mr. Westhoven had also inquired of Mr. John Marshall Briley whether his property, adjacent to the France property, was for sale but received a negative reply.

Donald Westhoven had heard that the George France farm had been on and off the market. Father Mack had asked him to keep quiet the identity of the property purchaser, lest the price rise if it were known that a Catholic institute sought to buy the property. Mr. Westhoven had gone to the office of the France Stone Company, owned by Mr. France, and asked a Mr. Martig whether the farm was for sale. Mr. Martig refused to talk business until the identity of the prospective buyer was revealed. As soon as he was told that a Catholic institution was interested he became quite sympathetic. It seems George France did not want to sell to anyone who would subdivide the property. Also, the neighbors, especially Mr. Briley and Mr. Hoffman, wished by all means to avoid subdivision of the France farm.

The group unanimously favored the George France farm. The nearness of two natural gas lines was an additional attraction, although it was understood the accessibility of water would be a problem.

Father Mack and Mr. Westhoven had an appointment with Mr. Martig on January 7. Mr. France called from his winter home in North Carolina; he spoke with Mr. Westhoven and then with Father Mack who explained to him the plan of building a minor seminary of the Society of the Divine Word. Mr. France replied, "I think we can arrange a decent deal." He said he was impressed by the fact that



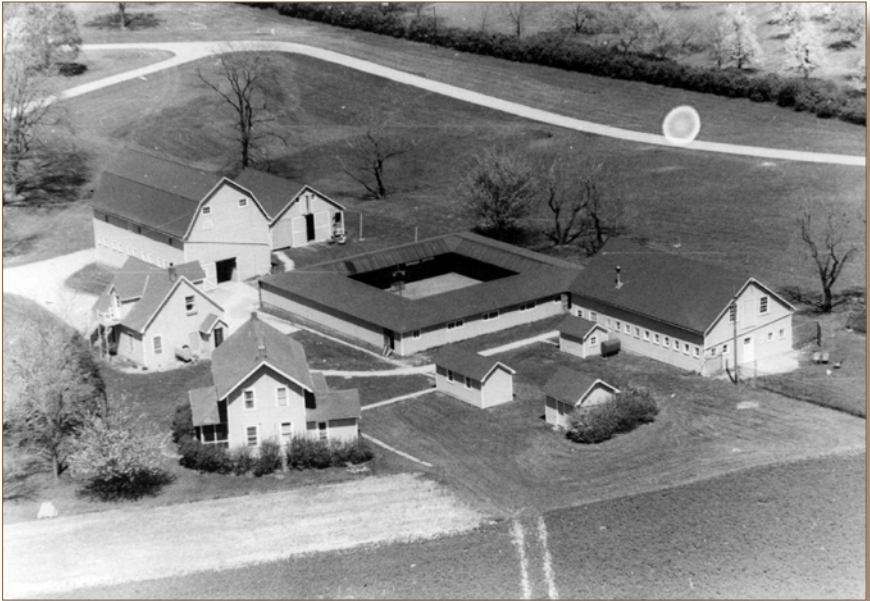


The stone house on the George France Farm.

the Catholic Church in Toledo remained true to its financial obligations during the financial crash of the late 1920s. He stated he would push the proposed sale of the farm and advised the provincial to speak with Sister Paris and Sister Farley at St. Vincent's Hospital in Toledo; they would witness to his generosity toward the hospital. These Sisters "have taken very good care of the France Stone Company members and employees, physically, morally, and otherwise." He mentioned that he and his wife are now alone and do not know what to do with the farm. During the conversation Mr. France mentioned, "You know we are all Protestants." From other sources it was learned that the farm had originally been intended for Mr. France's son, Nathaniel, who died of brain cancer. It was also learned that Mrs. France was very much attached to the farm and was probably opposed to its sale.

A letter was sent to the Superior General on January 10, 1955, requesting permission to begin negotiations with Mr. France for purchase of the farm. The reply came on January 21, "The General Council is quite in favor that you enter into negotiations with the gentleman to whom you refer."

As the months passed and Mr. France refused to discuss the sale of the farm before his return to Ohio in spring, Donald Westhoven began to lose hope of acquiring the farm and began to seek other properties.



Several buildings of the France Farm were repurposed in 1956 to house the first class of students.

Then, on May 19, the long-awaited telephone call came, inviting Father Mack to discuss the purchase of the farm with Mr. France in Toledo. It was Ascension Thursday, the day set aside for the celebration of the Jubilarians of the year. (Father William Bauer, provincial of the Southern Province, and Father William Hunter, provincial of the Eastern Province, were at Techny when the call came.) The Techny community was urged to keep this intention in prayer. The following day, Fathers Mack and Melcher flew to Toledo for the meeting with Mr. France. For all practical purposes he gave every assurance that he would sell the farm to the Society.

Mr. Westhoven called on May 28, 1955, to say that Mr. France had set a price of \$200,000 on the farm of 374 acres, thus knocking \$13,000 off his original asking price as a favor to the Society. He insisted in selling all or no part of the farm. Within two or three weeks he would inform the Society definitely whether he would sell.

In a letter of June 4 to the Generalate, requesting permission to acquire the property, the advantages of the property were pointed out. Among them: only 12 miles from downtown Toledo, just three

miles from Maumee and Perrysburg, beautiful building site on a bluff overlooking the river, assurance of seclusion for the future by the river and the farm on two sides and by large estates on the other two sides. On June 11 a cablegram came from Rome granting the permission. The contract of sale was finalized on June 28. Announcement of the sale appeared in the *Toledo Blade* on July 7 and the following day in the *Catholic Chronicle of Toledo*. Thus, the Society of the Divine Word began preparation for its tenth seminary in North America.

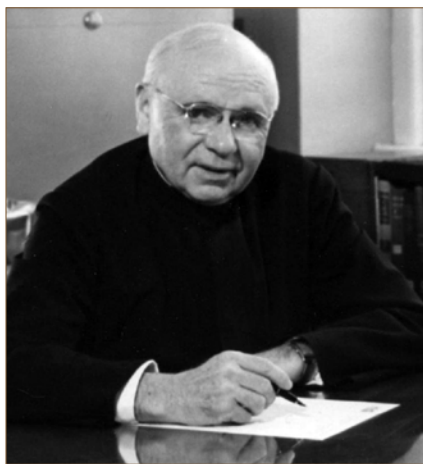
### **PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIRST CLASS OF STUDENTS**

Brother Richard Krick was sent to Perrysburg in early 1956 to supervise the preparation of the building so that school could begin in September. The old stone house on the property, after some remodeling, served as the priests' residence and provided dining space for 25 priests, Brothers and students. It also housed a chapel with three altars. A three-car garage was converted into a classroom and study hall on the ground floor, with rooms for two Brothers in the apartment above. The tenant's house was converted into a dormitory to house 20 boys and to provide space for the prefect (the priest in charge of the students) and a third Brother.

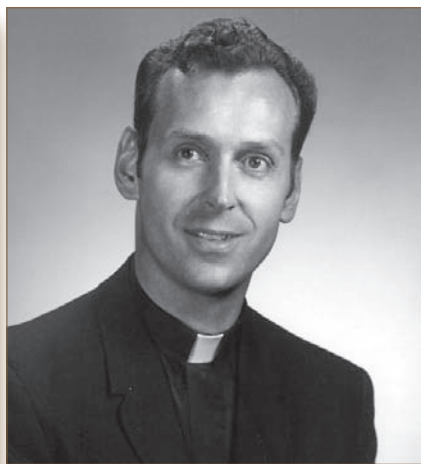
The gracious Ursuline Sisters of Nazareth Hall provided a residence for Brother Richard and many visiting priests over a six-month period. They accepted no remuneration for this hospitality and the many other kindnesses they provided to the Society in those early months. It was suggested that the names of those 11 Sisters "should be inscribed in letters of gold in the annals of the new seminary." The first "pioneer" of Perrysburg, Brother Richard Krick, left for an appointment in the Southern Province on September 17, 1956.

### **THE PIONEER YEARS**

In early August, Father Emil Lesage arrived as the first rector of Perrysburg. Father Frederick Rudolph, the newly appointed prefect, arrived in August to prepare for the pioneer class of seminarians. Brothers Camillus Turkalj, Nicholas Carlin and Stephanus (Steve) Steinhauser arrived soon thereafter. Father Mack said, "Brother Steve is too good for Perrysburg." He was very handy with tools, and no job was too dirty or unpleasant for him, according to notes from House Council meetings. Brother Steve served Perrysburg for 15 years until 1971.



**Father Emil LeSage, First Rector  
of Perrysburg.**



**Father Frederick Rudolph, First Prefect  
of Students.**

The first order of business, according to the first House Council meeting, was affirming the patron saint of the house. “Since it has been ‘understood’ that St. Peter is to be the patron of the house and chapel, and since he really was a great missionary, the council unanimously agreed to propose St. Peter officially as patron.” St. Peter’s name was never prominent in usage; the seminary was always referred to as “Divine Word Seminary.” The meeting minutes contain this wise observation:

On September 5, seventeen young hopefuls arrived, and that was the end of any hopes for peace and quiet! To the older members they seemed to be the “liveliest extroverts this side of reform school.” Father Rudolph had to keep after them 24 hours a day. Silence? They had no idea what the word meant. Not that they were bad boys. They were the friendliest and most alert youngsters ever seen together in one place. On schedule, September 7, 1956, we had a full day of classes. Father Rector was teaching high school freshman again after 25 years! Alas, he forgot the rigid rule for freshman teachers: Don’t smile until Christmas! He went so far as to crack a few jokes—a fatal mistake.<sup>8</sup>

Thus began life at Perrysburg for the pioneers. There were no recreational facilities for the boys, no sports fields, nothing. The focus had been on providing living, dining and academic space. A spacious lawn leading to the old stone house was converted to playing fields. Fraters (major seminarians) from Techny spent the last few weeks of the summer cleaning the property and painting the long cyclone fence along River Road. They remodeled a cow barn for indoor recreational use and dubbed it the “Cow Palace,” a name they copied from the place in San Francisco where the Republican Convention had recently been held.

It wasn't safe for the boys to swim in the Maumee River, so Father Rector located an old “borrow pit” filled with water that had been dug out to provide dirt for a nearby highway overpass. While the weather was nice the boys would load into the back of the dump truck for the four-mile trip to the swimming hole. Life was simple in the beginning. When the boys weren't recreating outside, they were in the Cow Palace playing table tennis, checkers and chess. Homesickness was never an issue.

The first class quickly adapted to the life of seminarians. Soon there was silence in the chapel, and the boys learned to genuflect and serve at Mass. One of the boys, Michael Fritzen, was a talented organist, and with his accompaniment the boys were soon singing the *Eighth Gregorian Mass*.



The indoor recreation space, dubbed the “Cow Palace.”



**The First Students and Staff.**

**First row (all left-to-right):** Father Fred Rudolph, David Malkam, Jack Gilmore, Terrence O'Toole, Paul Morman, Gerald Drake, Father Eugene Scherzinger.

**Second row:** Stanley Batt, Terry Wheeler, Robert Wilson, Robert Jackson, Father Emil Lesage.

**Third row:** Michael Fritzen, Daniel Abraham, Adrian Utrup, John Dedischew.

**Fourth row:** Clem Boenne, John Bettice, Laurence Mowat, Timothy Harter.

**Fifth row:** Brothers Stephanus Steinhauser and Camillus Turkalj.

No sooner had this first class become comfortable in their surroundings when the planning shifted in order to accommodate another 40 young men when the next class arrived in September 1957. The original plan was to remodel the Cow Palace, using the upstairs and enlarging it to accommodate the second class of students. When that plan was deemed unworkable, thoughts shifted to the first floor of the horse barn standing on the property. The remodeling cost would need to come in under \$7,500, to avoid having to go to Rome for permission.

### **CONSTRUCTING A TEMPORARY BUILDING**

Father Mack had sent a petition to the Superior General to construct part of the planned seminary building. The need was obvious, and building needed to start as soon as possible. The Generalate, however, did not feel justified in putting large sums of money into



a building without better assurance that the area would produce a sufficient number of vocations to warrant such an ambitious building program. In December the Superior General replied that they could not give permission to begin the big new building. The orders were to put up something “temporary, but adequate and substantial.”

In early January, during a visit of Father Mack, meetings were held with the community. It was decided to build a small but substantial temporary seminary building, which could eventually be converted into a retreat house. The plan would be to build for 50 boys. Thus, the new building would be a permanent structure but would only be used temporarily as a seminary. Monsignor Max Walz, pastor of St. Rose Parish in Perrysburg, suggested engaging the firm of Munger & Munger Architects.

In the first meeting with Harold Munger Jr., the committee described the function of the new building. It was suggested that a large dormitory (accommodating 50 boys) and a large study hall to be joined by a washroom to serve both the study hall and the dormitory be built. The size of the chapel, kitchen, and locations of the class-



The “temporary” buildings are on the left. The original farm buildings are on the right. The Maumee River is in the background.

rooms were all laid out for Mr. Munger. The priests described in detail the Divine Word way of life with its various “requirements”—silence, for example.

Mr. Munger came back with a proposed sketch drawn to scale. He felt that it “sacrificed symmetry to function.” It was decided to make alterations to the plan and to use the economical one-story “Pease type” of prefab construction. The rough estimate of putting up the proposed building as sketched ranged from \$165,000 to \$218,000. In late February, Mr. Munger returned with a revised sketch, which was more detailed and provided a somewhat larger house. The estimate grew to a possible \$228,000. The Munger plan was approved by the House Council on February 26.

The discussion brought out that we were practically forced by the circumstances to approve it: we do not have permission to put up a big permanent building; to keep putting money into the present barn arrangement seems to be throwing money away; to move out of Perrysburg altogether is also, according to Father Provincial, practically decided against by Rome; moreover, if we are to continue here, we have to do *something soon* so that we shall be ready for the boys by next September.<sup>9</sup>

Approval to build was received from Rome on March 18.

Work on the new building began on May 8, with bulldozers tearing into the ground on the brink of the hill overlooking the Maumee River. The materials arrived on schedule, but the contractor and architect fought one another regularly with Father Lesage caught in the middle. The boys pitched in with the unloading of materials and even performed some of the carpenters’ work.

The pioneers started with 17 students and finished the first year with 17—one was lost and one was gained during the year. The expectation as the year closed was that the new school year could begin with 12 sophomores.

By early June the contractor was in a race against the clock. The objective became to finish the dormitory and have a couple of toilets and washbasins in working order by the time the boys were due to arrive in September. In tandem with the construction was an effort by Fathers Mack and Lesage to bring gas and water to the property. There



were many challenges over several months in getting the lines extended to the seminary property, but approval was finally granted in late June.

Construction of the interior of the building was slowed considerably for a variety of reasons, so the decision was made to delay the arrival of the students for several weeks. On September 15 the new freshmen arrived, 31 strong, and 13 sophomores returned for their second year. An unexpected wave of homesickness hit the student body during the first week. One of the Fathers speculated:

We didn't know why this year should be so much worse than last year. There was the rain and the mud, which made everything dreary. Then the unfinished building, improvised washroom facilities (we had to carry drinking water into the school building), no showers, dirt and disorder and workmen all over the place.

Father Eugene Scherzinger, a very popular vocation director, was absent, so the boys saw no one whom they knew. Father Lesage remedied that by phoning Father Scherzinger and having him fly back to Perrysburg. He knew all the boys, and they confided in him. He had a way with boys. How many remained at Perrysburg because of his quick return to the seminary will never be known. Had he been there at the beginning of the school year, the whole epidemic may have been avoided. Both he and Father Lesage had thought he could "skip the opening of the school year," judging from last year. *Moral:* The vocational director should be on hand for the first month or six weeks of the school year.

As the seminary finished its first several years, the Divine Word priests had gained a reputation of being very helpful to many of the parishes in the Diocese of Toledo. The priests were active on supply on the weekends and during the week when possible.

The seminary chronicler noted that life became very challenging as the second fall season arrived. Flu was already striking other Divine Word houses, and the fear was that flu could strike Perrysburg before the building was heated. Gas heat became available in mid-October, although there was no working thermostat to effectively regulate the heat, and soon thereafter the flu hit everyone. Almost every priest, Brother and student had the flu.

The second year was also difficult with ten boys leaving during the course of the year, and serious construction delays caused a disruption to life at the seminary. Even before the “temporary” building was finished, planning for the permanent structure had begun. The year closed with a beautiful dedication of the new temporary structure on June 15, 1958. An estimated 2,500 people came out to see the buildings and grounds. Bishop Rehring officiated.

### **THE DAILY ORDER**

In early 1959 the House Council held a lengthy discussion leading to a revision of the students’ daily order and the order of the community to match those changes. A thoughtful daily order came out of the discussion, which was forwarded to Father Mack for approval. Some of the discussion leading to the revision of the students’ daily schedule is summarized in the following statement of opinion of the faculty of Perrysburg:

- A later rising and retiring schedule would be desirable because it would be more in accord with the shift in living habits of people today towards a later retiring time. In this way, a half-hour shift upward would approximate the home more closely, and ease the transition from home to the minor seminary. Also, psychologically, parents would more easily understand a routine with a six o’clock rising and a later retiring. The advantages for the faculty would be considerable, since so many of the parish events in which the priests were invited to participate in, are scheduled for a late hour.
- The recreation period after school would be more profitable if extended thirty minutes beyond the present 4:25 schedule. It would make possible a more meaningful recreation program, which should be considered as co-curricular, where game time would be reasonably longer and allowance for clean up more generous.
- A 40-minute class period instead of the mixed program at present would be more in accordance with Ohio State recommendations (and the accrediting association) and at the same time would provide for a longer study period in the morning.

—The extended recreation after supper to 7:15 is highly desirable because of the students' participation in house work, scullery, etc. It would also enlarge the recreation time to a more desirable proportion, in preparation for the rest of the work in the evening schedule. The extended time at this point would also make possible club meetings, such as mission study clubs, class meetings, hobby time, music appreciation, television news, music practices, etc.

—A full half-hour recess in the morning would not be absolutely necessary. Twenty minutes together with a shortened class time would be sufficient.

—The total amount of study time could be equivalent to that of the present schedule, but more advantageously distributed, a total of 175 minutes.

—It would be desirable to have only one study time on Sunday (preferably before High Mass), in order to put the student more on his own for independent work in preparing for his classes. It would provide an educational situation in which a student could develop a deeper sense of responsibility.

—The regular Sunday afternoon study time could be conveniently transferred to Saturday after supper, 7:00–8:00 or 7:15–8:00. It is not desirable to have study before supper on Saturday, but rather to have a full 45-minute period of community singing practice.

—Spiritual reading should be provided for on evenings when there are no devotions, conference or confessions, and should not exceed 15 minutes (preferably only 10 minutes).

—The visit to the Blessed Sacrament would seem to be more appropriate after the last class in the afternoon, and should not exceed 10 minutes.

—In the students' minds, there should be a clear distinction between class time and study time. Class time is teacher-controlled and supervised; study time is student-controlled and is intended to be an exercise in developing independent study habits. It is recommended that more guidance be provided students in this area.



The graduates of 1960 included five of the first 17 students and the four top students from the second entrance class. Left-to-right: Paul Morman, Thomas Flannery, John Bettice, Herbert Hess, Father Frederick Rudolph, Robert Jackson, Clem Boenne, Ralph Musilli, Michael Fritzen, and John Riegler.

—Whenever possible in the revised schedule, provision should be made for the individual differences and group differences in endurance, attention-span and abilities. This is particularly desirable when comparing the freshman class with the higher classes. A freshman orientation program early in the year would improve their understanding of the meaning of the schedule, the objectives of the seminary, the methods of class preparation and study and the relationships between students, teachers and superiors.

As candidates for a religious order with far-flung missions, the students were members of the “Catholic Students’ Mission Crusade,” and each student belonged to a mission study club. Some of the missions the clubs studied were Africa, Formosa (Taiwan), India, Indonesia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and the southern United States. Missionaries returning to the United States would frequently visit and talk about the work of the missions and describe the cultures and living conditions. Among the most interesting in the early years was Bishop Leo Arkfeld, known as the “flying bishop,” and His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Tien Ken-Hsin (Tienchensing), China’s first Asian bishop. Father Emil Lesage’s brother, Father Alphonse Lesage, entertained students in the Cow Palace with boa constrictors brought from his mission in West Africa’s Gold Coast (present-day Ghana).



The Mission Festival was a popular annual picnic and fundraiser.



Barbecued chicken was one of the top drawing cards for the Mission Festival.

### **THE NEW PERMANENT SEMINARY**

On December 24, 1958, Father Nicholas Bisheimer called, saying that Rome had just given permission to build a new permanent seminary building but the construction cost should not exceed \$1 million. (The final cost would exceed the limit by over 50 percent.) A general sketch was quickly completed and sent to Rome for approval.



Hay rides with musical accompaniment were another popular Mission Festival attraction.

Munger & Munger developed an interconnected four-building plan. The distinctive chapel building would have a cupola made up of three concrete vaults 108 feet long. The undercroft of the chapel was to include the kitchen and refectory areas; the classroom building would include the dormitories; the gym would be equipped for sports, theater and entertainment; and the final building would be the residence for the priests and Brothers. The plan was set on the bluff overlooking the Maumee River and to the southwest of the temporary buildings at a distance from those buildings so not to disrupt activities in these latter structures. The cost was estimated to be \$1.35 million for the 103,000-square-foot facility. The General Council suggested several changes, and the plan was approved. The bids were opened on December 15, 1959, and the low-bidding general contractor, Steinle-Wolf Inc. of Fremont, Ohio, began moving dirt on December 24.

Construction proceeded at a quick pace, allowing the buildings to be partially occupied when the 85 students arrived in September 1960. The dedication of the completed structures was held on May 28, 1961.

In the spring of 1961, five Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Good Counsel joined the staff of the seminary. They were formerly missionaries in Cuba and had been exiled to the United States. Sisters Amparo, Angustias, Angela, Benigna and Carmela worked in the kitchen and

laundry, and were housed in the old stone house, formerly the priests' residence.

From the opening of Perrysburg in 1956 and for the balance of its first decade of existence, the student body grew. The peak number of 170 students was reached in 1965. The largest graduation class was 29 in 1966.

Minutes of an Educational Committee meeting in the fall of 1964 suggest that the seminary was facing growing pains. They reported that there were too many changes in personnel. There had been five graduating classes and four deans of students and 31 faculty members. The priest educators were expected to work in various parishes of the diocese besides teaching in the seminary as well as handling administrative duties. There were so many seniors in 1965 that the group would have to be divided into two senior classes. Two of the priest-teachers were not qualified to teach at Perrysburg, according to North Central accrediting standards. Those who did qualify were being asked to handle too many class hours. At the same time the vocation recruiters were being encouraged to keep finding more boys for the minor seminary.

For six years in the mid-1970s and into the early 1980s, a summer camp was conducted for eight weeks, with 290 children in attendance each week. The peak net profit was about \$80,000.

## **THE DECLINING YEARS**

A dramatic decline in numbers began in 1968 when a 30 percent drop in enrollment was experienced. The size of the student body remained relatively consistent from 1968 to 1981 with an average of 62 students. Then, in 1982, the seminary dropped from 70 students to 30. Further declines were experienced in subsequent years.

In a letter to Bishop James Hoffman in December 1982, Father Nicholas Weibl, rector of Holy Spirit Seminary—a diocesan high school seminary begun about the same time as the Divine Word seminary in Perrysburg—mentions a conversation he had with Father Donald Mulrenan, then-provincial of the Northern Province, headquartered at Techny. In part Father Weibl says:

I have just finished a conversation with Father Don  
Mulrenan, the Provincial of the Society of the Divine Word.

He wanted you to be aware of the following reflections concerning the program at Divine Word. Protocol would probably call for the two of you corresponding but since we were good friends and time is short, he agreed to this method of communication.

He feels that the program at Divine Word is not developing as expected for them. Of course, it has been only two years (?) and it might be too early to judge its value. He feels the retention rate has been low and this brings to question the value of manpower investment. The program is definitely continuing this year and next year. However there will be a re-examination within these years and perhaps another decision might be made at that time. The question of a home program and direct college recruitment program will then be a possibility. He wants you to know that the present program is under examination and evaluation but no decision will be made this year or next year.<sup>10</sup>

In late 1982 the Diocese of Toledo was undergoing its own reexamination of its minor seminary program. The number of priests on the staff had been reduced to two, and the student enrollment was 33. In a discernment proposal to the Priests' Senate, Father Weibl asked the priests' senate of the diocese to consider whether the self-contained formation program at Holy Spirit Seminary should continue or whether consolidation in a common formation program at Divine Word Seminary with class attendance at St. John's Jesuit High School might be considered.

Holy Spirit Seminary, which opened in 1964, closed in May 1983. Twenty students moved to Divine Word Seminary. The seminarians from both Holy Spirit and Divine Word were educated at St. John's High School in Toledo. In a 1983 House Council meeting, the reality of eventual closure of the Perrysburg seminary was addressed:

Looking ahead we must consider what is the future of the seminary program. The feeling is that we will not get new members. Some in a higher position of authority feel they would not be fully employed here or that we are not using



members in a proper way. One big problem—we have large buildings and fewer students. We are spending money on the buildings rather than on the people. We do not spend a lot directly for education.

The House Council meeting went on to consider the following questions:

- Are we willing to have an alternate program?
- Would it be feasible to move into smaller buildings?
- Would it be best to remove some buildings?
- How do we make vocations a top priority?
- Where are vocations coming from?
- Where are vocational choices being made?
- Can we tie into other alternate programs?

The meeting concluded with discussion of the possibility of some seminarians from the Precious Blood community coming to Perrysburg.

In an August 2, 1985, letter, Father Raymond Lennon, newly-named provincial of the Chicago Province that had been formed that year from the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, mandated that the committee made up of Father Donald Mulrenan (chairman), Father Edward Norton and Brother Raymond Albers prepare a report on the Divine Word houses in Perrysburg, Girard and Conesus. As it relates to Perrysburg this report was to provide information on the following areas of concern:

- The feasibility of continuing/discontinuing our own SVD high school seminary program
- What to do with the buildings and land at Perrysburg in the event that the high school seminary program is discontinued
- What the presence of the SVD would be in the area of Perrysburg

The committee's report to the Provincial Chapter on March 31–April 2, 1986, stated,

For several years a good enrollment was maintained at the Perrysburg Seminary. In the latter part of the late sixties and early seventies, the Perrysburg Seminary experienced a decrease in enrollment like most high school seminaries throughout the country. The Marian Hill Fathers and Brothers sent their high school candidates to Perrysburg for several years until they terminated their high school program in 1978. The drop in enrollment persisted throughout the seventies and eventually necessitated the termination of the self-contained seminary program.

In 1981, a program was established which provided for the education of our students at St. John's High School, administered by the Jesuits, while the formation program continued at the Perrysburg Seminary. In 1983, the diocesan students of Holy Spirit Seminary joined our program at Perrysburg. For the past two or three years the greatest challenge has been to get an enthusiastic and dedicated vocation recruiter for this program. No doubt the absence of a vocation recruiter has negatively impacted on the seminary program at Perrysburg. We might even question whether it was given a fair chance. On the other hand the decision must be made whether we can justify continuing this program in light of the present facilities, decreased enrollment, and availability of dedicated personnel.

### **A NEW APPROACH**

The program of sending the students to a local Catholic high school had replaced the self-contained seminary program in 1981, and over the following five years there was a steady decrease in enrollment.

The majority of the Divine Word faculty at Perrysburg believed their formation program to be a good one. However, dedicated and qualified personnel continued to be a very strongly felt need, especially in the area of recruitment and formation. The enrollment in 1985 when there were less than a dozen students could hardly justify maintaining the expensive facilities.

The financial numbers and the enrollment numbers were bleak. The subsidy for the 1982-83 school year was \$16,870. With the termi-

nation of the summer camp and the loss of the revenue it produced, the subsidy rose to \$43,470 for the 1983-84 school year. In the final two years that the seminary operated, the subsidy rose even higher to \$58,950 and \$63,000 while enrollment fell to only 11 students in the final year.

The Provincial Chapter presented numerous options to the committee, with the statement that future aims and goals of our presence at Perrysburg must concretely and specifically contribute to the realization of traditional Society purposes of:

- Creating mission awareness
- Involvement in formation / recruitment
- Involvement in society apostolates
- Promotion / fund-raising

Several documents were attached to the report. Among the documents was a letter dated January 8, 1985, in which Bishop James Hoffman of the Toledo diocese responded to the questions that had been presented to him at a previous meeting, concerning the possible future uses of the Perrysburg property and facilities. Recognition was given to this exceptional site. On the other hand, they ruled out its use for a parish or school. Because of the present existence of four retreat centers, a spiritual and retreat center did not meet with much support. Maybe a combination of circumstances in the future could bring about intensive development. Of course, the bishop would want the Society of the Divine Word to remain in his diocese and expressed appreciation for the contribution made, especially in the area of mission awareness.

On October 28–29, 1985, the *ad hoc* Committee met with Bishop Hoffman, Jesuit Father Theodore Walters (president of St. John's High School) and attorney Francis McManus. Bishop Hoffman was brought up-to-date on the information that had been gathered. He was told that a final decision would be reached in an upcoming Provincial Chapter. The integral role that St. John's High School played in providing the academic program for our students at Perrysburg as well as the Divine Word faculty at St. John's necessitated Father Walters being present for the meeting. He spoke very positively of our students and indicated support of our program. He also mentioned the positive impact of our students on the student body of St. John's. He appreciated the

tremendous contribution made by Father James Braband as a member of the St. John's faculty. In light of planning for the next school year he asked that the Society let him know the final decision concerning the program at Perrysburg as soon as possible.

A letter from attorney McManus to Father Raymond Kolk (November 4, 1985) "in response to our meeting of October 28, 1985" stated that Mr. McManus and his firm had:

- Confirmed the interest of the Cavalear Development Company in the land at Perrysburg
- Estimated the value of the land between \$7,000 to \$10,000 an acre
- Established negotiations for Munger & Munger to do a feasibility study of the buildings at Perrysburg
- Procured a copy of the tax map indicating land owned by the Society of the Divine Word

## **THE CLOSING**

The contribution of the Society of the Divine Word to the Diocese of Toledo was immense. Financial records from the early 1980s list 47 parishes, schools and convents at which priests from Divine Word Seminary celebrated Mass and performed other duties. Over the 37 years of the Society's presence in the Toledo diocese, 50 priests provided about 270 total years of service. When priests of the Diocese of Toledo and other religious orders were no longer able to provide priests, the Society responded positively. In April 1980 Sister Mary Louise Ann, the superior of the Notre Dame Sisters, contacted Father Gerhard Vogel when the Jesuits were no longer able to provide a priest to celebrate daily Mass for the Sisters.

In a five-page handwritten letter to Father Donald Mulrenan dated January 11, 1986, Bishop James Hoffman wrote:

Allow me to state again what a blessing the presence of the Society of the Divine Word has been for the Diocese. You have been effective witnesses to the Gospel, a constant reminder of the missionary dimension of the Catholic Church and constant contributors to the life of the local church. We appreciate all that has been and pray that your presence among us will continue.

Divine Word Seminary at Perrysburg closed in June 1986 at the conclusion of its 30<sup>th</sup> year of educating young men for the priesthood.

Among the final records of the Perrysburg seminary was the Triennial Report written by Father Raymond Kolk in December 1991. He reported that the four most recently built brick buildings were in excellent condition, and the farm of 278 acres was being farmed out under contract. The remaining three members of the community—Brother Gerard Pashia, Fathers Thomas Lavin and Raymond Kolk—continued to take care of the grounds and provided chaplaincy service to the Notre Dame Sisters and to hospitals, as well as for weekend supply to area parishes. During the previous four years neither priest had taken any vacation. Brother Gerald had taken only one week off in that period of time.

Father Kolk's final words in the report tell of his effort to find a buyer. He wrote:

Our deep concern is that the site will be used properly by whomever it is purchased. We are sorry the Diocese at the moment cannot afford to develop the site into what we think is a very important parish that would be beneficial to the Diocese as well as the people who have been so supportive of the SVD as a Society and its work in the missions of the Church.

In July 1993 an article in the *Toledo Blade* announced the sale of the seminary property. The buildings on the property were later razed. Forrester & Wehrle, a local developer, announced plans for building a new subdivision on the former seminary property. The name of the development was The Sanctuary, with expensive homes overlooking the Maumee River.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Members Who Served in Perrysburg**

#### **Rectors**

Father Emil Lesage	1956–1958
Father Leo Hotze	1958–1961
Father Raymond Weisenberger	1961–1967
Father Paul Jacobi	1967–1970

Father Ronald Jaeckels	1970–1971
Father John Farley	1971–1976
Father James Mullaley	1976–1979
Father Gerhard Vogel	1979–1985
Father Raymond Kolk	1985–1993

### Priests

Father Alex Hoefler	1956–1958
Father Emil Lesage	1956–1958, 1976–1977
Father Frederick Rudolph	1956–1961
Father Eugene Scherzinger	1956–1964, 1969
Father Leo Hotze	1958–1961
Father Bartley Schmitz	1958
Father James Richard	1958
Father Leo Schaffhauser	1959–1961
Father William Bauer	1959–1968
Father Claire Risse	1959
Father Charles Leisring	1959–1964
Father Charles Heskamp	1960–1967
Father Raymond Weisenberger	1961–1967
Father Christian Baker	1962–1966
Father John McHenry	1962–1964
Father David Slattery	1962–1971
Father Terrence McGurk	1963–1984
Father Robert McCormack	1963–1964
Father Eugene Bauchwitz	1965–1967
Father Edward Baur	1965
Father Boniface Duritsky	1965–1968
Father Norbert Schuler	1965–1986
Father William Shea	1965–1966
Father Walter Bunofsky	1966–1969, 1977
Father Victor Butler	1966
Father Edward Amelse	1967
Father Paul Jacobi	1967–1970
Father Joseph Donahue	1968–1977
Father Thomas Krosnicki	1968–1969
Father Robert Jones	1969–1982
Father Ronald Jaeckels	1970–1971
Father Wilbur Klunk	1970–1996

Father James Bergin	1971–1976
Father John Farley	1971–1976
Father Lawrence Mack	1971–1981
Father John Rodney	1971–1973
Father Elmer Elsbernd	1973–1986
Father Donald Mulrenan	1974–1979
Father Eugene Stoll	1975–1989
Father James Mullaley	1976–1979
Father Thomas Commons	1977
Father Edmund Morman	1977–1986
Father Jerome Brzakowski	1979–1981
Father Gerhard Vogel	1979–1985
Father James Braband	1982–1986
Father Sylvester Jaworski	1984–1989
Father Lawrence Walsh	1985
Father Raymond Kolk	1985–1993
Father Thomas Lavin	1985–1993
Father Vincent Burke	1986–1987

### **Brothers**

Brother Stephanus Steinhauser	1956–1971
Brother Camilus Turkalj	1956–1958
Brother Nicholas Carlin	1957–1958
Brother Longinus Posch	1958–1986
Brother Raymond McKenna	1961–1962
Brother Simon Maciolek	1961–1962
Brother Petrus (Richard) Hilt	1963, 1967
Brother Richard Ball	1963–1965
Brother Lucas (Luke) Droste	1965
Brother René Gawlik	1966–1967
Brother Frederick Schrein	1966–1968
Brother Don Bosco Urbain	1967–1968
Brother Donald Champagne	1969–1971, 1977–1984
Brother George Vanden Bergh	1970
Brother Leonard Burkard	1971–1973
Brother Daniel Rebant	1973
Brother Daniel Hoffman	1974–1975
Brother Gerard Pashia	1975–1990
Brother William Prinz	1975–1979

Brother Paul Cassabon	1976–1984
Brother Raymond Albers	1977–1982
Brother Dominic Nigro	1977–1981
Brother William Kersey	1978
Brother Gerard Raker	1980–1993
Brother George Haegele	1980–1983
Brother James Mullen	1985–1986
Brother Thomas Granfield	1986–1989

### Students

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1957	18	1972	70
1958	41	1973	70
1959	51	1974	56
1960	64	1975	57
1961	80	1976	55
1962	130	1977	51
1963	145	1978	64
1964	145	1979	64
1965	170	1980	70
1966	148	1981	70
1967	125	1982	30
1968	87	1983	25
1969	74	1984	27
1970	73	1985	27
1971	58	1986	11

### Perrysburg Students Who Professed Perpetual Vows

(and the year in which they made their perpetual profession)

Father Michael Fritzen	1968
Father Walter Bracken	1971
Father Michael Blume	1972
Father James Pawlicki	1973
Father Richard Wolff	1973
Father Daniel Bauer	1974
Father Stanley Uroda	1974
Father John Horstman	1979
Father Roger Schroeder	1979
Brother Bernard Spitzley	1981



## NOTES

1. The information about the purchase of land and the opening of the seminary is drawn from Father Lawrence Mack, Chronicle of Divine Word Seminary, Perrysburg, Ohio, "Inquiries, Plans, and Purchase."

2. Father Aloisius Große-Kappenberg, Letter to Western Provincial Father Lawrence Mack, August 9, 1951, Topic: Another Mission Seminary.

3. Father Große-Kappenberg, Letter to the three U.S. provincials, August 23, 1954, Topic: USA-Provinces Juniorate / Permanent Location.

4. Superior General, Letter to Western Provincial Father Lawrence Mack, August 23, 1954.

5. Western Provincial Father Lawrence Mack, Letter to the Superior General, September 6, 1954, Topic: Minor Seminary.

6. Superior General, Letter to Western Provincial Father Lawrence Mack, September 16, 1954, Topic: USA-Western Province / New Minor Seminary.

7. Sometime later, Bishop Rehring told Father Mack that shortly after he granted the Society of the Divine Word entry into the diocese, two other religious institutes sought the same permission but had to be refused.

8. House Council meeting minutes, August 1956. (This was the first House Council meeting.)

9. House Council meeting minutes, February 26, 1958.

10. Letter of Father Nicholas Weibl to Bishop James Hoffman, December 1982.

**NOTE:** All the documents cited in these endnotes are maintained in the Chicago Province Archives.