

February 11, 2018

## **EULOGY DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL MASS FOR BROTHER CONRAD KEARNEY, FSC**

About five or so years ago, Brother Conrad and a few brothers were having lunch here at the holy family community. We were discussing some news announced during the previous week. The news was that a Brother had been appointed a university president, another Brother had been made a diocesan superintendent of schools, and a third Brother was named a general counselor of the institute in Rome.

In the course of the conversation I asked Conrad if he ever aspired to have such titles as President, Superintendent or General Counselor for himself. Without a moments delay – he answered - "Brother has always been title enough for me!" Those of us at the table learned a lesson that day, a lesson about Conrad, and perhaps a lesson about ourselves.

Conrad came to the District of San Francisco as a stranger in the summer of 1965. He was an exchange brother from the New York District. No one here really knew much about him. That gap in Conrad's history was filled in for us in 2004. Former District Archivist Andrea Miller asked Conrad to sit for an Oral History. He declined. And instead decided to write an autobiographical sketch. He was born William Edward Kearney on April 21, 1919 in Greenwich Village, New York City. So - we have Conrad's memories of his childhood, his vocation and his early years. Allow me to share a few of Conrad's memories in his own words...

I was born on April 21, 1919, in Greenwich Village, New York City. Our family lived in a fourth-floor apartment on West 14th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. My parents were William and Caroline. Dad was a bookkeeper for Stokes Coal Company, while Mother remained home with us four children. The oldest was Helen. I was next, two years younger. My brother Dan was one year younger than I; and my brother Ed two years younger than Dan.

All four of us children went through the parish school, which was just around the corner on Thirteenth Street, about opposite the church. So in going to and from both the church and the school, we didn't even have to cross a street. It was a huge school building of about four stories. On one side was the boys' department, in charge of the Christian Brothers, and on the other side, the girls' department under the Sisters of Charity.

I graduated from St. Bernard's in 1932, receiving the General Excellence medal-a gold one attached to a watch fob. I had hoped to go to the Brothers' high school, La Salle Academy, on East Second Street (referred to by the Brothers of the District as "Two Street"). But in those Depression days my Dad's salary was cut twice that summer. So he could not afford to send me to La Salle... especially with my two brothers following soon after me. Therefore I went to the local public high school, where I received a pretty good education under some excellent, dedicated teachers.

Each Friday afternoon we had a school assembly. It always began with the principal (a woman and a Ph.D.) reading us a selection from the Bible!

The New York District had a Junior Novitiate and a Novitiate at Barrytown, New York, ninety-four miles north of New York City. The property was rural and extensive, like that of Mont La Salle. It was atop a long slope to the Hudson River, along the shore of which ran the New York Central Railroad. Several of my friends and former classmates at St. Bernard's were then in the Junior Novitiate. I had visited them and was much impressed by the place and the Junior Novices. My friends seemed so happy. So, one year from graduating from high school, I felt attracted to the Brothers' life.

The Juniorate was full: 150 living in three dorms of fifty each. It was a happy time. Just about every Sunday morning the Visitor, Brother Eliphus Victor, would come up from the City to distribute report cards and give one of his lively conferences-frequently punctuated with "No doubt about it!"

In June 1936 our senior class of about forty moved over to the Novitiate, in a separate wing, for our two-and-a-half-month Postulancy. On September 7th, eve of the Birthday of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, we received the Religious Habit and began our year of Novitiate.

I was given the name "Conrad of Jesus." (Many years later when we went back to our family names, and could either keep our entire family name or our Religious first name with our family name, I chose "Conrad J. Kearney." The initial "J" for "Jesus." Thus I practically kept both my full Religious name plus my family last name.)

The Novitiate was like a Trappist monastery under the stern, longtime, "Keep-the-Rule-and-the-Rule-will-keep-you" Novice master, Brother Austin Joseph, and the milder Sub-Director, Brother Conrad Vincent. Rising at 4:30, bells ringing about every half hour to signal the end of one religious exercise or the beginning of another, strict modesty of the eyes, daily accusation of faults, Friday night advertisement of defects, strict silence outside of recreation, Thursday afternoon long walks in groups through the countryside, reading during every meal, and after lunch and dinner "recreation of Rule" walking around outside in groups, begun by recalling and commenting on the readings, plus manual labor outdoors every afternoon! "Free" time? No such thing! On the go from morn till night, ending at 8:00 with prayer in chapel. And so to bed.

Once in a while a little humor helped lighten the seriousness. One day for manual labor we were out picking cherries all afternoon. Afterwards, just before spiritual reading, the Novice Master announced: "Those who ate any cherries during manual labor today, stand up." There were few empty chairs! Then at dinner that night, guess what we had for dessert?  
CHERRIES!

September 8, 1937, we Novices pronounced our first vows. The very next morning we left, by bus, for the Scholasticate at De La Salle College, Washington, D.C. (Actually the house was in Prince Georges County, Maryland; just across the border line with D.C.). This was another full house-150 Scholastics, including those from the Baltimore District. But instead of dormitories, we had rooms, about four to six to a room. Brother Leonard from Baltimore was the Director.

The first two years of the Scholasticate we spent right at De La Salle College (affiliated with Catholic University), with mostly faculty Brothers as our professors. Brother Charles Henry, future Superior General, taught us Latin; at the same time that he was studying for his Ph.D. at Catholic U. He used to play handball with us on recreation days.

At the end of each school year the entire group of Scholastics would travel by buses up to La Salle Military Academy in Oakdale, New York, on Long Island. There we would spend the whole summer-taking courses in the morning and swimming and playing ball in the afternoon. The last two years of our Scholasticate we spent at Catholic University, commuting by our bus from De La Salle College. In June 1941 our class graduated from C.U. I received a B.A. degree in English. Then at the end of that summer we were given our teaching assignments. I was sent to La Salle Academy on East Second Street in Manhattan---the very school I was unable to attend as a student!

I taught Religion, English, speech, and typing; was moderator and coach of forensics, and coach of freshman basketball. I served as secretary of the Catholic Forensic League of Greater New York, and as president of the Azarias Forensic Society, a league of our Brothers' high schools in the New York District. The La Salle Academy debaters, orators, and actors won a large share of awards, including State championships in the National Forensic League. One year in the NFL tournament held at Hamilton, New York—I think it was--we won first place in both Dramatic and Humorous Declamation, and second place in debate. The championship debate was broadcast live over the local radio station.

I received my M.A. in English from Manhattan College, taking classes on Saturday mornings usually. That meant a long subway ride to and from the College. I would do my research for my thesis on Saturday afternoons at the well-known New York Public Library on 42nd Street. Right after lunch in community I'd walk the two miles, for exercise, to the library; do the research, then take the subway home in time for dinner.

My teaching ended, temporarily, in 1953 when I was appointed Vice-principal of the school and Sub-Director of the community. In 1955 I was sent to the Retreat house on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan for the 50 (or 60?)-day Retreat. Brother Cornelius Luke was Director; and Brother Leo Kirby, Sub-Director. Two of the California Brothers on that Retreat were Chris Hosman and Maurice Flynn, with both of whom I would later live in community.

At the end of the Beaver Island Retreat I learned that I was assigned to Christian Brothers Academy (CBA), a long-established and reputable military day school, in Albany, New York. There again I taught Religion and English; was moderator of forensics, the school newspaper, and the golf team; ran the bookstore; and was economer for the Community. At CBA in 1961 I observed my Silver Jubilee as a Christian Brother. There was a Mass in the school chapel with cadets in uniform as servers, then a reception and luncheon in the house. My two brothers, with their wives and oldest sons, attended.

In the spring of 1965 I got a phone call one morning from Brother Leo Kirby, Visitor. He told me that a Brother from the San Francisco District wanted to come to New York to take a certain course, or courses, at Fordham University. He couldn't get those courses at any university in California. To come to New York the Brother needed a New York Brother to be his exchange. Leo asked if I'd be willing to be the exchange teacher, probably for a year or so. Leo said for me to think it over for a few days, then to let him know my decision. It was "Yes." So the San Francisco Brother-- Harry Morgan--came East, and I went West.

I was assigned to Bishop Armstrong High School in Sacramento. Brother Haig Charshaf was the Director and Principal. I taught Religion and English, and coached forensics. I'd leave with our squad around 6:00 o'clock in the morning on many a Saturday to go to a tournament at various schools in the valley.

After two years at Bishop Armstrong I was assigned to Garces Memorial High School in Bakersfield. Daniel Lee was the Director and principal; Zachary Shore, sub-director and vice principal. Again I taught Religion and English, and coached forensics. In the Community we had an elderly Afro-American lady as our cook. One of her memorable desserts was brandy pie. She would soak the pie with so much brandy-and serve it in individual soup bowls-that when you finished your pie, you had plenty of brandy left over for your soup spoon!

One Sunday morning in 1968 near the end of the school year, Brother Bertram Coleman, Visitor, phoned me to say that a Brother from the Midwest, Michael Walsh, was recommended by his doctor to move for his health to a warm, dry climate like that of Bakersfield. To make room for him at Garces, Bertram asked me if I'd go up to "that new school," Justin High, in Napa. It had opened just two years before, in 1966. I said I would. And never did I imagine that Justin would be my home and apostolate for the next thirty-four years!

When I had come to the San Francisco District in 1965 as an exchange teacher for Brother Harry Morgan, I had expected to be here only for a year or two. Harry finished his studies at Fordham University in one year. Then he returned to California. So I assumed I'd have to return to the New York District. I felt that, being here for such a short time, it wasn't worth coming all the way from New York. Besides I was just getting acclimated to this part of the country, to the Brothers, and

to the students. So I asked Brother Bertram Coleman, Visitor, if I could stay in the District for another year or so. He said I could.

Time went on, and I lived from year to year expecting that I'd soon have to return to the New York District. About 1970 the Visitor, Bertram, called Malachy back to the San Francisco District. Then I assumed I'd have to return to my District. By that time I'd been in the San Francisco District for about six years. And I was feeling "at home" and very happy here. After much prayer and reflection, I felt I "belonged" here, and I really wanted to stay in this District permanently. I asked the Visitor about this. He said that he'd gladly accept me into the San Francisco District but that I would first have to be released by the New York District. So I wrote to the New York District Visitor, Augustine Loes, and made my request. I foresaw three possible answers: 1. "You may stay for another year"; 2. "No, return now;" 3. "Yes, you may transfer to the San Francisco District." The Visitor's written reply was number "3." He added, "You seem so happy there that you must be doing good work. So we've decided to let you change Districts." Thus, in February 1971 I became an official member of the San Francisco District.

The words most often mentioned when Brothers, HFC staff and his many friends used when they thought of Brother Conrad were ---deep faith, kindness, generosity, loyalty, dedication, professionalism, friendship, and on and on.

Brother Conrad's life was bound together by his religious vocation as a Christian Brother, his deep faith, his zeal for Christian education, his love and respect for students and their parents, the Dominican Sisters and all his coworkers, the alumni of Justin-Siena high school and his many, many friends.

In recommending Brother Conrad for the "Distinguished Lasallian Educator award" in 1999 principal of Justin-Siena high school Greg Schmitz wrote-"Brother Conrad exemplifies the ideals of St. John Baptiste de La Salle, both spiritually and pedagogically ... he is a working example of what it means to be a total Christian - always pleasant, always hopeful, always efficient, and especially, always dedicated."

Thank you Brother Conrad - rest in peace.

Brother James Riordan, FSC