

THE SECOND DECADE: 1975–1984

The graduation of the first 11 seniors from 6 countries in June 1974 was a time of great celebration at St. John's, because it marked the successful completion of a College Preparatory program. The academic standards of this program had been endorsed by a visiting team of educators who approved it for accreditation by the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges in 1976. However, in 1975, population changes were taking place in Brussels, which meant that this accreditation was but one step towards the creation of an academic program that would satisfy the needs of the present and future pupils of St. John's. The growth rate of the American population had begun to drop while that of the British population was rising, mainly due to the expansion of the European Community in 1971 to include Britain, Ireland and Denmark.

Families relocating to Brussels seeking education leading to entrance into British universities for their children were attracted to the recently established British School, whose program was designed to conform to the entrance requirements of these universities. The British families whose children were already enrolled in St. John's, particularly those who had sought an education grounded in Christian values, were faced with a difficult decision now that a program in harmony with the demands of the British system of Higher Education was available. A further complication was manifesting itself. How could St. John's accommodate the broader requirements encountered by the growing number of nationalities enrolled, now approaching 30, all of whom faced similar problems?

Furthermore, since 1962 a worldwide group of educators had been involved in a project to create a High School curriculum that would be accepted by the major university systems all over the world as a suitable entrance requirement. This was the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, which had already been introduced into over 400 colleges in 40 countries. In order to investigate the possibility of future harmonization of American, British and international standards in one curriculum, St. John's set up a task force to evaluate the British General Certificate of Education "Ordinary level" program ("O" level). Simultaneously, work began on a study of the requirements of the IB.

This same year, 1975, saw the appointment of Brother Timothy Mc Nary FSC as High School Principal, taking over from Brother Dominic Everett FSC who had held the post since 1972. Further changes came with the setting up of a School Advisory Board to replace the previously existing Advisory Committee on Finance and Development.

In 1976, Brother Michael Corry FSC took over as High School Principal while Brother John Mc Niff FSC was appointed to the new post of High School Vice Principal. The relationship between St. John's Waterloo and St. John's Washington was also reviewed. It was agreed that St. John's Waterloo would continue to offer international educational experience for the De La Salle Brothers, and that the Brothers would continue to help in recruiting and supplying teaching Brothers. In addition, St. John's Waterloo would initiate a scholarship program for students from Washington.

Following the report from the Task Force on the British General Certificate of Education, the Advisory Board approved the recommendation to introduce the program with a limited number of "O" levels in September. The examinations to be offered were: Physics, Geography, English Language, French, German and Mathematics. However, the limited number of students did not warrant introducing GCSE "A" levels. Construction of a second



THE SECOND DECADE: 1975–1984

gymnasium was completed this year, and in December there were 679 students on roll. Cardinal Suenens of Malines agreed to be the Commencement speaker for the forthcoming June graduation. This was a great honor for St. John's, not least for the publicity given to the school throughout the Belgian community.

In the light of St. John's commitment to ensure that the school would continue to serve the needs of the changing English-speaking community, the introduction of a boarding program was now considered. It had come to the attention of the Advisory Board, that American families moving to Saudi Arabia with oil companies were obliged to board children after Grade 8 in the US, UK or Switzerland. A Boarding Facilities Committee was instituted to look into the matter and seek interest from families. In December 1977, the school population had risen to 692 students.

Following the positive report of the Boarding Facilities Committee, the Advisory Board in 1978 agreed to the introduction of a boarding program, and two villas were leased in Waterloo for that purpose. Later that year, the proposed scholarship program for students from St. John's Washington was presented to the St. John's Waterloo community as follows: The President of St. John's Washington would nominate students to St. John's Waterloo. The students would reside in one of the residential student villas. Their courses would be approved by St. John's Washington, in the best interests of the students, in order to complete their graduation requirements.

Some changes occurred in the school administration in 1979. Brother John McNiff FSC became High School Principal on a one-year appointment. Mrs. Judith Debetencourt took over as High School Vice Principal, and Mrs. Carol Staudt was appointed Elementary School Vice Principal.

After some years of discussion and planning, St. John's School agreed to amalgamate a small nursery school on Drève des Chasseurs, under the overall philosophy and administration of St. John's. The new nursery was opened in a recently purchased villa on the Champ du Roussart.

Several years of study by the faculty came to fruition when St. John's completed the work of bringing its curriculum in line with the requirements of the International Baccalaureate and was authorized to establish the program. The harmonization of British, American and international standards in one program placed great demands on the educators at St. John's, but their efforts were recognized on 6 February 1979 when St. John's English-Speaking School became St. John's International School.

In September of that year, Sister Mary John FCJ, in a report to the St. John's community, highlighted the growth and development of the school after 10 years in Waterloo. Through developing alternative academic programs in recent years in the light of future population trends, the school was facing the future with confidence. The new nursery school was a successful addition. The boarding program was serving a need; although still in a developmental stage. At this time, seven boys and three girls were in residence.

The year 1980 was ushered in with the news that the charismatic Superintendent, Sister Mary John Shannon FCJ, was being recalled by the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus. (She was later to become Provincial of the Continental Province.) This was a surprise and shock to the school community, since she had been at the helm from the inception of the school in its "Montjoie" days and had guided its development through the move to Waterloo to the present successful situation in 1980. Her farewell ceremony was a bittersweet occasion for faculty, students and their parents. Sister Mary John (now known as Sr. Maeve) donated her parting gift from the school community to endow a scholarship for families in genuine need. Sr. Barbara Hughes FCJ from England was warmly welcomed as the new Superintendent, and the reins of government passed smoothly into her capable hands. Two years later, in September 1982, the school community was devastated by the news that the much-loved Elementary School Principal, Paul McCarthy, had died as a result of a sudden,

THE SECOND DECADE: 1975–1984

tragic heart attack. His passing was a huge blow, but the memory of his own strong faith, his idealism and vision as an educator helped St. John's move forward confidently with its future plans.

The early '80s saw improvements to the gymnasium facilities with the building of an extension from the small original gym to the large gym, locker rooms and the addition of an athletic office. A new tennis complex was completed providing all-weather courts at the rear of the school on Champ du Roussart. The Elementary School acquired an innovative video center with a large screen and a new computer laboratory, which was set up in response to an increasing interest in the development of computer studies among staff, students and parents. Two Apple IIe computers were installed to replace the old Tandy machines. At a special ceremony these new facilities were dedicated to the memory of the late Paul McCarthy, and a handsome trophy case was installed by the Booster Club in his honor. In August 1983, Grade 13 was added to the High School in response to parental requests and a perceived need to provide enrichment for European-based families. The Recruiting Report at that time showed 17 students in Elementary School and 303 in High School (Grades 7–13). There were 12 girls and 8 boys in the boarding program.

The next few years were a busy time for the St. John's Development Committee. Early in 1984, a questionnaire was given to the faculty concerning the use of space in the whole school. Following that, together with their own studies of the situation, the committee began the work of prioritizing the pending proposed building projects. These included the building of an arts center and theater. Consideration was also given to plans for a pre-primary building or wing. About this time, the property belonging to the Blangy family came up for sale. These premises comprised a spacious villa with extensive grounds situated on the Champ du Roussart behind the school. Acquisition of this site would give the school space to expand. The FCJ congregation purchased the property in September 1984 just in time for the 20th anniversary celebrations of the founding of St. John's. This anniversary was an emotional event for those in the school community whose memories went back to "Montjoie" days or to the early '70s in the new buildings on Drève Richelle, Waterloo.