

1-1-2016

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Recommended Citation

Service, Allan L.. "Embracing Mission: Profile of a Jesuit Leader." *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 5, 2 (2016). doi:-.

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Embracing Mission: Profile of a Jesuit Leader

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Abstract

This article provides a profile of the leadership of David M. Clarke, S.J. as president of Regis College/University. The persona of the leader is the driving force. Leadership strategies and tactics are filtered through the talents, motivations, and values of the leader. Embracing Jesuit and institutional mission is the foundation. Pursuit of visibility follows naturally. Listening and learning are constants. Fostering collaboration is a capstone. Jesuit leadership advances mission and makes an enduring impact upon the institution.

Handley's report to the Board showed that Clarke was the leader of the institution from yesteryear's brink of disaster to the creative and entrepreneurial programs of the contemporary institution.¹

He Had Me at Purple

David Clarke and I first met in the spring of 1984. He was well into his presidency. I was a candidate for Dean of Career Programs, the then-current label for adult degree programs. One of my last stops was with the president. Knowing I was a proud graduate of the College of the Holy Cross, his first question was “So. Do you bleed purple?”

In that moment I knew I was meant to be at Regis. Here was a man I could learn from; a president I could respect; a leader I could follow. Dave Clarke would prove to be all that and more. One of my Jesuit heroes.

I tell you this, dear reader, so you know this author is no unbiased observer. What emerges here is a work of heart as well as mind. Though I begin with the conviction that David Clarke was an exemplary Jesuit leader, I make no claim for his way of proceeding as a universal model of leadership, Jesuit or otherwise. This effort is simply a set of observations informed by analysis, experience, and discernment.

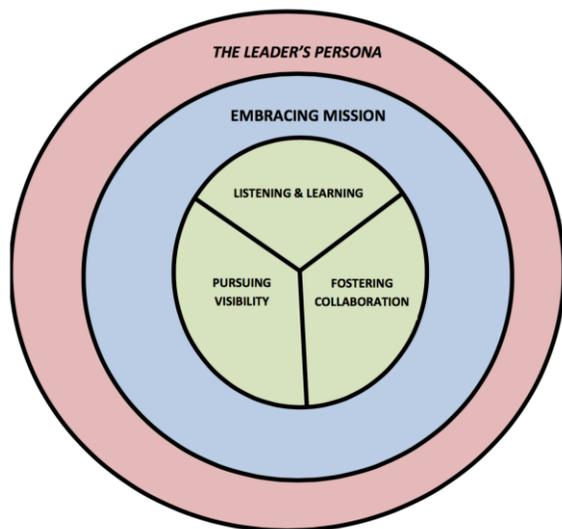
Two excellent histories of Regis College/University serve as foundation. *Regis: On the Crest of*

*the West*² by Harold L. Stansell, S.J., begins with the founding of the school in 1877 and continues to the advent of the Clarke presidency. *Regis: Beyond the Crest*³ by Ronald S. Brockway resumes the story and includes a rich and copiously documented record of the Clarke years and beyond.

Chris Lowney's *Heroic Leadership*⁴ is indispensable here, providing a resonant model for understanding Jesuit leadership. Present in the background are numerous perspectives encountered during this author's time in the Jesuit educational milieu. Finally, the study is infused with personal recollections, complemented by the insights and memories of generous Regis colleagues.

The profile centers on a framework for examining Clarke's leadership. The leader's persona is the starting point. His embrace of mission — the mission of the Society of Jesus and the mission of Regis College/University — is foundational. That embrace led directly to a quest for visibility for the institution and for the president. While pursuing visibility, Clarke was constantly listening and learning. Listening for advice and guidance; learning of opportunities to advance the mission. All that in an environment that valued collaboration and partnership. These dimensions — summarized in Figure 1 — provide an integrated view of the leadership of David Marshall Clarke, S.J. as president of Regis College/University.

Figure 1. A Framework for Clarke’s Leadership



This Man Clarke

Study of leadership begins with the leader. Regardless of the strategies and tactics used, the leader’s persona is the determinative element of leadership. What does the leader bring to the work? What aspects of the leader’s persona are most critical? Most distinctive? Who is this man Clarke?

Clarke came to the Catholic faith as an adult. Raised in Spokane, Washington, he met both Catholicism and Jesuits at Gonzaga University.

After completing a doctorate in organic chemistry at Northwestern University, he entered the Jesuit novitiate at age 26. He was ordained a priest of the Society of Jesus on June 13, 1963. David M. Clarke, S.J. was named president of Regis College on August 1, 1972, the school’s twenty-second president; the first located by a search committee; the first named by vote of the Board of Trustees.

He was a large man; in stature and in presence. A Regis fund-raiser once said of him: “He didn’t work the room, the room worked him.” A man of keen intelligence and large appetites; of chosen faith and wide vision; of power and humility. Many experienced David Clarke as shy, almost reclusive. He valued solitude. At Regis he lived in a dorm room, separated from the Jesuit community. When he could, he escaped to a

modest lakeside retreat or wandered the mountains photographing flowers. Even took an occasional “road trip” like a jaunt up the ALCAN Highway. One of the characteristics — almost contradictions — of this leader’s persona was that he overcame his private inclinations to become the very public figure required of a university president.

Through much of his life, Clarke was near the leading edge of technological development, especially the application of computers and information systems. He designed a new science curriculum at the Jesuit novitiate. Created the essence of a computer center at Gonzaga many years ago. Senior (in years) members of the Regis community recall fondly his *ex machina* introduction of computers to the campus back in the day when the machine of choice was the Tandy/Radio Shack TRS 80 (the dear old “Trash 80”).

As a man of faith and a Jesuit priest, Clarke’s values were exemplary. Integrity. Honesty. Courage. Loyalty. Collaboration rather than competition. Bold; his tolerance of risk was legendary. Confident yet quick to cut losses. Trust was at his core. Trust in his instincts. Trust in opportunities for expanding mission. Trust in people chosen to help advance the mission. Trust in their application of their talents.

David Clarke was exceptionally gifted when dealing with numbers. He spoke the language of numbers fluently. Financial numbers. Budget numbers. Student headcount and credit hour numbers. Enrollment numbers. The full range of quantification vital to leading an institution of higher learning. Whether a product of Jesuit and scientific education or a kind of left brain/right brain fusion, Clarke’s adeptness with numbers was a distinguishing element of his persona.

Working closely with him was invigorating. A budget problem became an opportunity not just for balancing the books but also for a creative approach to the root of the problem. Declining enrollment numbers provided impetus for identifying new markets, ultimately leading to hosts of adult learners. Institutional budgeting in the Clarke era grew from back-of-the-envelope to

a sophisticated process for achieving the annual goal of a “balanced budget.”

Pursuing new opportunities often had the flavor of experiments. *Start with an hypothesis:* Something like this might work. *Conduct the experiment:* Try out the program. *Observe and evaluate the results:* What were the outcomes? If the experiment succeeds, the hypothesis is verified and a new way to advance the mission is discovered. If not, the hypothesis is rejected and something useful has been learned. The scientific method applied in an organizational setting.

David Clarke the leader was arguably most Ignatian in his relationships with people. Recognizing that we must be cautious in interpreting another’s psyche and motives, we turn here to Lowney’s model:

Jesuit love-driven leadership is:

- the *vision* to see each person’s talent, potential, and dignity
- the *courage, passion and commitment* to unlock that potential
- the resulting *loyalty and mutual support* that energize and unite teams⁵

Clarke had strong and practical instincts about people he called to serve with him. When he encountered a mission-related need for specific talents, he trusted his instincts and drew the right people to the cause. He “was an innovative, entrepreneurial leader who showed a knack for identifying a good idea and for recruiting exceptional talent.”⁶

At the same time, he had high standards, consistent with Jesuit values. Serving as the Society’s chief recruiter in the early days, Ignatius was faced with a shortage of qualified candidates. Rather than compromise, the Founder “went to his grave wishing that he could have tightened standards even more. Only certain candidates were up to snuff, what one Jesuit called *aptissimi*, ‘the very best.’ It made for a memorable recruiting slogan: *quamplurimi et quam aptissimi* — ‘as many as possible of the very best.’”⁷

Needing lay people to enrich the Regis Board, Clarke recruited stars from the Denver and

Colorado business and philanthropic communities. Needing a major figure to head the planning for a ground-breaking comprehensive campaign, he drew in Admiral Richard Truly, space shuttle astronaut and director of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. As many as possible of the very best.

Showing both good sense and courage, he relied upon the guidance of a relatively unknown consultant who became his trusted advisor in matters ranging from faculty union negotiations to national higher education policy. Remembering a fellow he’d met back in Illinois, he drew the man to serve Regis in multiple high-level administrative roles. A young financial aid administrator at Loretto Heights College became director of financial aid, served for years as the president’s executive assistant, and then took on a major vice presidential portfolio. A junior student affairs functionary from another Jesuit school became Vice President for Student Life and went on to create the role of Vice President for Mission. Another Illinois acquaintance made the gleam in the president’s eye real and established New Ventures and Corporate Education.⁸ As many as possible of the very best.

Clarke did not stop at simply recruiting “exceptional talent.” He believed in people. He trusted them; allowed them free rein to utilize their talents. He unlocked our potential. As a supervisor he was more inclined to consult or question rather than direct or command. He rarely substituted his judgment for the inclinations of his team. He was even willing to let us fail so long as we didn’t make the same mistake twice. In many respects, Clarke’s approach recalled early words of Ignatius: “You who are on the ground will see better what should be done.”⁹

At its core, there was love in David Clarke’s leadership. Love grounded in faith. Love of a human organization and its mission. Love for the people who strove to advance that mission. Love that was quiet and circumspect but nevertheless fully real. Love in the footsteps of Loyola.

The watchwords that paced Loyola’s team to success are no less relevant to any company today in any industry. Find as many as possible of the very best, the

aptissimi. And welcome all talent whether they are “noble knight or another.” . . . They saw human talent and potential where others didn’t even look for it. Love was the guiding vision that enabled them to do so.¹⁰

The Context

David Clarke’s leadership was embedded in a context; lived in the real world. No towers here, ivory or otherwise. The context is Regis College/University across the years from 1972 to 2012.

On Clarke’s watch, Regis began substantial degree programs for adult learners and welcomed the dying Loretto Heights College as the base for one of the university’s three colleges. The residential liberal arts college reached new levels of prosperity. The core mission was enhanced and protected. And Regis College became Regis University. At the start, though, the context did not present a pretty picture.

Stansell provides an overview.¹¹ It was “a difficult time for any Jesuit to become chief administrative officer of a growing institution.” The leader faced “a decreasing number of Jesuits available for assignment.” The previous president had resigned “to make way for a fresh approach to the complex problems” facing the college.

Complex problems indeed. A major remodeling of organizational and governance structures loomed. The Missouri Provincial had mandated that the time had come to divide Regis into three separate entities: college, high school, and Jesuit community. That restructuring had haltingly begun. A substantial expansion of the Board of Trustees, including the addition of outside Jesuits and lay people, presented an additional test. Years of struggle had also created a need for “establishing stability in the administration.”

Money played a leading role. Enrollments — the foundation of the school’s finances — were shrinking. At the same time, numerous practicalities demanded attention: appropriately compensating the faculty; dealing with Main Hall, the aging campus icon; building a new high school; balancing the budget. Early in his tenure

the new president even “found it necessary to reduce the size of the faculty in an effort to meet the requirements of budgetary responsibility.”

Simultaneously, a faculty union was emerging. “During the summer of 1972 some members of the college faculty took steps to form the Regis Educational Association.” After an NLRB-supervised election, an AAUP chapter was formed. “The officers and agents of the Regis chapter of AAUP would undertake collective bargaining with the representatives of the college administration.” A new experience for the struggling Jesuit school.

Into this roiling context came David M. Clarke, S.J. as president-elect; as erstwhile leader. As Stansell puts it, “Clarke was willing to accept the challenge.”

Embracing Mission

Embracing mission was the bedrock of David Clarke’s leadership.

The Society of Jesus takes *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* (AMDG)¹² as its global mission, “the distinguishing characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding.”¹³ “It’s clear what the Jesuits founded their company to do ... anything and everything that fit a mission statement that was hardly confining.”¹⁴ At the same time, the Society is firmly grounded in faith and values. “Core beliefs and values are nonnegotiable, the centering anchor that allow for purposeful change as opposed to aimless drifting on shifting currents.”¹⁵

David Clarke treated mission in this same way: breadth of possibility, integrity of application. With mission as the first screen, he led Regis toward new arenas such as increasing numbers of students or new programs in fields familiar to Jesuit schools. He also saw wholly-new possibilities. Along with his brother Jesuit Fred Daly, S.J. he created an Associate of Applied Science degree (at a Jesuit college!) that benefitted active-duty soldiers who were already in the service of others. He welcomed the degree completion concept that gave literally thousands of adult learners access to a value-centered Jesuit education. With Ignatius, he saw opportunities rather than constraints, all resting on core values.

“Clarke exuded an expansive sense of mission ... and occasionally had to remind himself and others to go back to see if what they were doing had mission connections.”¹⁶

Expansiveness of mission was evident in Clarke’s approach to adult learning. “The president committed Regis to lifelong learning by deliberately broadening the College’s mission to meet the educational needs of degree seeking adults” (Brockway, 127). This effort grew into a major expansion of the Regis mission. Thousands of new students would align with the Regis mission even as the leader remained vigilant about the academic mission. New programs focused on complete degrees rather than individual courses. The core curriculum, modified to fit the programs’ structure, remained a centerpiece. Clarke made it clear that the academic mission would be respected.

Attention to mission was apparent at the program level. “The decision to offer an MBA was primarily driven by pragmatic matters. Graduate programs enhanced the status of Regis and generated a new revenue stream. However, it also fit the mission of Regis College to provide an ethical framework for the leaders of tomorrow” (Brockway, 130). Evident here is the linkage between mission and financial stability that would become a motif of Clarke’s leadership.

Clarke protected the mission by setting limits. Early in the negotiations leading to Regis absorbing Loretto Heights College, the president listed items he deemed nonnegotiable, including “the mission of Regis College could not be changed in the process” (Brockway, 240). The positive aspects of acquiring LHC “included the fact that Loretto Heights had several strong programs that complemented the mission and the offerings of Regis” (Brockway, 238). Clarke focused on continuing the programs that fit the Regis mission. In the end, Regis took on most of the LHC academic programs (as well as faculty and staff) but let the pre-professional performing arts program go. “Performing arts had a different mission and drew different kinds of students than did the liberal arts” (Brockway, 240). David Clarke the leader was in tune with Lowney’s paradigm: “The leader adapts confidently by knowing what’s negotiable and what isn’t.”¹⁷

Clarke’s embrace of mission carried beyond the university. As a member of the MacArthur Commission of the National Commission on Higher Education Issues, “the priest from Colorado helped decide that the last decade’s preoccupation with access would most likely be supplanted by a concern for quality in higher education. Clarke had to have been pleased that the commissioners declared the first step toward quality was to follow a well-defined mission” (Brockway, 154).

One of the singular achievements of the Clarke presidency was the move to university status. There had been intermittent conversation about such a change for years. Clarke saw the issue in mission terms. He asserted that it was “important that Regis decide on whether it will be a college with large appendices or a modest university.” Having weighed the pros and cons, he brought the proposal to the Board. “He told trustees ... university status fit the mission of Regis” (Brockway, 274). “During the final discussion in July 1990 about university status trustee and Executive Committee member [John] Padberg ‘assured the Board that the identity of the undergraduate program would not get lost.’ By a vote of twenty-one to three with no abstentions, the board approved changing the corporate name to Regis University, effective in the fall of 1991” (Brockway, 276).

“Education for leadership in the service of others” had become the mission of Regis *University*. David Clarke the leader had taken Regis from college to university. Broad growth in undergraduate and graduate degree programs would follow. Leadership had changed the context.

As he entered the last stages of his presidency, embrace of mission remained a touchstone. “On his return from sabbatical, Clarke made enhanced articulation of the mission of Regis College one of his major goals for 1988-90” (Brockway, 184). He wanted to “instill the Regis mission clearly into the minds of the entire campus community” (Brockway, 272). As a Board commendation put it, “the president had never lost his vision of the future” (Brockway, 154).

Per Lowney, “company mission statements don’t take root simply because they’ve been elegantly

worded. They take root when subordinates see managers take a personal interest in the mission.”¹⁸ David Clarke the leader made the Regis mission live; made it true kin to *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*.

Dave’s Law

No money, no mission.

Embracing mission is all well and good; noble even. But *advancing* mission requires resources. As early Jesuits quickly discovered:

Schools required school buildings. Jesuits became increasingly saddled with property holdings and the mundane preoccupations that came with them.... Jesuit managers were forced to reserve at least some creative energy for keeping the boiler running and the school roof from collapsing.¹⁹

David Clarke was clear about this reality. His guiding principle became known as “Dave’s law — no money, no mission” (Brockway, 352). Embracing mission, he simultaneously dealt with the Regis financial situation — a succession of institutional budgets materially out of balance. With little endowment, Regis College was hugely dependent on tuition revenue and enrollment had been steadily sinking. “Regis teetered on ‘the brink of financial ruin.’ The audit for the year ending June 30, 1973, confirmed the dire straits of the institution and noted thirty-three separate areas in need of improved internal accounting controls” (Brockway, 46).

In his typical fashion, Clarke attacked the problem head on. Faced with declining enrollments and aiming for a balanced budget, he knew expense reductions were inevitable. When his budget-building group reached an impasse, “Clarke spent his Christmas writing the 1,500 lines of a balanced budget by himself. He found the figures mandated a 25 percent reduction in faculty and staff” (Brockway, 46). That led to painful cuts and a near-fatal blow to his relationship with the faculty. It also led to the first in a long series of balanced budgets.

Clarke’s personal prowess with numbers produced results. Within a few years, budgets were balanced and financial stability was restored. Even the auditor had praise for the leader’s work. “Arthur Young & Co. provided an unqualified audit report that stated Clarke was largely responsible for superior performance in the management of the school’s financial resources” (Brockway, 102). Operating surpluses became the norm, a far cry from the not-distant years of financial crises and persistent rumors about the college closing. No money; no mission.

Yet Clarke was no miracle worker. Keeping carefully crafted operating budgets balanced as the academic year unfolded was a constant challenge. “Despite success in campaign fund raising Regis continued to have yearly budgetary woes. In April, Clarke announced a budget freeze for the rest of the 1985-86 fiscal year. This was followed by a spending restraint in 1987, a budget freeze in 1988, a ‘slow down in spending’ in 1989 and a 10 percent encumbrance on nearly all line items for fiscal year 1990-91” (Brockway, 179). In the end, however, the budget *always* balanced. Life for Regis was lived on the financial edge, but consistently on the positive side of that edge.

The leader’s secret was unfailing embrace of mission coupled with rigorous attention to “keeping the boiler running.” Mission rhetoric without financial undergirding is tilting at windmills. A balanced budget without a living mission is an empty shell. David Clarke the leader was a master at maintaining a constructive equilibrium between the two vital dimensions of success.

Pursuing Visibility

Mission is fundamental to a Jesuit university. So much so that embracing mission is tantamount to embracing the institution itself. Clarke embraced Regis College/University and stayed for forty years.²⁰ His commitment led to another element of his leadership strategy: pursuing visibility on behalf of the mission and the college.

At the start of the Clarke presidency neither the college nor its mission were well known. Frequent turnover in the presidency had precluded a consistent or recognizable spokesperson. “The

effect of having five presidents in five years undermined any sense of an overall vision in the college. Regis had become, in the words of one administrator, ‘a nearly invisible minding-its-own-business, going-absolutely-nowhere institution’” (Brockway, 58). Locally, many dismissed the place as a quiet little school for Catholic boys or a seminary on the hill.

Clarke saw immediately that this aspect of the context had to change. The most direct path to visibility for Regis was to make himself as the leader visible. Locally, regionally, and — in time — nationally.

Clarke’s approach was an amalgam of managerial roles identified by Mintzberg.²¹ Now a “spokesperson,” transmitting mission to internal and external constituencies. Now a “figurehead,” performing social and symbolic duties as the leader. Now a “disseminator,” communicating the details of Regis academic programs and activities. Often a “liaison,” establishing and maintaining an extensive network of contacts and connections vital to the advancement of mission.

Transforming challenge into opportunity was another hallmark of his leadership. As a first step, he took the work of restructuring the Board of Trustees as an opportunity. Three nationally-prominent Jesuits had recently been named Trustees: Paul Reinert, S.J., the recently-retired president of St. Louis University; John Reinke, S.J., president of Loyola Academy in Illinois; and James Hennessey, S.J., president of Bellarmine School of Theology at Loyola University of Chicago. These moves began to put Regis on the national Jesuit radar.

Clarke then turned to the Colorado business community, recruiting some of its most prominent members as lay trustees. Walter Imhoff, founder of a leading Denver investment firm. Peter Coors, scion of the semi-legendary brewery. John Moran, who would in time become the first lay chair of the Board of Trustees. Steps toward creating visibility for Regis.

Visibility did not come easily. Sustained, conscious effort was required. “An average of two-and-one-half days a week he was off campus to sell the institution to others” (Brockway, 68). And

visibility was not without its costs. The president became a kind of lightning rod for faculty and staff discontents. “Many of the lay faculty never saw the president, and while Jesuits had some contact with Clarke in the community, few knew him well” (Brockway, 97). On campus Clarke could be criticized for lack of presence. Dissatisfaction with his internal visibility lingered for years. Late in his tenure, a new director of public relations even mounted a planned effort to make him more of a figure on campus (Brockway, 181).

The leader’s pursuit of visibility yielded results. In just a few years, Clarke’s status as the face of Regis had risen considerably. Trustee Walt Imhoff reported that the president had “a new image in the business community and predicted this would help him accomplish so much more for Regis.” There was “a high level of respect for Clarke among both Catholics and non-Catholics” (Brockway, 71).

When the college moved toward serving adult learners, Clarke stayed true to his plan and became the point man. Leadership in that arena seemed to come naturally, perhaps because he so clearly saw the work as a broadening of the Regis mission. *Colorado Business Magazine* described him as eloquent when talking about adult learning and observed that the president “gathered fervor as he talked about empowering adults for leadership in the service of others” (Brockway, 128).

In the later stages of his presidency, Clarke remained consistent, and persistent, in his pursuit of visibility. He kept Regis in the limelight. “He spoke to every major downtown club during the 1990-91 academic year. In 1992, the president was the keynote speaker at a Corporate Education Conference in Boston.... The same year, he was invited to become part of the selection committee for the Drucker Foundation” (Brockway, 279).

The apex of David Clarke’s pursuit of visibility came in 1991. On its front page, *The Wall Street Journal* featured a likeness of President Clarke and a story on Regis’ entrepreneurial approach to working with adult learners and corporations. Reporter Marj Charlier wrote that “Clarke chose the right time to tap into a changing workplace where people needed to acquire new skills or

establish new careers” (Brockway, 307). The president “was clearly pleased that what he considered objective outside scrutiny produced such a positive story” (Brockway, 307). Regis, its mission, and its president had achieved visibility leagues beyond the obscurity in which it languished when Clarke arrived on the scene.

Listening and Learning

David Clarke was always listening; constantly learning. He listened closely to what was happening in the world, both near and far. He listened to admirers and to critics, especially the latter. He regarded student complaints as caring messages from learners motivated to teach us something. He learned widely and with powerful discernment. Late in life, he learned photography well enough to produce professional-class work.²²

His behavior during the birth of the Regis College AAUP Chapter illustrates his listening and learning. Faced with the prospect of a faculty union, the president resisted vigorously, mostly from a conviction that a union would divide faculty from administration. “The president’s letters became increasingly shrill and contained many statements that were read as veiled, but believably deniable threats” (Brockway, 49). Not a happy time for the president or the faculty.

As the debate progressed, the president was listening. A faculty vote approved collective bargaining and a second election was scheduled to choose a bargaining agent. At that point, Clarke modified his stance. “The president issued no further attack letters. He did, however, urge everybody to vote their ‘conviction as to how Regis College ... may best be served’” (Brockway, 50). The leader’s more balanced position was a step in the right direction. He was learning.

Contract negotiations with the faculty were tense. The new president and the new union were rigidly at odds. Clarke listened to a key advisor experienced in union negotiations. “Tom Emmet advised Clarke to be moderate in dealing with the faculty.... Fortunately for Regis, the Emmet approach prevailed in the long term.” In time, the negotiating difficulties were ascribed to ‘inexperienced negotiators’ on both sides of the table” (Brockway, 52). Clarke’s learning led him to

conclude that collective bargaining had “not proved to be the nightmarish experience many of us anticipated it would be” (Brockway, 80). Praising with faint damns, perhaps, but an effective relationship with the faculty union did emerge.

Clarke’s listening and learning was essential to the success of the Regis move toward adult learning. Clarke *listened* to the head of the Colorado Department of Adult Education about underserved adult learners. He listened so well that he chose that man — John S. Brennan — as the founding dean of the Regis adult degree programs. He *learned* about the opportunity to extend the Regis mission to hosts of adult learners. As that *Wall Street Journal* reporter put it, “Clarke ‘made a leap of faith’ in 1978 and decided that education was ‘a service industry.’ The president committed Regis to lifelong learning by deliberately broadening the College’s mission to meet the educational needs of degree-seeking adults” (Brockway, 127).

After surveying other attempts to serve adult learners, he made a crucial management decision early on. “Clarke supported a separate unit with its own leadership, noting that there were no successful adult education programs housed under a college dean.”²³ Listening and learning mated with embrace of mission allowed Regis to grow more than ten-fold to nearly 14,000 students. Not surprisingly, Regis achieved something of a national reputation as one of the premier providers of value-centered adult learning in the country. The leader’s listening and learning dramatically changed the context.

One aspect of the president’s listening and learning was distinctive. As with most leaders, Clarke faced the persistent test of reacting to feedback, particularly negative feedback. Does the leader listen and really hear or does he retreat into defensiveness or denial? David Clarke the leader passed this test.

In his early days as president, conflict with the high school people was rampant. There was a widespread lack of trust in Clarke’s administration. He listened and faced the issue. “Clarke decided to publicly acknowledge the credibility gap” (Brockway, 97). He attended hostile faculty

meetings, inaugurated regular communication channels, and recruited consultants to advise him further. He listened, heard, and learned.

One of his toughest tests came during the Loretto Heights College transition. Disputes raged in public about the financial aspects of the transfer of the campus and its associated debts. Clarke took harsh personal heat from many quarters — LHC faculty, the good Sisters of Loretto, even the local newspaper. He was known to be stung by the uninformed criticism. But he kept his focus on mission and closed the deal in fair and equitable fashion. All he ever said about the matter was “our views of events, processes and values are at significant variance” (Brockway, 246). A leader behaving well under stress.

Criticism could come as well from close at hand, even from the Regis community. Faculty cuts in search of a balanced budget were never forgotten. Some even felt the cuts were one of the reasons Clarke lived in semi-isolation for much of his time at Regis. His discernment about tough personnel decisions was so private that he could be regarded as abrupt or perhaps heartless. However deeply this sort of bad press bothered Clarke, he never let it distort his actions as leader. Listening and learning were integral to his leadership regardless of the messages received or the issues involved.

Fostering Collaboration

Collaboration is a hallmark of many Jesuit works. Jesuit-lay collaboration has been a prominent part of the Society’s agenda for years. New forms of collaboration among the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities emerge with regularity. David Clarke the leader made collaboration one of the pillars of his leadership. He loved being a partner. With individuals. With organizations. With Jesuit schools and Colorado schools. With corporations and businesses. Collaborators and partners were, after all, multipliers of mission.

One of his more complex collaborations was with the Regis faculty. It began in conflict — negotiating contracts with a new union in a time of financial challenge was not a promising start. Yet Clarke found a colleague in Dr. Martha Ashmore, respected professor of psychology and one of the founding mothers of the union.

“Dave” and “Mike” spent much of a summer hammering out a first faculty contract that “management” and “labor” could live with. “Ashmore and Clarke did most of the talking during the summer of 1973. Slowly, the atmosphere thawed and the terms of an acceptable contract emerged” (Brockway, 52).

Clarke’s collaborations regularly advanced the Regis mission. When Regis began serving adult learners, he realized Colorado’s community colleges could be important allies:

Regis had not been especially competitive in the adult field. Community college transfers needed an extra year to complete their required core courses. Some saw this as having to ‘lose a year’ in order to graduate. To rectify this, the president ordered the Division of Special Programs to negotiate articulation agreements with the community colleges. (Brockway, 127)

This at a time when the state’s public colleges were more at odds with one another than inclined to cooperate academically. These articulation agreements — pioneering educational partnerships — would grow into one of the mainstays of Regis’ service to adult learners. Years later, “the college participated in a university-wide articulation agreement with the Colorado Community College and Occupational Educational System ... the comprehensive private-public agreement was one of just a few in the nation” (Brockway, 322). Academic collaborations were firmly part of the fabric of Regis.

Some of the president’s attempts to collaborate came to less than happy conclusions. Recall that the Jesuit provincial had mandated the separation of Regis College and Regis Jesuit High School. Clarke brought his collaborative perspective to the task. He even had a partner identified in the person of Robert Jerome Starratt, S.J., the newly-appointed principal of the high school. “Clarke and Starratt envisioned an equal partnership” (Brockway, 92).

After a series of changes at the high school, there ensued a protracted period of negotiations, personnel changes, financial disputes, misunderstandings, and all the other complexities

of what was essentially a family matter. In the end, college and high school separated and both subsequently prospered. But there was no partnership. “The separation was painful for Clarke. He had tried hard to make the college and the high school equal partners. It took him a long time to realize that it would not work” (Brockway, 98-99). Not all collaborations flourish, even with a leader as their champion.

Another try for collaboration collapsed into a nasty battle. Half a dozen years into the Clarke presidency, a contractual partnership with a provider of educational marketing and logistical services was created. Regis leadership “felt reasonably safe because Regis would control academic quality and policies. They believed because IPD [the partner] worked for Regis, IPD would have to conform to their desires” (Brockway, 134). That faith would prove to be misplaced.

The firm was to provide marketing, admissions, and enrollment services and otherwise assist Regis in launching an accelerated undergraduate degree completion program. The arrangement held great promise and early results were positive. However, significant disputes arose concerning recruiting tactics and admissions criteria. Citing the need to protect its mission and maintain academic standards, Regis declared a breach of contract and terminated the relationship. Legal wrangling predictably followed. Regis eventually lost a significant court case.

From the perspective of collaboration, the entire affair was a disaster. From a different perspective, the matter served as an object lesson in protecting the mission. Ensuring the institution’s academic integrity could require aggressive and even costly action. David Clarke the leader fostered collaboration but his embrace of mission trumped all.

The leader’s ambitions were not restricted to traditional pathways. “A significant growth area in the late 1980s occurred in ‘New Ventures and Corporate Education.’... begun in July 1987 in the president’s office.... The most important distinction regarding the New Ventures thrust was that it dealt with institutions rather than with individuals” (Brockway, 203).

Several types of collaboration emerged from the new venture that was New Ventures. One was educational partnerships with Colorado corporations. Coors Brewery was the first. Regis provided courses and advising services at the brewery and developed an innovative model for embedding Coors training programs into credit-bearing courses. “Clarke believed success with the Coors program demonstrated that there [was] a future in corporate education. The partnership had shown that Regis could successfully oversee and authenticate on-the-job training.... The Regis program delivered ‘value-oriented collegiate education’ within the ‘corporate environment’” (Brockway, 204). Partnerships with other corporations ensued, notably IBM, AT&T, Storagetek, and Sun Micro Systems.

New Ventures followed Clarke’s urgings into another arena — the creation of a network of “partner schools.” A partnership with a college gave that school access to Regis learning designs and extensive on-site consulting services. In exchange, Regis received a share of the revenue generated by the new programs at the partner school. At its height, the partner school network had dozens of members and generated sizable contributions to the Regis endowment. Fruit of the instinct toward collaboration.

One other partnership was inspired by David Clarke the leader. Working with Sistema Universitario Ana G Méndez (SUAGM) of Puerto Rico, Regis formed Agmus Ventures, Inc. The mission of the jointly-owned company was delivery of dual language (Spanish/English) higher education at learning sites in three states. Chancellor Clarke was one of the mainstays of the Board of the separately incorporated entity. After a dozen years of successful operation, Regis changed its priorities under a subsequent president and sold its share of the partnership to SUAGM. In many respects, all the elements of Clarke’s leadership approach came together in this unique educational enterprise: listening for and learning new ways to advance mission through enhanced visibility and creative collaboration.

Legacies of the Leader

Leaders make a difference. They change the context; create institutional momentum. David M.

Clarke, S.J. did. Regis College/University was marked by his leadership.

Clarke's visibility naturally changed as he moved from spotlight to twilight. He made the transition gracefully. "David Clarke soon left for a year-long sabbatical to allow his successor to put his own stamp on the university. When Clarke returned in January 1994 he established the Office of the Chancellor" (Brockway, 284). As Chancellor he carried on a program of "friend raising" among alumni and benefactors of the revitalized Regis University. Internally he was an accessible source of advice and counselling. He played a large role in the university's faculty and staff mentoring program. Though his own head was bald and shiny, he nonetheless became a kind of "white-haired eminence."

Collaboration remained the order of the day. The New Ventures partner school network gave birth to the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities, a course and curriculum sharing consortium of nearly one hundred schools. Regis online programs began with a ground-breaking partnership with the Jones Cable Corporation. Fostering collaboration left its mark on the institution; made a difference.

"Regis continued to take pride in an unbroken series of balanced budgets, noting in its new case statement that 1982-83 marked the eighth consecutive year without a deficit" (Brockway, 142). That tradition remained intact through all the years of the Clarke presidency and — to the best of this author's knowledge — continues to this day. Another legacy of the leader.

David Clarke's embrace of mission — both AMDG and education for leadership in the service of others — became an institutional and community life force. Soon after his presidency concluded, care for the mission was elevated to the vice presidential level as a peer of academic affairs, finance, operations, and development. "Mission-related activities played out in all three schools" (Brockway, 337).

In 1996, Regis University was again preparing for a comprehensive accreditation visit from the (renamed) Higher Learning Commission. An extensive series of "listening sessions" was

conducted across the institution as part of the self-study process. "From the listening sessions emerged a strong indication that there was a commitment and pride in the University's mission" (Brockway, 329). Mission had become an essential part of the organizational culture. Embracing mission made a lasting difference.

David Clarke's leadership left these legacies and more. Embracing Jesuit and college mission, he stabilized a struggling college and inspired its people to build a great university. Putting aside his personal inclinations, he made himself a public figure and garnered unprecedented visibility for the school and its mission. Relentless listening and voracious learning opened new vistas, transformed the institution, and dramatically advanced its mission. Creative collaboration and partnership multiplied the fruits of his leadership many times over. David M. Clarke, S.J. was the epitome of a Jesuit leader in action.

A Closing Note

This modest work is dedicated to the late David M. Clarke, S.J., the leader who inspired it, as well to Regis colleagues who gave it life. Some have left us: Martha (Mike) Ashmore, John S. Brennan, Frederick T. Daly, S.J., Thomas Addis Emmet, Harold L. Stansell, S.J. Others are alive and well: Ron Brockway, Bill Husson, Bob Kaffer, Tom Kennedy, Tom Reynolds, Karen Webber, and legions of others. Most especially to my closest Regis colleague, Dr. Esther Ray Mills, dear wife and treasured editor-in-chief. Remember the *Magis!*

Heroism makes a person equal parts dreamer and indefatigable pragmatist.... Their heroism was measured not by the scale of their opportunities but by the quality of their responses to the opportunities at hand. Heroic leaders don't bide their time until the big moment comes along; they grasp the opportunities within reach and extract as much richness from them as possible. Heroism lies in the nobility of committing to a way of life that focuses on goals that are greater than oneself.²⁴ HJE

Notes

¹ Ronald S. Brockway, *Regis: Beyond the Crest* (Dexter, MI: Thomson-Shore, Inc., 2003), 181

² Harold L. Stansell, S.J., *Regis: On the Crest of the West* (Dexter, MI: Thomson-Shore, Inc., 2003).

³ Brockway, *Regis: Beyond the Crest*.

⁴ Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company that Changed the World* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2003).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶ Brockway, *Regis: Beyond the Crest*, 351.

⁷ Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 210-211.

⁸ This particular choice by Clarke brings to mind the Dallas Cowboys strategy of drafting the best athlete available regardless of position. The man who established New Ventures came to Regis without a clear mandate from the president or a specific vision of how he would contribute to the Regis mission. Clarke the leader trusted his instincts and inspired others to trust theirs.

⁹ Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 163. Lowney takes this Ignatian quotation from a letter of Jesuit Pedro Ribadeneira describing the decentralization of authority that Loyola promoted in the early days of the Society.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹¹ Stansell, *Regis: On the Crest of the West*, 205-225. All of the quotations in this section of the paper are from these pages of the Stansell volume.

¹² For the Greater Glory of God

¹³ Barton T. Geger, S.J., "What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012), 18.

¹⁴ Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁶ Brockway, *Regis: Beyond the Crest*, 351-2. In the interest of economy of notation, all subsequent quotations from the Brockway volume are indicated in parenthetical citations in the text, rather than as endnotes.

¹⁷ Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 224-5.

²⁰ Of interest is the fact that David Clarke was an Oregon Province Jesuit. Regis College/University was a work of the Missouri Province. His long tenure at Regis might thus be celebrated as one of the Society's finer manifestations of inter-province cooperation.

²¹ Henry Mintzberg, "The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact," *Harvard Business Review* 68, no. 2 (March/April 1990): 163-176.

²² David M. Clarke, S.J., *Sacred Moments* (Denver, CO: Regis University, 2010).

²³ Brockway, *Regis: Beyond the Crest*, 88. As one of the earliest deans of the adult degree programs, this author experienced both the benefits and the challenges of Clarke's decision about separate governance. As a separate unit, the programs for adult learners grew rapidly and prospered mightily. At the same time, an academic canyon formed that had to be bridged (and was) so that a true university could emerge. Clarke's early decision was fundamental to both successes.

²⁴ Lowney, *Heroic Leadership*, 281.