

"In so far as we see, really see, we are changed. No one can see injustice and merely record the facts."

Edmund Grace, SJ

This quotation sums up the essence of my story about Loretto Academy, Woodlawn in Chicago. Loretto Academy was founded on the southeast side of Chicago in 1905 as a boarding and day school. The early students of elementary and high school age were white and Catholic. In fewer than 30 years the boarding school closed. High school students continued to attend as day pupils. In the early fifties the academy became racially and religiously mixed. The ^{mission of} Loretto Woodlawn changed.

In an excellent talk given by Henri Nouwen, he used the image of Christ's discourse at the last supper. "He took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it." For me these words provide a beautiful image of Loretto Woodlawn's mission.

The bread Christ took in this Loretto story was the energy, courage and enthusiasm of the founding sisters. Two of the early founders were Seraphina Dwyer, whose "genial disposition and graciousness endeared her to many," and Scholastica McTague, "Who was associated with our Foundress in America, Mother Teresa Dease from whom she learned the ideals of Catholic education. Legend is that they built the academy on fifty cents! Whatever the amount, the sisters erected a fine four-story brick building properly equipped with classrooms for the liberal arts and sciences and fitting residential quarters for the young ladies who boarded.

Christ blessed the bread, the IBVM Sisters, with sufficient funds to add a new building housing additional classrooms, gym, cafeteria and assembly. The greatest blessings from the Woodlawn foundation were the strong and loyal friendships that grew between faculty and students, and the vocations that came from among ^{them} to our Loretto Community. One year after the opening of Loretto Academy in 1905, Marie

Cullinan was born, who in her high school years attended Loretto academy and became the first postulant to enter from there--Sr. M. Xavier. Among the more recent vocations to our Institute from Woodlawn is our present Superior General, Eleanor Holland who also served as principal of the Academy. The last vocation was Brenda Eagan, a young black woman who has gifted our Institute in a remarkable way.

Christ took the bread, blessed it, broke it. No mission, no life is without its suffering, but in the fifties a most unique suffering, - the breaking of bread - came to the sisters at the Academy. It came in the form of integrating the school racially. At first the small number of black girls was easily absorbed, hardly noticeable. But by geometric progression the numbers went from 2 to 4 to 8 until the student body was ostensibly black. The breaking touched on all facets of life, ministry and the economy of Woodlawn. Divisions arose among community members; quotas were encouraged; fear of the unknown terrorized some; white students transferred. Even friends drifted away. Loretto suffered the same rejection as the black girls to whom it opened its doors. Christ broke the bread.

It is only when bread is broken that it can be given. And so it was. After the early days of struggling with such dramatic and painful change, the sisters embraced the change. In the words of T.S. Eliot, they realized "last year's words belong to last year's language. And next year's words await another voice." When other area schools did not accept black girls, Woodlawn welcomed them and continued to provide the same academic and social advantages. Under the direction of Sr. Therese Rooney a night school at Loretto offered education to adults. Sisters became involved in parish and civic programs to

* Sr. Mary^{Simpkin} inaugurated the Loretto Extension Service, a correspondent school for students who could not continue in regular classes.

promote racial harmony and civil rights.* When it was not possible for Loretto to maintain the Academy on a sound financial basis the faculties of Loretto and Mercy High School merged using the Mercy facility. Unity High School was born.

The giving manifested itself in many ways, perhaps the most important were the attitudinal changes--from fear to a renewed confidence in God's providence; from a closed educational system to one open to social changes; from a local to a more global awareness; from the security of "what has always been," to the risk of the unknown, all of which are reflected in a recent mission statement:-

To refocus our resources in order to be more directly involved with those living on the fringes of society.

We who have experienced these changes can resonate with T.S.Eliot:

"See how they vanish, the places and faces, to become renewed, trans-figured in another pattern."