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### **The Legacy of WJU and Community Economic Development The Work of Fr. William F. Troy, S.J.**

HUMBLED! This is the best word I can use to describe my disposition as I became more and more involved in researching the work of the Jesuits, lay faculty and staff, and Wheeling community leaders who founded and molded our University during its early years from 1955-1966.

As I studied the materials generously provided by Paul Orr and Eileen Carpino – and I must extend my gratitude to both of them – the expressed dynamism of our founders’ vision and dedication was contagiously inspiring. Jesuit Fathers, such as Lawrence McHugh, William Troy, Clifford Lewis, James Muldowney and George Zorn, to name just a few, and community leaders, including H.G. Jepson, Harry Hamm, Joseph Gompers, A.C. Spurr, the Holloways and the Schenks were apparently gifted with a collective purpose which transcended special or individual interests and consummated in a mission *ad majoram Dei gloriam*. As an often-used slogan of the time communicated, “Wheeling College is Wheeling’s College,” the birth and early development of our University is an exemplar for community solidarity, the “merger” of “town and gown,” of “culture and commerce,” and perhaps most importantly of “the sacred and the civic.”

Another impression engaged me as I researched, and it played over and over again in my mind with a kind of mantric resonance, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” This adage hummed as *the leitmotif* which blends our past with our present in order to scale our

future.

Our University and Wheeling community are presently immersed in transitional times, just as the community was in transitional times when the Jesuits were asked to start a college in Wheeling. “Transitional times” is the same for both the past and present, though the features of the transitions are different. In the past, Wheeling was seeking a social-cultural transition, while today we are facing a challenging economic transition. Through the 50's and 60's Wheeling-area industry and commerce were expansive: consider, Wheeling and Weirton Steel, Blaw-Knox, Ormet, Viking, Dalzell, Hazel-Atlas, Fostoria and Imperial Glass, Bloch Tobacco, Marsh Wheeling Stogies, Marx Toys, Consolidation Coal, and the list could be much longer. What was lacking, however, amid this burgeoning financial capital was a sufficient supply of intellectual capital. There were not enough institutions of higher education to produce the teachers, business managers, accountants, scientists, attorneys, etc. to fill the needs of the changing and growing society, culture and commerce. A “Wheeling college” was called for, and the Jesuits answered.

A College public relations brochure from 1962 entitled, *Town and Gown* proclaimed the “mutual dependence” between Wheeling College and Wheeling City. It championed the College’s “civic involvement” and its “greatest benefit” as educating “men and women for the Valley’s business and professions.” It asserted that since the College’s establishment, the percentage of Ohio County high school graduates going on to college increased from 25 to 31 percent. The College proudly described itself as a “source of trained personnel oriented toward business, industry and the professions, since students tend to settle in their college community.”

Today, our challenging economic transition is also calling to our University, and the need is the same, intellectual capital, though the circumstances now are to transition to a “new economy” distinct from the kind of industry and commerce which once defined our region.

For the moment, however, let me suspend reflecting on the present and future, and focus

on recollecting our past, particularly the principal figure of our early years, Fr. William F. Troy, the first Dean and Academic Vice President, and second President of Wheeling College. I offer this recollection with due deference to the memory and achievements of Fr. Clifford Lewis whose place in Wheeling's Hall of Fame at Wesbanco Arena testifies to the need to study and honor his work as well.

It didn't take much prodding to get our colleague, Professor Emeritus John Wack, to offer some remembrances of Fr. Troy. Without hesitation, John characterized Fr. Troy as an "ideal Jesuit" embodying everything a Jesuit priest and leader should be, "sophisticated, gregarious, congenial with an ability to put others at ease" and "an expert at making you feel that you are part of a great enterprise, on the cutting edge of the future." For John, Fr. Troy led by example. He aimed to make the College great, a "Harvard on the Ohio," a Fr. Troy epithet which was at once a source of amusement and aspiration for faculty.

Still, even with his urbanity, John recalls a certain innocence or *naviété* with Fr. Troy. John told a story about a dinner that he, Fr. Troy and others had at a local bar/restaurant. Off to the side in a small room in the restaurant were slot machines, and watching the patrons go in and out of the room had piqued Fr. Troy's curiosity. Not wanting to enter a gambling den by himself on his own, though intrigued by its lure, Fr. Troy asked John to go in and play the machines. John did, and a few minutes later Fr. Troy appeared next to him wanting to know what the attraction was and how it all worked. One wonders what he would have done at our current Wheeling Island Racetrack and Gaming Center.

Fr. Troy's comments when he was elected for his first of two terms as President of the Wheeling Area Conference on Community Development reveal clearly his views on college/community relations, "A college these days simply cannot remain uninvolved with the community. Serving as President of the Conference will give me an opportunity to show just

how deeply interested Wheeling College is in the Wheeling area.” (*This is Wheeling College*, March 1964).

Among his many other activities, Fr. Troy was involved in the WV Conference on Community Development; he served as a member of the Board of Directors of Oglebay Institute; he co-organized the Tri-State Tax Institute held annually on the College’s campus for more than 45 years, and he contributed to Wheeling College Week, an event in March 1958 at which more than 100 leaders from the Wheeling community came together to make recommendations for the College’s Ten-Year Plan.

Fr. Troy was also an academic leader who highly valued traditional Jesuit liberal arts education. He knew that such humanistic educational formation, infused with faith in and understanding of Divine design, would indeed yield the creative intellectual capital which could contribute significantly to Wheeling’s and our nation’s social, cultural and commercial development. In addressing the Class of 1964 he said:

“You are graduates of a liberal arts college. In one field you should know well what you are talking about. You will find that in others (and possibly in your own) many will know more than you. This should not dismay you. If your liberal education has validity, you should have developed an approach to reality, which enables you to generalize when others stand bogged in the particular and to move backward and forward in time when others are shackled to today’s headlines. This is an advantage, as you will discover. Your college is one where religious belief and practice are important. You have had your moments of doubt and you will have many more. But for a space you have lived among people to whom God is an everyday, ever-present and awe-inspiring reality, where unaided human reason is only the beginning of man’s search for meaning and where God is so concerned with history that He sanctified our planet with His footsteps and comes daily to our altars. Four years of this should sustain you, if its awareness

grows as you grow.” (*Manifest* 1964)

Now, let me conclude this presentation by returning to our present and the economic transition which we are facing. The value of a humanistic education is as important now as it ever was. The kind of intellectual capital needed is that which is trained in the specific fields of business, pre-law, education, science and healthcare, but is also able to draw from a mature religious faith to understand rationally and apply concretely principles of moral excellence to its work for the betterment of our community and nation. It is vital that Wheeling Jesuit University reconfirm its historical engagement with the Wheeling community for the sake of serving its economic transition. Identifying needs and expanding our services, especially in regard to the health care fields, such as nursing, and adult education, such as our BOLD program, appear to be areas, which could be immediately developed.

Still, above all else, what we must have is hope. Remember, hope is not optimism and it is certainly not pessimism. The pessimist moans “Woe is me, things aren’t happening the way I will them to happen.” The optimist, on the other hand, boldly asserts, “Things will happen the way I will them to happen.” In both cases, what is principally operative is what “I will.” Both optimism and pessimism are ego-centric while hope is ego-effacing. Hope is the humble deference to a higher purpose; with hope, it is not a matter of “My will be done” but “Thy will be done.”

Paraphrasing some words from Fr. Troy will, I believe, provide an appropriate finish to this talk:

This is a time “when colleges will be forced to ask themselves repeatedly, daily, hourly, what they are doing. Gone will be the frills of former years in education. Gone will be much of the fuzzy thinking about objectives. The aims of college education become clearer by the minute,—the swift maturing of men and women capable of coping with accelerated history and

influencing their times. These men and women must be serious and purposeful. They must have learned to ask questions always and to use their minds for themselves in seeking answers, regarding apathy as the cardinal sin of the intellect. They must be concerned in an impassioned way with what goes on around them and dedicated enough to sacrifice themselves in contributing to the good of their fellow man. They must be staunch patriots, scorning the cynicism that has rusted the bright image of our national destiny in the minds of so many. They must be at home on their knees before their Creator and draw from prayer the inner strength to act unselfishly and if necessary to die that way.” (*This Is Wheeling College*, January 1960)

These were the words of Fr. Troy in January 1960. The more things change, the more they stay the same.