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The Decline and Fall of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens: A Case Study in the Contraction of An American Catholic Religious Order - Part Two

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Saint Mary’s of the Barrens, 1995–2002

The provincial council’s decision to accept the general principles informing the SMOB report, without approving the specific details of the proposed plan, ushered in a new era in the history of the Barrens. The provincial administration established a series of committees to study the separate elements identified at the Barrens (retirement center, “core campus,” farmlands, “other services” — including the Catholic Home Study Service, and “other physical assets” — the library, archives and museum collections). Overall coordination of these committees was to be assumed by the group charged with developing proposals for the “core campus.” This group was to function as an implementation committee for the entire project, but the right to final approval and oversight was reserved by the provincial superior and his council.

The ambiguity implicit in the administration’s reserved acceptance of the SMOB report and in the multiplicity of committees established to draft proposals for the future of the various works and properties of the Barrens (always under the ultimate authority of the provincial administration) contributed to a confusing sequence of events after 1995. Committees, confreres, houses and provincial leaders often disagreed over the specific contours of a plan for the Barrens. Committees made preliminary reports and were disbanded by the administration – or disbanded themselves over failure to complete their tasks.

Lacking a unified consensual plan, decisions were made piecemeal over time, and practical considerations, very often financial, triumphed over ambitious, idealistic proposals. Controversy ensued over plans, and even over the procedures, by which proposals

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were made and decisions were reached. A rift developed between the community of the Barrens and the provincial administration surrounding decision-making authority over Barrens properties. Rumors and inaccurate news reports contributed to a growing climate of confusion regarding the future of the Vincentian motherhouse. The crisis represented by the decline and fall of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens climaxed in the years following the 1995 SMOB report.

Even before the March 1995 public announcement regarding implementation of the SMOB report, a mandate was drafted to oversee the work of the implementation committee. The mandate given to the original Heritage and Shrine Committee charged the group with submitting “a number of proposals detailing possible options for the main campus as a Vincentian heritage center and a Marian shrine.” Proposals were to conform to certain principles, including sensitivity to the mission of the province, the need for “creative and appealing” ideas, attention to earlier sources (like the SMOB report and the Provincial Assembly proceedings of 1995), “efficient and effective use of resources,” the necessity for open communication and sensitivity to the civic community at Perryville. An “implementation report” update, dated 12 April 1995, reiterated the role of the implementation committee and identified its reporting line to the provincial superior and council through the assistant provincial for mission and planning. Already, however, disagreement emerged and abortive plans were announced. The Vincentian brothers who operated the farm at the Barrens petitioned both the provincial superior and the international superior-general for reconsideration of any decision to sell farmlands.

An immediate decision was reached by the committee overseeing the moveable assets of the Barrens to transfer the archives, rich in the history of mid-American Catholicism, to DePaul University.

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81 Mandate to the Heritage and Shrine Committee as Part of the Long-Range Plan for Saint Mary’s of the Barrens, 26 February 1995, Personal Files of Charles Shelby, C.M., Perryville, Missouri (hereinafter referred to as Shelby Files).
82 Ibid.
84 Farm Brothers to John Gagnepain, C.M., 6 April 1995; Farm Brothers to Robert Mahoney, C.M., 10 April 1995, Provincial Files. The brothers recognized the unprofitability of the farm – an April 1994 letter from Brother Richard Hermann to Reverend Gagnepain reported $200,000 in losses for the previous fiscal year – but hoped to continue operations as a charitable work providing food for the needy.
That decision triggered a letter-writing campaign by members of the Barrens community aimed at saving archival treasures, some noting the irony of the decision in light of the expected announcement that the Barrens would soon be placed on the National Register of Historic Places and others questioning whether the Barrens was “about to be reduced to just another roadside marker.” A retired confere complained that decisions were being made without consultation with the retired and infirm of the Barrens. “If you take items from Perryville that belong to Perryville, there will be no heritage left here, and I don’t think Saint Mary’s of the Barrens should be just a stop-over / rest area. It should be a place where pilgrims will see all of the heritage and spirit of the Vincentians of the Midwest Province.”

The concern of the Vincentian community at the Barrens was expressed strongly in a July 1995 report by the house superior, Reverend Arthur Trapp. Trapp’s report included a summary of projected plans for the Barrens – the gradual sale of 1600 acres of farmland over a 10 year period, the possible donation of rare books and objets d’art to DePaul University, and the imminent move of the library collection to DePaul and the Vincentian-run seminary in Kenya. More ominously, the Barrens superior reported on a meeting with a canon lawyer from the Archdiocese of Saint Louis regarding the potential alienation of Barrens property. “I have no intention to disobey the Provincial Superior,” Trapp reported, “Yet, I have the duty to do this right and to protect what needs to be protected.”

As a result of the controversy generated by the initial report of implementation activities, the provincial administration made no immediate moves to activate the oversight committee beyond an official appointment of committee members in April. Indeed, in a report to the Provincial Council dated 31 July 1995, Reverend John Gagnepain informed council members that “I have done nothing to convene the implementation committee.” Gagnepain’s revelation prompted

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88 Memo, A. (Trapp) to Confreres of the Barrens, 29 July 1995, Shelby Files.
89 Ibid. The canon lawyer reported that any alienation of Barrens property required the approval of at least 50% of the house council and the Provincial Superior.
the provincial council to review its earlier decisions regarding the SMOB report at its August meeting. At that time the council moved to request additional information on the “complex issue” of planning for the retirement center and infirmary, and to educate the province “about the realities of the situation” regarding the farmlands and moveable assets so as to “move forward on resolving the corporate status of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens.” 91 Finally, the council formally dissolved the implementation committee and established a new and separate heritage and shrine committee. 92 The new committee, under the chairmanship of Reverend Charles Shelby, C.M., of the Barrens community, issued a progress report in October 1995, vowing “to produce the best, most exciting, mission-centered, attractive, economically viable proposal possible.” 93 After some preliminary communication between the administration and Reverend Shelby over the mandate of the new heritage and shrine committee and some discussion of committee membership, the committee was never formally appointed.

91 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 11-16 August 1995, Provincial Files.
92 Ibid.
The election of a new provincial superior in 1996 once again affected the climate of planning for the Barrens. Reverend William Hartenbach, educated as an historical theologian and one-time rector of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary, guided efforts to plan for the future of Saint Mary’s for the next six years. Hartenbach confessed in a 1997 interview with the *Perry County Republic- Monitor* that as a student he grew to love the Barrens and as rector of Saint Mary’s he fought the sale and development of seminary lands.\(^{94}\) Now, as provincial superior, his feelings for the Barrens were tempered by the needs of the entire province.

Here is what the province wants. We want to be able to guarantee funding for our missions in Kenya. We want to see to it that we have the money we need to develop the central acreage where (Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Church) and the other buildings are now. We are retaining them and they will continue to be residences for the retired and a visitor’s center. All those buildings need work so we need to see to it that we have the funding for that. Along with that is the fact that one-third of our membership is over the age of 70 and we need to be concerned about retirement in other places besides Perryville. We are looking to have the income to support that.\(^{95}\)

Reverend Hartenbach’s efforts to balance his professed admiration for the Barrens and his professional obligations on behalf of the midwest province were tested early in his tenure, as controversies over the mandate of the heritage and shrine committee continued and new concerns arose over the disposition of the Barrens property long used by the local parish for their annual summer fund-raising picnic. Indeed, by the end of his first year as provincial superior, relations between the provincial administration and the Vincentian community at the Barrens became increasingly strained.

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\(^{95}\) Ibid.
In November 1996, a paper by a Vincentian canon lawyer examined the relationship between the province and the Perryville house in an effort to “provide a basis of discussion” between the two.\textsuperscript{96} In light of the SMOB report and the provincial council decision that certain works at the Barrens, including the farm, were not considered apostolates, the paper found that, “Ultimately the provincial and his council determine the apostolate (or apostolates) of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary. However, this determination needs the cooperation of the confreres of the seminary.”\textsuperscript{97} Traditional activities conducted at the Barrens, including the retirement center and heritage (represented by the archives and museums), belonged more properly to the “community life of the house” and not to any determination of apostolic activity.\textsuperscript{98} Regarding the thorny question of who controlled the property of the Barrens, the report found that “Both the Code of Canon Laws (canon 741, #1) and the Constitutions (150, #1) are quite clear that houses of the congregation are capable of acquiring, administering and alienating temporal goods. Therefore, the property of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary belongs to the house and only the house through its juridic representative, the superior, can dispose of the property (or alienate it) according to the universal and proper law.”\textsuperscript{99} The paper went on to outline the appropriate steps required for valid alienation of Barrens property, finally concluding, “The immovable goods of the Barrens seem to be the most controversial item. It seems to the author of this paper that the matter is quite clear and simple. Those goods belong to the house, no matter how they were acquired.”\textsuperscript{100}

In an effort to clarify provincial intentions and conciliate the Perryville house, Hartenbach met with the members of the Vincentian community at the Barrens in December 1996. The provincial superior began his remarks by assuring confreres that, while facilities at DePaul University and in Saint Louis were now available for retired

\textsuperscript{96} Michael Joyce, C.M., “Relationship Between the Midwest Province and Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary,” 17 November 1996, 8 (unpublished paper), Shelby Files.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 2-3.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 7-8.
Vincentians, no one would be asked or required to leave the Barrens retirement center unless they needed care unavailable there.  

Regarding plans for the disposition of Barrens property, Hartenbach reiterated that the core campus of 55-60 acres would be retained for the preservation of the shrine and a Vincentian heritage center, while the surrounding lands were “presently being considered for development” (farming was not under consideration), and non-contiguous lands, including the rich farming lands of the Mississippi River bottoms owned by the Barrens, would be left as is for the present, with any future development reserved for “agricultural purposes.”  

The monies from any sale of property, he assured confreres, would be directed toward Vincentian formation projects, the development of the core campus, and the Lazarist Trust. In response to questions from his confreres at the Barrens, Hartenbach noted that present plans were not definite “but [were] moving toward the definite” and any input was still welcome. “The challenge,” the provincial superior asserted, “is to be as gentle as we can with every conferee while at the same time being faithful to the obligations that have to do with money and the rest of those kind of things. I’m aware that these conversations... are about saying goodbye to a past that is terribly, terribly important to me. And I’m also aware, however, that if I don’t say goodbye to that past the future which I give to myself because I refuse to say goodbye could very well be a pretty miserable future.”  

Regarding the larger issues of leadership and decision-making in the Vincentian community of the midwest, Hartenbach concluded, “In the end we will choose something, we being me, after we have talked a lot. And for some people it will be painful and for others it won’t be so painful and for all of us it will be sad. Please don’t construct an us vs. them conversation. It does nothing but cause hurt and sadness. It doesn’t need to be there.”  

By March 1997, a new heritage and shrine committee was issued a revised mandate from the provincial council, again reserving the right of approval of “all aspects of the plan” to the provincial

\[\text{102 Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Summary Presentation, 2 December 1996, Provincial Files. In a subsequent report to the provincial superior dated 4 February 1997, a cost analysis for maintenance of the retirement center at the Barrens found that the 20 senior Vincentians in residence for 1996 cost the province $425,085 – or $58.23 a person per day.}\]
\[\text{103 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{104 Ibid.}\]
administration. The new committee was to restrict its planning to issues relating only to “a community house, a Vincentian heritage center, and a Marian shrine” on the core campus of the Barrens, and not venture into the broader area of overall planning for the future of the Barrens. With Reverend Hartenbach in attendance, in April 1997 the house council of the Barrens moved to maintain the central acreage of the core campus while endorsing a plan by Mueller and Neff Real Estate Appraisers and Consultants to develop 665 acres of surrounding seminary land for an approximate cost of $4 million. With that endorsement, in the presence of the provincial superior, the house council officially ceded control of seminary lands outside the core campus to the province. The difficult question of who controlled Barrens properties, a question considered by canon lawyers and argued back and forth among Vincentian confreres, was settled by the submission of the Barrens community.

With the issue of control of lands settled, the provincial administration moved quickly to plan for the sale and development of the Barrens property. Permission from the superior-general was sought, and obtained, in May 1997. A formal press conference was convened in Perryville on 4 June to announce the province’s plans for the development of seminary lands. Reverend Hartenbach outlined a provincial plan to seek co-developers of the 665 acres surrounding the core campus. “We are not interested in selling out and walking away,” Hartenbach noted. The Vincentians would become co-developers of the land to insure that nothing harmful to the local community or the environment would occur on former seminary lands – the order would preclude “casinos, land-fills, polluting companies, companies that pay wretched wages.” According to Reverend Michael Joyce, C.M., assistant to the provincial superior, the order was treading new ground in its development efforts. “The Vincentians know of no other Catholic order that has become a social justice oriented land developer and co-owner,” Joyce announced, “If it’s successful the project may become a model for other orders with large tracts of

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105 Mandate to the Heritage and Shrine Committee from the Provincial Committee, 27 March 1997, Provincial Files.
106 Minutes of the Perryville House Council Meeting of 2 April 1997, Provincial Files.
109 Ibid.
unneeded land.” The Vincentian return on the project would yield funds to construct a heritage center on the core campus as well as support of retired confreres and other works of the order.

Among the reasons given by Reverend Hartenbach for responsible commercial development of Barrens property were the needs of the Perryville community. In his December presentation to the Barrens house, the provincial superior referred to the town’s economic expansion plan – “I mean, there is a desire, I know that for a fact, there is a desire for expansion and the image of Saint Mary’s is a horrible one.” Municipal officials and local real estate agents, however, professed surprise at the June 1997 announcement of the province’s plans for the Barrens. Karl Klaus, presiding commissioner of the Perry County Commission, admitted that economic development of seminary lands would improve to the “well-being of the citizens of Perry County.” Bob Ray, executive director of the Perry County Industrial Development Authority, conveyed his support of the project in a private letter to the provincial. However, more recently

110 Ibid.
111 Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Summary Presentation, 2 December 1996, Provincial Files.
Glenn Graham of the Perry County Industrial Development Authority recognized the potential economic boom to Perryville of commercial development at the Barrens, but linked any development of Barrens property with a fuller plan for the core campus. Graham predicted that any development on former seminary lands would be retail or service oriented and would not necessarily attract new populations, as would more extensive industrial or recreational projects. Graham suggested that the importance of the Barrens stood beyond economic considerations and touched on the pride and heritage of the community.\textsuperscript{114}

Indeed, the initial reaction of the Perryville community to the development plan was mixed at best. Lay leaders of Saint Vincent’s Parish in Perryville expressed concern that the project would endanger their use of the so-called “picnic grove” for their annual fund-raising festival. In letters to the editor of the \textit{Perry County Republic-Monitor}, Perryvilleans questioned the wisdom of commercial development at the historic old seminary. “The Vincentians call this progress,” one citizen wrote, “I call this the end of a long tradition.” Others mused, “Growth and change come in many forms, this should not be our only way.” A particularly articulate writer criticized the plan as overcommercial and insensitive to the needs of a rural community and residents who prized “the simplicity of life... not just the financial interest” of the community. “I can’t find anyone in support of this plan,” according to this critic.\textsuperscript{115}

The issue of the picnic grove proved particularly vexing to local leaders and the provincial administration. In his November interview with the Perryville newspaper, Reverend Hartenbach admitted that the topic elicited strong emotions and outlined the history of the relationship between the Vincentian order and the local parish, offering hope for “mutually profitable discourse.”\textsuperscript{116} That discourse eventually led to the establishment of a Missouri not-for-profit corporation – the Perryville Community Park Association – as an entity for long-term lease of the picnic grove to the parish.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} Glenn Graham, interviewed by the author, Perryville, Missouri, 30 July 2002.
\textsuperscript{117} Memo, Bryan Cave LLP to William Davidson, 12 January 1998; Memo, Bryan Cave LLP to Joseph Hess, C.M., 6 February 1998; Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 9 February 1998, Provincial Files.
In the meantime, the issue of the core campus was taken up by a new heritage and shrine committee chaired by Reverend Joseph Geders, C.M., and reporting to the provincial treasurer. The new committee included among its members the Reverends John Gagnepain (former provincial superior) and Charles Shelby as well as Sister Damien Wetzel, D.C., and non-Vincentian lay members. At its meeting of 13 January 1998, the provincial finance committee noted the progress of the task force, whose work to that date envisioned both new construction, renovation of existing buildings and demolition of other campus structures. In response to these reports, the provincial treasurer informed Reverend Hartenbach that the forthcoming proposal of the heritage and shrine committee would carry an approximate price tag of $4 to 5 million. “At present, Saint Mary’s is somewhat expensive to operate,” Brother Joseph Hess, C.M., summarized, “due in part to the many old buildings and operating systems. Newer buildings, or modernized older ones, will be more efficient to operate and should cut costs for the Province Fund.” The up-front costs of a potential proposal raised concerns in the provincial council, however, which noted in its February 1998 meeting that “the Shrine and Heritage Committee will be told to pay attention to the mandate from which they are working.”

The committee submitted its formal report to the provincial council in May 1998. Its proposal included a Vincentian Heritage Center, to be located in a remodeled existing seminary building, a new residence for the Vincentian community at the Barrens, the maintenance of both the Shrine Church and the archives and museums, and the demolition of several outdated seminary buildings (the old novitiate, student building, boiler house, gymnasium, garage and chicken houses). The committee estimated costs for new construction ranging from $1.8 to 3.5 million, with $1 million for demolition of old buildings, for a total price tag of $3 to 4.5 million. Plans were also included for the employment of a curator to oversee operations (15-25,000 visitors a year were projected for the heritage center and shrine) and for the development of an appropriate outreach ministry utilizing Vincentian personnel. Reverend Geders asked the provincial council to authorize a market study as a follow-up to these preliminary

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118 Finance Committee Minutes, Meeting of 13 January 1998, Shelby Files.
120 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 9 February 1998, Provincial Files.
proposals and to provide the committee with a revised mandate, a new timeline and information about any future plans for the Barrens retirement center.  

The provincial administration linked approval of any core campus proposal to the sale of outlying seminary properties. Proceeds from the sale and development of Barrens properties were earmarked for the funding of core campus projects, but were also expected to contribute to the Lazarist Trust (for support of retired Vincentians) and to the Midwest province’s seminary in Kenya. The sale of the 665 acres surrounding the core campus was proceeding slowly. In its April 1998 meeting, the provincial council met with William Davidson (a consultant procured by the province), Reverend Jack Minogue (president of DePaul University and a noted champion of “entrepreneurship” by Catholic institutions), Mr. Ken McHugh (CFO of DePaul University, which had made a remarkable turnaround and was enjoying unprecedented popularity and success), lawyers from the firm of Bryan Cave, and consultant/planners from the prestigious Saint Louis architectural and urban planning firm of Peckham, Guyton, Albers and Viets, Inc. (PGAV). The council inquired into the progress of the development plans. One member, Reverend David Nygren, C.M., noted that “the province needs to be able to show that we are not just disposing but are also developing it [seminary lands].” Regarding the province’s pursuit of its co-development plans Reverend Hartenbach wondered aloud, “Where do we cut losses?”

At the April provincial council meeting, consultants from PGAV unveiled a prospectus for mailing to potential developers of Barrens properties. The prospectus outlined a conceptual plan that included a convention center, motel, 18 hole golf course, outlet mall, some light industry and commercial uses along Highway 51, and a large residential subdivision west of Interstate 55. The mailing asked for “developer partners” to act “in the role of Master Developer on behalf of the Congregation [of the Mission].”

The ambitious plans represented by the PGAV prospectus, and the provincial administration’s concern with raising funds for the pursuit of various works, represent the backdrop against which the

121 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 11 May 1998, Provincial Files.
122 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 13 April 1998, Provincial Files.
123 April 1998 Prospectus, Peckham, Guyton, Albers and Viets, Architects and Urban Consultants, Provincial Files.
report of the heritage and shrine committee was considered. Even if ready buyers could be found for the seminary lands, the total projected value of the 600 + acres had been estimated at just under $4 million. The proposals of the heritage and shrine committee carried a price tag that could consume that entire amount. As a result, the province balked at approving the report and sanctioning further work on the project. Reverend Hartenbach’s comments to one committee member summarized the response of the provincial administration:

My reaction to Joe’s [Joseph Geders, C.M.] presentation (and I think I can speak for the council as well) was a pretty severe case of sticker shock. Since the meeting I have had to do some serious soul searching to discern whether I am willing to approve the expenditure of such a significant amount of money for an entity that will celebrate past achievements while not, in all likelihood, furthering to any great degree our present mission. I am aware that my reaction may wind up modifying the mandate that you were given and so, in effect, may well create some frustration in you; if so, I apologize.¹２⁴

The provincial superior went on to detail his specific concerns: 1) the heritage and shrine proposal would be funded by the sale or lease of surrounding seminary lands “which will not occur in the near future,” and the delay in development might affect the population of the Vincentian community at the Barrens and, hence, alter the housing needs envisioned in the proposal; 2) the expense of the proposed project might detract from the funding of the Kenyan mission (“the land was given to us originally in order to sustain the work of clerical formation; I would like to see it continue with that purpose”); and 3) “There is a wild card in all of this – namely SEMO U.” [Southeast Missouri State University], which had expressed some preliminary interest in leasing seminary buildings for their extension courses in Perry County.¹２⁵ Hartenbach offered to meet with Reverend Shelby in the fall to “re-express” the mandate of the heritage and shrine committee.

¹２⁵ Ibid.
Before the revision of the committee’s mandate could be clarified, however, a new controversy ensued. In September 1998, the Perry County Republic-Monitor published a story on the possible lease of seminary buildings to Southeast Missouri State University for educational purposes. The news story reported on the activities of a committee established under the leadership of Bob Ray of the Perry County Industrial Development Authority to investigate the possibility of a higher education facility at the Barrens (initially in response to the training needs of area industry). As the committee was raising funds for an assessment of area educational needs, it contacted William Davidson (of Davidson and Associates, consultants employed by the Midwest province) to inquire about the availability of seminary property. The newspaper quoted Bob Ray, "Davidson said the seminary buildings, except for the church and administration building, could be purchased.... We were always under the impression that the seminary campus itself was off-limits (in the development plan for the seminary). We feel this is a golden opportunity to preserve part of Perry County’s heritage." Ray’s committee had also been in contact with Dale Nitzsche, president of Southeast Missouri State University. Nitzsche noted that SEMO was

already offering extension courses in cooperation with Mineral Area Community College at a site in Sereno, Missouri. “The discussion we are having now with community leaders in Perryville,” Nitzsche told the newspaper, “centers around the possibility of doing two things: the utilization of the Perryville Vincentian campus, as opposed to the Sereno site... and to complete a survey of the comprehensive needs of the entire area.” Finally, the newspaper observed that the Ray committee was exploring possible funding sources for the estimated costs of renovation to seminary buildings ($3-5 million).

The Perry County Republic-Monitor article rankled members of the Vincentian community at Perryville and members of the heritage and shrine committee, still awaiting formal disposition of their status. Reverend Trapp immediately faxed the provincial offices in Saint Louis with his concerns.

When we deeded over the “doughnut” (the property surrounding the campus) and the “doughnut hole” (the campus) of this property to the community at your direction, it was with the understanding that the “doughnut hole” would be deeded back to us. So far, the “doughnut hole” has not been deeded back.

When I got home today, I found this article in the Republic-Monitor. I had heard nothing of this – and was surprised to find a confrere’s name [Kevin Fausz, C.M., pastor of Saint Vincent de Paul Parish in Perryville] included among the members of the “local committee.”

I cannot help but wonder if our loyalty is being taken advantage of.128

Reverend Charles Shelby immediately contacted Reverend Jack Minogue of DePaul University, “remembering our discussion about a satellite campus,” with a copy of the Republic-Monitor article. Shelby informed Minogue that “Bill Davidson is rumored to have

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127 Ibid.
offered the property, 8-9 acres, for about $260,000.”

In response to a query from a local citizen, who inquired about the apparent confusion at the Barrens, Reverend Shelby recounted a telephone conversation with Joseph Hess, C.M., Midwest Provincial Treasurer at the order’s office in Saint Louis. “He vehemently denied much in the article and will demand a retraction,” Shelby offered. “I am also supposed to get a call from SEMO’s President verifying that sale was never discussed.”

Three days after the Republic-Monitor report, the Cape Girardeau newspaper The Southeast Missourian published a story announcing that “SEMO could open seminary center soon.” The Southeast Missourian added a comment from Joseph Hess, C.M., that “the buildings themselves aren’t for sale” but “the Catholic organization has indicated it might rent or lease the buildings for use as a higher education center.” Within a week, the Republic-Monitor followed up on its original story, quoting a Vincentian spokesman that “the Congregation is not considering selling any building in the core campus complex, the area of the main buildings where retired brothers are living.” The spokesman added that the buildings might be available for lease or rental and that properties outside the core campus were available for sale, but that “nothing has been offered to the Congregation, either verbally or in writing.” Perry County IDA director Bob Ray admitted, “We were working under the assumption that the buildings were for sale. We welcome the (Vincentians’) apparent statement about retaining the seminary campus. It is a large part of the county’s heritage. If renting or leasing (the buildings) is a viable solution then we will consider it along with alternative suitable sites.”

The brouhaha over the sale of campus buildings, clarified by the province’s announcement that no core campus property would be sold but might be leased, further complicated the task of planning for Saint Mary’s of the Barrens’ historic central campus and effectively

130 Memo / Fax, Charles Shelby, C.M., to Faye Amschler, 18 September 1998, Shelby Files.
killed the May 1998 proposal of the heritage and shrine committee. That proposal had included plans for buildings now publicly advertised as available for lease by the provincial administration. Reverend Shelby recognized that fact and almost immediately circulated a new proposal to Reverend Hartenbach and members of the now defunct heritage and shrine committee. “Ever since your ‘sticker shock’ letter to the Shrine and Heritage Committee,” Shelby wrote the provincial superior, “I have been thinking about a reply.”

Yesterday’s article in the Republic-Monitor provoked me to action. As you can see from the attached ‘Proposal,’ there are alternatives to sticker shock. No one addressed the question of where the money would come from. I am convinced there are lots of potential donors who appreciate history and their Catholic heritage, and who would be proud to contribute. And there is no reason why an educational option could not be integrated into the center, as shown.133

Shelby’s new proposal, after surveying the torturous history of future planning for the Barrens, hinged on the establishment of a Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Heritage Foundation which would assume financial responsibility for the growth and maintenance of the core campus. “It will seek funding from grant-giving agencies, corporations, and the general public. It will not receive a subsidy from the province.”134 The informal proposal included improved living quarters for the Vincentian community in existing seminary buildings, the conversion of the existing main building into a Vincentian heritage museum, lease of part of the library building to a university as a satellite campus, and the maintenance of the archives and museums on the Barrens campus, with an option to build a new visitors center should the need arise.135 Other parts of the proposal incorporated elements of the old heritage and shrine center report.

133 Memo / Fax, Charles Shelby, C.M., to William Hartenbach, C.M., 18 September 1998, Shelby Files.
135 Ibid., 3-4.
In his communication with the province and meetings with the provincial council in the fall of 1998, Reverend Hartenbach recognized the new circumstances brought on by the expense of the heritage and shrine committee proposal and by new revelations of community interest in seminary buildings. At the end of October, Hartenbach announced that the province had contracted with two real estate brokerage firms to facilitate the sale of the 600 acre patrimony surrounding the Barrens. While the province still hoped to realize its original concept of co-development, the superior’s letter recognized the growing impracticality of the PGAV plan. In the provincial council meeting of November, Hartenbach directed a review of the heritage and shrine committee’s mandate, with clarification of its goals given options for “the future look of the campus.”

Shortly afterward, serious discussions began regarding lease of the seminary academic building for educational purposes. One outcome of the September 1998 newspaper controversy was the statement of provincial interest in a possible lease of seminary buildings for educational purposes. Following up on that statement, William Davidson engaged in informal conversation with Southeast Missouri State University officials. In January 1999, Davidson informed Reverend Hartenbach of his conversations, in which SEMO officials indicated that, despite lack of follow-up with Perryville city leaders regarding an educational needs assessment, the University wished to proceed with its plans to expand its offerings in Perry County. According to Davidson, the SEMO president and executive vice-president inquired “about the possibility of space at Saint Mary’s of the Barrens,” including “the Library building, perhaps the student building and five to ten acres adjoining the library.” The University asked Davidson whether the province would entertain such an inquiry, and whether permission would be given for site visits to determine the suitability of seminary buildings.

Hartenbach responded positively to this query and over the next few months negotiations continued with successive Southeast Missouri State University presidents (Dale Nitzsche and Kenneth

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137 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 16 November 1998, Provincial Files.
By January 2000, SEMO officials attended a provincial council meeting to present a proposal for a 50 year lease of part of the seminary library building at $1 per year, with the University assuming renovation and maintenance costs. The proposal also included a provision for the possible purchase of five acres adjoining the library building (at $10,000 per acre) and a request for lease of the seminary’s rare books and museums located in the library.139

Reverend Hartenbach recognized the importance of his response to the SEMO proposal, which would affect the work of any future projects at the Barrens. In an undated report to the Barrens community, he conceded that the lease agreement “looks like the gradual dismantling of this house” but cited the need for good financial stewardship and service to the local community.140 And, in a letter to the superior-general of the Vincentians requesting permission to enter into the lease with SEMO, Hartenbach noted the annual costs of maintaining the library building, and the possibility of relocating the archives and the offices of the Catholic Home Study Services.141

The superior-general requested a modification in the lease in the form of a 10 year withdrawal clause allowing reconsideration before the
50 year term expired, in recognition that the “Church changes over years.” With that restriction, a formal lease agreement between the province and Southeast Missouri State University was signed in October 2000.

Of course, leasing even part of the library building to an outside group occasioned discussions regarding the disposition of the archives, rare books and objets d’arts already housed in the library. The provincial council noted in its December 1999 meeting that “the minute an agreement is signed to lease the building to SEMO the community is confronted with the decision on the archives and museums.” As mentioned, SEMO officials expressed an early interest in keeping these resources in the library under the care and supervision of the University. The University launched a public relations and private letter-writing campaign to secure the Barrens archives and museums. In April 2000, the Southeast Missourian reported on SEMO efforts to acquire the pieces for its projected River Campus in Cape Girardeau (located on the Mississippi riverfront campus of the former Saint Vincent’s College).

From March to June 2000, Reverend Hartenbach received letters pleading SEMO’s case for acquisition of the archives and museum. Letter-writers included Gary Rust (publisher of the Southeast Missourian), Cape Girardeau Mayor A.M. Spradling, Governor Mel Carnahan, Missouri Secretary of State Becky Cook, Cape City Manager Michael Miller, and Presiding Cape County Commissioner Gerald Jones. In response to SEMO’s public campaign, Perryville city officials launched their own efforts to keep the seminary’s treasures in their city, supported by Mayor Robert Miget, City Administrator

143 Difficulty in securing state funding delayed SEMO’s plans to begin classes at the Barrens in 2001, but grants totaling almost $15 million, including $400,000 from the Perryville Development Corporation, were secured in 2001 and 2002. Classes were scheduled to begin at the Barrens in August 2002. “Classic American Campus,” Southeast Missourian, 16 August 2001.
144 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 20 December 1999, Provincial Files.
146 “River Campus May Get Rare Book Collection,” Southeast Missourian, 22 April 2000.
147 Letters in Provincial Files.
Craig Lindsley, officials of the Perry County Industrial Development Authority, and Presiding Perry County Commissioner Tom Sutterer. In the spirit of academic compromise, and in recognition of his own constituency, SEMO President Dobbins suggested that perhaps Perryville and the Cape River Campus could share the Vincentian collection.\textsuperscript{148}

The Vincentian community, however, was in no mood to part with the literary and artistic vestiges of its mid-American heritage. A provincial committee was established in December 1999 to address the question, and the provincial council called for a professional review and assessment of the collection in January 2000.\textsuperscript{149} Louis Derbes, C.M., the house archivist at the Barrens, argued strongly for keeping the archives and museum collections at Perryville.\textsuperscript{150} Reverend Edward Udovic, C.M., Vice-President for Mission and Values at DePaul University and a historian of the Vincentian community, with the backing of DePaul president Jack Minogue, C.M., and the DePaul Board of Trustees, proposed the transfer of the De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives and the Doheny rare book collection from the Barrens to DePaul’s Richardson Library.\textsuperscript{151} The final report of the ad-hoc committee set up to advise the provincial administration recommended relocation of the archives to DePaul University and the appraisal and sale of museum holdings that were non-archival in nature. The committee split over disposition of the Doheny collection and other rare books, some favoring relocation to DePaul and others supporting sale of the items.\textsuperscript{152} The provincial council approved the committee’s recommendations regarding the archives and initiated the relocation of the De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives to DePaul University.\textsuperscript{153} The provincial administration authorized an appraisal of the rare books and objets d’art in the Barrens museums, which were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} "Perryville City Officials Ask That Vincentians Keep Rare Books in Their City," \textit{Southeast Missourian}, 2 May 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Thomas Croak, C.M., to William Hartenbach, C.M., 13 January 2000, Provincial Files; Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 17 January 2000, Provincial Files.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Louis Derbes, C.M., to William Hartenbach, C.M., 16 April 2000, Provincial Files.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Memo, Edward Udovic, C.M., to William Hartenbach, C.M., 7 May 2000, Provincial Files.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Report of Ad-Hoc Committee on Provincial Archives and Rare Books / Museum Holdings at Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary, Perryville, Missouri, undated, Provincial Files.
\item \textsuperscript{153} William Hartenbach, C.M., to Edward Udovic, C.M., 16 May 2000, Provincial Files.
\end{itemize}
eventually valued at $5 million. Given the delay in selling seminary property (by March 1999, only 25 acres of the over 600 acres up for development had been sold154), the museum collection represented a real opportunity for supporting Vincentian apostolates in mid-America and Kenya. “The books, manuscripts and art objects are beautiful to look at,” Reverend Hartenbach told The Saint Louis Post-Dispatch:

However, locked behind glass doors or stored in a vault they do not support the contemporary mission of the Vincentian community, they do not help one person in poverty or hopelessness. Here we sacrifice the possessions of works of human hands to honor and care for the beauty and dignity we Vincentians most cherish.155

On Friday, 14 December 2001, the rare book collection of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary was auctioned off at Christie’s in New York City, fetching over $6 million, including world book auction records for a first edition King James Bible ($424,000) and a first edition of Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn ($44,600).156 Christie’s was also contracted to oversee the sale of the art objects in the former Barrens museums.

The lease agreement with Southeast Missouri State University, the relocation of the archives, and the Christie’s auction of Barrens museum collections overshadowed central planning for the seminary campus itself, which proceeded fitfully throughout 1999 and 2000. In September 1999, Reverend Charles Shelby submitted a preliminary plan to the provincial council for a Shrine and Heritage Center, followed by a formal report in October. Reverend Shelby explained his action to Reverend J. Patrick Murphy, C.M., faculty member at DePaul University and former Director for Personnel Services for the province, as follows:

It occurred to me about 6 months ago that the Provincial had no business setting up a committee to determine the future of a house and its assets: it is the house’s responsibility. The Provincial should be setting up parameters, principles, policies, guidelines within which the house can submit plans for approval. (This might have some bearing on the devastating effect decisions from on high have on morale....) Anyhow, I then took it upon myself to work with the Barrens house council to draw up a plan for adoption and approval by the house and then the Provincial. I had a conversation with H’Bach and to a lesser degree with Geders, the chair of the 7th committee. Geders was fed up with the process and wanted to distance himself, so he half-heartedly joined in the conversation and then excused himself after a few remarks reviewing the work of his committee.

Hartenbach told me that history and heritage are important but he does not see them as closely related to the mission of the province. The heritage of the Barrens is therefore something the province should hold on to. But the resources of the province should go to mission. Therefore, he would support and be interested in a plan which preserves the Barrens without a great impact on the personnel or financial resources of the province.

I took that, along with what I knew of the work of the 7 committees, and used it as guidelines for drawing up a plan of my own. No committee ever got to the point of drawing up a plan based on the market nor anything like a business plan.

I kept Hartenbach informed along the way, and last week I showed what you have to the Barrens house council. They like it, suggested that I get someone like you to review it, and then present it to the house.
With the house’s formal endorsement, I should then submit it to the provincial as the house’s approval.  

The Shelby plan centered on the establishment of a Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Heritage Society, with a projected future enrollment of 10,000 members, to generate income and increase tourism at the Barrens. With a staff executive, an advisory board, an archivist (this before the announcement of the relocation of the De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives to Chicago) and a two-year budget of $850,000 (raised to $1,830,000 in the final proposal of October 1999), the SMOB Heritage Society would provide new and remodeled facilities, develop and manage the Shrine and Heritage Center, and provide housing for resident Vincentians. The plan was accompanied by a projected costs analysis and a market study likening the tourism potential of the center to the nearby Our Lady of the Snows, the historic sites in Ste. Genevieve and the Trail of Tears State Park in Cape Girardeau. 

When the provincial council received the preliminary Shelby plan, it questioned the authorization of the proposal. Reverend Hartenbach announced that it was the result of personal talks he had with Shelby in June of that year. The council, however, agreed that “the Barrens Heritage Society proposal is not in accord with what the Council has in mind for the future of the Barrens,” as it would remove the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal from the control of the province, and the council unanimously rejected the plan. Not to be deterred, Reverend Shelby continued to polish his proposal and attended the November meeting of the provincial council to pitch his plan. The council questioned Shelby about the opinions of the Perryville house, which was supporting pursuit of the proposal, and wondered about the level of public interest in the project. Finally accepting that “we need to make a clear decision that sticks on what to do with the Barrens,” the council postponed final consideration until the year 2000.

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157 E-mail message, Charles Shelby, C.M., to J. Patrick Murphy, C.M., 9 November 1999, Shelby Files.
159 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 18 October 1999, Provincial Files.
160 Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 15 November 1999, Provincial Files.
There is no record of a formal provincial council response to the Shelby proposal outside of its rejection of the plan in October 1999. The Barrens house council endorsed the proposal and, according to Reverend Shelby, it remains the future planning document of the Barrens community. No action can be taken without provincial approval, however. The provincial finance committee did initiate an inquiry into the status of plans for the core campus and the provincial administration pursued its interest in a new visitor’s center at the old seminary.\textsuperscript{161} In response to provincial interest, Reverend Shelby submitted a proposal in August 2001 to authorize a capital campaign to raise funds for a Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Visitor Center. On behalf of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, Shelby requested permission to conduct a fund-raising campaign and “carry out the construction of a visitor center... at no expense to the Province” and “without significant impact on the support [already] given to the Province by the Association.”\textsuperscript{162}

The proposal envisioned the construction of a modern center to accommodate visitors and pilgrims to the shrine and old campus at a cost of under $2 million. Also included in the $5 million campaign would be funds to demolish the old novitiate building (site of a small existing gift shop / visitor center), landscape the surrounding grounds, and establish an endowment for the operational costs of the center.\textsuperscript{163} To lessen provincial concerns that the project would endanger Vincentian control of the Barrens, the proposal concluded with the assertion, “Carrying out this project does not imply that the Province will surrender ownership of the Shrine or the Barrens.”\textsuperscript{164}

The provincial council approved the request with qualifications, as summarized by Reverend Hartenbach in an April 2002 letter to Reverend Shelby: 1) “approval of the Visitor’s Center in no way contains an approval of the development of any lay association;” 2) the approval covers the entire plan submitted by Shelby; 3) approval is based on the assumption that “the capital campaign will not have an adverse effect on the Association’s ordinary fund-raising efforts;” and 4) construction could not begin until at least 75% of the required money was in hand.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{161} Finance Committee Minutes, 24-26 August 2001, Shelby Files.
\textsuperscript{162} Request to Conduct a Capital Campaign and Build Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Visitor Center, Draft, 26 August 2001: 1, Shelby Files.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} William Hartenbach, C.M., to Charles Shelby, C.M., 9 April 2002, Shelby Files.
On 1 July 2002, Reverend Hartenbach concluded his six-year tenure as superior of the Midwest province of the Congregation of the Mission and Reverend James Swift assumed the office. At this time, efforts are still underway to sell the 650 acres surrounding the core campus. A Perryville Community Park Association, including members from the Vincentian order, has been founded to oversee the maintenance of the grounds for the local parish’s “Seminary Picnic.” Southeast Missouri State University is finishing renovation of the library building to accommodate extension courses beginning with the fall semester 2002. The library collection has been removed and books have been donated to the Vincentian seminary in Kenya and to DePaul University. The De Andreis-Rosati Memorial Archives are now located at DePaul’s Richardson Library. Monies from the auction of the Barrens’ rare books and museum collections are being used to fund endowments for support of the mission efforts of the Midwest Vincentians. The Association of the Miraculous Medal continues its devotional and fund-raising work on the Barrens campus. The offices of the Catholic Home Study Service have been relocated to rented space off the seminary grounds. The capital campaign to raise funds for a visitor’s center has not been publicly announced. No central, coordinated plan for the development of the remaining core campus has been approved.

Conclusion

The story of the decline and fall of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary – a story of one American religious order coming to grips with changing circumstances necessitating hard decisions about the fate of its most historic institution – illustrates key characteristics in the contemporary history of American Catholic religious life. Since at least the Second Vatican Council, practically every element of the institutional Catholic Church has undergone a prolonged period of soul-searching and reorientation. For Catholic religious orders, the rapidly changing religious environment (declining vocations, shifting apostolic commitments, etc.) represents a veritable crisis that calls for some transformation of identity or emphasis. As David Nygren (himself a midwestern Vincentian) and Miriam Ukeritis have pointed out, transformation involves a model with discernible stages, from crisis through an “unfreezing” of former attitudes and search for
alternative understandings and actions, to conflict and ultimately a new synthesis.\textsuperscript{166}

Based on their comprehensive survey of Catholic religious, Nygren and Ukeritis trace the effects of transformation on three levels—intercongregational, congregational, and individual. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of their research is the effect of change on the individual religious priest, brother or sister. On a personal level, their study uncovered a significant level of \textit{anomie} caused by dissatisfaction with the efforts of congregations to return to the spirit and charism of their founders.\textsuperscript{167} Other studies have identified the source of this dissonance as the rise of a “spiritual virtuosity” that characterizes the contemporary Church.\textsuperscript{168} Whatever the source, the growing dissatisfaction of individual religious contributes to a growing crisis of identity in religious orders. The problem of identity becomes increasingly evident in conflicts over institutional commitments, which, paradoxically, Nygren and Ukeritis find strongly supported by religious individuals.\textsuperscript{169} At heart, then, the crisis of contemporary Catholic religious orders is a crisis of identity, complicated by the tension between the individual priest, brother or sister and the congregation which, according to Patricia Wittberg, sometimes offers an “organizational resistance to ideological and operational change, even to the point of courting extinction.”\textsuperscript{170}

The Midwestern Vincentians provide a clear example of several aspects of religious transformation. As early as 1970, the report of the Vincentian Committee on the Apostolate (COTA) suggested a growing concern with the ability of the order to maintain its apostolic commitments in the midst of environmental change. The decision to close Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary, the American motherhouse of the order and historic center of the province, was made on essentially practical grounds—the declining number of vocations and costs of maintaining an outdated physical plant rendered the decision practically inevitable. The Vincentians explained the closing, however, with reference to an interpretation of cultural and ecclesiastical history that stressed adaptation and development, ebb and flow, change and


\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 265.

\textsuperscript{168} Wittberg, \textit{Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders}, 273.

\textsuperscript{169} Nygren and Ukeritis, “Future of Religious Orders,” 265.

\textsuperscript{170} Wittberg, \textit{Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders}, 273.
transition. Such an interpretation allowed for an internal assimilation of the transformed status of the Barrens, but failed to provide a clear direction for the future of the old seminary.

Planning for the future of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens after 1985 proved more problematic than the closing of the seminary itself. The seminary had provided the central apostolate of the campus and cemented individual and congregational commitments to the institution. The loss of its unifying apostolate made it difficult to consider the future of the Barrens. Only after nearly a decade of inertia was the province able to readjust its perceptions of Saint Mary’s. The so-called SMOB report of 1995 established the principles on which future planning, however erratic and fitful, would proceed. That report focused on the Barrens as both property and heritage, with a few apostolic works in progress and a great deal of community life but no central, distinctive apostolate. Therefore, future decisions about the Barrens could be made divorced from romantic attachments to any single work.

Individual attachment to the institution of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens remained strong, particularly given the vitality of community life at the Barrens (which remained among the largest single communities of Vincentians in the province). These attachments contributed to conflicts with the provincial administration over the disposition of Barrens properties. The whole issue of provincial leadership and governance became embroiled in discussions over the future of the Barrens, with canon lawyers pronouncing on the rights of the house versus provincial authority and multiple committees charged with revised mandates offering alternative proposals that met with little enthusiasm. As many testify, the Barrens still evokes strong feelings among Midwestern Vincentians. Because so many Vincentians spent a significant amount of time there during their formation, the Barrens became the focus of strong emotions, both positive and negative. This swelter of feeling translated into a lack of consensus over the future of Saint Mary’s. As Patricia Wittberg has observed, a lack of individual consensus can serve to hamstring leaders who are unable to provide a unifying vision for the congregation.\\171 Coupled with a growing movement of decentralization and individualism, the result can be confusion and even serious conflict. In the case of the Barrens, communal identity and allegiance triumphed when the

\\171 Ibid.
house council, at a critical moment in the planning process, submitted to provincial authority and ceded Barrens properties to the province.

The issue of congregational identity became closely tied to the fortunes of the Barrens after 1985. For the Vincentians, Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary represented the heritage of the order, and heritage is a prime component of corporate identity. Thus, questions of identity often focused on perceptions of the past and its role in defining the community and ordering its future. Ultimately, two visions of the past collided in planning for the future of the Barrens.

Reverend William Hartenbach, a trained historian and provincial superior from 1996-2002, felt a keen appreciation of the Vincentian heritage at the Barrens. He hoped to celebrate the past through the Barrens, but was adamant in his insistence on investing in the future. When the costs (in financial, physical, human and psychological resources) of renovating the Barrens became prohibitive, Hartenbach saw it as an impediment to the mission of the province and pulled back. Reverend Charles Shelby, a trained manager and director of the Association of the Miraculous Medal, also felt a deep attachment to the heritage of the Barrens. Shelby, however, believed that investment in the past was a sound route to recovery of a brighter future. For him, the costs of renovating the Barrens represented an investment that would pay off in greater visibility and resources available for present Vincentian works. Paradoxically, in their planning the historian became the futurist and the entrepreneur became the preservationist. Such was the outcome of the often turbulent history of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens from 1985 to 2002.

ADDENDUM

N.B.

New developments have occurred at St. Mary’s of the Barrens since the completion of this article. In August 2004, the Midwest Province of the Congregation of the Mission made a final decision to proceed with a $10 million project that includes the demolition of several old buildings and the construction of a new Vincentian residence center on the Barrens campus. The project will unfold in stages, beginning in early 2005 with the demolition of the old student
and novitiate buildings to make way for a new one-story residence center. When the center is completed, active and retired Vincentians will be relocated from their present quarters in the old “C” building, which will be demolished along with “B” building. (Both of these older structures on the eastern side of the campus are attached to the historic administration [“A”] building and the Church of the Assumption. The administration building and the church will not be affected by this project.)

The province based its decision to pursue this project on the increasing costs of maintaining and repairing the old campus, including the unoccupied student and novitiate buildings. According to Rev. Joseph Geders, C.M., treasurer of the Midwest Province, the new residence hall will incorporate some of the distinctive architectural elements of the demolished older buildings. The new project “makes the statement that we are here for the long run,” suggests Rev. Geders, “and reflects our commitment to our founding roots.”

Meanwhile, the Miraculous Medal Association remains active on the Barrens campus, in addition to a successful extension program in the library and academic building of the old seminary jointly administered by Southeast Missouri State University and Mineral Area Community College. It seems the one constant in the history of St. Mary’s of the Barrens is its resilient capacity to adapt to the changing needs of the Vincentian community and the local Church.