

SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Vol 4

Father John E Boll, Archivist

No 15

ARCHITECT HARRY J. DEVINE

Both Function and Worship Dictated Seminary Design

This article was printed in the April 20, 1961 issue of the *Catholic Herald*



Harry J Devine, Architect

Designing multi-million dollar structures is not a new experience for the architectural firm of Harry J. Devine. The Sacramento area is replete with the results of Devine's creativeness, from hospitals and schools, to churches and government edifices, to name only a few categories.

However, there is little doubt that the commission to draw up plans for the first permanent seminary in the history of the Sacramento Diocese, St. Pius X, presented a challenge. Not only must the facilities relate the living and educational patterns of the seminarians and their instructors, the Salvatorian community, they must also reflect faith and dedication to engender worship of God.

Point of Beginning

To the uninitiated, the complexities of construction high-lighted by myriad stacks of blue prints and specifications is almost overwhelming. Where and how does it all start? According to Devine's son, Harry Jr., who is spokesman for his father while the latter and his wife are on a Mediterranean cruise, "the point of beginning is necessarily the land itself upon which the structures will rise."

The problem was answered even before the actual launching of the diocesan-wide seminary fund drive in 1958, with the donation of 320 acres of land by the late Henry J. Need of Galt. "Next," explained Harry Jr., "came countless consultations with Bishop McGucken and the Salvatorian priests, to determine the daily traffic patterns of both seminarians and the religious community.

Heart of the Seminary

"Since the heart of the seminary is the chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is continuously enshrined, we knew this must become the focal point of all the buildings." After traffic patterns are established – that seminarians rise each morning and head for meditation and Mass in the chapel, then to breakfast, then to classes, lunch, more classes, recreation, dinner, study, chapel, etc., a preliminary form starts to take shape in the mind of the architect. Interwoven with the students' needs, is the daily living pattern of the religious community.



Photo by John E Boll 1963

The Chapel, the Heart of Saint Pius X Seminary

Cutting Costs

“Although there was over 300 acres of land to work with,” stated young Devine, “because of the specialized teaching requirements and for reasons of economy, the buildings are clustered and

designed more in cloister fashion. Normally, an institution of this size would be designed more in campus fashion, spread out over the large site to a greater degree. "However," he continued, "by drawing the buildings closer together it diminished the cost factor from the standpoint of utility installations. And we were keeping in mind that maintenance is a large item; there would not be a large staff of custodians available to tend to grounds and corridor areas."

As a result, the new two million dollar St. Pius X Seminary is tailor-made to the teaching and activities program. Said Harry Jr.: "this is a case of function dictating to a high degree the form of the buildings. This makes good sense as well as good architecture."

Newest Techniques

The designing firm utilized every new building technique which it estimates cut construction costs approximately 20 percent over normal methods and speeded up the completion date. These included the lift-slab method of building roofs and floors, tilting up concrete walls and the application of pre-stressed concrete columns and beams.

Considering in the over-all planning was the utilization of natural light, again with maintenance costs in mind. This resulted in a classroom wing with north window exposures, which also guarantees built-in sun-shades as well as good illumination.

The architect works closely throughout the planning phases with his consultant engineers: Ernie Francis, structural; Les O'Meara, mechanical; and Lew Walters, electrical.

It takes the better part of a year to develop the completed set of drawings, preparatory to the start of construction, which was done by Continental Construction Company. Prof of the months of work involved are the stacks of blue-prints: 30 architectural drawings: 17 structural; 17 plumbing and mechanical; and 13 electrical.

At the height of the construction phase, some 50 workmen swarm over the 91,815 square feet of buildings. They included carpenters, laborers, cement finishers, welders, brick masons, iron workers, plumbers, sheet metal workers, electricians, lathers, plasterers and painters.

Honored by Pope

On constant call, checking and rechecking building details and progress was Devine, Sr., who was honored some years ago for his contribution to the welfare of the Church. The late Pope Pius X II conferred on him the rank of Knight Commander of the Grand Cross, Order of St. Gregory the Great.

St. Pius X Seminary is architecturally representative of the 20th Century. As many church edifices of past centuries reflect the Gothic, Baroque or Romanesque eras of the times in which they were constructed, so St. Pius X is a seed of today, U.S.A. Its massive, clean-cut lines portrays strength, durability and beauty, re-echoing the Faith promulgated there.