

It's been 50 years since Brother Charles Cummiskey, S.M., Ph.D., strode into Garni Hall and began his first chemistry lecture at St. Mary's University. And it's still where you'll find him every fall and spring. "(I like) the challenge to do a good job, whatever it is, and to do it the best you can do."

Born in St. Louis in 1924, Cummiskey was inspired by Marianist teachers at McBride High School to join the Society of Mary. As a first-year scholastic, he was summoned to Detroit's Holy Redeemer School to replace an injured teacher. "The student council president—future Marianist Joe Barrett—filled in until I

Donohoo, James Gray, and Marion Belka, all of whom taught at St. Mary's.

By way of South Bend, Cummiskey arrived in San Antonio in 1955.

During his early years, he was a Chaminade Hall proctor while teaching two freshman chemistry classes plus labs, and two math or religion classes each semester. He chaired the chemistry department and was its first graduate adviser, and with assistance from the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research, he added



Brother Charles Cummiskey, S.M., Ph.D.

50 Years and Staying Put

by Candace J. Kuebker, Executive Editor

got there. I had 53 seventh-grade boys, the oldest being 16 years old and I was 18!" Cummiskey says.

Along with earning degrees at the University of Dayton (B.S. '44), and Northwestern University (M.S. '52), he taught high school in St. Louis. After taking perpetual vows in 1945, Cummiskey was appointed Postulant Prefect at Maryhurst, the Marianist postulate, where he taught math, religion, French and chemistry. Except for a one-year detour to St. Boniface High School in Winnipeg—where he first taught chemistry—he was at Maryhurst until 1952, teaching postulants and first-year scholastics.

When provincial superiors directed Cummiskey to get a doctorate, he earned his in inorganic and nuclear chemistry from the University of Notre Dame in three years. Spurred by interest in the developing space program, many St. Mary's students were interested in chemistry and the department chair, Brother Ed Collignon, was eager to get a Ph.D. in the department.

At Notre Dame, Cummiskey was one of several brothers pursuing doctorates known as "The (Marianist) Four Horsemen" (after Knute Rockne's fabled 1920s Fighting Irish backfield). The quartet included Cummiskey, and Brothers John

biochemistry to the curriculum.

When Brother Joseph Schmitz fell ill in 1965, Cummiskey filled Schmitz's vacant vice president-dean of faculty job. He spent nine-and-a-half years as St. Mary's chief academic officer, but never stopped teaching (albeit a lighter load).

As vice president, Cummiskey hired faculty. He recruited them by emphasizing St. Mary's commitment to teaching and sharing with them its mission. In those days, he says, the faculty was smaller and "you were rubbing elbows with them all the time—in the mailroom (we picked up our own mail in the basement of St. Louis Hall), in the coffee lounge next door, and at Faculty Club events," he says.

In his 50 years at St. Mary's, Cummiskey has taught all but biochemistry courses offered by the department, and he was honored as a Minnie Stevens Piper Professor in 1979 for his teaching of organic chemistry. Ten years ago he reduced his course load to one lecture class and lab; however, he now produces the University catalogs!

Today about 100 St. Mary's students are majoring in chemistry and biochemistry, most in the latter. The interest, Cummiskey surmises, comes from what's going on in science today.

"There's so much happening in the development of new drugs and there's been a research explosion in that industry," he says.

After all these years, he still favors teaching freshman students. "(I try) to get them off to a good start...and I figure they'll be around for four years and I'll get to interact with them more," he explains.

With teaching one precept stays the same. "How well a student does depends entirely on how hard and efficiently they are willing to work," he says.

And why has he spent most of his professional career at St. Mary's? "Well," he says chuckling, "they (his provincial superiors) never asked me to do anything else."

Lucky for thousands of St. Mary's students who, for a half century, have been the beneficiaries of Brother Charles Cummiskey, doing the best job he can do. ■



Cummiskey was mentor to the late Carlos De Llano (B.S. '58), who would go on to earn a doctorate at The University of Texas at Austin.