



From the Archives

Exploring Father Egan's Desk

By Marketing & Communications Staff

“A few months after I started working here, someone mentioned that the big ‘table’ being used as storage in the archives was Father Egan’s desk,” says Viola Chontos, reference librarian in the St. John Paul II Library at Franciscan University.

Yes, *that* Father Egan—the Father Dan Egan, TOR, who pioneered the College of Steubenville in 1946 and played such an integral role that thousands of students over the decades have spent most of their academic life in a building named after him.

Realizing the significance of the desk and its owner, Chontos, who works with Special Collections and Archives, and Library Director Amy Leoni set out to create a display that would do justice to Father Egan’s life and legacy. Today, the simple wooden desk sits in a more dignified place in the St. John Paul II Library, complete with an array of letters, diary entries, and notes left behind by the school’s first president.

“We wanted to make it look as if he was just sitting at his desk looking through correspondence or writing in his diary,” says Chontos, who installed a glass topper on the desk and relocated a bust of Father Egan to appear over the display.

Staring through the desk’s glass, examining the tight, quick cursive lines of Father Egan’s journal, or the familiar, idealistic syntax of his letters to Bishop John King Mussio, a picture emerges of a man deeply committed to his students, the Ohio Valley, and the idea of a Catholic liberal arts education.

“Father Egan was a thoughtful man who truly cared about and loved this school,” says Chontos. “He wanted the best for the school, the students, and the surrounding community. He was a tireless and hard worker and loved getting to know the students.”

He was also ahead of his time, a deep thinker and constant doodler who wrote thought-provoking proposals and papers on the nature of Catholic educa-

tion in democracy and the use of mass media—including the then-new television—to educate and evangelize.

“It is to . . . the transmission of knowledge, that television will contribute in an outstanding measure,” he writes in a paper from 1956. “Moreover, the impact of this medium will be felt in the areas of indirect transmission of knowledge and what is commonly called ‘adult education.’”

Yet, Father Egan never saw television-based continuing education become a reality—or his plans for the hilltop campus fully realized. A fire at the Holy Spirit Monastery on Fourth Street in Steubenville claimed his life in March 1959, just months before construction was set to begin on the new hilltop campus of the College of Steubenville.

He was remembered fondly, mourned as a humble man who sought to live his life as did the *Poverello* of Assisi. And, as visitors to the St. John Paul II Library can see, one who closely followed God’s plan to bring faithful and excellent Catholic education to the Ohio Valley. ■

