

# The History Of Gonzaga

## Gonzaga College A History 1950-2005

In 1949 the buildings that now comprise the Jesuit residence and Prep building with their surrounding lands of c.15 acres in Ranelagh, two miles south of Dublin city centre were purchased by the Irish Province of the Society of Jesus with the intention of opening a preparatory school under the patronage of St. Peter Canisius. The school which opened September 8th 1950 was in fact called after St. Aloysius Gonzaga and occupied the present Community residence. It consisted of three class groups (Preps I, II, III) comprising a total of 52 boys. The founding Jesuit Superior (and later first Rector) was Rev. Charles O'Connor SJ (The O'Connor Don) and the first Prefect of Studies was Rev Bill White SJ.

Initially the curriculum of the College was based on an application of the Ratio Studiorum. The intention was to break from the restraints of the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate Examinations and emphasise clarity of thought linked to a thorough knowledge of languages; especially the Classical languages. The curriculum did not include the sciences. It was planned to have pupils sit the Matriculation Examination of the NUI which would be taken at the end of 5th Year, enabling 6th Year to be devoted to a transition into a world of academic work or other occupation during which there would be wide reading and pupils would learn how to assemble knowledge effectively as well as how to present it.

In 1956 the first of many building projects for the College was begun. These buildings included the entrance hallway and library, the assembly hall and two classrooms (now numbers 10 and 11). The costs of these developments were again borne by the Jesuit Community and Province so when in 1962 it was proposed to build a College Chapel the Rector turned to the parents. The College was heavily in debt but with parental support the proposal became reality and the foundation stone of the Chapel was blessed in 1965. This tradition of turning to parents to fund new developments has continued to this day. In 1974 the Classroom block; in 1980 the Chapel windows and in 1984 the Science block were all built with funds raised in the main from the parent body. In 1993 the First Board of Management, after a review of the existing facilities undertook a further building project. These buildings included a new gymnasium, Art rooms, general classrooms, and dining facilities

Over these years many other changes occurred in the curriculum, structure and staffing of the College but two, in the mid seventies had the most profound long-term effect. The first re-direction of policy arose from the 32nd. General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (GC32) which saw the election of Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ as General and the re-examination and re-direction of the efforts of the Jesuits which focussed on the preferential option for the poor. The second was the introduction of the points system as a means of gaining entry to specific faculties of the Irish Universities.

The re-thinking of the Jesuits after GC32 led them to question the operation of schools such as Gonzaga which charged fees and could be considered elitist, being based on the ability to pay. Arising from the discernment on this issue the Jesuit Province proposed to the Department of Education the setting up of a co-educational, Comprehensive School at Gonzaga, owned by the Department but involving Jesuit trusteeship. The proposal was rejected.

The introduction of the points system effectively spelt the end of the Gonzaga experiment based on the Ratio Studiorum. It was no longer possible to be certain of admission to the more selective faculties if the results of a Matriculation examination taken at the end of Fifth Year were to be the yardstick. The College switched to the Leaving Certificate, taken at the end of Sixth Year.

Under the dynamic leadership of Fr Dermot Murray SJ many of the most productive changes in the late seventies and early eighties occurred: the extensive building programme created a modern school in which science took its proper place in the curriculum and the introduction of a second stream in the secondary school and an entrance examination as a means of selecting pupils improved the academic record

When the decision was taken, in 1989, to appoint the first lay Headmaster there was still a doubt over the continued existence of the College. In 1991 the Jesuit Provincial Delegate for Education undertook a wide ranging review of the operation of the College. The outcome of this review was more than positive.

The Provincial gave a commitment, on behalf of the Province, to the continued existence and development of the Senior School. He decided that the Preparatory School should close and that the intake of the Senior School would be expanded. It was further decided to establish a Board of Management in line with national norms.

This first Board of Management initiated the development plans which came to fruition in the 1996 buildings. They set up an organised and professional fund-raising campaign to fund these developments. In consultation with the educational stakeholders, the Board drafted the Gonzaga Mission Statement which was approved by the Provincial.

The Board's work was continued by the second Board and their joint efforts culminated in the opening of the new buildings in September 1996 by Fr Provincial SJ. With the school plant now developed to the needs of a new century the Board established a sub committee to prepare a ten year plan for the ongoing development of the College.

A fire in February 2003 destroyed the Administration building which had been the site of the original Prep school. Extensive re-building and refurbishment ensured that Staff facilities and the boys' library which rose from the ashes were amongst the finest in the country.

In March 2003 the Jesuit Provincial advised the five Jesuit Colleges that because of shortages of Jesuit manpower it would not be possible, within a short period, to guarantee the presence of Jesuits in the Colleges. He invited the Colleges to reflect on whether they wished to remain in the Jesuit fold and undertake the Ignatian vision of education as laypeople. At a meeting with the Provincial in September 2002 the Gonzaga staff undertook to sustain and develop the Jesuit/Ignatian ethos of the College. An action plan was prepared and adopted by the Board which was aimed at cementing Gonzaga College into the worldwide network of Jesuit schools.

As an integral part of this ongoing development the fourth Board again reviewed the College facilities and decided on a further programme of building to begin in Summer 2006.

**AMDG**