

The Tidings

THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES



2015
*Congress
Special
Issue*

SPECIAL ISSUE
Congress 2015

This is a special Religious Education Conference issue of The Tidings, the weekly newspaper serving the people of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. In it you will find a Q-and-A with Father Chris Bazyouros, who will take the helm of the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education; some reflections from Pope Francis on education and faith; thoughts on Lent and Easter from Father Ronald Rolheiser, whose column runs every week and last but not least, a feature on our beloved Sister Edith Prendergast, RSC, who is stepping down as director of Religious Education this summer.

In the Congress program, Sister Edith explains this year's theme, "See," which is inspired by the blind man's encounter with Jesus (John 9:1-41). It challenges us to "see anew, to peer beneath the surface and see more deeply and broadly. We are invited to open wide not only our physical eyes, but also the eyes of the heart, the eyes of our memory and perceive God's presence in all of life, in joy, in pain, in struggle."

Sister Edith, who served on our editorial council for years, has been an inspiration to the staff at The Tidings as well as Vida Nueva, our Spanish-language monthly. We hope our newspapers help our readers "perceive God's presence in all of life." And we look forward to continuing our partnership with the Office of Religious Education under the leadership of Father Bazyouros.



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Thank you, Sister Edith!

Don't miss "The Influence of One Life," an evening that will celebrate Sister Edith Prendergast, RSC, and her more than 25 years of service in the Office of Religious Education.

Saturday, 8:30 p.m., Arena.

Read: "A faith-filled journey," page 11.



Rick Warren will be the keynote speaker at 8:30 a.m. Saturday in the Arena

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Meet Father Chris Bazyouros

Archdiocesan priest will be next to helm Office of Religious Education

This summer, Father Chris Bazyouros will succeed Sister Edith Prendergast, RSC, as director of the Office of Religious Education of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Father Bazyouros, who currently serves in Adult Education in the Religious Education department, grew up as a parishioner of St. Francis of Rome in Azusa. He attended their parochial school, Bishop Amat High School in La Puente, Cal Poly Pomona and then St. John's Seminary in Camarillo. He was ordained in 2003.

Father Bazyouros sat down with *The Tidings'* J.D. Long-Garcia to share more about his background and his vision for religious education in the local Church.

JD: Let's start with an easy question. Who's your favorite saint?

Father Chris: I don't know if that's an easy question. I think it's a tie right now between Sts. Luke and John. I've been working with the Catholic Bible Institute, and I've always enjoyed those two accounts, and so they've always been very powerful in my own spiritual life and I identify with the parables. Both of those accounts have been very profound in my own life journey.

Scripture seems to be a pretty central part of your faith. Can you tell me more about that?

I love reading. I love the stories. So Scripture has always been a part of my life. And so when I came to this particular position of Adult Faith Formation (in the Office of Religious Education), and one of my responsibilities was guiding the Catholic Bible Institute, I was really excited.

It's been amazing to be reintroduced to these passages and to continue to hear some amazing people talk about their passion for scripture, and to help people understand it, so that they can also share that passion with others.

This is where we meet Christ. We meet Christ in the word. He's the Word of God. It all began with the Apostles telling the story of Jesus. Their experience of Jesus Christ. And through that sharing, people came to faith.

There are many beautiful aspects of the Religious Education Congress. What stood out for you the first time you went?

Just being around so many people who share that faith, and they are seeking to become better at living it and expressing it. So many people drawn together and celebrating our faith, celebrating all the different varieties of the way our faith expresses itself. It's just a very positive energy — coming together as people of faith. I think that's probably, for me, one of the earliest impressions that I had about what Congress was like for me.

When the Baltimore Catechism was more commonly used, there was a certain approach to religious education.

How have we as a Church adapted our religious education throughout the years?

With the Second Vatican Council, we were reacquainted with the ancient way that the Church brought people into the faith, which is through the catechumenate process. We're still trying to understand a lot about how impactful that process can be.

So in the General Directory on Catechesis — which is a document that had been propagated from Rome — the catechumenate model is the basis of all catechesis. Learning how to bring people into the faith by journeying with them. Opening their experience to an encounter with Christ is a key component of that.

The issue is, I can't make you meet Christ. I just have to give you these opportunities and help you be open to it. And when you have the experience, to walk with you as you try to make sense of it and what God is doing in your life. That is one of the most powerful components, but it's one that, you know, I can't schedule it. [laughs]

That is what is exciting about being in catechesis right now ... we're trying to explore all the ways that we can help people encounter Christ. Pope Francis' talk about a ministry of encounter resonates with people.

When you meet Christ, in some ways, it's beyond words. I hear that. When that moment takes place, and that person does have their encounter with Christ, it's on God's time. Is that right?

We're just trying to help people be aware that God is present and God wants to interact with each person: wants to enter in this dialogue with each person, and with us as a community. How do we help people be open to that?

But that's only part of it. The second part is, when someone has had this experience with Christ. Then our job is to just help them learn how to articulate that ... to articulate how to integrate this experience into our faith journey.

I can't encounter Jesus and not be transformed. I can choose not to let the transformation go deep. And see, the catechist helps the person to not be afraid to



VICTOR ALEMAN

Father Chris Bazyouros gives a new catechist her certificate as Archbishop José H. Gomez and Father Brian Castañeda, priest secretary, look on at the Service of Prayer & Commissioning service, Sept. 14, 2014.

"I can't make you meet Christ. I just have to give you these opportunities and help you be open to it. And when you have the experience, to walk with you as you try to make sense of it and what God is doing in your life."

let the transformation go deeper.

That's beautiful. That's exciting work.

It is exciting work! It's amazing. And so all of us in the Office, we're excited about learning how to do that in ways that can help parishes take this on. And parishes understand, and the catechists especially, how to best create this environment. And it's not just religious ed programs. It's not just confirmation programs. We need to help parish communities create this experience, create this environment where people are given the opportunity to encounter Christ.

You're reaching out to people at different age groups. Do you think there will be a time when we don't do adult faith formation? If we did the children's catechesis perfectly, would that be sufficient?

This is the crux of it. Jesus called adults

to be his disciples. You know, the human person has an extraordinary capacity for growth and development. It's only we at a certain place [who] say, "Well, I'm an old dog, I can't learn any more new tricks." And then you see this person who's 80, running marathons and taking university courses and earning degrees. Where is the real barrier?

Our faith is not something we just get. It's a living relationship. And I always call people to think about a relationship with a significant person in their life — like a parent or a sibling. And can you tell me that such relationships haven't changed from the time you were 5, 15, 25?

It can't be, because we grow and we become who we are. Those relationships grow. It's the same with God. God is that living reality, that person. And so there won't be a time when you won't have to [grow]. There's always something more.

Please see **BAZYOUROS** page 5

BAZYOUROS

Continued from page 4

The Greeks had the sense that because God is infinite, you can never stop deepening your relationship with God. And so even some theologians from the Greek school would say that even when you get to the Kingdom of Heaven, you're going to continue to move deeper and forward in your relationship with God.

What are you looking forward to as director?

From my standpoint, coming in as a new director, is that there are so many wonderful things that we are doing. There's a great spirit of cooperation and collaboration in the office. And to be able to continue that, but also to be able to discern where God is leading us now.

How does Pope Francis' papacy affect your approach to religious education?

It reaffirms that catechesis is a holistic integration of faith. It's not just that I know what my Church teaches, but I live how my Church lives. I speak how my Church speaks. And we've been focusing on institutions a lot, but a lot conforms to Christ.

The power of attraction that Christ had was the complete and holistic sense that people could perceive of God's presence with him. There was nothing hidden. He simply was. He spoke and he acted and he was always doing what God asked him to do. What he was meant to do.

I think people have a similar view when they look at Pope Francis. They see some-



VICTOR ALEMAN

one who not just talks about caring for the poor, but is asking to have showers put in the bathrooms in the Vatican, so that homeless can go in and get a shower and feel clean. And so it reminds us in

our office of what Blessed Paul VI said: Modern man does not believe teachers anymore. He believes witnesses. And if a modern man believes a teacher, it is because the teacher is a witness. ■

Father Bazyouros sings out at last year's Service of Prayer & Commissioning of more than 2,000 catechists at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. "We're just trying to help people be aware that God is present and God wants to interact with each person," he says.

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Pope Francis on education and faith

Excerpts from 'Evangelii Gaudium'

“Catechesis is a proclamation of the word and is always centered on that word, yet it also demands a suitable environment and an attractive presentation, the use of eloquent symbols, insertion into a broader growth process and the integration of every dimension of the person within a communal journey of hearing and response.”

“Again and again, the Church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defense of life, human and civil rights, and so forth. And how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world! This is a good thing.”



FRANCO ORGLIA/GETTY IMAGES

“Youth ministry, as traditionally organized, has also suffered the impact of social changes. Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual structures. As adults, we find it hard to listen patiently to them, to appreciate their concerns and demands, and to speak to them in a language they can understand. For the same reason, our efforts in the field of education do not produce the results expected. The rise and growth of associations and movements mostly made up of young people can be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, who blazes new trails to meet their expectations and their search for a deep spirituality and a more real sense of belonging. There remains a need, however, to ensure that these associations actively participate in the Church’s overall pastoral efforts.”

“Yet we desire even more than this; our dream soars higher. We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a ‘dignified sustenance’ for all people, but also their ‘general temporal welfare and prosperity.’ This means education, access to health care and, above all, employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives.”

Easter should be an eye opener

In honor of the 2015 Religious Education Congress' theme of "See/Ver," The Tidings is reprinting a Father Ronald Rolheiser 1989 column on Easter and "seeing."

Easter is mostly about waking up. It's Easter when God and spring susurrate through the veins of nature, giving frozen earth and frozen hearts a wake-up call. That call is ever needed, because the human proclivity is towards sleep. Without outside revelation, the trumpet blast announcing resurrection and God whispering new life inside of us, our preoccupations and obsessions invariably render us blind as bats.



IN EXILE

By FATHER RONALD ROLHEISER, OMI

Easter is about eyesight, seeing. George Orwell once summarized our difficulties in this area: "A rather cruel trick I once played on a wasp. He was sucking jam on my plate and I cut him in half. He paid no attention, merely went on with his meal, while a tiny stream of jam trickled out of his severed esophagus. Only when he tried to fly away did he grasp the dreadful thing that had happened to him. It is the same with us. The thing that has been cut away is our soul and there is a period of time ... during which we do not notice it." (Collected Essays, Vol. II, p. 15)

It's a strange irony! We spend our lives searching for life in its rarity and we hardly notice Easter and spring. It's Easter and we are heavy in spirit. Resurrection is all around and we are feeling old! Why? Why are we so blind to spring and resurrection?

Classical spiritual writers have always affirmed a connection between morality and epistemology. That's a sophisticated way of saying that how we live morally affects our eyesight, our perception of reality. Moral laxity, sin and lack of faith cloud our vision. Our propensity to sleep through the resurrection, obviously, has something to do with our less than perfect faith and morals. However, I believe in

"Mostly resurrection is about susurrection, whispering. God whispers a lot. There are all kinds of secrets to be heard. Spring is a good season for looking and listening."



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the end, the problem is not so much our badness as our busyness, our sin as our obsessions. Let me try to explain this:

I don't think that we are a particularly bad people. We have moral faults and laxities which are peculiar to our generation, but, conversely, we also have moral strengths and virtues that past generations lacked. Moreover, God is used to revealing love and resurrection to sinful people. Where God is perhaps less practiced is in revealing love and resurrection to such busy and preoccupied persons. Where we differ from past generations is more in the pace of our lives than in our moral inadequacies. We are pressured, preoccupied, hurried and driven in a way that previous generations never were. We've no time for the examined life, for contemplation, to notice spring and resurrection. "The plant must run!" as Merton once put it. There is little time or energy left after that has been taken care of.

Sadly, this is true even of our preaching of the Gospel. We are so busy teaching the Gospel, learning the Gospel, running religious programs, administering sacraments and making sure the religious plant runs that there is precious little, if any, time and energy left to actually live the Gospel. We have to spend so much time talking about God that, at a point, there is no time to listen to God any more. To this we add restlessness and emotional obsessions. Here too we differ from past ages. We are more restless, more diseased than they. People have always been restless and prone to obsessions, but our age militates against restfulness and literally invites obsessions.

A myriad of factors — mass media,

more leisure time, unbridled romance and sex and philosophies of self-fulfillment which point us towards a "salvation" within our world — have driven up our psychic temperatures and made it very difficult for us to accept our own lives and spirits. This makes for a lot of heartache. As painful as are the headaches that come to us from the hurriedness and pressures of our work, they are a lesser evil. It's our heartaches, the emotional obsessions that so unsettle our rest, which, like Orwell's wasp, keep us concentrated on the jam.

These obsessions are the pain and the narcissism which makes us unaware of spring and resurrection and the whispering of God. We don't notice spring and resurrection because, outside of our heartaches and headaches, we hardly see anything at all. The earth is ablaze with the fire of God, with sights, sounds, smells, touches and tastes that are enough to make anyone want to take one's shoes off. There's resurrection a plenty! Mostly it goes unnoticed. We sleep the sleep of heartaches and headaches!

It's the time for spring and resurrection. I doubt there will be any resurrection trumpets loud enough to blast the narcissistic hell out of us. Mostly resurrection is about susurrection, whispering. God whispers a lot. There are all kinds of secrets to be heard. Spring is a good season for looking and listening. ■

*Oblate of Mary Immaculate
Father Ronald Rolheiser is a
specialist in the field of spirituality
and systematic theology. His website
is www.ronrolheiser.com.*



Father Rolheiser will be speaking twice during Congress:

- > Friday, March 13, 10-11:30 a.m. "Seeing What Lies Most Deeply Within us: Developing Mystical Eyes" (1-22)
- > Saturday, March 14, 10-11:30 a.m. "Seeing with Eyes of the Soul: The Challenge to Cure Our Blindness" (4-22)

A faith-filled journey

Sister Edith Prendergast reflects on her service that has taken her from a small Irish town to the world beyond

BY BRENDA REES

After she steps down as Director of the Office of Religious Education (ORE) for the Los Angeles Archdiocese, Religious Sister of Charity Edith Prendergast wants to take a sabbatical and visit places that have deep meaning for her: London (where she got her education certificate and was exposed to great art and museums), Boston College (where she received her Master's Degree in Theology and met famed theologian Karl Rahner) and, of course, her Irish homeland.

"I want the land to lay fallow for a while," she explains. "I need time to regenerate the fields."

The metaphor is appropriate coming from the daughter of an Irish farmer who taught his six children the value of faith and action at an early age. For Sister Edith, it's a faith that has challenged and nurtured her throughout the years. And it's a faith she passionately wants to continue to share with others in a ministry that has included nearly 35 years of leadership in the Los Angeles Archdiocese.

"It was my family who laid the foundation for my vocation," she says, recalling praying the rosary with her mother Catherine and taking walks with her father, Richard. "I learned a lot from my father, he had a Celtic spirituality of God in all things: the trees, plants, animals, us."

Richard also taught her the power of charity. Often, the family home became a refuge for travelers or homeless who would knock on their door in the cold of winter looking for a place to spend the night. "We had an attic and they would stay the night and have breakfast with us the next morning," she says. That experience paved the way for Sister Edith to later choose a vocation with the Sisters of Charity in 1959, taking a vow to serve the poor.

After her novitiate in Dublin, Sister Edith went to London to be trained as an educator, majoring in ecclesiastical art and divinity – two areas close to her heart that would become her unofficial ministerial themes, helping her bring people closer to God using the power of art, poetry and music. It was natural for Sister Edith to combine the two because as she says, "In the early years, catechism was done all through images. That was how people learned about their religion."

Sister Edith had her first taste of the American school system in 1966, when she taught various grades in Southern California. The American system clashed with her English training. "In England we had color corners, art and all things to stimulate the students who worked in groups at tables," she says, describing the straight lines of desks and empty walls of American classrooms of the time as "boring to students and teachers."

Sister Edith believed then, as she does now, in experiential learning, a more tactile and personal exploration for students to grasp lessons. In this way, she would promote people taking active involvement in their education of and relationship with God.

"She was always in the heart of things, being in the right place at the right time," says longtime friend Msgr. Lloyd Torgerson, pastor at St. Monica Church in Santa Monica. This was particularly true for Sister Edith in the early 70s, when her religious community asked her to be involved in



CHRIS KRAUSE

Religious Sister of Charity Sister Edith Prendergast, third from left, with current and former coordinators of the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress: Paulette Smith, Jan Pedroza, Vikki Shepp, Mary Lou McGee and Adrian Whitaker.

the formation process. She spent a year studying formation and how to become a spiritual director, a process she says "strengthened my own spiritual life."

Upon her return, Sister Edith found challenges in the formation ministry because of the changes that Vatican II advocated. Many religious communities struggled internally on how to adapt and renew their commitments, a landscape which had to be navigated with sensitivity. These struggles deepened her, she says, and "hewed out a place in me to be non-judgmental and a good listener."

Sister Edith next continued her education, enrolling as a graduate student in Boston College majoring in scripture. She would later return to parish work in Southern California.

By this time, Sister Edith had led many retreats, developing a creative and spiritual experience based on scripture that also included poetry. Her work caught the attention of Msgr. Torgerson, who was the associate ORE director at the time and who, after one interview with her, decided to offer her the position as the first youth ministry consultant.

"She has a great spirit for people and can see things in people that we can't always see in ourselves," he says. "We worked together on developing retreat programs for our Catholic schools and high schools as well as developing programs in youth ministry — it was the first time the archdiocese was involved in this outreach."

From that platform, Sister Edith stepped up to duties as ORE associate director and was in charge of Youth Day for the Religious Education Congress, and then the entire Congress once she was named ORE director soon afterward.

Under her leadership, she expanded Congress, the largest gathering of Catholics in the nation, to reach a broad array of church ministries: social outreach, justice efforts and personal and human development, in addition to religious education and catechetical ministry. Multicultural workshops were added with a great emphasis on engaging Spanish-speaking communities. She was particularly involved in Youth Day, giving rousing and inspirational opening addresses.

"She took a great event and made it bigger and better. It is without question the best gathering anywhere in the world every year," says Dan Mulhall, director of professional development and Hispanic ministry at RCL Benziger. "Only a papal visit might top it!"

"The liturgies are aesthetically appealing and create a sense of devotion and prayerfulness that cannot be expressed in words," agrees Msgr. David Sork, pastor at St. John Fisher and former ORE director. "If anyone should have any doubt of the effectiveness of the reforms that came out of Vatican II, let them come to the Congress. The leadership of Sister Edith



Sister Edith, daughter of an Irish farmer, has been an elementary school teacher, spiritual director, parish worker, youth minister, formation and retreat developer and religious education leader.

has made that happen.”

Overall, the influence of Congress has spread “beyond the shores” with similar gatherings in Ireland, Canada and England taking their cue from the Anaheim event.

In addition to shepherding Congress, Sister Edith expanded the nature of religious education, especially with the creation of the Bible Institute, an idea that was brought to her originally by Kay Murdy and Dorothy King, two laywomen. “It started like planting a seed that soon blossomed,” she says, pointing out that now the ORE commissions about 2,000 catechists and leaders (many of them young adults) at the annual ceremony.

“We want to form and inform adults without forgetting the children or the youth,” she explains. “Transforming lives, that’s our mission.”

All during her time at the archdiocese, her staff and colleagues have been enthusiastic about her leadership.

“She has a genuine respect for each person, and is able to bring forth their unique gifts,” says Jo Rotunno, publisher emerita of RCL Benziger, who worked with Sister Edith in various roles over the years. “If she had chosen a different path in life, we might be honoring her as a retiring CEO.”

“What I admire most in Sister Prendergast is her enthusiasm for the ministry, her commitment to make catechesis and youth ministry strong and viable in all the parishes,” says Maria Sedano, who served as her associate for more than 15 years.

“One of the most incredible gifts Sister ever gave me as one of her coworkers was the freedom to fail. I’m



VICTOR ALEMAN

From left, Father Richard Fraomeni, Archbishop José H. Gomez, Sister Edith Prendergast and Mark Shriver at the 2013 Los Angeles Religious Education Congress in Anaheim.



TIDINGS ARCHIVE

“It started like planting a seed that soon blossomed. ... We want to form and inform adults without forgetting the children or the youth. Transforming lives, that’s our mission.”

— Sister Edith Prendergast, RSC

serious,” says Mike Norman, former associate director. “It is so empowering to have someone that supports you so completely. She has, in turn, helped me to become that kind of leader, as well.”

In addition to these duties in office, Sister Edith attended Claremont School of Theology, receiving a doctorate in ministry; served on the board of directors for the National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (then National Conference of Diocesan Directors) to help increase lay involvement in spiritual formation and religious education and facilitated the International Consultation for Adult Religious Education, sharing stories and best practices with others across the globe.

Determined that people should be able to pursue a Master’s degree in Theology even if money is an issue, she set up her own endowment for laity. Every year, 12-15 people receive partial tuition scholarships toward their education which, in turn, they will share with others. “I think if you are passing on the faith, you have to have depth in yourself,” she explains.

Throughout all her many responsibilities, Sister Edith continues to participate in many catechetical and ecclesial events, often as an

inspirational speaker and/or spiritual guide — a role she cherishes.

“I found that during Congress I had a forum during the opening talk, to get across my message, my vision and for people to know who I am and what makes me tick,” she says.

She takes a moment to recite the poem “The Avowal” by Denise Levertov. It sums up her strong faith, and perhaps also her faith journey that has brought her to this point in her ministry where the next step may be unknown, but nonetheless joyfully embraced.

“As swimmers dare to lie face to the sky and water bears them, as hawks rest upon air and air sustains them, so would I learn to attain freefall, and float into Creator Spirit’s deep embrace, knowing no effort earns that all-surrounding grace.” ■



CHRIS KRAUSE

Sister Edith with Monsignor Lloyd Torgerson, a longtime friend and former ORE director and current pastor of St. Monica Church in Santa Monica. “She has a great spirit for people and can see things that we can’t always see in ourselves.”

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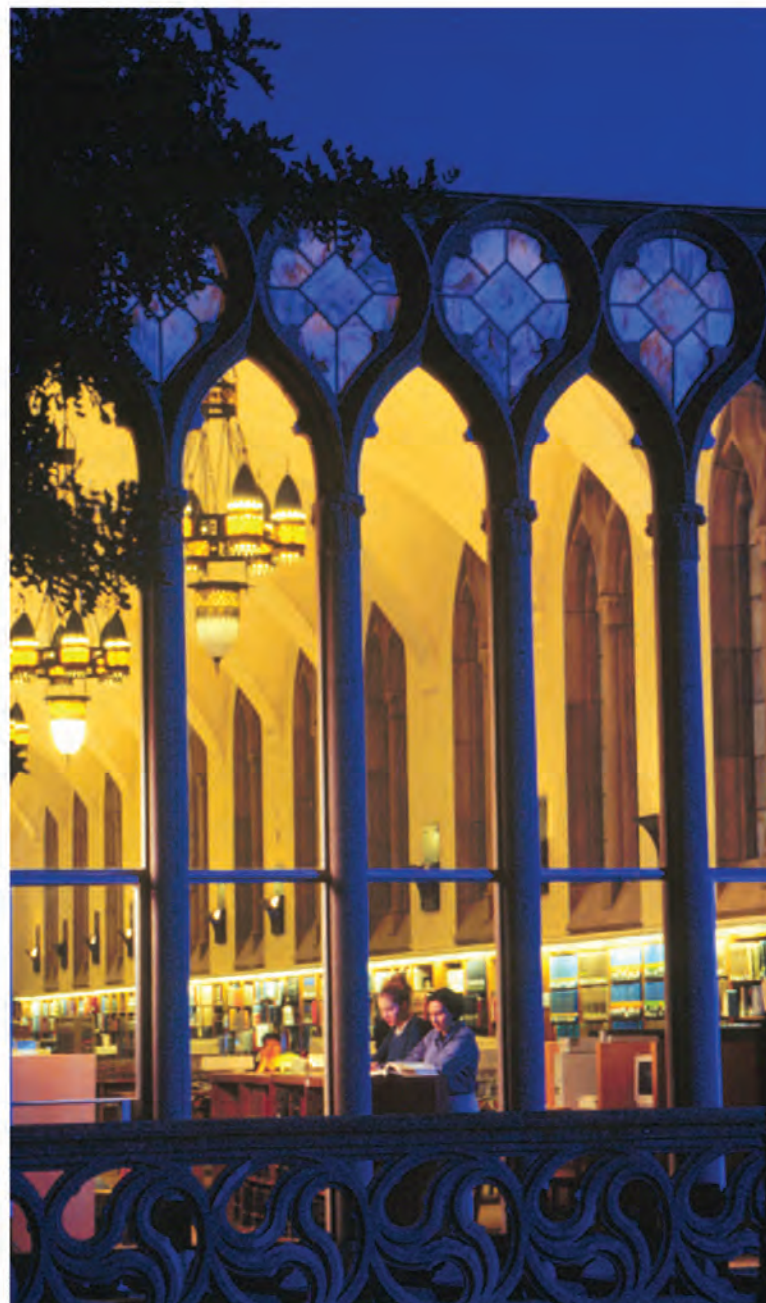
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