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DEAN STEVEN P. FRANKINO:
INSPIRED LEADERSHIP OF GRACE, POWER
AND ABUNDANT GENEROSITY

VERYL VICTORIA MILES*

DURING the months following the passing of Dean Steven P. Frankino, many of his colleagues, friends, former students and admirers gathered together to recall his many gifts of inspired leadership and friendship. These encounters were phenomenal to witness because of the consistencies found in each person's story about Dean Frankino and how he had so gently touched and, yet, powerfully affected their lives. For each colleague who recounted his or her experience with him, they uniformly shared how he was able to envision the kind of potential for their professional accomplishments that they would have never thought or even imagined to be conceivable. For each law school faculty that he served as dean, he was fondly remembered for his great knowledge about legal education, his natural wisdom and capacity for reserve in guiding a community of faculty of diverse viewpoints to places of growth and change that always resulted in an enhanced school and community.¹ For each individual who experienced Dean Frankino's hospitality, his gracious style and beautiful flare for celebrating collegiality and friendship remains indelibly imprinted in our hearts and minds as a part of his credo for sharing the blessings of life.

Each story about Dean Frankino helped me find greater appreciation for the enormous legacy of his life as a teacher, mentor, visionary of legal education and friend to all who knew him. While one would expect a

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1. In a tribute to Dean Frankino honoring his twenty-five years as a dean of three different law schools written by Dean Ralph Rohner, his former colleague and one-time college roommate, he eloquently described Dean Frankino's commanding and holistic leadership:

Steve also has the gift of being able to engage fully in the hardscrabble processes and decision making of academic administration, from major crisis to petty squabble, without ever losing sight of those fundamental principles that derive from faith and the rule of law. Kindness and civility to all. Institutional loyalty, always. A keen sense of due process in resolving controversies. Fairness among contestants for favors or resources. Tolerance and respect for divergent views within a diverse law school community. . . . His principled approach to deaning created a sense of serenity and comfort among colleagues who knew that, whatever the issue or its difficulty, it's [sic] disposition would be thoughtful, supportive of the teaching mission and fair.

Ralph J. Rohner, *The Patience and Prescience of a Chess Master*, 43 VILL. L. REV. 3, 3-4 (1998).

person who devoted approximately forty years of his professional life to legal education to leave a legacy of some magnitude, such a legacy can never be assumed based on the time of service. It will be the acts of the individual that truly define the legacy.

Dean Frankino's entry into legal education was swift and reflected a pattern of purpose. With the exception of his time at Northwestern University School of Law as a teaching fellow, Dean Frankino's career in legal education was devoted to Catholic universities, and for each law school his leadership brought the best results. After completing a one-year term as a teaching fellow at Northwestern, he returned to his alma mater, The Catholic University of America, Columbus School of Law, as an Assistant Professor where he taught from 1963-65. He then would move on to the Villanova School of Law, teaching from 1965-1971 (including a one-year leave to serve as a research professor at the University of Florence) before taking his first position of leadership as dean at the Creighton University School of Law, where he served from 1971-1977. Fortunately for Catholic University, Dean Frankino would return to our community as dean from 1978-1986. Villanova would experience similar good fortune with his return to serve as dean from 1986-1997.

Leadership as the dean of a law school is always challenging, but to lead a religiously affiliated law school is uniquely challenging. It requires a special appreciation, understanding and respect for the mission of the sponsoring university, and an ability to enable the religious mission of the university to enhance and compliment the educational goals and objectives that a law school must embody in preparing students for law practice and the profession, as well as creating a supportive environment for the teaching and scholarly work of faculty.

As one former Villanova colleague of Dean Frankino's observed, he was very conscious of the "marriage" that must take place between the religious identity of the law school and the educational goals of the law school; he "develop[ed] a comfort level with [Villanova's] Roman Catholic affiliation . . . building it in as an *ethos* apparent in the fiber of the law school . . ." ² It was noted that this "ethos" embraced the school's religious identity "without compromising, but rather enhancing, classroom dialogue, scholarship and the unfettered search for truth" in the spirit of its religious tradition. ³ This aspect of his leadership was similarly demonstrated at Catholic. In a recent tribute to the legacy of Dean Frankino, Professor Mike Noone, who served as Dean Frankino's Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, reflected that, "[h]e was a model dean for any Catholic school. He was proud of his distinctive intellectual and spiritual heritage but always respectful of faculty, staff and students who did not share it."⁴

2. Doris DelTosto Brogan, *The Right Dean at the Right Time*, 43 VILL. L. REV. 7, 8 (1998) (emphasis added).

3. *Id.* n.5.

4. *The Loss of a Leader: A Man for All Seasons*, 24 CUA LAWYER 25 (Fall/Winter 2005).

Dean Frankino's ability to lead three Catholic law schools successfully made him particularly qualified to lead numerous site inspection teams for the Association of American Law Schools and the ABA's Section on Legal Education and Admission to the Bar at other religiously affiliated schools. His knowledge and sensitivity to the dual responsibilities of such schools in realizing their commitment to excellence in legal education and to reflect the mission of their sponsoring schools was always welcomed and appreciated.⁵ In addition to his appreciation of the challenges facing the religiously affiliated law school, Dean Frankino's years of experience in legal education progressively evolved to a point where he was a visionary of legal education. This vision was most obvious in the way that programs and institutes of specialized law practice blossomed under his leadership as dean at Catholic.

During Dean Frankino's tenure at Catholic, several specialized certificate programs and concentrations were added to the academic program between 1980 and 1985. Such programs included the Institute for Communications Law Studies, the Comparative and International Law Institute, the Law and Religion Program, the Law and Public Policy Program; not to mention the establishment of the *Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy*. Each program would spring from the creativity of individual law school faculty and find the necessary support and encouragement from Dean Frankino that allowed them to take root and flourish. Today, Catholic celebrates twentieth and twenty-fifth milestone anniversaries for each of these programs.⁶ Dean Frankino is appropriately credited as a visionary leader in legal education given the fact that such institutes and programs did not find general adaptation in most law schools until the early 1990s, according to a recent ABA survey of law school curricula at ABA accredited law schools.⁷

In reviewing the many tributes and dedications written about and by Dean Frankino, it is clear that in each of the institutions he led, he facilitated growth and improvement. Not only did he support curriculum development at Catholic, but oversaw the building of a new facility at Creighton to support growth in the student body and the faculty; the renovation and technological enhancements of the library at Villanova; and he helped the university administration at Catholic begin the necessary and initial preparations for a much needed law school building that would be built under the leadership of his friend and colleague Dean Ralph Roh-

5. This fact was noted by Dean Brogan in her tribute to Dean Frankino. I also had the wonderful opportunity to serve on an ABA site inspection of a religiously affiliated law school that Dean Frankino chaired where his depth of experience and knowledge of the many intricacies and nuances of legal education was most illuminating.

6. Tom Haederle, *From Acorns to Towering Oaks: CUA's Legal Clinic, Institutes and Special Programs Spread Far and Wide*, 24 CUA LAWYER 7 (Fall/Winter 2005).

7. ABA SEC. ON LEGAL EDUC. AND ADMISSION TO THE BAR, A SURVEY OF LAW SCHOOL CURRICULA, 1992-2002 (Feb. 10, 2005).

ner.⁸ He is also credited with inspiring increased scholarly productivity among the faculty of each institution and opening the doors of each school to become a welcoming forum for outstanding international and domestic legal scholars, bringing greater visibility and prominence to each institution.

The legacy of Dean Frankino runs deep and includes many. I include myself as a part of his legacy. He was the dean of Catholic when I graduated from law school. As a law student, one is not necessarily aware of the influence the school's dean will have on his or her career. Preparing this tribute has been a wonderful opportunity for me to reflect on the marvelous ways that Dean Frankino touched my life.

When I first started teaching at George Mason University School of Law in 1983, Dean Frankino's wife, Rosemarie, was one of my very first students. Mrs. Frankino and I would meet frequently after classes to review and discuss course materials. At the conclusion of these meetings she would share with me words of encouragement from Dean Frankino; words that became a lifeline for me as an inexperienced law professor. Years later, Dean Frankino and I would often see one another at various law school association gatherings and even work together on an ABA/AALS site inspection team. Without failure, he would always encourage me in my teaching and scholarship and expressed pride in my progress.

Two years ago, a dean's search consultant informed me that I had been nominated for a deanship. That nomination had been made by Dean Frankino. He wrote me in great detail stating his reasons for nominating me for the particular deanship and his belief in my potential to be a law school dean.

My last conversation with Dean Frankino was on the day that I was appointed dean at Catholic. He gave me good counsel on deaning and expressed his hopes that I would come to love it as much as he had. These last words of encouragement from Dean Frankino are a lifeline for me today.

At his memorial service, the following quotation from the Book of Acts was included in the program. It is part of the description of Saint Stephen. I found it to be a perfect description of Dean Frankino: "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people . . . and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."⁹ This is truly a fitting description of Dean Steven P. Frankino, teacher, mentor, leader and friend.

8. See Brogan, *supra* note 2, at 10; Donald W. Dowd, *The Frankino Style*, 43 VILL. L. REV. 13, 14 (1998); Steven P. Frankino, *Dedication Ahmanson Law Center*, 9 CREIGHTON L. REV. 227, 235 (1975-76).

9. *Acts* 6:8-15 (New Int'l).