Introduction

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In this issue, the Catholic University of America Law Review for the first time publishes the opinions written during the preceding year by the judges of the District of Columbia Court of General Sessions. It is anticipated that this kind of collection of decisions will become an annual occurrence and a tradition both with the Review and with the court.

The publication of these opinions by the Review constitutes a significant public service, not only because of any intrinsic value the documents themselves might have but also, and primarily, because the court which is thus singled out for attention is the principal purely local trial court. I firmly believe that law schools would be wrong if they took the view that, because of their particular national or regional orientation or outlook, their location in a particular locality was a largely irrelevant accident to which relatively little attention need be paid. In a sense, it is of course true that a particular school may have a special mission or appeal based upon its philosophical or scholastic orientation—an appeal which may far transcend the bounds of the community in which the university of which it is a part happens to be physically situated. At the same time, however, each university also is, or at least should be, an integral part of the community in which it exists, and it has an obligation to make an impact upon and a contribution to the life of that community.

A number of law schools throughout the country have recognized this special obligation and have freely given of the energies and the work product of their faculty and student body to local causes and programs. The law teacher who represents a defendant in a criminal case or who donates his talents and his scholarship to the writing of an appellate brief involving local issues and local law repays the community for the hospitality it extends to the university of which he is a part. This kind of contribution has now
become so common in so many cities as to be almost as expected as the writing of theoretical treatises or learned articles. A more recent development along the same lines has been the representation by law students of indigents in civil and criminal cases, often with beneficial results both for the students involved and for the "clients" they represent. A program of this nature has been proposed for this area, and I am happy to note that all of the city's law schools, including Catholic University School of Law, have expressed their willingness to cooperate in this effort.

The publication of the opinions of judges of the Court of General Sessions is in the same area of what might be called local public service. Because of the enormous proliferation of opinions handed down by appellate tribunals—which, it almost seems, increase in geometric proportions every year—the large law publishing houses are simply unable to collect and print also the opinions of trial court judges. Yet in many fields of the law the views expressed by those same judges are the only guides the practitioner has to his practical problems of litigation. The issues dealt with by trial courts are frequently of a nature that they never reach the appellate stage or reach that level only years after trial court practices have become settled and hardened and have affected litigants in hundreds, perhaps thousands of cases. It is most important that the Bar be advised of the views of the local trial judges in order that attorneys who practice in the courts may know what they can expect in the course of day-to-day litigation.

Published opinions of trial judges, moreover—to the extent at least that they are persuasive and well reasoned—have a tendency to influence the thinking of other trial judges as well as the views of those who sit on appellate courts, and they may influence, too, the thinking of those in the academic community from whom we expect the answers to some of the broad questions of public policy which underlie so much of our litigation.

Finally, the Review is rendering a service to our court by acting as an unofficial reporter of decisions for the court. We are indeed appreciative of the service which is thus being rendered.

I congratulate the Review on its initiative on behalf of the local legal community and I look forward to many years of productive cooperation between the law school and the court.