

AMERICANS ON MISSION TOGETHER 1806-1865

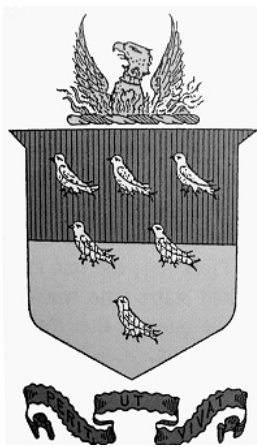
CHAPTER 4

OVER THE MOUNTAINS TO KENTUCKY

In 1788 John Carroll, who would be consecrated Bishop of Baltimore two years later, expressed the earliest known desire that the Dominican friars should form an American foundation of the Order. In response to Philadelphia Catholics who sought the ministry of Francis Antoninus Fleming, O.P., Carroll drafted an affirmative but cautious reply, colored by his experience with vagabond priests. At its close he wrote, "If Mr. Fleming be inclined to attempt an establishment for his order in Philadelphia, or any of the United States, they shall have every encouragement I can give as long as I retain any authority"^[1] But Fleming died of yellow fever in 1793, and during his short ministry no Dominican establishment was formed.

Bishop Carroll did not give up. In May, 1796, he informed John Troy, Dominican Archbishop of Dublin, his regular correspondent, that the Irish Augustinians were forming a province in Philadelphia.^[2] But hearing no more on the subject, he left it in abeyance for more than five years. Then in 1802 a proposal came from a new source: the English province of the Friars Preachers; or more precisely, from a single member of that province. And Bishop Carroll, consistent in his desire for the good of the nascent American Church, turned with interest toward this new possibility.

The Fenwick family coat of arms



During the summer of 1788 when John Carroll expressed his idea of a Dominican establishment in the United States, an American youth in Belgium was preparing to enter the English Province of the Order of Preachers. He was Edward Fenwick, Carroll's fellow Marylander, whose family counted five generations of colonists; and in Edward, the first generation of U.S. citizens. Their progenitor was Cuthbert Fenwick, who had come from England in 1634 with the first Catholic colony. Edward was born August 19, 1768 on the extensive family plantation bordering the Patuxent River in St. Mary's County. His father, Colonel Ignatius Fenwick, and his mother, Sarah Taney, belonged to the Maryland families who staunchly defended their beliefs during several periods of anti-Catholic oppression. Their pastors, from the days of Lord Calvert, were zealous members of the Society of Jesus.

Edward Fenwick's childhood was affected by two events of worldwide significance: one within the Church and the other in the land of his birth. In 1773 Pope Clement XIV suppressed

the Society of Jesus throughout the world, including those houses in Maryland where the members were the only parish priests. Their scholastic institutions, including those in Europe to which American Catholic youth went for higher studies, were confiscated by the respective governments.[\[3\]](#)

Three years after the baleful event of suppression, the Fenwicks rejoiced with other liberty-loving colonials at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Edward was eight years old. When he was sixteen he entered the College of Holy Cross, conducted at Bornhem in Belgium by the English Dominican friars. Edward's uncle John, nine years his senior, had finished college there and then entered the English province of the Order of Preachers. Setting out for Europe, Edward sailed from Baltimore in November 1784, mourning the recent death of his father Ignatius. His mother, Sarah Taney Fenwick, had died four years earlier.

Edward Dominic Fenwick, O.P.



On completing his studies in the summer of 1788, Edward asked to enter the Order of Preachers. He was accepted as a novice of the English province on December 4, 1788, and given the religious name of Dominic. Although his response to a religious vocation was wholehearted, with no particular expectations of the future, the youth did have a dream: to establish the Order of Preachers in his homeland. This he stated clearly more than a decade later, on the eve of setting out for the United States. In an open letter from London addressed to "English Catholic Nobility and Gentry" he declared,

I entered the holy Order of St. Dominick at Bornhem with the view of endeavoring, as soon as I should be duly qualified for so arduous an undertaking, to establish in my native Country a Seminary of Religious Men of the same holy Institute, who, actuated by an Apostolic Spirit, might effectually labor to plant Religion and virtue in the widely extended Continent of America."[\[4\]](#)

By a coincidence that Edward Fenwick would call providential, his request for help in founding an American province was published in England the same year that John Carroll wrote to the Irish provincial about sending friars to the United States. Two Maryland men, each without knowledge of the hopes of the other, looked to the day when there would be an American province of the Order of Preachers: the one an American novice, the other a leader of the Church in the United States who would soon be its first bishop. Neither Carroll nor Fenwick could have guessed that their hopes would be realized nearly two decades later by their collaboration.

While Edward Dominic spent his novitiate year at Bornhem, the French Revolution erupted in Paris, portending the dire events that would soon affect his community in Belgium. The Belgians themselves rose up against Austria and won a short-lived liberty. But at home in Maryland in that eventful year of 1789, the novice's relatives and fellow citizens were rejoicing in the stability of their new nation. The first President was elected, the first Congress convened,

and the first States, including Maryland, ratified the Constitution. The novice Fenwick made his profession of solemn vows for life at Holy Cross on March 26, 1790. He pronounced the first words with an added identity, saying clearly, "I, Edward Dominic Fenwick, an American, make my profession. . ." [\[5\]](#)

The new American friar continued his studies in a country on the verge of conquest, and on February 23, 1793, was ordained a priest at the Cathedral of Saint-Baron in the city of Ghent. During the following spring, the French revolutionaries entered Belgium, confiscating and destroying property as they went. The English Dominicans fled to their homeland, risking oppression and persecution there. They left behind Edward Fenwick, presuming that his American citizenship would keep him from harm. Instead he was imprisoned briefly, then freed. He crossed the channel to rejoin his confreres in southern England, where they re-established the College of Holy Cross. There Fenwick taught for five years and then was assigned to study at Woburn Lodge in Surrey with theologian James V. Bowyer. The assignment was too brief. Later he deplored his lack of further studies owing to the upheavals in Europe.

During nine years of ministry in the English province Edward kept before him his original dream of founding a Dominican province in the United States. Meanwhile Bishop John Carroll had again proposed that idea independently. Of that proposal he wrote, four years later in 1806:

I had long encouraged their emigration from England, which offered no flattering prospects for the extension of their order, and so long ago as 1802 I had urged Mr. Short, then the Provincial of it in England, to embrace a fine opportunity which offered of obtaining a most advantageous settlement in the United States. [\[6\]](#)

Carroll's second letter of support was sent to Fenwick himself, who stated in 1804 that Carroll's encouragement was "clearly expressed in a letter his Lordship honored me with two years ago in which he approved, advised & urged the execution of the plan." [\[7\]](#)

And with reason. The English province at that time was reduced in number to a handful of friars, most of them past middle age. To lose any of these to a new foundation would be disastrous. However, the objections of the English provincial were overruled by the head of the Order who was urged by his vicar, the mission-minded Concanen. Therefore Edward Fenwick proceeded with plans for the American province, thanking Concanen for encouraging his "vague proposal" for a foundation in his native country "where the cries of religion and repeated solicitations of my friends pressingly call for me and all who feel for their spiritual wants." [\[8\]](#)

In the autumn of 1803, Luke Concanen again pledged his support and that of the Dominican Vicar General, Giuseppe Gaddi. [\[9\]](#) He assured Fenwick that he had all required permissions to go ahead. If the plan succeeded, he wrote, the first convent of friars in the United States would be accountable directly to Gaddi until Fenwick could "form a little American province after the example of the Augustinians." Concanen was not only Gaddi's assistant, but also the agent in Rome for the diocesan business of Bishop John Carroll. At the end of the year, when writing to Carroll on Diocesan matters, he added this word:

A Mr. Fenwick, an American of my Order, proposed some time back his plan & wish for establishing a Convent or College in some part of that Country. I remitted him to Yr Lordship's Will & determination on this plan which if favourable he will have every due encouragement from this quarter.[\[10\]](#)

Before Concanen's letter reached Baltimore, Fenwick sent definite word to the bishop about his plans. On January 12, 1804, he wrote,

The long conceived project of endeavoring to form an establishment under your Lordship's patronage for the education of youth etc. I now regard as the order of Heaven, since it is approved and much recommended to me by our General at Rome. I ... shall embark as soon as I have made the necessary arrangements which suppose will be in May or June.

He said that he hoped to execute "in miniature" the plan of Bornhem College and Convent. His ultimate goal was made very clear: "Yes, my Lord the education of youth, the propagation of St. Dominic's Order, in fine, the cause of Religion is the object of my ardent wishes and ambition and feeble prayers."[\[11\]](#)

Fenwick then moved to his final preparations, seeking Dominican friars to carry out the new mission and financial support for it. These were his immediate concerns until he sailed for the United States in September, 1804. For financial support he looked first to his family in Maryland, where he could claim land and property by inheritance; but where in reality disappointment awaited him.[\[12\]](#) Meanwhile he appealed for help to the English people in an address to "The English Catholic Nobility and Gentry," published with the approval of the Bishop of London, John Douglas.

The Primitive Christians did not confine their Charity and Solitude to their own Churches, and we find St. Paul receiving contributions from the Churches of Greece and Asia Minor for the relief of their Brethren in Jerusalem.

In the future, he added, American seminaries could be "of the greatest service in the cause of Religion in England."[\[13\]](#)

Fenwick's quest for personnel began with a petition to Concanen to bring to America their Regent of Studies from Bornhem, Belgium, Samuel Thomas Wilson, O.P. This would seem feasible since Wilson's ministry in that country was curtailed by a papal decree which placed religious under the bishop of their diocese rather than their superiors. But the choice of Wilson, and subsequently of Robert Angier and William Tuite, all members of Bornhem college community, was a blow to the beleaguered provincial Underhill. The province could not afford to lose these valuable members. Even before the selection of Angier and Tuite, the provincial had voiced his objection, although he said he would leave all to the General.[\[14\]](#)

Finally, on August 29, 1804, Fenwick informed Concanen that the English provincial had given his reluctant consent. The American friar and Angier would sail from England to the United States on September 10. Although Fenwick was designated superior of the colony, he

petitioned that Wilson be made prior in the United States – an office which became in 1807, not prior, but provincial, by authority of the general Gaddi.[\[15\]](#)

Fenwick arrived at the Norfolk seaport in November, accompanied by his English confrere Robert Angier. It was thirty years since he had left home to study in Belgium. Along with the joy of his homecoming, he met with unexpected disappointment. Although his brother James welcomed him to Maryland, nothing had been done to fulfill Edward's requests to sell lands he inherited from his father. Fenwick wrote to Bishop Carroll that, after all his planning, nothing was ready; then he described the situation.

I have not yet seen my Brothers etc., shall take them all in on our way through the country to Baltimore —where we hope to wait on your Lordship as soon as possible after Xmas -- I shall hear the opinion of Relatives & friends on the way, concerning our projected establishment, shall make my own observations & submit the whole to your Lordship's superior light & decision — Am sorry indeed to learn here that nothing is prepared for me, no place fixed upon, as I had flattered myself & others, there would be.[\[16\]](#)

The first disappointment was having no place ready for Fenwick's establishment in Maryland, where he could claim an ample portion of the vast Fenwick plantation. Far more discouraging was the possibility that, despite all previous communications, the bishop would not encourage the founding of the Dominican college anywhere in Maryland. After the friendly and candid correspondence he had carried on with the bishop, this possibility seemed incredible to Fenwick. On receiving a letter from Carroll to this effect [an undiscovered document], he replied in astonishment and characteristic self-deprecation:

I must observe for the present that it is totally owing to my inaccuracy & inattention which I am sorry for, if your Lordship did not clearly understand from my letter the chief & primary object of my coming over to be that of establishing the Order of St. Dominic by any possible means which might hereafter afford assistance to the mission in my native country at large, and that I conceived the only way of establishing it would be in a college or convent. For this purpose alone, my Lord, I applied & with great difficulty obtained permission of my superiors as also the engagement of three of my confreres.[\[17\]](#)

He added that he hoped to see Bishop Carroll in Baltimore after Epiphany.

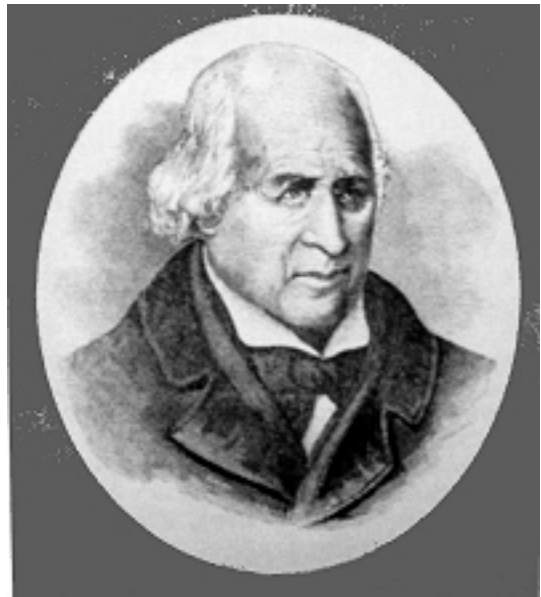
Actually, Bishop Carroll's objections were not with regard to the founding of the college or to the province. He had himself long desired that the Dominicans establish a permanent foundation in the United States. But he was opposed to a college being in Maryland. Fenwick could not understand this and considered Carroll's reaction to his plan totally new. He had been very clear from the beginning about Maryland being the locale of his enterprise, even asking Carroll to solicit help from his brothers James and Thomas in choosing a site for the college.[\[18\]](#) The objection was a blow to this sixth-generation Marylander, returning from England to his birthplace.

John Carroll's opposition was clarified when Edward Fenwick arrived in Baltimore early in 1805. In his first meeting with Carroll, the bishop cited two reasons for preventing a Maryland foundation. The first was to protect other interests in the Church, the second involved the need to evangelize the western frontier of his diocese. He was, of course, being protective of Georgetown College, which he himself had founded in 1789. As one of the former Jesuits, John Carroll had continued to be their guide. But by 1804 when Fenwick arrived with Angier, the Jesuits were in the process of partial restoration. At that point Carroll gave the struggling college at Georgetown into the care of the Jesuits. No other new institution could be encouraged, although in a few years the Sulpicians opened the same kind of dual institution: a college and seminary at Emmitsburg.

A second reason for locating Fenwick's enterprise away from Maryland was the insistent plea of settlers in far off Kentucky for priests to minister to their needs: needs which Fenwick had indeed foreseen but planned to address in his beloved Maryland. Yet he also knew that there had been at least sixty families of Maryland Catholics who had already gone to Kentucky and that Bishop Carroll had been receiving their petitions by mail and messenger. They were in fact both relatives and friends.

In 1804 the only priest in Kentucky was the zealous, eccentric French missionary, Stephen Theodore Badin. He had been ordained by Bishop Carroll in 1793, the first priest ordained in the United States, and proudly signed his myriad letters as "Stephen Vincent Badin, Proto-Priest." Assigned to Kentucky after ordination, he had served there alone, occasionally helped by itinerant clergy. He joined the crescendo of pleas from his people to the Bishop of Baltimore, which by 1804 convinced Bishop Carroll to send Fenwick and his Dominican brothers. The bishop concurred and sent the good news to Badin, but no hint of it to Fenwick. In fact, the first two Dominicans had not yet seen the bishop after their arrival when Badin was writing gratefully to Baltimore saying "I am happy to hear [from Carroll's letter of October 15] of the Dominicans coming shortly to this state." [\[19\]](#)

Stephen Theodore Badin



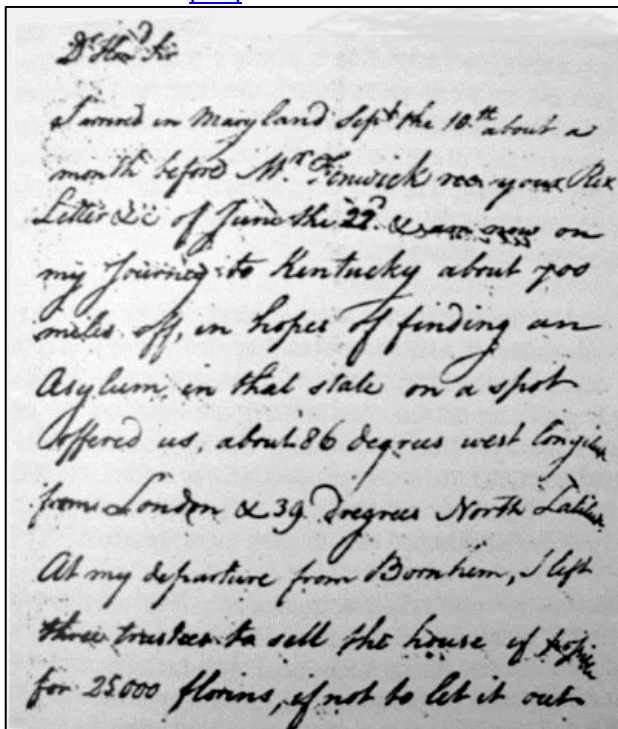
Fenwick and Angier finally met with Bishop Carroll early in 1805 in Baltimore. Whatever explanations they were given, Fenwick was persuaded by Carroll to go to Kentucky and see the region and the people for himself. This he did in the spring. Badin welcomed him joyfully. In a long letter to the bishop the veteran missionary expressed satisfaction at the coming of the friars and reminded Carroll that he had promised before the arrival of the Dominicans from England that they would be assigned to Kentucky. In his enthusiasm Badin asked to give all his property to the Dominicans, even suggesting he intended to enter the Order! [\[20\]](#)

By August of 1805 Fenwick had returned to Maryland, persuaded to make the new foundation in Kentucky. He informed Carroll that the final decision would depend on the

approval of the Vicar General Gaddi and also the consensus of the four friars, when the other two would have arrived from England. The Kentucky Catholics promised to obtain funds to build the hoped-for college. And Fenwick had returned to pastoral ministry among the Maryland Catholics for the time being.[21] By now every needed authorization for the new province had been procured by Concanen from the Order of Preachers and from the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide. Concanen also sent the necessary faculties for Fenwick to Bishop Carroll for his approbation.[22]

From Kentucky, meanwhile, came several serious questions newly raised by Stephen Badin. Using a pattern of interaction he would subsequently follow, Badin set aside his previous enthusiasm for the Dominicans and proposed caution in dealing with them. Apparently he had become influenced by a Belgian priest, Charles Nerinckx, who had arrived in Kentucky shortly after Fenwick returned from there to Baltimore. In two letters, mailed in the same post, Badin expressed caution about giving the friars any property, and fear of possible future errors in their teaching.[23]

On September 10, 1805, the number of founding friars was completed by the arrival from England of Samuel Thomas Wilson and William Raymond Tuite. Fenwick informed them of Carroll's request and of his own journey of exploration to Kentucky. They concurred with Fenwick and Angier in the decision to found the province in that distant mission. Wilson wrote to Rome from Georgetown saying he was now on the way to Kentucky, about seven hundred miles away. He added, "Ever since the Notice I recd from our Archbishop Mons. Roquelaire, that all religious in France being now secularized by his Holiness, were entirely under his jurisdiction; I have turned my thoughts to America, where a new prospect opens of labouring with success." [24]



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offered us, about 86 degrees west longitude
from London & 39 degrees North Latitude
At my departure from Bornhem, I left
three trustees to sell the house if possible
for 25000 florins, if not to let it out...

Samuel Thomas Wilson, O.P., to Luke Concanen, O.P., Georgetown, MD, October 14, 1805. Extract:

Dr. Hon'd Sir

I arrived in Maryland Sept the 10th about a month before Mr. Fenwick, recd your Rct Letter etc. of June the 22. & am now on my journey to Kentucky about 700 miles off, in hope of finding an Asylum in that state on a spot offered us about 86 degrees west longitude from London & 39 degrees North Latitude. At my departure from Bornhem, I left three trustees to sell the house if possible for 25000 florins, if not to let it out...

As Wilson posted his letter to Rome, John Carroll was writing to his friend Anthony Garnier about the coming of the friars, saying,

The English Dominicans, at my request, have sent hither four of their number, worthy and zealous Gentlemen, & they are directed by their vicar General, and authorized by the Pope to establish, with my approbation, an independent province. Of these good Gentlemen I intend principally to make use, for the consolidation and extension of religion in the Western States, Kentucky & the part adjacent to the Mississippi and lakes of Canada. They are now departing for Kentucky where they will form a college; to the great joy of the most active and zealous Mr. Badin.[\[25\]](#)

Bishop Carroll had never gone west of Maryland. His words reveal how his purpose differed from the original Fenwick plan for a college, and also how little he knew of the extent of the mission he proposed for the Dominicans. Actually, they would find challenge enough for the next thirteen years in the central counties of Kentucky, where most of the Catholics had settled.

In the year 1805, with formal approval by the Order Of Preachers, the first steps were taken to found the American province, the realization of Edward Fenwick's dream. His sponsor Luke Concanen thanked Bishop Carroll for his encouragement, saying "You are the father and protector of this infant colony."[\[26\]](#) The initial members of that colony, Wilson and Tuite, arrived on the Kentucky frontier, but not without some difficulties.

Accompanied by Fenwick's nephews, Robert and Nicholas Young, Wilson and Tuite began their journey westward. The bumpy ride in a farm wagon over primitive roads of the Wilderness Trail took them in a southwesterly direction from Maryland through Virginia to the border of Tennessee and Kentucky. There they had to cross the Cumberland Gap. On the western side of the pass, the horses suddenly bolted, and dumped their passengers from the wagon. The only ones to sustain injuries were the less agile Dominican friars. Wilson broke his arm and Tuite suffered a deep cut in his forehead. First aid was applied and the ride continued.

Back in England the future of the Dominicans seemed bleak. It took encouragement for their confreres even to stay in existence. That they had lost four of their brothers to the American mission, as the 1806 chapter minutes record, was almost a fatal blow. The remaining English friars felt the crisis in much the same way that the first Dominicans mourned the loss of the great St. Dominic.[\[27\]](#) For the next quarter century they came close to dissolution. But the British perspective was written into their province history: "While in the United States things were thus triumphantly marching to success, in England the Province seemed only to grow more enfeebled."[\[28\]](#)

The American friars did not see themselves as triumphant. They were merely eager for the enterprise of evangelization. Thus Samuel Wilson and William Tuite spent the first months of their mission getting acquainted with both the land and people: the knobs and creeks of Kentucky; the struggling Anglo-Americans who had settled there. Sixty families had begun the trek from Maryland two decades earlier and in 1793 had welcomed, first, Stephen Theodore

Badin and then in 1805 the Belgian Charles Nerinckx. Now they welcomed Wilson and Tuite, the vanguard of the Dominicans.

With the help of Father Badin the two friars became acquainted with the needs of the area. Because Badin had no room for both priests and Fenwick's two nephews, other families boarded the group. Father Tuite lived with the family of Thomas Gwynn and Father Wilson with the family of Henry Boone on the Cartwright Creek settlement. Wilson opened a school in the Boone home and took charge of the mission of St. Ann. By July Edward Fenwick was freed from his temporary service in Maryland to set out for Kentucky. Robert Angier would not arrive in the Kentucky hills until the fall of 1807.

Fenwick's arrival in the Bardstown area inaugurated several activities essential to the foundation of the first Dominican priory and province.^[29] Although he had spent nearly thirty years abroad, the Maryland native brought to his new responsibility essential "American" qualities. He was energetic, restless, inventive, adaptable and even self-effacing. It was the perfect combination for leadership on the American frontier. Fenwick and Wilson traveled on horseback, stopping at newly built log cabins in the forest, as well as at farm homes, greeting their fellow Catholics. Their welcome always depended upon the experience the Kentuckians had had with Badin and Nerinckx.

In 1806, Badin wrote about the differences he felt between himself and the new evangelizers, "They long to be united in a college or monastery." Despite this realization, Badin withdrew his offer of property. Using Fenwick's Maryland patrimony the Dominicans purchased in his name the John Waller farm near Cartwright Creek, in the midst of the Catholic population of Washington County. On the 500-acre property stood a two-story brick house, a grist mill, and a saw mill. The farmland was hilly, but its soil was fertile. And the sturdy house was adequate for present numbers. The Dominicans had realized their first dream.

By Christmas of 1806 the friars established their community and dedicated it to the first Dominican saint of the Americas, Rose of Lima. It became their priory where a new province of the Order of Preachers was established. The first exception was made, since priories were to have twelve professed members, while provinces could not be established without the existence of three priories. This first test of viability would be matched by many other challenges as the young Province of St. Joseph struggled to stay alive.

At St. Rose, the friars also established a school for young boys and for youths interested in joining the Order of Preachers. The plan was similar to the one begun by Father Wilson at the Boone farmhouse. Bishop Carroll gave approval for the school even before Fenwick left Maryland, stating publicly that he greatly rejoiced at the plan for it, which he said would produce beneficial effects for "improving the minds and morals of the rising generation, and fortifying their religious principles."^[30] On this point Carroll and Fenwick were of one mind. Fenwick had been determined to build both school and seminary in his native Maryland. Now he would fulfill his dream in Kentucky.

The Dominicans named this pioneer educational institution after St. Thomas Aquinas. It was open to boys eight to sixteen with tuition \$125 a year. Offerings included "Greek, Latin, French,

English, Reading, Writing, Algebra and Geometry" Extra charges were assessed for "clothes, mending, books, postage, medical attendance and medicine."[\[31\]](#) The flyer made no mention of length of school year, but supervision was assured.

One of the best-known pupils to attend St. Thomas was the future President of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis. At the age of eight in 1816, he traveled from Mississippi to attend the school. In his old age, he recalled:

The Kentucky Catholic School, called St. Thomas College, when I was there was connected with a church. The priests were Dominicans. They held property; productive fields, slaves, flour-mills, flocks, and herds. As an association, they were rich but individually they were vowed to poverty and self-abnegation. . . . When I entered the school, a large majority of the boys belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. After a short time I was the only Protestant boy remaining, and also the smallest boy in the school. From whatever reason, the priests were particularly kind to me.

As the charge has been frequently made that it is the practice in all their schools to endeavor to proselytize the boys confided to them I may mention an incident, which is, in my case at least, a refutation. At that period of my life, I . . . thought it would be well that I should become a catholic, and went to the venerable head of the establishment, Father Wilson, whom I found in his room partaking of his frugal meal, and stated to him my wish. He received me kindly, handed me a biscuit and a bit of cheese, and told me that for the present I had better take some Catholic food.[\[32\]](#)

Rev. Charles Nerinckx



Relations between Badin, who had originally rejoiced to hear of the Dominican venture, and the friars grew worse. Within months of their arrival Badin had a complete change of heart. For one thing, Nerinckx had warned him not to give his property to the friars, or any other religious order, who might use it to gain ecclesiastical power and "allow error or heresy or any substantial deviation from morals or discipline" to take place. As to the Dominicans, Nerinckx "does strongly suspect the purity of their faith." In Belgium they strolled around freely "among the lawless soldiery of the French revolution,"[\[33\]](#) seeming to indicate collaboration with the invaders. If Fenwick had read these lines, his mind would turn wryly to his own imprisonment by the revolutionaries, as his brethren fled back to England in disguise. Carroll, now grown used to Badin's anxious concerns, must have been surprised at his

rapid change of attitude toward the friars.

Upon Fenwick's arrival the friars experienced the crescendo of criticism on the part of Badin and Nerinckx, matched by the rising voices of people who objected to the rigid practices of both

men. In frequent letters to Bishop Carroll, Fenwick and Wilson cited Badin's strictures on dancing, and his unreasonable penances. Badin had actually commanded some to hold one hand over a candle flame while reciting the Hail Mary. Both Badin and Nerinckx continued to make implacable decisions about people's behavior. One young woman seeking a dispensation for a mixed marriage was told to spend six months fasting and praying as a penance. Still the permission was not given.[\[34\]](#)

Wilson judged such cases pastorally. As a Master in Theology, he was always in a quandary about decisions made by the two diocesan priests. In August, 1805, Wilson made known his apprehension to Bishop Carroll:

No place in the world, Dr Sir, is more in want of a prudent Bishop than Kentucky, where thousands are living in constant neglect of the Sacraments, through the too great zeal I fear of the former Missioners. Young people are not admitted without a solemn promise of not dancing on any occasion whatever, which few will promise & fewer still can keep. All priests that allow of any dancing are publicly condemned to Hell. People taught to believe that every kiss lip to lip between married persons is a mortal sin. . . People publicly warned on our arrival, that there are all sorts of Priests good & had, etc. Women refused absolution for their husbands permitting a decent dance in their house, not to mention a thousand things far more ridiculously severe.[\[35\]](#)

Such reports were certainly not new to Bishop Carroll. Letters from Kentucky laity of this period abound in the diocesan archives at Baltimore. Yet Fathers Badin and Nerinckx were not easily convinced they were creating a problem. Their rigorous practices were merely expressions of their zeal for their people. Stephen Badin wrote:

Missioners in these parts must descend into the huts of the poor, and be satisfied with any sort of treatment by day or night; they must be inquisitive and indefatigable in the search of stray sheep. They should have at hand catechism books, pictures, beads, etc. to procure admittance or secure to themselves easier success; they must be dexterous, disinterested, humble and patient . . . They must expose themselves to disagreeable weather, cross-rides, disappointments, and even insults. They are not to be backward in . . . making known their sacerdotal character: They should be always ready to give a sermon, an exhortation or a controversial speech, publicly or privately."[\[36\]](#)

Even as Badin wrote, the Dominicans continued their own missionary ventures and made great progress. In 1806 Edward Fenwick sent a full report to the Dominican headquarters in Rome.[\[37\]](#) In that letter he gave a description of the geography of Kentucky, the social life of the people and the various Protestant sects in the area and requested faculties for forming the Rosary Confraternity and a local unit of the lay Third Order.

Wilson and Tuite continued to conduct the school while Fenwick directed the building of a new convent at St. Rose to house their increasing numbers. The building was ready in March 1807 on the feast of St. Joseph, the provincial patron. The same house would be maintained for more than 150 years as the center of the province mission. Its construction was a matter of realistic hope, since the numbers of friars and students were gradually increasing.

The year closed with two helpful events. In October Robert Angier, the fourth founding member of the province, arrived after a prolonged ministry in Carroll's Maryland parishes. He would soon be sent to St. Francis' congregation in Scott County. Two days later came a letter from Rome to the community, enclosing the appointment, made on the previous February 27, of Samuel Thomas Wilson as provincial. This word had been long-awaited by Edward Fenwick who in the formation of the province had placed Wilson's name before his own as being more able for that responsibility.

Hardly was the Kentucky mission begun when a series of letters to Bishop Carroll from Ohio settlers led the way to a new frontier for the Dominicans, one which would be significant for the Order, the Church, and Edward Fenwick. One petition came from two laymen in the tiny capital of Chillicothe, near the western end of the National Road. On February 1, 1807, they wrote in part: "Dear Sir, if you would be so kind as to make a trial and send a priest, there is nothing would give us more pleasure on account of our children as well as ourselves."[\[38\]](#)

One year later, on February 1, 1808, Bishop Carroll received a second plea, this time from Jacob Dittoe of New Lancaster near Somerset, representing three Catholic families. He described some good land suitable for the Church and said,

We will exert ourselves in making improvements on the said land, if you have any prospect of sending a priest. We will have a good house for him to go in with a tenant and maid. Perhaps a tenant and some decent women to wait upon the priest might be found in your part of the world to come with the priest.[\[39\]](#)

In the summer after Carroll received this letter which he labeled "Important," he received a visitor from Kentucky, Edward Fenwick, who undoubtedly shared his concern for the Ohio Catholics. Before the end of the year 1808, Fenwick rode into the Ohio forests seeking the Dittoe family. The sound of an axe led him to a clearing on the Dittoe property. This was the beginning of the Dominican mission and of the Church in Ohio. Meanwhile, the little colony of four Dominican friars at St. Rose gathered for their first provincial chapter on May 10, 1808. Two weeks later the cornerstone was laid for St. Rose Church. Their Kentucky parishioners rejoiced as changes began to take place.

Then from the single Diocese of Baltimore were carved four new Catholic dioceses to serve a population that was expanding and moving westward. Along with the expected choice of three urban centers, New York, Boston and Philadelphia, the people on the western frontier were honored with the designation of little Bardstown in Kentucky as an episcopal see covering the vast area that reached north to the Canadian boundary and west to the Mississippi. Baltimore had now become the archdiocese, with John Carroll as archbishop over all.

Two of the new episcopal appointments were of keen interest to the friars in Kentucky. The first was that of Benedict Joseph Flaget, who would be their bishop at Bardstown. The second was the naming of a Dominican confrere, Luke Concanen, to be the first bishop of New York. As Vicar General of the Order of Preachers and also as agent in Rome of Bishop Carroll, Luke Concanen had been the most effective sponsor of the American province since Fenwick first

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expressed the idea of its establishment. Even more significant was the new role given Concanen by the head of the Order: to be his vicar with authority over all the Dominicans in the United States.^[40] What this would have meant to the life and growth of the American friars, including the possibility of their being called to ministry in New York, soon became a moot question. Concanen was prevented from leaving Italy by Napoleon's embargo, and before it was lifted he was taken by death. The Dominican named in his place, John Connolly, arrived in New York only at the end of 1815. He had no previous ties with the American friars.

In 1809 Stephen Badin conveyed to Bishop Carroll news of the Dominican friars. Seven American youth were received as novices in the spring, and Badin told Carroll that it gave him much pleasure that "the Dominican monastery of St. Rose begins at length to assume a regular appearance."^[41] In 1810 Badin reported enjoying peace with the Dominicans concerning their theological-pastoral differences.^[42] In May he would join the friars in rejoicing at the first religious profession of new members. These were: Richard Pius Miles, of a family that had come to Kentucky from Maryland in 1796 when he was five years old; Samuel Louis Montgomery and Stephen Hyacinth Montgomery (not related), two sons of Maryland families transplanted to Kentucky; Robert Young, the nephew of Edward Fenwick; and William Thomas Willett, the only native Kentuckian. In 1811, Nicholas Young made his profession.

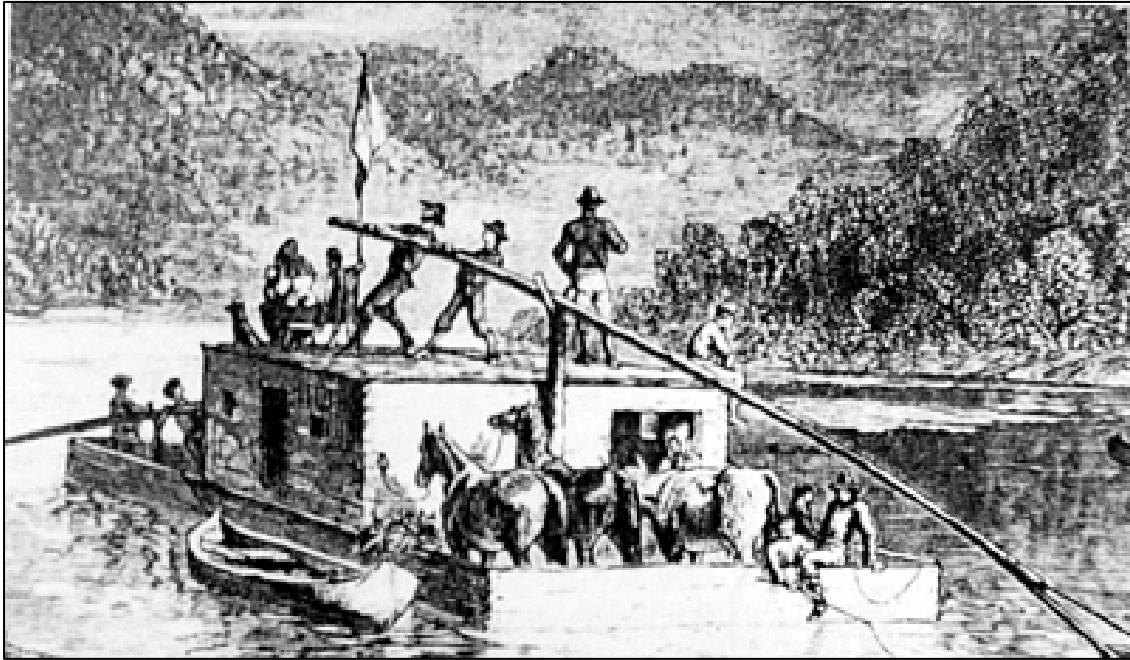
Some time after the profession at St. Rose, Edward Fenwick set out for New York to meet the newly elected bishop, Luke Concanen. It would be a meeting of brothers and friends in the Order: Concanen as sponsor, Fenwick as founder of the Province of St. Joseph. Only upon arriving in Manhattan did Fenwick learn to his profound sorrow that Luke Concanen had died in Italy, before Napoleon's embargo on American ships was lifted. Fenwick became ill and could not participate in the memorial Mass for Bishop Concanen at St. Peter's on Barclay Street. He was still there recuperating in mid-November before he could return to Kentucky.

The year 1811 was a banner one for Kentucky Catholics. One year after his consecration as Bishop, Benedict Joseph Flaget was conducted by flatboat down the Ohio River. Accompanying him on this journey into Kentucky, to his new diocese at Bardstown, were three future bishops: Jean Baptiste David and Guy Ignatius Chabrat, both Sulpicians, and the Dominican Edward Fenwick.

Father David's account of the flatboat journey is charming in its realism:

The roof is high enough not to oblige anyone to stoop. Imagine on this comfortable Ark Monsignor Flaget, who is its life and delight, together with three priests; for you must know that Father Edward Fenwick joined us at Pittsburgh, and in giving us a pleasant, useful travelling companion, he has freed us of the discomfort (which they say

is extreme) of having a horse on board, since he sent our horse overland by two of his nephews who are taking his own horses. . . . Imagine, then, this family living in the greatest harmony (with a good-natured pilot who speaks little, but who is always in a good humor and very obliging, etc.) performing our regular exercises; edifying one another, cheering one another, and not refusing to put our hands to work, all knowing how to man the oars; keeping watch in turn; with book in hand marking all the places we pass; counting faithfully the hundreds of miles passed and the hundreds still to go; making guesses as to the probable hour of our arrival in Louisville.. . .[43]



Journey by flatboat on the Ohio River

The arrival of Flaget was a blessing for every Kentuckian. Not only did they have a bishop to serve the vast region, but the people could breathe more easily with one who they hoped could modulate the practices of Badin and Nerinckx. Now the Dominicans could serve them with less restraint. Two months after Bishop Flaget arrived at Bardstown he wrote to a fellow Sulpician, Francis Nagot, "The Messrs. of St. Dominic appear very attached to me. I do everything in the world to support and augment . . . good understanding: we often visit one another reciprocally, and we do it always with pleasure." [44]

The early growth of the Province of St. Joseph was neither rapid nor steady. The members from 1806 to 1820 counted only nine, besides the four men from the English province and the six professed in 1810. Of the latter, Robert Young died in 1812, and none was ready for ordination until 1816. Moreover, the seminary was the responsibility of Samuel Wilson, a task he shared with his office of provincial and his regional ministry. So difficult was his threefold role that in 1815, the year before the first ordinations, Wilson was cautioned by Bishop Flaget to give more time to the students to insure their proper preparation in theology. He suggested this, not because the students were lacking in ability, or because their teachers were unqualified. No ecclesiastic in Kentucky, Bishop Flaget acknowledged, was more learned than Wilson. Exhorting the prior to form the young men in prayer and recollection as well as theology, the bishop added that he did

not intend to interfere with their internal affairs. Rather, "Your family is very dear to me, and will one day be too important in the affairs of my diocese for me not to do what in me lies to make it more pleasing to God and more useful for my diocese."[\[45\]](#)

Because of the shortage of priests, Edward Fenwick pined over his inability to remain in ministry to the Ohio settlers. On receiving a letter from Jacob Dittoe in May, 1812, the Dominican declined a visit and explained the duties which kept him from returning to Ohio:

Yours of the 9th inst. is before me. I am sorry you have been so much disappointed, and so long neglected, and am the more sorry it is not in my power to visit you at present, having my hands and head all full. But take courage and patience a little longer, and you shall be comforted.

Then he tried to make clear the flurry of activities that overwhelmed him at St. Rose: building a brick church and college, finishing a new saw-mill and grist-mill, having "three companies of workmen about me, carpenters, bricklayers, all lodged and boarded — besides a large plantation and six congregations to attend to. Thus you see I have no time to spare. I have mentioned you all to the good Bishop. He pities you, and will do his best to provide for you."[\[46\]](#)

Despite all this activity, Bishop Flaget asked Fenwick in May 1816 to replace the ailing Robert Angier in Scott County. Angier was suffering from depression and had asked to go back to Maryland. The Dominican provincial Wilson, writing to the Jesuit provincial in Maryland, asked whether the Jesuit superior might recommend Angier to someone for "a little occasional consolation in case of a relapse."[\[47\]](#) With the departure of Angier, only three of the original founding friars remained. In the following September, however, four men were ordained to the priesthood: Richard Miles, Stephen and Samuel Montgomery, and William Willett.

Now Edward Fenwick was free to attend to the Dittoe family and the other settlers in Ohio. As an itinerant preacher, he sought his fellow Catholics in the forest clearings and new settlements. In 1818 his recently ordained nephew, Nicholas Dominic Young, joined him in Ohio. Together they built a log church and house. Over the next three years they would work together to bring the message of the Gospel to Catholics through out the state. The blessing of their church of St. Joseph, the first in Ohio, took place on December 6, 1818. This parish and its missions began to match in scope and intensity those in Kentucky at St. Rose. The two sites would become dual mission centers of the Order. The detailed story of these parishes is reserved for Chapter 6.

Bishop Flaget did not forget the efforts of the Dominican missionaries in Ohio. He himself visited that state, listened to the requests of the settlers, and marveled at the work of Edward Fenwick and his nephew. So vast was the Bardstown diocese that Flaget became convinced of the need for two new dioceses to be separated from Bardstown; one for Ohio, the other for the Territory of Michigan, which extended across Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River and beyond.

NOTES

1. First draft, Carroll to "Petitioners for Fleming," July 21, 1788, Archives, Archdiocese of Baltimore AAB GAG 2. Whether his proposal remained in the final draft or not, it expressed an idea that would be conveyed later to the English Dominican province, with fruitful results.
2. Baltimore, May 25, 1796. Spic.Oss.3, 520-522. Cited in Hugh Fenning, **The Irish Dominican Province**, 1697-1797 (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1990).
3. John Carroll had gone to St. Omer in France for studies with the Society of Jesus and was ordained a Jesuit in 1761.
4. The address, published in London on Aug. 21, 1804, was a plea for financial support for the new province; a plea authorized by the Vicar Apostolic of London, Bishop John Douglass, Saint Joseph Province Archives, O.P., (SJP).
5. Handwritten profession document, ms., English Dominican Province Archives (EDP), Edinborough, Scotland.
6. John Carroll to Luke Concanen, O.P., Baltimore, Nov. 21, 1806, Archives General, Order of Preachers, Rome (AGOP) XIII, 03150, 76. Short had completed his term as provincial in 1798 and died in 1800.
7. Fenwick to Concanen, Carshalton, Jan. 23, 1804, AGOP XIII, 03150, 63.
8. Fenwick to Concanen, Carshalton, Mar. 15, 1803, AGOP XIII, 03150, 63.
9. Concanen to Fenwick, Rome, Nov. 19, 1803, EDP Gaddi, the major superior of the order of Preachers, held the title Vicar General because of papal action in response to Spanish political interference. See IMP., Mortier, O.P., **Histoire des maîtres généraux de l'Ordre des Freres Precheurs**, vol. 6 (Paris: Picard, 1914) 427-455.
10. Concanen to Carroll, Rome, Dec. 20, 1803, Archives Archdiocese of Baltimore AAB 2 W 2.
11. Fenwick to Carroll, Carshalton, Jan. 12, 1804, AAB 2 W 2.
12. Fenwick to Concanen, London, Jan. 23, 1804, AGOP XIII, 03150, 64.
13. Fenwick to "The English Catholic Nobility and Gentry," AGOP XIII, 03150, 66.
14. Fenwick to Concanen, London, Jan. 23, 1804, AGOP XIII, 03150, 64.
15. Fenwick to Concanen, London, Aug. 29, 1804, AGOP XIII, 03150, 67. This appointment would hold until the friars could move to the customary election of their provincial.
16. Fenwick to Carroll, St. George's, Southern Maryland, Nov. 29, 1804, AAB 3 R 3.
17. Fenwick to Carroll, Washington, D.C., Dec. 15, 1804, AAB 3 R 1. He offered, while in the new "Federal City," to minister to the Catholics of the area. The coadjutor Bishop Leonard Neale gratefully accepted his offer.
18. Fenwick to Carroll, Carshalton, England, Jan. 12, 1804, AAB 3 R 1.
19. Badin to Carroll, St. Stephen, KY, Dec. 6, 1804, **American Catholic Historical Society Records**, ACHSR 23 (1906): 155.
20. Badin to Carroll from "near Bardstown," May 15, 1805, AAB 1 G 9.
21. Narrated in Fenwick to Concanen, Piscataway, MD, Aug 1, 1805, AGOP XIII, 03150, 73.
22. Sources of those authorizations were: Cardinal Dugnano of Propaganda Fide to John Carroll, Rome, Dec. 22, 1804, AGOP XIII, 03150, 70; Propaganda to Fenwick Rome, Mar. 11, 1805; Concanen to Fenwick, Rome, June 22, 1805, AAB 3 R; Giuseppe Gaddi, Rome, to Fenwick, June 22, 1805.
23. Badin to Carroll, Kentucky, Oct. 5 and 12, 1805, AAB 1 G 10. Nerinckx, like Badin, had leanings toward rigorism. Also, he had been in Bornhem when the French revolutionary soldiers seized the town. He believed, mistakenly, that the soldiers treated the Dominicans and property with leniency. If the soldiers were lenient to the friars, it was because the commander happened to be an American, Major Eustace, who showed respect to religious men and women.
24. Wilson to Concanen, Georgetown, Oct. 14, 1805, AGOP XIII, 03150, 74.
25. Carroll to Gamier, Baltimore, Oct. 15, 1805, Thomas Hanley, SJ, ed. **The John Carroll Papers** (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) Hereafter CP, vol. 2, 492.
26. Concanen to Carroll, Rome, Jan. 30, 1806, SJP.
27. Bede Jarrett, **The English Dominicans** (New York: Benziger, 1921) 197.
28. Jarrett 198.
29. This was the first American province of any religious order. Although the Irish Augustinians came to the United States in 1796 to establish a province, the foundation did not become a formal province until 1874. See Arthur Ennis, O.S.A., **The Augustinians: A Brief Sketch of their American History from 1796 to the Present** (Philadelphia: Augustinian Press, 1985) 9-19.
30. John Carroll to the Public, Apr. 25, 1806, Baltimore, AAB 3 R 6.

31. Flyer, St. Thomas College, n.d., near Springfield, Washington County, Kentucky, SJP.
32. Varina H. Davis, **Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir** vol. 1 (New York: 1890) 13-14.
33. Badin to Carroll, "near Bardstown," Oct. 12, 1805, AAB 1 G 10.
34. This controversy between the rigorists Badin and Nerinckx, and the moderate Dominicans has received much attention in the past. See John B. Boles, **Religion in Antebellum Kentucky** (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976) 62-65, and Victor O'Daniel, **A Light of the Church in Kentucky** (Washington, D.C.: The Dominicana, 1932) 109ff.
35. Wilson to Carroll, Kentucky, Aug. 25, 1806, AAB 8 B 16. "The former missionaries" were Badin and Nerinckx, whose place Wilson took in St. Ann's parish and other missions.
36. Badin to Carroll, near Redstone, KY, "alias Brownsville," Oct. 17, 1807, AAB 1 I 15.
37. Fenwick to Luke Concanen, Springfield, KY, Sept. 25, 1806, AGOP XIII, 03150, 75.
38. Whaland Goodee and Major Philips to Carroll, Chillicothe, Feb. 1, 1807, AAB 10 I 6.
39. Jacob Dittoe to John Carroll, New Lancaster, OH, Feb. 1, 1808, AAB 3 D 8.
40. This appointment was reported by Concanen in a letter from Rome to John Carroll, July 23, 1808, AAB 2 W 5.
41. Badin to Carroll, Bardstown, Jan. 8, 1809, AAB 1 J 1.
42. Badin to Carroll, Kentucky, Feb. 5, 1810, AAB 1 J 7.
43. David to Simon Brute, Bardstown, June 4, 1811, Notre Dame University Archives (UNDA) II 3 n. The two nephews of Fenwick were Robert and Nicholas Young, professed a year earlier as Dominicans of St. Joseph Province.
44. Flaget to Nagot, Bardstown, Sept. 6, 1811, Filson Club Archives, Louisville, KY. (FCA).
45. Flaget to S.T. Wilson, Bardstown, 1815, A rough draft found in SJP.
46. Fenwick to Dittoe, near Springfield, May 25, [1812], SJP.
47. Wilson to John A. Grassi, S.J., Jesuit Provincial, St. Rose, KY, May 5, 1816, Archives of the Maryland-New York Jesuit Province (GUA) 205, 17.