

Sister Jacqueline Grennan made the following announcement to the faculty and students of Webster College on Wednesday afternoon, January 11, 1967:

"My concern about the whole question of nuns' involvement in the public sector has been of long standing. I have struggled to understand whether the vow of obedience limits one's ability to commit oneself to responsibilities which are largely outside the domain of the hierarchical Church. In the past five years, I have become increasingly involved in enterprises which are not specifically ecclesiastical. I have come to believe that the notion of cloister--in physical enclosure or in social regulations or in dress--is not valid for some of us who must live our lives as dedicated women in the public forum. In my opinion, this newer role of Christian presence is at the heart of the Vatican II document on The Church and the Modern World. It seems both inevitable and appropriate that some of us who function in this new role were in another time the women religious who sought to make a total Christian commitment in the only way we then saw possible. We joined religious orders.

I believe that there are many religious sisters who genuinely prefer the conventual and juridical life and who will continue to give themselves directly within Church institutions. Others may teach and work within more public institutions as individual religious. The conflict of interest, in my opinion, is apparent only when the religious order as order, makes itself responsible for a public institution and thereby is unable to discharge its responsibilities to the secular or semi-secular institution and, at the same time, be subject to external juridical control by the Church.

It is my personal conviction that the very nature of higher education is opposed to juridical control by the Church. The academic freedom which must characterize a college or university would provide continuing embarrassments for the Church if her hierarchy were forced into endorsing or negating the action of the college or university.

For the past year, I have been working on behalf of the General Council of the Sisters of Loretto toward the yielding of the trusteeship of the college by the Sisters of Loretto to an autonomous and self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. Potential board members and sources of funding have been identified. A pro forma charter for the new incorporation has been completed. The request for canonical permission for the transfer of the property of the Webster College corporation from the religious congregation to the incorporating board was formally made in early November. The reasons given by the General Council of the Sisters of Loretto in making this request are attached to this announcement. In a convocation speech given to the college community on November 21, 1966, I attempted to place this development in its historic context as we see it. It may take some months to complete the ecclesiastical negotiations.

The college will then be legally a secular institution in which the power of Christian presence is an important force. I was compelled at this time to face the personal decision about my own role in the institution and my continuing personal role in the public sector for the rest of my life. I have, therefore, requested a dispensation from my juridical vows as a Sister of Loretto. My letters to His Eminence Cardinal Ritter and to Sister Mary Luke Tobin, Superior General of the Sisters of Loretto, indicate the reasons for my decision.

(over, please)

Sister Jacqueline Grennan/contd.

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I am grateful that Cardinal Ritter and Sister Mary Luke are agreed that I should remain as president of Webster College while we continue to work out the negotiations for the transfer of the college. During this period I shall also spend some time working with Mr. Harris Wofford, newly appointed president of the State University of New York, (Nassau County) in conceiving and launching his new university. I feel that this experience will be invaluable to us in launching our own "new college" under private auspices."