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GOOD NEIGHBORS

New leadership, improved programs, and better facilities for the Church of the Gesu, the Marquette University College of Nursing, and Marquette's Haggerty Art Museum are making the Law School's neighborhood more vibrant.

BY CATHRYN JAKICIC

While Marquette University has been part of Milwaukee since 1881, throughout this time, change, too, has been continuous on and around campus. The Law School's move from Sensenbrenner Hall to the brand-new Eckstein Hall in 2010 may stand out. Yet more recently, within the past year alone, the Law School has seen some changes in its immediate neighborhood, in both places and people. ►

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In the summer of 2024, the Church of the Gesu welcomed a new pastor, Rev. Michael Simone, S.J. The Haggerty Museum of Art introduced a new director, John McKinnon. And, for the most outwardly evident change, Marquette's Straz Hall has gone from housing the College of Business Administration to becoming the new, expanded home of the College of Nursing under the leadership of Dean Jill Guttormson.

Let's start with Gesu, which—with its cornerstone laid in 1893—is the oldest building in the vicinity of the Marquette University campus.

GESU: RENEWING THE BUILDING, RENEWING THE COMMUNITY

While Father Michael Simone's focus is now on the future of Gesu parish, the new pastor has had a varied career. After his ordination in 2007, the Cleveland native's first assignment was another parish with the name Gesu, in Detroit. Simone then attended Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he earned a Ph.D. in Northwest Semitics and Assyriology. He went on to Boston College from 2013 to 2021, where he served as assistant professor in the School of Theology and Ministry. Simone has also been a regular contributor to many Catholic publications and was a magazine columnist from 2016 to 2019 at *America*, the national Jesuit magazine, where he still serves as a contributing editor.

Now in Milwaukee, Simone is leading a \$10 million capital campaign focusing on needed interior renovation work at Gesu. The work will include new flooring, pews, and lighting, along with replacing the sound system and adding ramps to allow people with disabilities to move from the seating area to the sanctuary.

"The church was constructed before electronic amplification, and it just was not built with any thought given to such acoustics," Simone said. "The choir can be heard because Gesu was built so the sound comes from the back to the front, but it's not built for microphones."

Beyond the renovation, Simone is focusing on connecting with his new community. And coming as a surprise to Simone, much of his initial connection is happening through the sacrament of reconciliation.

"Gesu parish makes a significant ministry out of hearing confessions, so we have roughly an hour and 45 minutes of confessions a day," Simone said. "I've never been in an environment where it's such an essential part of the ministry. In my experience



A renovated and expanded Straz Hall is the new home of Marquette's College of Nursing.

elsewhere, it's usually a couple of hours on a Saturday afternoon, and that's all you get. Here, it's a constant, and I love it. It's the high point of my day."

Simone's parish is a combination of three communities: Marquette students, people from the surrounding Milwaukee neighborhood, and Marquette-connected parishioners who come from all around the Milwaukee area. "I think we counted 91 different zip codes among our 800 or so parishioner households," he said.

Father Simone has a three-to-five-year goal of strengthening the community life of the Gesu parish and continuing to rebuild lost connections post-COVID. "In a neighborhood parish, everyone lives within walking distance, and there's usually an elementary school. At Gesu, we don't have that

built in, so we have to get creative,” looking for ways to bring people together, Simone said. “I want to strengthen our bond with the community even more over the longer term.”

Simone elaborated: “Step one is going to be asking our neighbors, ‘What do you need?’ That being said, as I’ve walked around the neighborhood, I noticed an abandoned warehouse, for example. Every time I walk past, I think that would be a great youth center.”

“We also have a rich music program here, and plenty of kids in the local schools probably would love to do more music. There are kids, musically talented, who don’t have much outlet for it. I’ve been talking to our organist about a way to make that happen, and there are all sorts of creative, fundamental things we could do.”

COLLEGE OF NURSING: NEW HOME, BETTER STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Marquette’s College of Nursing also has long served the community. Its latest chapter in that effort began with a 2020 evaluation of Emory T. Clark Hall, built in 1981 for the nursing college. The study determined that Clark Hall was too small to accommodate its current population and would be further strained by planned enrollment growth.

After the business school moved in 2023 from Straz Hall to its new campus home at 16th and Wisconsin, in Dr. E. J. and Margaret O’Brien Hall, a \$42 million renovation and expansion of Straz swung into gear. The building first opened in 1951 and was dedicated as Straz in 1984. The 2023–2024 project, which created a 103,000-square-foot space for the nursing college, includes classrooms, simulation labs, and flexible technology to support in-person and hybrid learning in the discipline. The design also includes an increased emphasis on student-wellness spaces.

Jill Guttormson, who became dean of the College of Nursing in 2022, said the larger Straz Hall space has allowed the nursing school to expand both graduate and undergraduate enrollment. The new facility was designed to deliver what students will need to be successful after they graduate.

“For example, the design team asked how they could design classrooms where students work and learn in a group, because health care is a team sport,” Guttormson said. “In health care, you’re working with multiple disciplines and you’re

working with other nurses. We wanted to help our students apply and share the knowledge they have. So all of our classrooms were built to engage student-learning at tables.”

The dean noted, “We also thought about student well-being more generally. There’s a lot of burnout in nursing, so we wanted this to be a space that was focused on the wellness of a student holistically.”

The project renovated Straz down to the beams. The new facility offers twice as much classroom space and simulation space as Clark Hall, including a simulation center that mirrors a hospital environment. It also has a studio apartment where students can explore home-health skills.

So far, Guttormson said, she is loving the new space and the new neighborhood.

“I will always have a soft spot in my heart for Clark Hall,” she said, “but I love being more central on campus. To be able to look at Gesu, to be able to go to the beautiful law school building and have lunch and get coffee, and to have this green space between us and the museum is great. Plus, we can look out another window at the Saint Joan of Arc Chapel across campus. It’s awesome. It feels more vibrant.”

Guttormson has a goal to graduate 2,500 new bachelor’s-prepared nurses in the nursing building’s first decade. “The building was designed at a time when we were accepting about 180 freshmen a year. But the building can potentially serve up to 250 incoming students every year,” she said. And the plan is ahead of schedule. “The recruitment has been very robust and so successful that we’ve actually already brought in two classes of 250,” Guttormson said.

HAGGERTY ART MUSEUM BUILDS CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS

Finally, to the immediate west of Eckstein Hall, John McKinnon is in his second semester as director of the Haggerty Museum of Art. His first year has coincided with the museum’s 40th anniversary. McKinnon has focused on building on ways the museum was integrated into other academic disciplines at Marquette in the absence of an art history or studio art program. He is grateful for the response to museum programs designed for non-art majors.

For example, as part of a physician assistant course, students were challenged to analyze

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artwork. The class reflection papers showed they were able to find applicability from their process of evaluating artwork to the ways they might observe and describe symptoms of a noncommunicative patient. Customized classes at the art museum stress observation, interpretation, and reflection skills apt for all occupations or areas of study.

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McKinnon pointed out a Marquette student group, Art Club, that is very active at the museum, meeting every Friday afternoon. “There are always around 30-plus students who gather in a common area with tables and create some sort of art-making project, such as beading or knitting—just because someone has knowledge and they want to pass it on,” he said. “It creates conversation.”

Deanna Arble, assistant professor of biological sciences, and Lynne Shumow, Haggerty’s curator for academic engagement, recently collaborated on another project, which brought students in to explore creative methods and thinking. McKinnon praised the way museum staff members over the years have built such efforts. He said that more than 5,000 visits each year to the Haggerty are made by students.

“Students have commented that their research abilities have improved by the way art has opened

them to new ways of seeing,” McKinnon said.

McKinnon knows well how science and the creative arts can coexist. He received a bachelor’s degree in art after he initially thought he’d be studying engineering. A Wisconsin native, McKinnon came to Marquette from the Elmhurst Art Museum in Elmhurst, Illinois.

One current Haggerty exhibit—Visual Legacies: Photographs by Ellie Lee Weems—is organized by guest curator Rikki Byrd in collaboration with Weems’s family members: Sandra Murray Nettles, a writer and educational psychologist, and her daughter, Kali Murray, a professor of law, who teaches intellectual property at Marquette.

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Eckstein Hall’s new neighbors are making plans to increase connections on and off campus. Marquette Law School has taken giant steps in that direction during the last two decades with the rise of its public policy initiative and its office of public service. The vibrant initiatives of the Church of the Gesu, the College of Nursing, and Haggerty Museum of Art enhance Marquette’s commitment to the community—making for a beautiful day in the Law School’s neighborhood, with many more to come. ■



Jill Guttormson, dean of the Marquette College of Nursing, Michael Simone, S.J., pastor of the Church of the Gesu, and John McKinnon, director of the Haggerty Museum of Art, gather in Eckstein Hall.