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SEMPER FIDELIS: A TRIBUTE TO JOHN FEERICK

*Constantine N. Katsoris**

After twenty years of exemplary service, John D. Feerick recently announced his retirement as Dean of Fordham School of Law. In a period when the pressures of such stewardship usually limits such deanships to about five years, John's term as Dean is truly remarkable. What he has accomplished in these twenty years is equally remarkable. He accelerated our transformation from a regional/national law school to one with an international reputation.

John's contributions to Fordham, however, started long before he became Dean of its law school. It started nearly fifty years ago when he first enrolled in Fordham College in 1954. Upon receiving a B.S. degree in 1958, John enrolled at Fordham School of Law. Not surprisingly, he became thoroughly enmeshed in student activities.

Although John and I are quite different in temperament and personality, our educational experiences are surprisingly similar. I also received a B.S. from Fordham five years earlier than John; and, similarly received a JD from Fordham, but in 1957. In addition, both of us attended law school at 302 Broadway, and both of us worked our way through college and law school. Yet, despite these similarities I did not get to know John until he became the Editor-in-Chief of the law review at the same time as I became President of the Fordham Law Review Alumni Association. We became friends instantly—a friendship which has grown sequentially ever since.

Upon graduation, John joined the then rather small law firm of Skadden Arps (under twenty lawyers in 1961). He stayed there for over twenty years, rising to the status of senior partner. During this period, he had a most distinguished career, specializing in the area of labor law. He never forgot his alma mater, however, continually hiring Fordham graduates. He also found time to serve as the President of the Fordham Law Alumni Association—a role that was most demanding of his time. It was at Skadden that John acquired the nickname of "John the Good." Even his adversaries in practice knew that they were dealing with a gentleman and an honorable advocate.

* Wilkinson Professor of Law at Fordham University School of Law. The previous holders of the Wilkinson Chair were the Hon. William Hughes Mulligan and Professor John D. Calamari.

A folklore has developed as to the Deanship at Fordham involving Deans Mulligan, McLaughlin and Feerick. Bill Mulligan was the Dean when both McLaughlin ('59) and Feerick ('61) graduated. Upon graduation, Joe McLaughlin became an associate at Cahill Gordon and John an associate at Skadden. When Dean Mulligan was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, his successor as Dean was Joe McLaughlin. In turn, when Dean McLaughlin was appointed to the United States District court for the Eastern District of New York, he was succeeded as Dean by John Feerick—who resigned as a partner at Skadden. *Coincidentally*, several years later, Judge Mulligan left the Federal Bench to become a partner at Skadden Arps. This tale of musical chairs becomes even more intriguing when one considers that: a) Mulligan taught both McLaughlin and Feerick; and, b) all three are descendants from a small island west of Great Britain. Conspiratorial indictments have been charged on less evidence than that. If someday John Feerick is appointed to the Federal Bench, and Judge McLaughlin joins Skadden Arps, the circle would be complete and a *prime facie* case established.

The Feerick Deanship started in 1982. As Dean, he tended to the needs of the University, the alumni, the faculty, and, above all, the students. He has always been there for everyone: in sickness and in health, from weddings to funerals—inspiring, supporting, rejoicing, consoling, advising and counseling. His professional, academic and public service appointments and contributions have been so many and so outstanding that any attempt on my part to list them would be ludicrous. Besides, it is the personal side of John Feerick that makes him so unique.

John Feerick is one of my closest friends. Interestingly, I also developed this same close friendship with his two predecessors—Deans Mulligan and McLaughlin. Understandably, however, when you mix people from a cold and damp climate with someone from a *warm* and *sunny* climate, some thunder is inevitable. Indeed, some honest differences of opinion surfaced over the years between these three Gaelic giants and myself. Above all, however, we had one thing in common, those three Deans and I—we all loved Fordham School of Law. Motivated by that common bond, each of those Deans became my brother; and, in the process, I became a little bit more Irish, and they became a little bit more Greek.

I can recall one occasion when Dean Feerick and I publicly clashed on a particular issue involving the law school. I believed rather strongly in my position (and still do) and, I must admit, I was downright mad at John Feerick. My sister had just died of cancer, and my aged mother had collapsed from the strain and was recuperating in a hospital in Brooklyn during the Christmas season. When I visited my mother that evening, we reflected upon the events of that day and

she casually told me that “the Dean” had visited her earlier that day. I suspected perhaps my mother had dreamed the incident and proceeded to rigorously cross examine her to discredit her story. In response, she quietly produced the “smoking gun.” She proceeded to pull out from under her pillow a plastic replica of the Madonna which contained Holy Water from Ireland. In jest, I later chastised John for not playing fair; but, it was this deep concern for others that makes anyone unable to stay mad at him for long.

As busy as he is, he never misses his weekly visits with or chores for his uncle Pat, who is 97 years old. As for his wife Emalie, she is *at least as “Good”* as John. Although she never attended Fordham, her love for the school is apparent. I have never seen as supportive a spouse as Emalie. She has attended thousands of Fordham functions with John over his tenure as Dean—sometimes as many as three a day. Perhaps this love affair with Fordham springs from the fact that she first met John (while she was a student at Manhattanville College) when she was selected as a juror for a Fordham Law Moot Court trial in which he was participating. As if this dedication to Fordham was not enough, Emalie’s family dedicated the Platt Atrium at the Law School in memory of her mother, Edith Guldi Platt.

As in the past, a Search Committee has been appointed to select John’s successor. No one is irreplaceable, but finding his successor will be no easy task. He is a man for all seasons, handling so many roles to achieve a common goal—the advancement of Fordham School of Law. He loved his job, and it showed. If he had any regrets for these past twenty years, I would suppose that it would only be that the rigors of the job took him away from the family he loves so much—his wife, Emalie, his six children and eight grandchildren. He will now have time to reflect instead of react. He will now have time to create instead of respond. I hope he will remain at Fordham, albeit in a different role, and allow his wisdom and goodness to act as an example and catalyst to all segments of the Fordham family.

I would like to thank John for helping to make the school what it is today. I would also like to thank his wife Emalie, their children and grandchildren for sharing John Feerick with us all these years. I assure you that, just as he has touched and influenced the lives of his biological family, he has touched and influenced the lives of thousands of his extended family here at Fordham.

May the Good Lord continue to bless the Feerick family.

Notes & Observations