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Transitions: Fidelity to the Core & New Leadership

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Transitions: Fidelity to the Core & New Leadership

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Archives & Artifacts, University of Portland
PORTLAND, OREGON

We are the Archives for a private Catholic college (appr. 4000 enrollment) which will, after 120 years, welcome this term our first President from outside the founding Holy Cross religious community. That is, we are encountering the trauma of change. The University of Portland was founded by the Archbishop of Oregon City in 1901. Direction and ownership was transferred (i.e., sold: promises of funds being exchanged) to the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1902. In 1968 ownership was vested in a corporate Board of Regents. From then, from the first year, and until today, the Holy Cross fathers have provided staffing and leadership and colleague-ship at the University of Portland.

But in point of fact—for good or ill—the University was always never yet the Catholic boys school envisioned by the founders. Through the years, time after time, seemingly just missing the goal. Fortunately. That Catholic boys school plan describes a horizon we were ever moving away from in reality, for whether as an aspiration or fall back safety-default, the cloistered boarding school model was not sustainable in early twentieth century Oregon. Truth to tell, looking back, we find a bit of failure woven into our story as we come to consider our horizons today in 2022. Starkly put: today we are a 120-year-old Catholic college at a time of transition. Again however, to repeat the previous point, we cannot discover a time in that 120 years when we were not in transition. Some years of security: yes. But mostly, and the dominant strain, not so much.

And in that, we are probably not so different from many parallel Catholic religious institutes and apostolates. Standard operation conditions after all. The question: how to tell the story, our story.



"Hello, I must be going..."



Campus paving stone, Library Plaza

Within the activities of the Archives is the management of an outward-leaning educational web-page, [PortLog](#), a digital magazine. Throughout the year we post 'one-page' sketches which might feature an artifact in our collection, a historical anniversary, or some anecdote crying out for attention. In this digital activity, the Archives received the charge that the web-articles might highlight and articulate the continuing Catholic and Holy Cross mission of our school. The example below welcomes the new president. The link at the bottom is an article on religious identity: "1901-1928: More Catholic or More College?" (While not daring to promote the examples here as best-practice—see the deprecations above—feel free to steal from the models if they are useful.)

The aim of our documentary articles is not backwards looking. The heritage our Archives promotes is not meant to note and celebrate the embalmed past. Instead, looking at the challenges of today, we remember and re-enact precedent, anecdote, lessons from our history to preserve and forward the educational mission that has been the center of the institution and the religious identity that remains a stable foundation. Our guidelines are fidelity to that core, which we find single and vital. Our aim is not to portray our predecessors as quaint. And we do not regret today as either loss or shadow.

Time and circumstance are conditions of life, and imply transition. But with change? Lots of things stay the same. The question: how to tell the story, our story. And so, here is the story of our first president drawn from outside the ambit of the University's founding Catholic religious order, with emphasis how on the more things change . . . the more clear and evident is the observer's discovery of the thread of continuity (values, mission, charism) that defines the work of the Congregation of Holy Cross at the University of Portland.

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One-hundred-and-twenty years, and continuing

Dr. Robert Kelly has been named the Twenty-first President of the University of Portland. He is the first person to hold that office who has not been a Holy Cross Religious at some point earlier in his life. (Trivia point: our first president, Rev. Edward Patrick Murphy, began his clerical career as a Holy Cross priest, and had even been president of a Holy Cross school, St. Edward's College in Austin, Texas, before Archbishop Alexander Christie appointed him president of Columbia University for one-year in 1901.)

But Dr. Kelly is not our first President Kell(e)y.

The name of the 21st President is now joined beside that of Rev. Louis Kelley, CSC; the Seventh President (1928-1934). Both of these educators—as indeed all of the presidents—assuming the role in a time of transition. Between 1928-1934, we grew from junior college status to a fully accredited 4-year university program, and merged into full partnership with St. Vincent Hospital to form the School of Nursing. The school's development during these years was so significant as to lead to altering our name to describe the new reality, Archbishop Christie's Columbia University becoming the University of Portland in 1935. Now entering our 121's year, President Robert Kelly's time — and our time— promising a period of new growth and potential for the years ahead.



Dr. Robert Kelly, President-Elect (Marketing and Communications Photo)



*Rev. Louis Kelley, CSC;
rendered by Emil Jacques, 1929*

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See the full posting on "Catholic Identity and Values 1901-1928: More Catholic or More College?" at <https://sites.up.edu/museum/1901-1928-more-catholic-or-more-college/>.