

# Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

---

Volume 43

Article 3

---

3-1-2013

## Leader and Friend: Vincent O'Keefe, S.J., R.I.P.

Ray Schroth, S.J.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

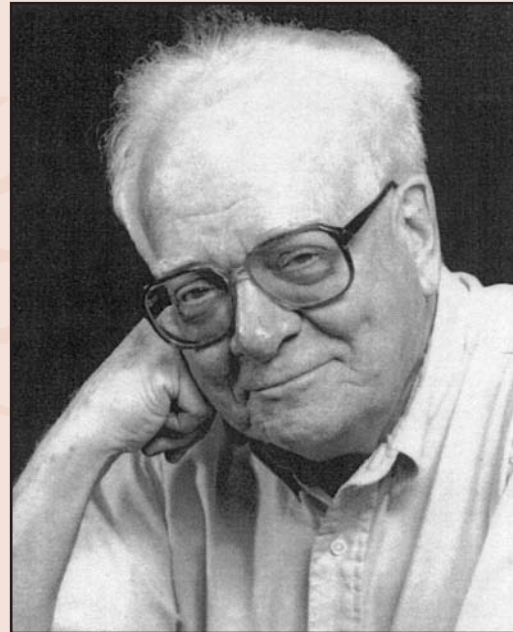
---

### Recommended Citation

Schroth, S.J., Ray (2013) "Leader and Friend: Vincent O'Keefe, S.J., R.I.P.," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 43, Article 3.  
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol43/iss1/3>

## Vincent O'Keefe, S.J. R.I.P.

### LEADER AND FRIEND



**H**ello. I'm Vinny O'Keefe. I'm a friend of Joe Frese [a Jesuit Fordham historian] and he told me to look you up." I was only a scholastic in studies and O'Keefe was a distinguished theologian, but because he and I had the same friend, he and I were friends too. Named president of Fordham in 1963, he took the initiative in making Fordham fully co-educational by starting Thomas More College for women. The provincial said he had gone too far and told him to call it off. O'Keefe told the provincial that if he canceled Thomas More he'd have to find a new president. He won.

In 1965 he was pulled to Rome as an assistant general for the Society of Jesus and a confidant of the general Pedro Arrupe. Following Fr. Arrupe's stroke in 1981, O'Keefe most likely would have been elected general of the whole Society; but Pope John Paul II, apparently misinformed about what Jesuits do and what they

were doing, intervened and placed his own representative, a conservative Jesuit who had been a confessor to Pius XII, to run things — until the Pope realized two years later that he had miscalculated. During all this O'Keefe kept his cool, helped hold the Society together until its original governance was restored in 1983.

O'Keefe's genius was high intelligence combined with a leadership style by which he drew you in by listening and really taking you seriously. He wrote a memoir now waiting to be published. To the historian's delight, until his death in July 2012, he had no hesitation telling his fellow Jesuits — in lectures, conversation, interviews at the Murray-Weigel Hall Fordham infirmary, and a series of DVDs — what was really going on.

**Ray Schroth, S.J.**