Sister Sally Furay – A Life of Meaning That Shaped a University and Beyond

“Some years ago, a 20-year-old USD junior was interviewing me for an article in the student newspaper. I will never forget her question – ‘What gives meaning to your life?’ How does one respond to that in a few well-chosen words suitable for a student newspaper! The answer is not something one sits down and reflects on every day. It was a significant moment that pushed me to explore meaning in a new way,” said Sister Sally Furay at a 1993 luncheon to the Associated Alumnae and Alumni of the Sacred Heart.

Sister Furay’s “life of meaning” began when, as an 18 year old, she joined the Society of the Sacred Heart. In 1952 with a master’s degree in English she came to the brand new San Diego College for Women to teach English. She went to Stanford University in 1953 to complete her PhD in English literature and returned to the College for Women in 1954 to teach literature and drama. She later chaired the English department and in 1967 became academic dean of the College for Women.

As the academic dean of the College for Women she soon realized that she needed more education. She explained in a 1992 Vista article why she became a USD law student in 1968. “You do things because it helps in what you need to do. I am a Religious of the Sacred Heart, that’s my top priority and it always has been. The knowledge Stanford taught me was great for the classroom, but it wasn’t much help for what was coming across that dean’s desk. I was just trying to get more knowledge to do my job.”

The late 1960s brought a desire to merge the College for Women, College for Men, and School of Law. As the academic dean, Sister Furay facilitated the merger that became the University of San Diego in 1972. The newly hired President Author E. Hughes and newly appointed Provost Sister Sally Furay charted a course to take the small – enrollment of 2,516 – financially-strapped, University of San Diego to become a nationally recognized Catholic university. Dr. Hughes built a strong financial course and Sister Furay used her analytic and legal skills to shape the university focusing on academic excellence and an ethical education of its students.
The University of San Diego Begins to Take Shape

Sister Furay, the deans, and the faculty worked closely to transform the College and the schools by hiring outstanding faculty and improving and expanding degree programs and academic offerings. The College of Arts and Sciences added new majors and minors and an MFA in Dramatic Arts. The School of Law took significant steps under her prodding that changed it to become a nationally recognized law school, hired distinguished faculty, and established a legal clinic. The School of Education expanded its graduate degree and credential programs. In 1978 a doctor of education degree (EdD) with a leadership emphasis was approved. The School of Business Administration was established in 1972 and became the fastest growing area of the university offering undergraduate business programs and an MBA degree. As more business classrooms and faculty office space were needed, the university applied for and received a building grant from the Olin Foundation. Olin Hall opened in the summer of 1984.

One of Sister Furay’s goals for the new university was a nursing program. With an endowment by the late Philip Y. Hahn in 1973 a School of Nursing began. The goal of the nursing program was to offer further education for registered nurses leading to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Founding Dean Irene Palmer, hired in 1974, obtained a grant for a nursing building and additional funding was received. The first nursing students received their BSN degrees in 1976 and in 1978 the Hahn School of Nursing building was completed. The school soon added a master’s degree program.

“I recently invited Sister Furay to the School of Nursing for lunch,” said Dean Sally Brosz Hardin, “and thanked her for her pivotal role in launching the school some 40 years ago. I remarked that without her there would not have been a School of Nursing. She looked at me, smiled, and said, ‘You are absolutely right!’”

Sister Furay had also dreamed of an MFA in dramatic arts program in conjunction with The Old Globe Theatre. When she was elected to The Old Globe Board of Directors in 1981 she spoke of it often with her friend Craig Noel, Director of The Old Globe. The university, however, had other more pressing needs at that time. When Sister Furay was elected president of the Old Globe Board of Directors, talks resumed of a USD MFA program in partnership with The Old Globe. The program was approved by the USD Board of Trustees and its first class graduated in 1989.

In other academic endeavors, Sister Furay used her role as provost to facilitate faculty creativity. One example is the university’s efforts to institutionalize service to the community that is part of USD’s learning mission. It hadn’t been done before partly because until the early 1980s the university had limited resources resulting from the deficit at the time of the merger. A faculty Social Issues Committee was formed, which soon used its influence to integrate the curriculum with service learning. The Center for Community Service-Learning (recently renamed The Mulvaney Center) opened in 1986 to help support faculty development of the community service-learning programs.

Other programs started through Sister Furay’s work with faculty, deans, and others were: Continuing Education; NROTC; Trans-Border Institute; Office of Sponsored Programs (formerly Grants and Contracts); Choral Scholars; University Professorships; and Enhanced Student-Faculty Interaction fund (ESFI).

A Well-Prepared Proposal … or Not

Deans, directors, and faculty knew that meeting with Sister Furay to discuss a proposed project or request meant that you had done your homework and were well prepared with supportive data. Sister Furay, with her keen intellect, was able to analyze a situation from many angles and perspectives and always had questions to better understand the intent and effects of a project or request. If the answers could not be given, the person could return at a later date with the additional information. As recalled by Peggy Agerton, a number of times a dean or another person leaving her office after presenting a proposal would say, “I was sure I had thought of everything, but Sister Furay had a good question related to my project that I hadn’t considered.”
In 1992 a *Vista* reporter told her that some people had said she was demanding, direct and assertive. She responded: “I do my homework! I teach Sex Discrimination and the Law. I’m a very strong advocate for women’s rights. It’s much less true now, but in the early ’70s, sometimes I’d be the only woman on a committee – and they don’t really pay attention to a woman unless you’re better prepared than they are, which I usually was. Again, I am an educator. If you’re going to empower people, then you expect them to rise to their full potential.”

Sister Furay was legendary for making phone calls late on a Friday afternoon – 4:55 p.m. to be exact. Deans and directors dreaded the potential ‘Friday 4:55 p.m. phone call’ from Sister Furay – ‘do I leave a little early or do I stay’ debate would circle in their heads on Friday afternoons. While working on projects and other tasks, additional information may be needed and Sister Furay didn’t hesitate to make a phone call. As she would say, “We are paid to be here until 5 p.m., so why wouldn’t my calls be answered?”

As a nun, Sister Furay took a vow of poverty and some would say that vow extended to the Provost’s Office. When it came to furnishing the Provost’s Office, Sister Furay and Debbie Gough made numerous trips to Shore Used Office Furniture in National City. Debbie tells how they would meander through and climb over dozens of desks and file cabinets looking for bargains. It was usually for the Provost’s Office but sometimes for other offices. The Provost’s Office didn’t get a new file cabinet until the office moved from Maher Hall to Hughes Center in 1996 and Debbie has never had a new desk in her 39+ years at USD!

As the vice president and provost, Sister Furay was responsible for the oversight of all educational affairs and activities and the final decision on most academic matters rested with her. Building an academically strong university from a struggling merged university consumed a large portion of her days. She would conduct a thorough review and meet with faculty and administrators before a decision would be made, but when it was made she was on to the next pressing matter. As time went on, people would ask, “Why do we do it this way?” and the response would be, “Because Sister Sally said so (SSSS)!”

Former Dean Patrick Drinan said of Sister Furay: “Sally was so many people to us: a mentor who demanded clear writing and analysis (her English background); a model of judiciousness who saw to it that good things got done even when you kept them from being a precedent (her legal background); a devoted advocate of the liberal arts who always made sure the professional school deans did not roll over the Arts and Sciences (her diplomatic role in this regard was forceful and very faithful to USD traditions); and an incredibly good listener who tolerated and encouraged my Irish wit and laughed with gusto. Sister Furay was one of a kind and a founder, along with Art Hughes, of the unified campus—the spirit of the Sacred Heart was, and is, an immense asset to USD; she was the most public face of that spirit, but we all know there are so many dimensions to it; we realize that and may we all remember it, and Sally, for generations to come.”

In 1989 the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities awarded Sister Furay the Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, Award that recognizes outstanding service and dedication to Catholic higher education. The citation on the Hesburgh award states: “She is decisive without being judgmental, compassionate without being soft, gentle without lacking firmness. Her peers are impressed by her clear analytical legal mind and just as conscious of her ability to synthesize and harmonize.”

**Building Institutional Fit One Interview at a Time**

As provost, Sister Furay interviewed all final candidates for faculty and Academic Affairs administrative positions. She believed that it was critical to hire people who understood USD’s mission and values and who would embody them in their prospective role at USD. During an interview, she would explain USD’s values and
describe how some people at USD implemented those values. She then asked each applicant how he or she could foster those values in their role at USD. In a talk she gave at a Faculty/Staff Prayer Breakfast in 2009 she said: “There was neither a right answer nor a wrong answer, just human beings giving their divergent perspectives from vastly different and often unique viewpoints. I’ll never forget the successful applicant who listened attentively, then remarked: in my faith tradition, we would change one word of what you just said; we speak, not of the dignity of each human being, but rather of the ‘sacredness’ of each human being. It was a compelling moment for me, one which has stayed with me and affected my own life and spirituality. I said to myself at the time and later to the dean, ‘what a perfect institutional fit!’”

Building Student Connections One Building at a Time
Sister Furay approached the value of close student-faculty interaction from different angles and sought to maintain USD’s personalized atmosphere. When new buildings were approved, or remodeled, she worked closely with the architect during the design phase to assure that the physical space considered the student space both in academic and administrative buildings. Academic buildings were designed with faculty offices in close proximity to classrooms to encourage additional student/faculty interaction in faculty offices and throughout the hallways. When it came to designing an administrative building, student services were placed alongside administrative offices to bring students into those buildings. Sister Furay would often remind us, “We are here because of and for the students and we don’t want to forget that. It is too easy for administrators to become enmeshed in their work and forget about the students.”

An example of how strongly Sister Furay felt about keeping faculty and students together was when the chemistry lab classes had to be scheduled on Saturdays in the mid-1990s because no other time slots were available. She thought that was a terrible situation for the students, and had the Science Annex (now part of the Facilities complex) built in 1995 so the chemistry labs could be taught during regular class times. The Science Annex was used until 2003 when the Shiley Center for Science and Technology was built.

The following buildings were built or remodeled between 1978 and 1996: Hahn School of Nursing (1978), Olin Hall (1984), Manchester Conference Center (1984), Copley Library (1984), Hahn University Center (1986), Legal Research Center (remodeled and expanded 1988), Loma Hall (1992), Guadalupe Hall (1982), Missions Housing (1979 and 1981), Alcalá Vista Apartments (1987), and Hughes Administration Center (remodeled 1995).

A Nun Who Embraced Women’s Rights and Equal Rights
Sister Furay said that her support of women’s rights, and equal rights, came from her religious convictions. She was a tireless advocate for women’s rights, which led to her active involvement in women’s issues and to advancing women’s rights at USD.

In 1969 she and a group of female attorneys staged a number of “sit-ins” at the Grant Grill restaurant in the U.S. Grant Hotel until the policy of men only before 3 p.m. was removed. In 1987, Sister Furay was one of the first five women admitted to the San Diego Rotary Club as a result of a Supreme Court decision that forced the then male-only Rotary chapters to accept women.

Having graduated from USD Law School in 1972, she developed a Sex Discrimination and Law curriculum which she taught at the Law School from 1974-1993. She said that the law was “ripe with blatant sex discrimination,” and that “USD was on the cutting edge. No textbook existed at the time.” Dean Stephen Ferruolo said, “A notable landmark in our curriculum was Sister Sally’s proposal to introduce and teach a course on sex discrimination in 1974, when sex discrimination in the law was unrecognized (except by those who suffered from it) and the first casebooks on the subject were still in early draft form.”
Keenly aware that nationally and at USD female faculty were underrepresented, she intentionally sought to increase new female faculty hires. Search committees were encouraged to increase women in the applicant pool, and some searches were discontinued, and then reopened, if a female candidate was not included as a finalist for campus interviews, especially in departments with a high number of female students and few female faculty. Sister Furay believed that female students benefited from having both male and female professors and female professors are needed as role models and mentors for the female students. Through Sister Furay’s efforts USD had a larger percentage of female faculty than most other universities, 41 percent in 1996. Many female faculty hired between 1972-1996 would say, “I am here because of Sister Furay.”

Another gender inequity that she became aware of as provost was that the salaries of women professors at USD were lower than the men’s salaries for comparable rank and years of service. She compared the salaries across the college and the schools and where there were salary inequities she corrected with a salary increase as necessary.

Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex by federally assisted education programs and activities, including athletics and sports, became effective in the mid-1970s. As soon as Title IX came out Sister Furay pushed to have it implemented at USD, while many other institutions delayed enacting it thinking (hoping) that it might go away. The NCAA conducted reviews at universities and colleges across the country to assess their Title IX compliance related to their athletic programs. USD’s Title IX compliance was way ahead of most other institutions.

**Advocate for Working Mothers and Children**

As an advocate of equal rights, Sister Furay was also cognizant that the United States’ family policies and child care provisions were one of the worst in the world. When she became provost she wanted a child care facility on campus, but additional student housing, classrooms and faculty offices were needed first. Once these were completed though, she renewed discussions of a USD child care center and persuaded the Board of Trustees to have it approved. In 1989 the Manchester Family Child Development Center opened to provide care and education for the pre-school age children of the university community.

In the early 1970s, Iris Engstrand, originally a history professor in the College for Men, was the first woman professor at USD to give birth during the school year. When Sister Furay realized that USD women faculty did not have maternity hospital benefits she met with the university’s insurance representative and set in place the necessary changes to include maternity hospital benefits for faculty in USD’s Medical Leave Policy.

Sister Furay took a very personal interest in babies, including Iris’ baby, Kristin - now Dr. Kristin Moran. Iris tells the story of when Kristin was three or four years old, she drew a picture, framed it, and gave it to Sister Furay as a Christmas present. Sister Furay was very pleased to receive it and asked Kristin what she could give her in return. The young Kristin replied “Oh, you can ask me over for dinner.” Iris gasped when she heard what her young child had just asked of the provost, but Sister Furay was delighted. On the date set for dinner, Sister Furay and the nuns in her community had prepared a delicious dinner for Kristin and her parents and all enjoyed the time together. Sister Furay continued to correspond with Iris and Kristin yearly at Christmas time. Iris said when Sister Furay talked with you, she was interested in you, wanted to hear about your family and what you were doing; she didn't talk about what she was doing.

Through her research and teaching about sex discrimination issues, she learned of how difficult it was for young mothers to re-enter the job market. The secretary to the provost position became available and she decided to change it to a job share position for two women who wanted part-time positions to balance their family and work life. Senior administrators at USD thought she was crazy to think a job share position would work for the Provost’s Office. In 1975 Debbie Gough, a young mother of 2½ year-old Liza – now Liza Peterson-Gary, ITS Budget Manager – was hired for the morning hours and Edna, a grandmother who wanted time with her grandchildren, was hired for the afternoon hours (a
half-hour overlap of work-time kept them informed of work duties). The job share position continued quite successfully until Edna retired in 1981 and Debbie took the position full-time.

A Reflection from Professor Roy Brooks to the Law School Faculty

Perhaps this reflection from Prof. Brooks best captures the many facets of this remarkable woman who was a teacher, administrator, lawyer, colleague and friend.

“As USD’s longest serving provost (25 years), Sister Sally Furay was a major force in the development of our law school. Over the objections of other university units, Sally gave the law school the “special treatment” we needed to become a nationally respected law school.

I first met Sally when she came to my office at Cravath, Swaine, and Moore in 1978 to recruit me for this faculty. She rented a car at the airport, drove through the city, found a parking space near Wall Street and Broad Street, and, after spending a couple of hours in my office, drove us to dinner at a restaurant on Madison near 45th Street. This was all quite miraculous because Sally had never visited New York City prior to that moment. It was her first time in the city, and I nearly turned white sitting in the passenger seat when she told me. Most people who live in or around New York City know that one simply does not drive a car in Manhattan. But Sally got around the city safely and rather efficiently. GPS had not been invented. Sally was guided by the hand of God as she would always say. Driving up 6th Avenue, Sally was fascinated by the endless line of tall buildings. She asked me if people actually occupied all these buildings. Millions I said. When we sat down at the restaurant, Sister Furay immediately ordered Blue Nun wine (no kidding), and was surprised to learn that I did not drink, not even wine.

Over dinner, Sally was refreshingly honest in her assessment of the law school. She believed that the law school’s reputation had suffered from its focus on the classroom at the expense of faculty scholarship—advertising itself as a “teaching institution”—and expressed her firm commitment to help transform the “university’s crown jewel” into a nationally recognized and respected law school. We are where we are today because Sally both initiated and supported institutional changes that encouraged high-level, intellectually risky faculty scholarship—recognition of scholarship, and “travel funds” designed to broadcast faculty brilliance beyond Alcalá Park.

Sister Furay was also an unabashed supporter of human rights, starting at home. She taught the first and, as far as I know, only Sex Discrimination course at the law school. She angered some faculty members and inspired others by refusing to approve any faculty appointments until the law school had conducted a formal under-utilization, or affirmative action, study. She and I had large discussions about the issues of the day. Sally was so worldly in her understanding of the touchstones of marginalization that I saw her less as a sister of the Society of the Sacred Heart (even after she had one of her fellow sisters knit a sweater for my baby daughter) than as a sounding board for my eclectic thinking. I was raised a Catholic so I understood quite well her deep belief that one could not be a good Catholic and turn a blind eye to the wrongs of the world. I proudly dedicated my very first casebook to her.

I have had the very good fortune of coming within the orbit of men and women of probity and intelligence, larger-than-life individuals such as Martin Luther King, Paul Robeson, Thurgood Marshall and his wife Cecilia, Justice Brennan, Tom Barr (who was more than just IBM’s savior), and Charles Black (who loved his poetry and Jazz more than his constitutional theories). Sister Sally Furay belongs in that pantheon. She was a woman of velvet and steel, a leader supple in action and large in motive. We at the law school (and USD) stand on her shoulders.”
Contributions of Sister Sally Furay Beyond USD

Sister Furay’s contributions have extended far beyond USD. Many organizations appreciated and benefited from her legal and community service leadership. She was actively involved locally, nationally and internationally and made an impact across a vast number of institutions and organizations. Below are a few of those organizations.

- **University of St. Thomas**

Another university that benefitted from Sister Furay’s wise counsel and intellect was the University of St. Thomas. Sister Furay first served on a committee to study coeducation at St. Thomas because of her experience facilitating the merger at USD. Through Sister Furay’s guidance, the University of St. Thomas, which originally was a men’s college, became coeducational in 1977. From 1989-1999 she was a member of the St. Thomas Board of Trustees. In addition, she served on a feasibility committee that studied whether or not the university should open a law school. As a result of her extensive consulting and guidance, the University of St. Thomas Law School opened in 2002 and she was a founding member of the law school’s Board of Governors from 2001-2015. (Read the [University of St. Thomas’](#) tribute to Sister Furay)

- **Society of the Sacred Heart**

Sister Furay was on almost every significant committee in her Society of Sacred Heart province and made many contributions to the international Society in helping to re-write their constitutions. In addition to helping design their one province structure, she worked for the last 20 years to ensure that the by-laws of all their institutions were written correctly. More recently, she acted as consultant to the United States-Canada Province, the Network of Sacred Heart Schools through her service as a member of boards of trustees and her international service to the Society of the Sacred Heart.

- **The Old Globe Theatre**

The Old Globe website provides the following information about Sister Furay:

“Sister Furay was elected to The Old Globe Board of Directors in 1981 and went on to serve as Board President and Treasurer for many years. Her subsequent generosity—of time and expertise—was instrumental to the success and life of this theatre. Her close friendship with Craig Noel and understanding of the need for training actors in classical theatre led to a partnership between The Old Globe and USD, creating one of the most lauded MFA graduate programs in the U.S. Sister Furay was also instrumental in planning and supporting efforts for a strong endowment to ensure the future of The Old Globe.

It is difficult to measure the huge impact she had on The Old Globe. Her wisdom, grace, and genuine passion for the dramatic arts immensely assisted the Globe well into the 21st century, as the theatre was growing at an astronomical rate. Her wise counsel in finance, legal, and human resource areas was heeded at every turn. Her service on the theatre’s Finance Committee endured to this year. She will be greatly missed. There will never again be another Sister Sally Furay, as her place in history is now confirmed—a woman who, through her love, compassion, and brilliance, changed the world for scores of people and institutions throughout the country.”

Sister Furay’s awards, honors and service on boards are too numerous to list, but include the following.

**Awards and honors**

San Diego Woman of Achievement (1976)
Governor of California’s Award of Merit for Achievement in Education and Women’s Rights (1979)
Lawyers Club of San Diego Community Service Award (1985) – First award recipient
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities Theodore M. Hesburgh, CSC, Award (1989)
Honoree of Women Together – a coalition which raises funds for battered and abused women and their children (1993)
Honorary Degrees awarded
University of San Diego
University of St. Thomas
University of Portland
College of Santa Fe

Service on Boards
University of St. Thomas Board of Trustees
University of St. Thomas Law School Board of Governors
President of the Board of Directors Old Globe Theatre
Board of Directors of the San Diego County Bar Association
Vice President of the San Diego County Bar Association
Chair of Senator Boxer’s Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee for the Southern District of California
First woman president of the Western College Association
Board Chair of the National Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities
President of the Board of Governors of the San Diego Foundation
Director and Executive Committee Member of Neighborhood National Bank in San Diego: She assisted in the creation of the bank which provides banking services to San Diego’s under-served and economically challenged communities, still serving as director and secretary of the bank at the time of her death.
Legal Services Review Panel for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities
California Student Aid Commission
Sacramento-based EdFund, a national student loan agency