

# V o i c e s

By Brother Mel Anderson, FSC

“To this second semester freshman, the optimism, booming voice and thespian-like delivery of history was an inspiring experience. Fascinated, I watched graduate student Ben Frankel fulfill his first teaching assignment at Saint Mary’s College. I was one of more than 100 students who had signed up for the Survey of Western Civilization course in February of 1949. After the first few weeks, there was little doubt among us that Ben Frankel engaged his professorial role with the deftness and excitement of a man who truly believed that teaching was his calling.” – *Brother Mel Anderson, FSC, Class of ’51 and President of Saint Mary’s College of California 1969 to 1997*



One day as Ben was expressing his thoughts on the Islamic incursions into the Christian West, a well-known journalist by the name of Herb Caen happened to be visiting the College. He couldn’t help but hear Ben as he walked along the road beneath Ben’s classroom. The next day, Caen’s column in the *San Francisco Chronicle* carried several lines on his visit to Saint Mary’s, one of which read: “As I passed one of the classroom buildings, I could hear the booming voice of one of the Reverend Fathers, lecturing on the glories of Islam.” Ben, the novice teacher and graduate student, a former New Yorker, Army Intelligence Officer, and a practicing Jew, was obviously amused by Caen’s report, which he read to his classes the next day with great delight.

Whether in the academic classroom discussing Homer’s *Iliad*, on stage as *The Mikado* in Gilbert and Sullivan’s light opera, *Tartuffe* in Moliere’s classical farce, a nostrum seller in *Carnival*, or teaching music to football players, historian Dr. Benjamin Frankel is the manifestation of the Saint Mary’s College Renaissance Man.

Alumni will readily state that, in addition to his dynamism, occasional histrionics, and ability as a raconteur, Dr. Frankel was one of those professors who was always well-prepared. His personal interest in students, particularly minority students, is a hallmark of his fifty-year tenure at Saint Mary’s, a trait evoking deep appreciation from the entire College community. At age eighty, he is still going strong.

Immersion in the total life of the College became Ben Frankel’s way of life, supported by Kate, his wife of nearly fifty years. He

fulfilled a number of significant assignments and volunteered his booming voice as narrator, announcer, actor, singer, and master of ceremonies. Because he rescued and then stabilized the financial health of the basketball box office as its one-time manager, Ben was presented with a block Saint Mary’s jacket and sports blanket, making him an honorary Gael, a moniker he truly enjoys. He was also one of the three founding fathers of CLAM, the Committee on Lectures, Art, and Music, which brought notable lecturers, exhibits, and musicians to the campus to enlarge students’ appreciation of the fine arts and contemporary understanding of current affairs. For nine