

Father Cornelius Siegfried



Father Cornelius Siegfried was an educated man not above the earthly matters of bricks and mortar. It is said the beloved priest, known affectionately as “Father Corky,” trudged through deep snow in the winter of 1960 to pick the perfect spot for the new site of St. Jerome’s College.

As college president, Father Siegfried was instrumental in moving the historic Roman Catholic school from its campus in Kitchener to the University of Waterloo campus in 1961-62. He chose the site, just west of Laurel Creek, and supervised the construction of the residence and classroom buildings.

Siegfried, who died in 1989, is remembered for his pragmatism in a book entitled *Waterloo: The Unconventional Founding of An Unconventional University*.

“. . . Cornelius Siegfried was more pragmatic than philosophical in outlook, more attuned to Ontario’s politics than to those of the Roman curia. He was considerably more comfortable with the realities of Ontario’s university life than with the disputations of theologians.”

Siegfried was instrumental in severing the College’s ties with the University of Ottawa and securing its own degree-granting privileges in 1959. The following year, Siegfried worked to federate the small school with the University of Waterloo.

Upon Siegfried’s death in 1989, St. Jerome’s president at the time, Dr. Doug Letson, said: “Today the University of St. Jerome’s College is thriving and prestigious. This is due to Father Siegfried’s wisdom in helping to found the University of Waterloo, and his foresight and courage in bringing St. Jerome’s into federation.”

While he is remembered for his long affiliation with what is now known as St. Jerome’s University, Siegfried is also recognized as one of the founders of the University of Waterloo, along with Ira G. Needles and Dr. Gerald Hagey.

Born in Formosa, Ontario, in 1916 Father Siegfried went to St. Jerome’s College in Kitchener before attending St. Peter’s Seminary in London, Ontario and was ordained a priest of the Congregation of the Resurrection in 1941.

He received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Western Ontario and graduated with a teaching diploma in 1943. Siegfried taught for three years at St. Jerome’s High School before getting his Master of Science degree from the University of Michigan in 1947 and becoming president of St. Jerome’s College in 1948.

In 1953 he became president of North Bay College for two years before returning to his post at St. Jerome’s for a second term that ran from 1955 until 1965. He was appointed

president again in 1972, resigning seven years later due to ill health. When St. Jerome's built a new auditorium in 1982, it was named Siegfried Hall in his honour. In 1966 he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Waterloo and the following year he received Canada's Centennial Medal.

“Father Siegfried provided valuable counsel as a professional academic colleague in the early days. He was a lively man, humane, personable and wise, and he brought those special traits to the University.”

Photo courtesy of St. Jerome's University.