The Night of the OLLU Fire
Oswald John Nira

When the Main Building roof was afame, I was relaxing at home, watching “Dancing with the Stars.” During a commercial break, I retreated to the kitchen to wash some dishes.

My daughter burst in, alerting me that “Our Lady of the Lake is burning!” I returned to the living room, and what I saw was so surreal. I couldn’t believe it. As I began to accept what my eyes were seeing, anger began to rise within me.

My first thoughts were that this fire was caused by an arsonist. I recalled some of the anger and frustration that had been present on campus in the days before the fire. The thought crossed my mind that some idiot had taken that crazy, hurtful step and had done something even worse.

I began to look at this as some karmic action. What had OLLU done to deserve such an action?

Karma, of course, is a religious concept born within Asian cultures. It is a universal law, an impersonal pendulum that sways back and forth according to the amount of fleshy or spiritual matter built up through such actions and thoughts. Although an Asian concept, it has a Christian counterpart in the verse: “for persons will reap only what they sow” (Gal 6:7-9).

And then I thought that Our Lady of the Lake has been sowing seeds for over a hundred years. Generations and generations have been nurtured by her, guided by her and inspired by her.

The aftermath of the fire shows what indeed OLLU has reaped. An overflowing of love and resolve to rebuild and recommit a distinctive and essential element of San Antonio. What a wondrous reaping has befallen us; what initially were tears of sorrow have turned into tears of joy.

We now find ourselves awash in bountiful love. We are reaping what we have sown.

I have long told my students that the soul of San Antonio can be found in the city’s Westside. Workers, lovers, dreamers and builders live here, doing so in an environment that does not call attention to itself with flashy lights or seductive, slinky commerce.

Men and women bonded in community live here, and those men and women were re-discovered on the night of the OLLU fire.

Our Lady of the Lake University • 43