

Bishop John F. O'Hern

Second Bishop of Rochester reputed for charity during short reign

THE "Beloved Bishop," The Most Rev. John Francis O'Hern, third Bishop of the Rochester Diocese won and held that title throughout his reign in the Rochester See. He counted among his friends men and women of every religious creed and every walk of life.

Consecrated to the Episcopacy on Mar. 19, 1923, he used his position of responsibility to advance Catholicism along educational lines in the establishment of new churches and schools; the improvement of the facilities of Catholic hospitals and homes for the orphaned and aged; and the organization of Catholic lay societies.

Bishop O'Hern strove to promote good feeling among the various racial and religious groups in the city and urged priests and Catholic laymen to take a more active part in civic affairs.

Within a year after his consecration, the third Bishop of Rochester authorized the organization of seven new parishes in the then suburbs of Rochester. In each case he stressed the importance of a school connected to each parish.

His interest in education expressed itself further in the organization of the Newman Club at the University of Rochester and the appointment of Catholic chaplains at the University as well as at Elmira College and Cornell University.

Bishop O'Hern invited new religious societies to the diocese. At his invitation the Carmelite Sisters and the Fathers of the Most Precious Blood opened communities here. He fostered the establishment of Holy Angels' home for underprivileged and delinquent girls under the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

Bishop O'Hern created the office of diocesan director of charities and recognized the increasing demands of the educational program of the diocese by appointing the first diocesan superintendent of schools. He displayed a rare ability in obtaining the co-operation of both the laity and clergy in his diocesan projects.

HIS successful leadership was due in large measure to his desire to give recognition most generously. Under him and at his recommendation, the Holy Father increased the number of Domestic Prelates in the Diocese to the largest in its history.

He was equally thoughtful of the laymen. On the second anniversary of his consecration five laymen received the Papal decoration which admits them to the Order of Knights of St. Gregory.

A few months later, on his petition, Pope Pius XI conferred the decoration of Knights of Malta on three laymen.

The Catholic women also were remembered. In the Spring of 1932 five Catholic women received the decoration "Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice" and five Catholic men that of the Equestrian Order of Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

His own pastorate among the needy of the city gave Bishop O'Hern a tender sympathy with those in economic distress. The paths of St. Patrick's Cathedral Rectory and to Corpus Christi Rectory were well worn by those who sought and received as-

sistance during his residence at these rectories.

When unemployment became so general during 1930, Bishop O'Hern continued his efforts in behalf of the Community Chest and emergency relief committees, and went even further in initiating a three million dollar building program throughout the diocese to alleviate conditions. This involved the building of new schools, rectories, churches, convents and hospital wings.

In accordance with the wishes of Pope Pius XI for Catholic Action, Bishop O'Hern fostered and encouraged the establishment of numerous lay societies in the diocese and in the parishes. He advocated the revival of old religious and secular societies that would bind more effectively the Catholic to his church.

The Nocturnal Adoration Society was formed at his suggestion. Catholic physicians were invited to participate in the organization of a new Catholic Medical Society. He established the diocesan councils for the National Council of Catholic Men and the National Council of Catholic Women.

Under his direction Catholic Girl Scout troops were organized and he displayed a special interest in the Catholic camps for boys and girls at Canandaigua and Conesus Lake and urged their extension to include larger groups of children.

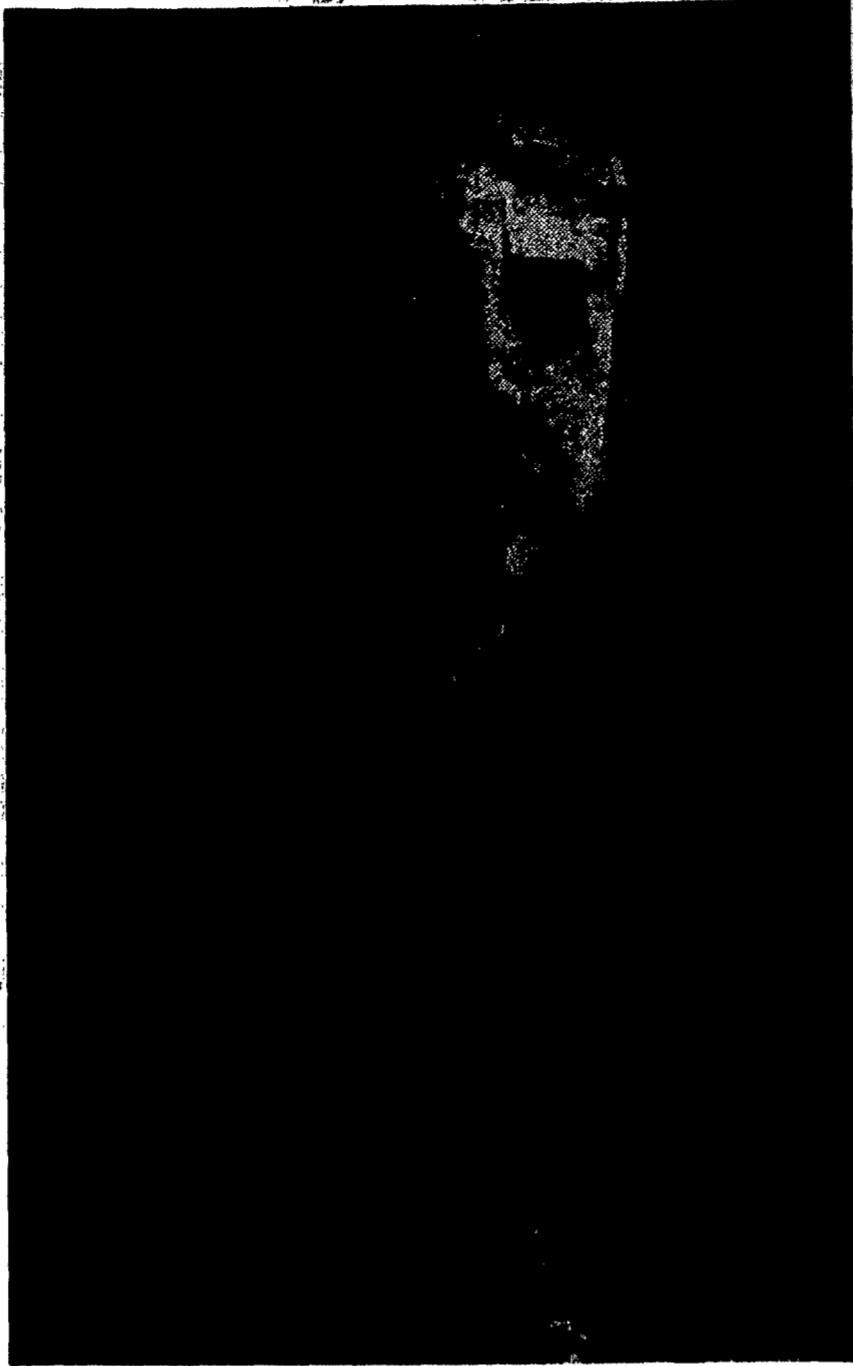
BISHOP O'Hern's friendship with the Knights of Columbus was a long-standing one and he shared their pride in the Columbus Civic Center. When the financial burdens made it impossible for the organization to own and maintain the building, he arranged for a corporation of diocesan clergy and laymen to take over the project. The project became profitable for the first time under his supervision. Facilities of the building also were made available for unemployed men and boys.

During the early days of the Rochester Diocese it proved more convenient, because of language difficulties, to establish Catholic churches along somewhat national lines, certain churches being recognized as Italian, Irish, German, Polish, etc. Bishop O'Hern did much to weld these various national groups together, to help them in their difficulties and to promote unity among all Catholics.

Of Irish descent, he still proved himself popular with other groups, especially with the thousands of Italian Catholics in the Diocese. He had studied at the North American College in Rome prior to his ordination and there learned to love the Italian people. He frequently reminded people of this, urging them to pride in their heritage and speaking to them in their native tongue.

This interest in the Italians in his Diocese won him recognition from King Victor Emmanuel of Italy who conferred on him in 1931 the gold cross of a Commander of the Order of the Crown.

BISHOP O'Hern gave up sparingly of himself in his duties and especially maintaining personal contact with his people. In simplicity, humility and



BISHOP JOHN FRANCIS O'HERN
... Third Bishop of Rochester

sympathies he remained always a parish priest. He liked to attend services at the various churches and renew old acquaintances. If he knew a man, he knew his first name and he never forgot it. If he knew the members of a man's family, he never failed to ask for them.

The burdens of Episcopal responsibility were never too great that he could not find time to officiate at the wedding of a child he had baptized as a parish priest, or to officiate at the funeral of an old friend. If an old parishioner celebrated a birthday, the Bishop did not forget to call and if an old friend was ill the Bishop delighted to come in the early morning with Holy Communion.

His Saturday evenings mostly were spent in the confessional at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

It was this thoughtfulness for those whom he knew and loved that endeared him to men and women in all walks of life and which made his leadership such a happy and loveable privilege.

He was true to his Episcopal motto, "Servire Regnare Est."
"To serve is to reign."

BORN at Olean, June 1874. Bishop O'Hern was baptized at St. Bonaventure College Church in Allegany. He was graduated from St. Mary's Parochial School in Olean and from the Olean High School. After completing

studies at St. Andrew's Preparatory Seminary he entered St. Bernard's.

While a student at St. Bernard's the late Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid sent him to Rome to complete his theological studies at the North American College. He was ordained in Rome on Feb. 17, 1901.

On his return to Rochester he was appointed assistant rector of the Church of the Immaculate Conception and in September of 1901 transferred to St. Mary's Church in Auburn. In July, 1902, he became an assistant at St. Patrick's Cathedral. At the time Father Thomas F. Hickey was rector. He later became Archbishop Hickey the second Bishop of the Rochester See.

In January, 1908, Bishop O'Hern was appointed rector of St. Patrick's Cathedral by Bishop Hickey. He served in that office for 13 years and then was named pastor of Corpus Christi Church and vicar general of the diocese in January, 1922.

Bishop Hickey resigned in the Fall of 1923 and Bishop O'Hern was named as apostolic administrator of the diocese and early in the following year was made Bishop of Rochester.

Bishop Emmet M. Walsh, who delivered the sermon at Bishop O'Hern's funeral Mass, summed up the life of the "Beloved Bishop" when he said: "For John Francis O'Hern was a man loved for his greatest virtue — the greatest of divine virtues — charity."

Diocese Of Rochester Founded In 1868

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works. It was also one of patriotism. The nation at war called upon Catholics of the Diocese of Rochester to do their bit in the first world conflict. They answered that call wholeheartedly. Catholic diocesan laymen fought and died on the fields of France; Catholic diocesan nurses cared for the wounded while on the home front Catholic diocesan men, women and children, did their "bit."

The Diocese also furnished more than its quota of chaplains to the armed service. The quota was eight; the diocese sent ten.

By the time another decade had passed, Bishop Hickey's poor health

made him decide to shift the burdens of his office to younger shoulders. On October 30, 1922, he resigned, and the Holy See promoted him to be titular Archbishop of Viminacium. Death came to Archbishop Hickey on December 10, 1940.

On January 4th, 1923, Magr. John Francis O'Hern, Vicar-General of the Diocese became its third Bishop. He was born in Olean on June 4, 1874, and educated for the priesthood first at St. Bernard's, then at the North American College, in Rome. His consecration took place in the old St. Patrick's Cathedral at Rochester on March 19, 1923.

BISHOP O'Hern was to rule as Rochester's third Bishop only four short years. But those were years of tireless devotion. The depression of 1929 had set in, and even the churches felt its effects severely.

But that did not prevent the Bishop from founding six new parishes. Another unique provision made for the faithful at this time was the St. Francis deSales Chapel for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, opened by the Redemptorists at St. Joseph's in 1930. The Bishop gave willing approbation also to the Nocturnal Adoration Society, established in 1929, and

the Holy Name Union, organized in 1932.

And he took a special interest in the procurement in 1929 of the Greig Street residence-hall for the out-of-town students at St. Andrew's Seminary. In the same year he adopted the *Catholic Courier-Journal* as the official diocesan organ. Spiritually significant, too, was his establishment of the Rochester Monastery of the Discalced Carmelite nuns, under Mother Beatrix in 1930.

Two new high schools were begun; Elmira Catholic High in 1929 and Holy Family in Auburn in 1930. Four

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