



Supreme Court Justice James O'Brien greets Bishop of lawyers' "Red Mass". Sheriff Al Skinner gets some advice from a leading Rochester citizen.

Bishop Hailed As Leader In Civic Life

His civic role and esteem of his fellow-citizens vindicate reporter's prediction made 20 years ago following first meeting with Bishop of Rochester

By WILLIAM A. LANG

The author of this article, now president of the Rochester Transit Corporation and formerly a well-known newspaper man, recalls his first interview with Bishop Kearney on the day that he was named fifth Bishop of Rochester. This interview had 20 years ago last August had in Detroit where Bishop Kearney was attending Archbishop Edvard Mooney's installation, inspired the enterprising journalist to make a prediction which came true...

...and it is so that Bishop Kearney, in his first meeting with Archbishop Mooney's installation...

...The ready smile, the quick wit, the twinkling eyes, the kindly humor which were soon to become hall marks to all who knew him were in abundant evidence during that first meeting with Bishop Kearney. From the very outset the Bishop seemed to sense the pre-arrangement of the reporter who was dogged by an editor, always snapping at his heels. The pictures, the letters of many in years to come, were made and the reporter hurried to the nearest telephone.

Over long distance wires hummed that first story about Rochester's new Bishop. The editor listened as the reporter took dictation from the reporter. Then came the inevitable question: "Now, strictly off the record, what kind of a man is the new Bishop? How will we get along with him and how will he fit into the civic scene?" Without hesitation the reporter shot back: "He's just great. We'll get along fine. He'll fit like a glove."

DURING THE ensuing two decades the reporter never once had occasion to alter that blunt, off-the-cuff estimate of the fifth Bishop of Rochester. As a matter of fact, the years that followed served only to enhance that original assessment.

This dedicated prelate who literally rose from the sidewalks of New York to the purple of his Church came to Rochester in November, 1937 in a surge of genuine enthusiasm which leveled the barriers of race, creed and color in one fell swoop. His diocesan heralded him at the railroad station. So did many outside his faith who were soon to become his friends and partners on the broad front of community service. Yet through it all, the new Bishop wore a thread of humility which, perhaps, he best expressed in his installation sermon at Sacred Heart Cathedral on Armistice Day, 1937:

"The respectful tribute of those outside my Faith represents a tribute of respect and honor which a consistent follower of the lowly Christ should trouble to accept were he not conscious that the tribute comes to the high and holy office which he today assumes as the Ambassador of Christ in this community."

And so this Ambassador of Christ moved into the community life of the Rochester Diocese. His broad interests were boundless. As a former public school teacher, the education of youth was paramount in his thinking. So were the rising problems associated with juvenile delinquency.

It may have been just coincidental and then again it may have been a forecast of things to come that Bishop Kearney's first public appearance in his new Diocese following his installation came at a dinner opening the 1937 membership drive of the Columbus Youth Association.

IN THE BRIEF, two years that followed came the first faint rumblings of the catastrophe which history records as World War II. As America, slowly but surely, was drawn into the vortex of this diabolical cauldron of "blood, sweat, toil and tears", the call went out across the land for a mighty defense effort.

The ranks of the armed forces were increased by tens of thousands. The fires of industry burned around the clock. Through civil defense, steps were taken to meet the impact of

direct enemy attack. Defense Bonds became the nation's best buy. Then Japanese bombs blasted the Sabbath stillness of December 7, 1941 and we were in it.

Working with quiet efficiency, Bishop Kearney steered his flock for the tragic days ahead. On the Sunday following Pearl Harbor, he directed the pledge of allegiance in all churches and issued a statement placing "all the spiritual, moral and material resources of the Diocese at the disposal of the government in the crisis with Japan."

That pledge was redeemed time and time again. The Bishop ordered a "prayer crusade" for victory in diocesan schools and pointedly told his people that "the power of prayer must not be neglected in this crisis. Every act of self-sacrifice, every Mass offered, every visit to the altar is a contribution to victory and peace."

Then Bishop Kearney turned to his priests to help fill the ranks of the chaplains corps. 42 diocesan priests answered the call and they wrote a brilliant chapter in this terrible epoch from Normandy to the South Pacific.

The very flower of his diocesan youth marched off to the colors and the Bishop gave them the courage and prayers they needed so much. He gloried in their triumphs. He sorrowed with paternal compassion in their defeats, wounds and death.

A succession of War Bond campaigns found Bishop Kearney in the forefront. He epitomized his philosophy on this score in a special Bond message when he said:

"We have given the flower of our young manhood to the service of our country. We must follow them with our prayers and also our material assistance to feed, clothe and arm them, also to care for them in sickness and injury. That takes money and it is our moral obligation to furnish money for our boys."

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