

# The Diocese of Rochester Nears its Centenary—a Hundred Years of Concern for the Church's Worldwide Mission

By FATHER ROBERT McNAMARA

When the news was announced of the appointment of that missionary *par excellence*, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, to the see of Rochester, I fancy a good many people outside the diocese were rather surprised. Most Americans doubtless think of Rochester as essentially an industrial center, busy from dawn to dark turning out cameras, copy machines, lenses, and thermometers. It projects no missionary image to the average spectator.

We, of the Rochester Diocese know that the industrial factor is only one, however large that may be, in a very diversified twelve-county district. We also know that the Diocese of Rochester itself has not only a strong recollection of its own missionary past, but has maintained up to the present an active interest in missionary work. Therefore, Bishop Sheen, coming to us from the great national office of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, will find that in the matter of missionary consciousness, he and his new flock speak the same language.

I say that we have here a strong recollection of our own missionary past. As a diocese we are approaching our hundredth birthday. Our first parish was established close to a century and a half ago. But this is still a relatively short time, too short to allow us to lose a sense of close association with the Church of our pioneer days.

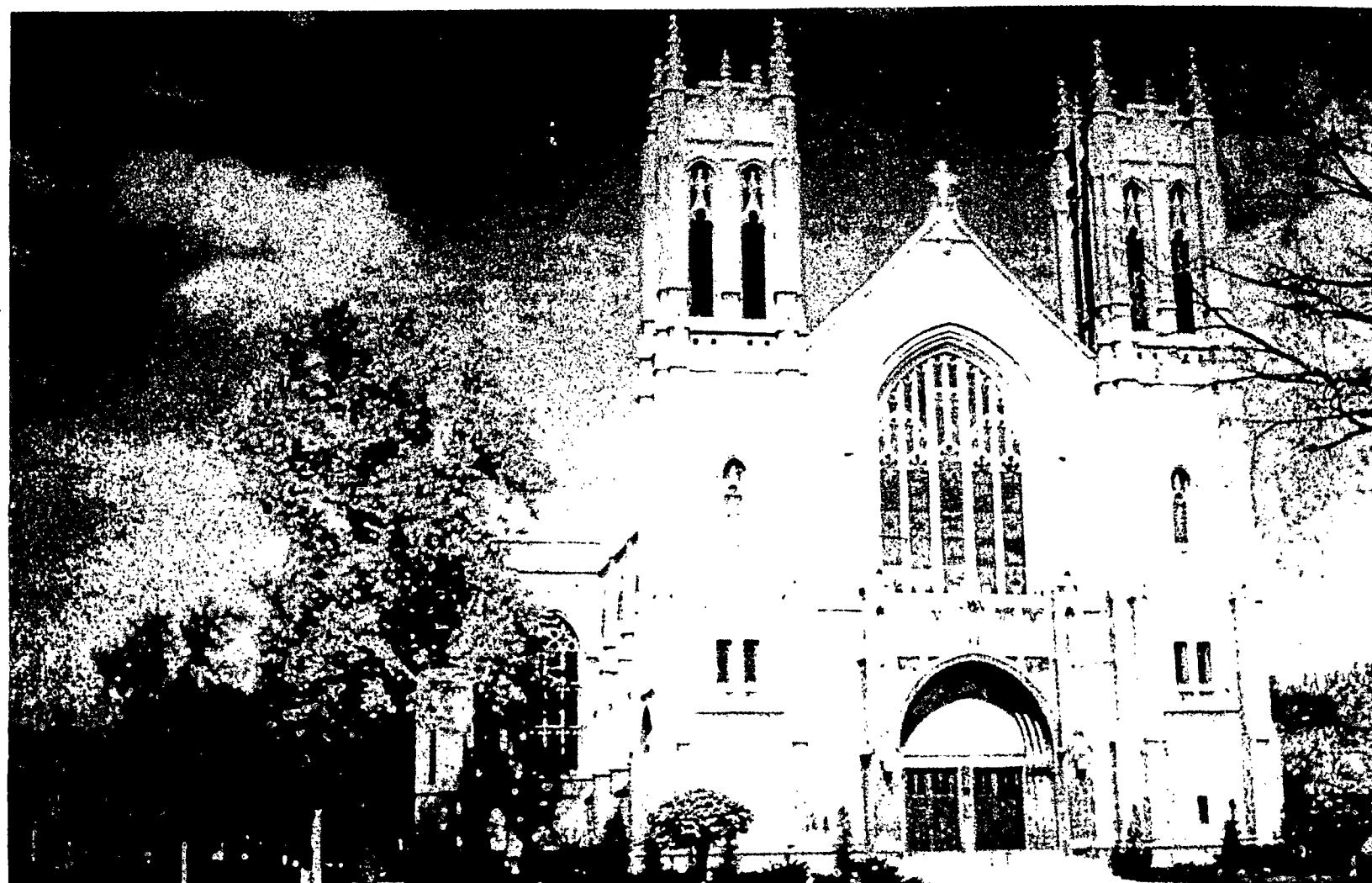
The few Catholics who settled near Rochester in the earliest decades of the last century, did their best to secure priests to minister to them. John O'Connor of Auburn brought a priest from New York to Auburn in 1816 to celebrate the first Mass ever offered there. Felix McGuire of Paddy Hill is said to have sponsored the first Mass in Rochester a couple of years later. When St. John's Church was established at Utica in 1819 as the parish church of all western New York, the trustees included Major Charles Carroll of the Genesee Valley, John McGuire of Paddy Hill, and John O'Connor of Auburn.

A decade later, after having assisted the foundation of St. Patrick's Church in Rochester (1823), the Paddy Hill Catholics established, in their own neighborhood, St. Ambrose Church (now Our Mother of Sorrows), the first country parish in New York State.

Irish-born missionaries were not the only ones to labor among us in our settlement days. The immigration of German agriculturalists to the rich lands of the Genesee Country brought German priests in its wake. A notable figure who worked for a few days among the Rochester Germans in 1836 was Blessed John Neumann. More permanent work was done by the German Redemptorist, Father Joseph Prost, who established St. Joseph's German Church in Rochester in 1836. He made this church a Redemptorist center, and from this center German-speaking Redemptorist missionaries fanned out into the countryside to take care of the German people. Several parishes were founded by them or entrusted to them on a regular or intermittent basis, from Rochester itself to Auburn in the east and Perkiwille, Dansville and Elmira in the south.

These missionary efforts in America were greatly helped by three mission-aid societies established in Europe. The first was what is now Bishop Sheen's own Society for the Propagation of the Faith, founded in France in 1822. The second was the Leopoldine Foundation Society, founded in Austria in 1829. Its constitution was like that of the French Society, but it devoted its benefactions to German-speaking immigrants. The third was the Ludwig Mission Society, founded in Bavaria in 1836. The donations made to this Society were also generally channelled off into mission efforts among German-speaking emigrants.

Bishop Sheen will appreciate the reminder that all of these organizations as-



Sacred Heart Cathedral

sisted the Church in the future Rochester Diocese with abundant alms in lean times.

For instance, one gift from the Leopoldine Foundation to the Redemptorist missionaries during the depression of 1837 helped save not only St. Joseph's Church but St. Patrick's Church in Rochester from foreclosure. All three organizations gave money to the area churches when they were still in the Diocese of New York and, later on, in the Diocese of Buffalo.

And even after the Diocese of Rochester was set up in 1868, the Propagation of the Faith Society gave the first Bishop of Rochester \$4,000; the Ludwig Society gave him \$800; and the Leopoldine Foundation gave him \$120.

Bishop Timon, who as first bishop of Buffalo developed the Church rather considerably in the counties of the future Rochester Diocese, was a truly missionary spirit. A member of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians), he had served as national superior of his community and as vicar apostolic of Texas before his assignment to Buffalo. Throughout his career in the Buffalo Diocese (1847-1867) he lived the life of an indefatigable missionary, always in motion about his diocese, in season and out of season, with all the energy and altruism of a St. Paul. One interesting phase of his apostolate was his attempt to induce Catholic immigrants and migrants to settle on farms in western New York where they could earn a good living and be within reach of the ministrations of the Church. He was relatively successful, and a good many Catholic settlers moved in to the farm lands near Dunkirk and around Rexville—the latter in the present Rochester Diocese.

Thanks to the efforts of this apostolic pilgrim, the counties cut off from the Buffalo Diocese in 1868 to form the Rochester Diocese were by that date fundamentally organized. But the first Bishop of Rochester, Bernard J. McQuaid, was also an ex-

perienced missionary, and it fell to his lot to mold the district into a well-functioning unit.

Bishop McQuaid had acquired his missionary drive during his early priesthood, when he pioneered in the organization of churches and parish schools in northwestern New Jersey—in a sector which is now within the jurisdiction of Bishop Lawrence B. Casey, the Rochester-born Bishop of Paterson. And he brought this zeal and know-how with him when he came to Rochester.

It goes without saying that Bishop McQuaid attended to the setting up of many new parishes and missions, to take care not only of English-speaking immigrants but of those who spoke other tongues: Germans, Italians, Poles, Lithuanians. Where he blazed new trails was in his educational policy.

Experience had already made McQuaid a firm believer in the "Christian Free School", that is, the parochial school, supported by the parish to provide tuition-free education wherever that was possible. The idea of the parochial school is commonplace with us today. It was not so in the days of McQuaid; but the Bishop of Rochester did much to popularize the idea by circulating his concept around the nation through lectures and writings. Rochester thus became a leader in establishing parochial schools and in fostering the parish school ideal.

Another pioneering effort of Bishop McQuaid was his seminary program. In 1870 he opened St. Andrew's Seminary, one of the world's first non-boarding minor seminaries. In 1893, with a shoestring and a prayer to back him, he opened a major seminary, St. Bernard's. Nor was he content with merely building a seminary structure and letting it go at that. He sought to provide the best possible staff to man it. He likewise introduced into the seminary rule many adaptations unheard of in European seminaries, for he believed that those

missionaries had shown in the American mission.

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith had been authorized in western New York in 1856. But the big drive came in the 1920's, after Pope Pius XI, that most mission-minded of popes, brought the Society from its original headquarters in France down to Rome, and declared it a "Pontifical Society". Hence it was that Bishop Hickey, on April 22, 1926, announced the inauguration of a diocesan office of the Society, to be headed by Father Leo C. Mooney. Thereafter there was an annual drive for membership in every parish of the diocese. Father Mooney brought to his benevolent task all the kindness and zeal it demanded.

In 1927, Hickey also urged the clergy and faithful of the Rochester Diocese to join another society designed to aid the needy in the Near East. This was the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

Rochester's third bishop, John Francis O'Hern, held office only four years (1929-1933). If his brief tenure did not permit him to take any outstanding part in foreign missionary effort, he at least gave steady encouragement to the normal diocesan activities in support of the missions. In 1929, for instance, Father Leo Mooney reported \$22,600 as the annual Mission Sunday returns to the Propagation of the Faith Society. Under O'Hern, also the number of vocations of diocesan men and women to missionary orders began to increase. Exciting letters sent back home by such missionary priests as Father Charles Hilbert, M.M., brought to the diocesan Catholics a new awareness of their relationship to the mission effort across the world.

Archbishop Edward Mooney was bishop of Rochester for even less time than John F. O'Hern. He came in November 1933

and was transferred to the archiepiscopal see of Detroit in May 1937. But of all the earlier bishops of Rochester he had had the widest personal missionary experience. Before his appointment to Rochester he served as apostolic delegate to India and Japan. A brilliant man, he briefed himself carefully on the mission situation in both these lands; and while he dwelt there as papal representative he took pains to visit the far-flung missions and to experience their work at first hand.

In Rochester Archbishop Mooney was no longer called on to play the role of missionary supervisor, but he never lost his enthusiasm for missionary effort. In his conferences to the Rochester seminarians and in his sermons and letters on Mission Sunday, he laid particular stress upon the necessity of the missions. He brought missionary bishops to Rochester to visit and to speak. And in one important phase of the home missions he took a pioneer step: the apostolate among the Negroes of Rochester.

Although James Edward Kearney, Rochester's fifth bishop (who came to us in 1937) had spent most of his priestly career in New York City, he, too, was a missionary, for his first episcopal assignment was to head a distinctly missionary diocese, Salt Lake City (1932-1937). The stories that Bishop Kearney tells of the difficulties of the Utah missionary priests, and the stories that others tell of his own earnest efforts to help the Utah missions, all mark him as one imbued with the genuine mission spirit.

Occupied as he was by his diocesan responsibilities at Rochester, Bishop Kearney also had to content himself with aiding the foreign missions from afar. But the diocesan office of the Propagation of the Faith, became increasingly effective under the directorship of Msgr. John S. Randall (1937-1956), Father George S. Wood (1956-1961) and Msgr. John F. Duffy since

1961. In 1959, for example, the local office reported an income of \$104,700 for Mission Sunday—quite a rise over the figure for 1929!

The Missionary Cooperation Plan was first decided upon under Archbishop Mooney but began to function under his successor. Formerly a host of different mission enterprises might in a single year request permission from a pastor to appeal to his congregation for financial aid. This was an imposition on the parishioners. By the Cooperation Plan, the diocesan director permits only one special appeal to be made in each church per year. To each missionary organization that desires to make an appeal, he assigns four parishes of varying financial status. Two other important developments under Bishop Kearney were the expansion of the activities of the Holy Childhood Society (for parochial grade school children) and the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade (for Catholic students of secondary and college level).

During these same years the number of diocesan missionary vocations continued to increase. Some Rochester missionaries gained considerable note. Father Charles G. Ebb, for instance, became one of the most prominent American members of the Society of the Divine Word. Sister Theophane Maier, S.S.P.S. (1906-1944), a missionary nurse in New Guinea, was captured by the Japanese in 1943 and tragically slain by American airmen who mistakenly strafed the prison ship on which she and many other captive missionaries were detained. It was likewise during Bishop Kearney's regime that the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph opened a mission and a hospital among the Negroes of Selma, Alabama. Elsewhere in this issue you can read about our diocesan missionary efforts in Rochester's Inner City, our lay missionaries abroad, and the missions lately undertaken

by our diocesan priests and sisters in Latin America.

In 1955 the Diocese of Rochester played host to the grand international Mission Scenerama, the opening event in the brand-new Rochester War Memorial. Dozens of missionary orders and organizations had their booths on the exhibit floor below, and the vast auditorium above was crowded more than once by visitors come from far and near to attend the Masses and hear the lectures. Among the speakers were the gentle Cardinal Thomas Tien, exiled Archbishop of Peking; the towering Cardinal Valerian Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay; and the dynamic Mar Benedict Gregorios, Malankara Rite metropolitan of Trivandrum, India. But of all the prominent prelates there, none was more eagerly awaited and more vigorously applauded than Bishop Sheen himself.

I think I have proved my point. The Diocese of Rochester indeed has a long memory of its own missionary past and an urgent sense of the Church's missionary role.

But if Bishop Sheen is pleased with our attitude, it will not be for mere historical reasons. It will rather be because such a view augurs well for our fulfillment, under his guidance, of the mission responsibility which is ours, as the Vatican Council has reminded us, by virtue of our very baptism. "The obligation to spread the faith," says the Constitution on the Church, "is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his ability." Therefore Pope, bishops, priests, religious, and laity alike, as the total people of God, have a part to play in the "care of all the churches."

Our earlier bishops have already led us along this apostolic path, and led us well. Under Bishop Sheen we are ready to move ever farther and ever faster.

## A Heritage of Vigor from Bishop Kearney

When Bishop Kearney escorted Bishop Sheen to the throne at Sacred Heart Cathedral yesterday it was not necessarily a case of the old giving place to the new.

Bishop Kearney, although full of honorable years at 82, is nonetheless, as the long-popular song puts it, "young at heart."

And the Diocese Bishop Sheen inherits, although soon to celebrate its centenary, reflects the vigor of the shepherd who has guided its destinies for the past three decades.

It is no secret that Bishop Kearney has preferred personally to keep to some of the older devotional practices—but he has just as emphatically opened the doors of his Diocese to new ways too.

When some priests of the Diocese wanted to keep those doors closed when talk of possible changes first became widespread, Bishop Kearney remarked to one of the advocates of such changes, "These people can't get used to new ideas. Don't let them bother you!"

That, undoubtedly, goes a long way to explain why the Rochester Diocese has never grown stagnant, why Bishop Sheen will not have to prod his flock into keeping pace with him.

Bishop Sheen's twelve county Diocese could be described from many different viewpoints.

Perhaps the best way is to take a cue from the viewpoint of his predecessor here.

Whenever Bishop Kearney has given the sermon for pastors marking their jubilees, he frequently used the quotation, "Si monu-



Cardinal Spellman and Bishop Casey with Bishop Kearney on his jubilee in 1957.