

Catholicism in Elmira... A Few Notes

By FR. ROBERT F. McNAMARA

This is the 26th article on Rochester diocesan history prepared to commemorate the diocesan centennial by the author of THE DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, 1868-1968.

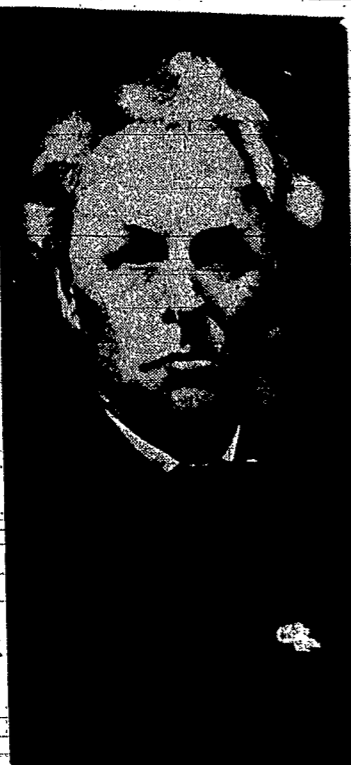
Now that it has an auxiliary bishop in residence (Most Rev. John E. McCafferty), Elmira has become rather important as a subsidiary center in the Diocese of Rochester. But long before the advent of Bishop McCafferty, Catholicism in Elmira had been increasingly influential.

There were Catholics living in Elmira at least by 1830, and perhaps five years before, and they had been permitted by the local Presbyterians to use the Presbyterian church for prayer meetings. The first recorded Mass celebrated for the increasing group took place in 1834. Two of the early settlers, Matthew Laffin and Michael Biggs, requested Father Francis O'Donoghue, recently stationed at Auburn, to come down and baptize their children. He came, offered Mass in the Laffin home, baptized children, assisted at marriages, and administered the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist.

After that, priests came to Elmira occasionally; first from Auburn, then after 1840 from Geneva, and after 1842, from Binghamton. In 1849, Father John Sheridan was named founding pastor of a parish in Elmira, and coming to Elmira, started building a brick church of St. Peter and Paul. The structure was not sound, however, so his successor, Father John O'Boyle began in 1854 a more substantial Gothic building of brick.

Unfortunately, during the construction of the church, Father O'Boyle fell from a scaffold and died, in December 1856. His remains were interred under the high altar — a rather unusual practice in an American Catholic church.

It took three years to build the new structure at St. Peter and Paul, but it still serves the Elmira parish. When it was finished in 1857, Protestants as well as Catholics were pleased with it. Several Protestants asked to rent pews, and some of them ap-



FR. THOMAS CUNNINGHAM

parently even requested to be received into the Catholic Church. Bishop John Timon of Buffalo (Elmira had been included in the Diocese of Buffalo when it was established in 1847) presided at the dedication on a broiling summer's day, Sunday, July 19. Forty Hours Devotion began the following day, and four priests were kept busy in their confessionals until Thursday.

Among the early pastors of Elmira's Catholic mother church, Father Thomas Cunningham was perhaps the most remarkable. When he died, his friend, the prominent Elmira minister Rev. Thomas K. Beecher, said of him: "We called him Father, and loved him because he was so fatherly." Another Elmira clergyman said, "He was a saint among saints, a self-sacrificing man of God."

The majority of the original Catholics were of Irish background. Their number increased rapidly after the mid-1840s, when famine in Ireland sent so many thousands of Irishmen flying to better lands.

They were mostly poor people, engaged in common labor principally on the Chemung Canal or the railroad. Their neighborhood was called "The Patch" or "The Cork Patch" and the

"Cork Patch," according to their Irish county origin. Irish settlers on the South Side inhabited a section known as the "Pickaway Patch". The name was applied, it seems, because of the obvious poverty of its inhabitants.

As the number of Irish Catholics rose, through immigration and natural increase, other parishes were opened: St. Patrick's (1871); St. Mary's, on the South Side (1872); St. Cecilia's (1905). Suburban parishes were set up in Elmira Heights (St. Charles, 1905) and West Elmira (Our Lady of Lourdes, 1940).

But not all the local Catholics were Irish. German immigrants and naturalized citizens, visiting German Catholics in Elmira in 1866, found 90 families (398 souls) in Elmira and six families (40 souls) on Dutch Hill, six miles west of Elmira. A little building was opened downtown as a church — St. John the Baptist — in that same year; a larger church was built in 1868, and the cornerstone of the present church was laid in 1891. By 1925 the parish counted 150 families and 657 communicants.

A succession of German-speaking priests held the pastorate. Longest in tenure was the late Father John B. Stomler, who was appointed pastor in 1903 and died in 1943. Between 1878 and 1905, the pastors also had charge of St. Mary's Chapel on Dutch Hill.

Polish Catholics began to move into Elmira around 1870. One of the earliest was Martin Lepkowski, who came in 1871. Up to 1890, these Poles were under the care of the pastors of St. John the Baptist Church.

In 1880, when there were about 40 Polish families in the community, they set up a small frame church, St. Casimir's. The second floor served as the rectory. Parish population increased in the first years of this century, with the migration of Polish families from the coal-mining area of northern Pennsylvania. Bishop Thomas F. Hickey dedicated the present church in 1912.

In 1905, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, Commissioner-Father Ernest Ziegler, who was well acquainted with the Italian language, to form a



SS. PETER & PAUL'S

parish for the Italians who resided within St. Patrick's parish neighborhood. For five years, the Italians of St. Anthony congregation used temporary quarters. In 1910, Bishop Hickey dedicated a combination church and school building.

Today, of these national parishes, only that of St. Casimir still uses a national tongue in some of its Masses. The German parishioners of St. John's Church have long since been Americanized or have scattered, and their former church is simply a downtown "noon-day" church. Even the Italian parish of St. Anthony is now essentially an "English" church.

A notable educational institution in Elmira, and the only early Southern Tier Catholic school of academic grade, was Our Lady of Angels Academy. It was founded in 1866 by the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur, who also taught in some of the Elmira parochial schools. In 1873, the Sisters built a "Gothic" school building. In 1905, they closed their school, for, despite their good record of service, they felt that Bishop McQuaid was not favorably disposed toward them. It was in this their "Gothic" school building, three years later, that the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph opened St. Joseph's Hospital, now a major institution in Elmira.

Confrontation

They Move Like Road Runners

By EILEEN SLAGIS

If you had to pick a television personality that the Christian Formation Board for the Southern vicariate most resembles, the answer would be Road Runner.

The board consists of five priests—a chairman, one from each deanery and one representing the pastors of the vicariate; a sister from each of the four vicariate teaching orders and three laymen from each deanery. This group is developing programs of religious education in the Southern Vicariate of the Rochester Diocese.

In May 1967, Father Gerald Connor, now assistant pastor at St. Joseph's, Penfield, was asked to work with the CCD Office in vicariate efforts. By June he and other priests representing each deanery were on the road interviewing pastors and determining area needs.

In July Father Albert Shamoun began to organize the present Christian Formation structure and the scope of responsibility spread. Initial programs included expanded training programs for lay catechists, encouragement of schools of religion and promotion of adult education programs.

In November 1967 at Horseheads, Religious, clergy and laymen began to compare disappointments, experiences, and hopes. From this first exchange, a strong working relationship evolved.

The board has been able to cooperate with the Christian

Formation Board, the Catholic School Office, the CCD Office, and the adult theology program operated by the Capuchin Fathers.

Lay rectors were selected for the clergy conference on First Penance. A sex education course was organized in the Elmira adult theology program. Lay catechists training centers have grown from three to six. Workshops on both the high school and elementary level sponsored by the diocesan CCD Office have been presented through board efforts. A vicariate audiovisual library planned by the CCD Office is now in operation.

Programs in adult education include assisting Capuchin efforts in many areas of the vicariate, a new approach to adult Confirmation developed in cooperation with Bishop John E. McCafferty, and the



Eleanor Pallone

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Womens' Council Lists Speakers

The Women's Council of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce will present four speakers in its "Religion in Action" program, at luncheon meetings on the first four Mondays of Lent.

Father Richard Torney, editor of the Courier-Journal, will open the series Feb. 24 with "The Potentiality of Women in the Ecumenical Movement."

On March 3, the Rev. George E. Ulp of Brighton Presbyterian Church will discuss "Four-letter Words."

"Religion and Reality" is the topic chosen for March 10 by Rabbi Allen J. Levine of Temple Emanuel.

Ending the series on March 17, Philip Kapleau of the Zen Meditation Center will talk about "The Meaning of Buddhism for Americans."

The speakers are scheduled for 12:30, after noon lunch at the Chamber of Commerce. Reservations for any or all of the meetings should be made with Mrs. Betty G. Schreff, council secretary, at the chamber building, 55 St. Paul.

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Jewish Council Appeals Hangings

From every pulpit in the Jewish synagogues and temples of Rochester, at Sabbath services last Friday and Saturday, a statement by the Jewish Community Council of Rochester was addressed, "To All Men of Conscience."

It stated that "the shocking public execution of fourteen men, nine of them Jews, in Iraq, fills all decent, freedom-loving people with a sense of outrage."

Through this statement, the Jewish Community of Rochester "speaks out in condemning this barbaric act, and in urging all men of conscience to join in protest to the end that further executions may be prevented and oppression relieved."

The statement says that the Jewish people of Iraq live in a state of constant terror, subjected to continuous persecution and harassment and denied the basic human rights of providing sustenance and security for their families. It says that Jews in these countries are not permitted to leave for Israel or elsewhere. The statement calls upon the international community to try out against this injustice.

Scholastic Art Show Next Week

Sibley's Scholastic Art Awards Exhibition will open next Thursday, Feb. 20, and continue during store hours through March 8.

It includes 1,110 art works from 84 junior and senior high schools in 13 counties. Prize winners will be announced Tuesday night, Feb. 18, at a preview for art teachers.

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1040 U.S. Individual Income Tax Return

Taxpayers Ask IRS

Q—Can you deduct the fees paid for auto license tags?
A—No, these are usually not deductible. The exception to this would be if the license fee is based on the value of the car. In that case, the fee could be deducted as a personal property tax.

Q—Is there any limit on what a child can earn and still be claimed as a dependent by his parents?
A—The general rule is that a person may not be claimed as dependent if he has gross income of \$600 or more. The exception to this rule is when the person is your child and he is either under 19 or is a full-time student. Then you may claim him as a dependent regardless of the amount of his income as long as you provide more than one-half his total support for the year.

Q—What's the rule on Social Security benefits; are they taxable?
A—No, Social Security benefits are not taxable and do not have to be reported. They should be considered, however, in determining total support of a person who is a recipient of such benefits.

Q—What can I deduct for sales tax?
A—Use the sales tax tables in the 1040 instructions to determine your deduction.

There is a table for each state which has a sales tax. Deduction is not limited to sales tax tables. Actual sales tax payments can be claimed if your records can support the total amount.

In addition, the sales tax paid on the purchase of an automobile can be deducted. This should be shown on a separate line as a separate item.

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