

Where Every Parishioner Has Major Problems

By DICK BAUMBACH
Elmira Correspondent

Elmira — Father James P. Collins has an unusual parish congregation to contend with every day of the year. He is the chaplain for 450 Catholics who are inmates at the Elmira Correctional Facility.

Father Collins has been the "parish priest" at the Reformatory for the last 12 years. He entered prison work because he "expressed an interest in that type of work, and I have never regretted it."

Father Collins pointed out that in the usual parish some of the parishioners might have problems, but at the Reformatory "every parishioner has a problem."

When inmates are first committed to the correctional facility Father Collins is responsible for interviewing all those that are members of the Catholic faith.

"I make it a practice never to look at an inmate's record before I meet him for the first time. I find that it helps me to draw my own conclusions if I don't know what the man has been sent to prison for," Father Collins said.

He noted that most of the inmates he interviews tell him what they are in jail for.

"We discuss his religious practices and try to get him back to the sacraments... this can be difficult sometimes if he is living outside the Church, before he comes into prison, like if he were married outside the Church before he was committed."

Father Collins said a Catholic inmate can see him any time just by asking for an appointment.

"If he wants to see me I'm available. I have to sign a slip to let him see me because the inmates can't go from one place to another without having the prison authorities know where they are," the prison priest said.

Father Collins said the two biggest problems the inmates have when they enter the Reformatory are alcoholism and drug addiction.

"Last year 45 per cent of the Catholics that came to the correctional facility were using drugs. Out of the 45 per cent there were 35 per cent using heroin, and I mean addicted to it."

Father Collins said he receives Christmas cards from some of the reformatory ex-convicts, but commented, "All of them say they are going to



FR. COLLINS

write them when they get out of prison, but they never do.

"I think it's because they want to forget the life they had behind the wall."

Asked if any of the inmates he has counseled have ever become priests or brothers, Father Collins said, "No they have a huge hurdle to cross and that's the educational hurdle."

"Ninety one per cent of the inmates are high school drop-outs, so that means they would need a high school diploma, plus a college education to become either a priest or a brother."

Father Collins is optimistic about the fate of the inmates once they leave prison. Most of them will make good, about 30 per cent will be first time violators as ex-convicts, while 10 per cent just don't ever make it on the outside world and will always be in prisons."

The prison priest pointed out the current meaning of the word, Reformatory:

"We are dealing with persons 16 to 30. These aren't youngsters. These are men who have committed crimes."

Father Collins also doesn't believe the prison system in the United States is falling apart as some recent news accounts have reported.

"A guy has got to help himself. We can try to help him, but in the end he still must help himself. Some people seem to think that when everything else fails in trying to help a man you send him to prison where we have magic wands

and everything turns out all right. That just doesn't happen."

One of Father Collins' toughest jobs in recent years came during a food strike called by the prisoners.

"I walked up and down the galleries for 11 hours with the Protestant chaplain, trying to convince them they had nothing to fear if they went to meals. It finally worked."

Prior to becoming the chaplain at the correctional facility Father Collins was a parish priest at three different churches in the Diocese of Rochester.

He was assigned to St. Monica's Church, Rochester for four years after he was first ordained, then spent eight years at Holy Family Church in Auburn and finally was assigned to St. John the Evangelist in Rochester for two years.

Father Collins might best have summed up his role in the prison system when he said, "I try to help them. Most of them want help, but some don't want anything. That's when it's sad."

Parish Council Elects Officers

Corning—The parish council of St. Patrick's Church recently announced the election of a new slate of members.

From Corning, representatives are: Daniel Lammon and Charles Warunek, east of Corning: Dale Noll; south of Corning: Frank Doherty; out of the parish: Richard Wardell.

The next meeting of the council is set for Sunday, June 6, at 8 p.m. in the parish hall.

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Kearney Sr. Wins Grid Scholarship

A member of the all-Catholic football team has been awarded a football scholarship by Villanova University.

Steven J. Mileo, a senior at Bishop Kearney High School, has received a four year scholarship to Villanova University, Pennsylvania. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph J. Mileo of 93 Briar Lane, Irondequoit.

Steve was a unanimous selection for the all-Catholic football team in 1969-70. The 6'2", 230 lb. senior is also a

member of the track team and recently set a new city-Catholic record in the shot put. He broke the record with a toss of 54'11-1/2". Other activities include the National Spanish Honor Society and the Varsity Club.

Groton Breakfast

Groton—The Altar and Rosary Society of St. Anthony's parish held its annual communion breakfast May 16. Guests included Father Joseph M. McNamara, pastor, and Sisters Edwina and Beatrice of Notre Dame High School in Elmira. Sister Edwina spoke on religious life in the modern world.

Officers elected are Rose Vasalotti, president; Muriel Bartlett, vice president; Catherine Reagan, secretary; and Catherine Buck, treasurer.

Summer Program

The summer program at St. THOMAS in RED CREEK and ST. JUDE's in Fairhaven has been announced by Father Elmer Heindl. The program will open May 29 and 30. Father Heindl will be assisted by Father Vernon Christy, teacher at the Christian Brothers Academy in Syracuse.

Masses at ST. THOMAS will be Sunday, 8:30 a.m. and 10 a.m.

Masses at ST. JUDE's in Fairhaven will be 7 p.m. Saturday evening, and 11:30 a.m. Sunday.

Elmira Area

Notes

Elmira — The Altar and Rosary Society of ST. CECELA'S Church will host a pot luck supper at 6:30 p.m. June 2 in the church hall.

All women of the parish are invited.

Horseheads — A rummage sale will be held in the parish annex of ST. MARY OUR MOTHER Church today, May 26, Thursday and Friday. Articles for the sale may be brought to the parish annex any day during the sale. Hours today and Thursday are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Friday, 9 until noon. Additional information may be obtained from Mrs. Barbara Melvin, 607-739-7836.

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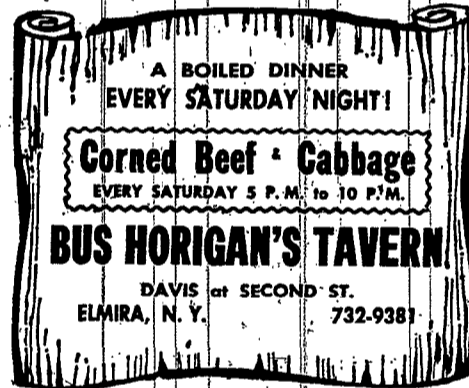
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New Officers For Elmira CDA

Elmira — New officers of Court St. Rita #137, Catholic Daughters of America, will be installed June 7.

Officers for 1971-72 are: Regent, Miss Lena Allington; first vice-regent, Mrs. James H. Brown; second vice-regent, Mrs. Clarence Hastings; financial secretary, Mrs. Edward Knafelz; treasurer, Mrs. Francis Crowley; recording secretary, Mrs. Raymond Carter; monitor, Mrs. Joseph Gublo; lecturer, Mrs. Packer Harrison; organist, Miss Claire Rose Stork; trustee, Mrs. Edward Widman, Mrs. Harry L. Kahler and Mrs. James A. Mallon.

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