

Father Walter:

A Story of Determination

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

Auburn — What is so unusual about Father William J. Walter, SJ, missionary to the Caroline Islands for 24 years, saying Mass in his own voice once again?

A lot, when you consider he had a laryngectomy in November resulting in the total removal of the voice box.

Interviewed while visiting his sister, Mrs. Marion Hoadley, a parishioner of Sacred Heart in Auburn, Father's enthusiasm over sharing the story of his mission work overshadowed the inspirational story of his battle to regain communication through esophageal speech.

Esophageal speech is not easy to learn and usually takes several years to master. Father Walter mastered it in 7 months. He was motivated through difficult phases of therapy by the desire to return to his people.

He commented, "I just knew I must get back; and needed my voice to administer to my people. I've seen these children grow up. I'm happy and satisfied with my work among them."

Priest to his far-flung flock in the Caroline Islands, no other American has lived so long among these people, logging thousands of miles per month by boat on his circuit. Father brings them religious consolation, and has seen them move from a multi-god concept to monotheism.

Father explained that in the past 10 years, the islands are just beginning to emerge from primitive life styles. While encouraged to maintain the strengths of their cultural identification, the missionaries are now attempting to educate residents to assume their rightful place and re-

sponsibility in the world as they will soon have to vote on their independence.

"I have seen them become less selfish, live together in peace and overcome their isolated attitude and become more cooperative among themselves in economic and social spheres. Now we are cultivating leadership and will educate them to work together. And I want to continue my part in this."

He is one of about 45 Jesuits serving the vast territory consisting of isolated islands served by trading ships. The area was entrusted to Japan after World War I as a League of Nations mandate, but came under the United Nations Trusteeship Council of the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Father Walter requested assignment in the area following several years as Army chaplain in the Pacific theatre of war.

Father Walter was not interested in using any mechanical device (which would be easier to learn) because it would produce an unnatural voice or need attention which would not be available.

When a larynx is removed, there is no longer any connection between the windpipe and the mouth and no way of producing sound. The surgeon attaches the top of the windpipe, below the severed voice box, to an opening in the neck called a

tracheal stoma. The patient thereafter inhales and exhales through this hole.

With esophageal speech, a person takes air into the nose and throat, forcing it back into the throat and upper part of the esophagus or gullet and expelling it slowly. This causes the walls of the esophagus and throat to vibrate and produce a low pitched sound that can be shaped into words.

Father was spurred on in his therapy by the knowledge he couldn't get the necessary therapy in the mission and would need to be his own therapist in much the same way he diagnoses his own need for medical care.

Noting a hoarseness of several months duration, he consulted the medical books. Luckily one of the 6 or 7 yearly ships was due and he went to the Naval hospital in Guam, and then on to the Veterans Hospital in San Francisco.

Currently visiting relatives in the area, he anticipates reassignment to the mission field in the near future. Father has built a reputation for resourcefulness through the years; and, used to being in the front lines in the missions, he has carried this over into his battle for health.

And for Father Walter, it can't be soon enough for him to return home to his people.

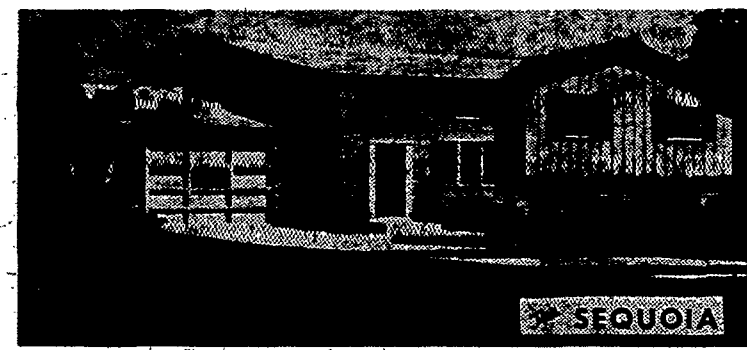


Liturgy Institute

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan talks with Father Joseph Nolan, center, main conference speaker, and Msgr. William Shannon, head of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, at Summer Institute on Liturgy held last weekend at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua.

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Disaster News

'Oldest' Man Aided in Flood

Elmira — Alexander Damico may be the oldest man ever to have received a loan from the small Business Administration. He is definitely one of the most deserving according to an SBA official.

Born in Italy in 1880, Damico came to the U.S. when he was 23 and has lived here ever since, spending most of his ensuing 70 years in this area.

His flood disaster loan will enable him to repair the small home he owns at 703 Sullivan St.

A fiercely proud man, "who doesn't owe one penny to anyone", Damico has already made arrangements with his attorney to make sure that the SBA loan will be paid whether or not he is around to take care of it.

An SBA loan officer, Philip Pariso, had to use both English and Italian to convince Damico that his loan contained a \$2500 forgiveness which he would never have to pay back. Tears came to the old man's eyes as he tried to express his thanks.

The Red Cross alerted SBA Officials to Damico's existence. A case-worker had discovered him during a routine house-to-house check, but had difficulty communicating with him, not knowing that his vision and hearing were impaired and that Damico was speaking to him in Italian.

Noticing that there was sufficient space beside Damico's home to place a HUD trailer, Pariso suggested that the old man apply for one to live in while his house was being repaired.

"My suggestion touched off a minor explosion," recounted Pariso. "I should have taken a better look at that space — it contained Damico's most prized possession — his vegetable garden, which somehow survived the flood and mud. Nothing on earth could have changed

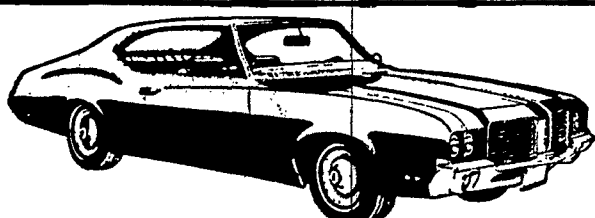
Damico's mind. He'd sleep on the floor before he'd let anyone disturb his garden."

January 1, 1918 is a red letter day on Damico's calendar, for it was on this day that he became a United States Citizen. He bought a big American Flag to celebrate the occasion and still has it — draped across the headboard of his bed. When the floods came, this was the only possession he made any effort to save. He has never slept without it above his head in the past 54 years.

He is very proud of the fact that he is self-sufficient and does not owe anyone anything. He has even prepaid his funeral, including lot and headstone, making all of the necessary arrangements a few years ago. He attends St. Peter and Paul Church, and has even paid for the Masses to be said after he leaves this world.

Pariso said of him, "I have met many people in my lifetime, but none who have impressed me more than that honest, humble, self-reliant man. My life has been enriched by this heart-warming experience."

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