

Columnists

A tour of duty in Macedon

By Father Paul J. Cuddy

Question: Weren't you in Macedon recently? Answer: Yes, it's the home town of Father Ed Dillon. Just for Saturday and Sunday Masses and confessions. In May, Father Eugene McFarland said: "The parish is giving me a retirement party at Marvin's Party House Sunday, June 5. After saying goodbye to everyone, I'd be embarrassed continuing to say goodbye for three weeks afterward. Could you take the weekend Masses?"

Father McFarland would return for baptisms, weddings and administration. He is presently at his summer cottage on Lake Conesus, and often assists Father William Gordinier and meets Father Walter Carron in Genesee. Come winter, Father McFarland will go to St. Petersburg, Fla., where Bishop Thomas Larkin, a native of Mt. Morris, assures him of parish work in the diocese.

Q: Three weekends? What did you do?

A: Well, I had the confessions and the 5 p.m. Saturday Mass. On Sunday, I had the 8 and 10 a.m. Masses. Each Sunday, a different Basilian from St. John Fisher College came: Father Lee, the archeologist; Father Miller, the philosopher; Father Trovato, spiritual director and guide to students. They took the 12 p.m. Mass. Macedon is a burgeoning parish with over 1,000 souls at Mass. It has a healthy fervor and parish pride. The new pastor, Father Emmett Halloran, will find it quite a change from St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Rochester, which is a parochial empire.

Q: Did you preach?

A: Yes, I welcomed the opportunity. Along with preaching, I always bring a good supply of religious articles — rosary beads, medals, prayer books and children's books — where there is no Catholic religious store. Elmira, Ithaca, Rochester, East Rochester, Canandaigua and Auburn all have Catholic shops. But other places I have served — Lyons, Shortsville, Weedsport, Corning and Elmira Heights — are thrilled to have these religious articles available.

Profile of a parish priest

By Father Richard P. McBrien

Every so often a book or an article appears that has "special" written all over it. The June 13 issue of The New Yorker contains such a piece, entitled "Parish Priest," by Paul Wilkes.

The article is a profile of a priest, Father Joseph Greer, pastor of St. Patrick's in suburban Natick, Mass., Archdiocese of Boston. It is one of the most realistic and responsible pieces ever done on the priesthood.

Father Greer is 56 years old — about the median age of U.S. priests today — and was ordained just a few years before the Second Vatican Council.

St. Patrick's is also fairly typical of a large number of American parishes that have fallen on hard times. Once considered a pastoral plum of the first order, the parish "plant" is now simply too big to manage on an acutely shrunken financial base.

When Father Greer arrived in 1984, he found the church badly in need of repair. The spiritual state of affairs didn't seem much better.

How Father Greer undertook the process of renewal is vividly described in the article. The more striking story, however, is that of a middle-aged priest, prepared for duty in a pre-Vatican II Church, but expected to serve just as effectively in a vastly changed postconciliar Church.

The description of his seminary training and the clerical culture which it fostered is unfailingly accurate — I know, I attended the same seminary at about the same time. It explains a lot about the gap between pastoral challenge and pastoral performance that many laity find in some of their priests.

One Boston priest, quoted in the article, put it bluntly: "For eight years, they dressed you like a girl and treated you like a child. And then they expected you to be a man."

There is something of the "day-in-the-life" genre about this profile, and to that extent it would make particularly instructive reading for all those who ask "Just what do priests do all day?"

But there is much more than that in this piece. Somehow, Paul Wilkes has penetrated to the personal and priestly core of his remarkable subject. Father Greer comes across as a profoundly committed Christian, a dedicated priest, and a no-nonsense — yet sensitive and

On the Right Side

Q: Any excitement in Macedon?

A: About 9 p.m. Saturday, I decided to walk downtown. Downtown Macedon is small. Everything was closed excepting the Light Tower Bar and a pizza place. As I neared the bar, five big motorcyclists in black leather jackets and helmets, each with a thin girl on the back of their bikes, came zooming into the parking lot of the bar. I thought: "I'd hate to meet that crowd in a dark alley!" Then a cheerful voice called out: "Hi, Father!"

"Hi, to you," I replied. The "hi Father" man turned out to be a member of St. Rita's, West Webster, an instructor at St. Joseph's Villa, and a member of Father Frank DiSano's Bible study group. We went into the bar where Paul G. introduced me to his friends.

Q: Isn't it out of character for a priest to visit bars?

A: Good heavens, no! That's where our people are. Some of the habitués of pubs may not be Mass-going Catholics, but I have never met one who doesn't respect the faith. These men are often very generous, and even tenderhearted. What do you think that parable of the lost sheep was about?

Q: Your tour of duty at Macedon was a success?

A: Yes, thanks to Father McFarland's 23-year pastorate, the people are attuned to orthodox doctrine, correct liturgy, and humor. Hundreds of Treasury of Prayer booklets, beads and medals are floating around doing good. And dozens said: "We hope you will come back again." That was nice.

Essays in Theology

compassionate — human being, tempered by his own physical and spiritual weaknesses.

"Sometimes this is a Church that expects too much of her people," Father Greer told his interviewer. "I never thought I'd live to see the day I'd say that, because at one time it was so easy to judge: I was right, and everyone who disagreed with me was wrong."

During the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, however, he found that he was "just as weak as the weakest of them."

"Now I'm not so quick to judge," he admitted. "I don't want to be judged that harshly myself."

"Maybe I'm a little late," he continued. "I'm rounding third and heading for home — but I hope I'm learning that the true sign of the Church is forgiveness, not making the wounds deeper."

He spoke of those who have resigned from the priesthood, but whose petitions for laicization were denied. They remain outcasts in their own Church.

He spoke, too, of the victims of broken marriages who are supposed to live as monks and nuns the rest of their lives. And he spoke of a Boston priest dying of AIDS, banished from sight. "God is kinder to man than man is to himself," he suggested.

"I learned from my own mistakes that people don't really want to sin," he concluded. "And through it all — this is strange to say — I knew that I was born to be a priest. And that I would die one."

The good news is that there are thousands of Joe Greers still active in the priesthood throughout North America. The bad news is that there aren't enough like him coming along to take his place.

Prayer and fasting alone won't change that situation. Only change itself will — change that many continue to resist.

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