

# 'Courier' covers 100 years of diocesan news

By Lee Strong  
Staff Writer

The newspaper of the Diocese of Rochester began its 100th-year celebration with a nod to the past.

On Jan. 10, 1989, the newspaper's name was legally changed from *Courier-Journal* to *Catholic Courier*, the title under which it was published in the 1930s.

The change, which took effect in the issue of Feb. 16, 1989, was an effort to reinforce the paper's Catholic identity, according to Bishop Dennis Hickey, general manager. "A newspaper sponsored by the diocese should have something which identifies it as a Catholic publication reflecting Catholic news," he said.

The name change is the latest wrinkle in a long history that began one evening in 1889 when printer Edward J. Ryan, typesetter Thomas H. Donovan and reporter Willard A. Marakle of the Rochester *Union and Advertiser* visited Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, the first Catholic bishop of Rochester.

Out of that meeting came the *Catholic Journal*, the direct predecessor of this newspaper. The first edition of the new Catholic publication was published Oct. 5, 1889. Although the paper has undergone various name changes and reorganizations, it is the longest-lived continuously operating Catholic newspaper in the diocese.

Marakle served as the paper's first editor, but left after five years. He was succeeded by Donovan, who in turn left after a few years. Ryan then became the editor, a position he held until his death in 1928.

Ryan's daughter, Ruth Ryan, tried to keep the paper in operation after the death of her father, but was unable to do so. In March, 1929, a group of laymen and

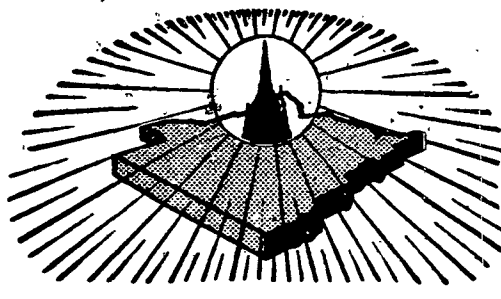
priests, with the encouragement of then-Bishop John F. O'Hern, bought the paper and renamed it the *Catholic Courier and Journal* to differentiate it from the *Catholic Journal*. Although still privately owned, the paper became the official-diocesan newspaper.

Financially unstable when the group bought it, the paper was hit hard by the Great Depression. On April 7, 1932, the diocese assumed control. Father Leo C. Mooney was made managing editor, and Thomas H. O'Connor, who had edited the Rochester edition of the *Catholic Echo* since 1924, became the news editor. Meanwhile, the paper was renamed *Catholic Courier*.

Throughout most of the 1930s, Father Mooney struggled to keep the paper solvent. Edward Esse, associate editor from 1938 to 1942, described the priest as "a magician and a banker." Nevertheless, money remained short, and at times the staff went without pay for as many as five weeks. In 1939, Father William Hart, vicar general of the diocese and pastor of Corpus Christi Parish, became the editor-in-chief, and on several occasions he advanced money to pay the bills.

O'Connor was a central figure at the paper during this period. Although his official title was that of news editor, he actually functioned as the *Catholic Courier's* editor. O'Connor remained with the newspaper from 1932 until he retired in 1968. In 1948, he was honored for 25 years in Catholic journalism, and in 1968, the 100th anniversary of the diocese, he was noted as one of the key laymen who "strengthened the faith of the diocese."

In 1942, Father Mooney left the *Catholic Courier* to devote himself more fully to his



duties as pastor of St. Patrick's Church. He left behind a paper that was financially stable, if not profitable. Circulation, meanwhile, had increased to just over 14,000.

Father Mooney's replacement as managing editor was Monsignor John S. Randall. The new managing editor — variously described as a "fireball," a "dynamo" and "one of the best businessmen in the diocese" — brought with him a growing reputation as an organizer and a fund-raiser. Armed with Bishop James E. Kearney's call for a 100-percent subscription level in parishes, he managed within five years to double the newspaper's circulation. By 1971, his last year as managing editor, the paper's circulation had risen to over 70,000 subscriptions.

Joining Monsignor Randall at the *Catholic Courier* was Monsignor Patrick Flynn, who served as the newspaper's editor from 1942 to 1958. Bishop Dennis Hickey recalled Monsignor Flynn as "a professional news person" who "was very much interested in the social teachings of the church, with an emphasis on labor and unions."

On April 7, 1945, the *Catholic Courier* became the *Catholic Courier-Journal*. Martin Moll, who has been involved with the newspaper since 1946 and is currently a member of its board of directors, specu-

lated that the change was made in part because the paper was changing its format and taking on a greater role in the life of the local church.

The newspaper's senior staff remained fairly constant until 1958 when Monsignor Hart, who for 19 years had contributed editorials and advice, stepped down as editor-in-chief due to ill health. Monsignor Flynn also departed, taking over as administrator of St. Agnes Parish, Avon.

Replacing Monsignor Flynn was Father Henry Atwell, who had joined the staff as associate editor in 1954. A liberal whom Bishop Hickey described as "way ahead of his time," the new editor became a leading advocate of ecumenism and of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Father Robert Kanka, now pastor of St. James the Apostle Parish, Trumansburg, served as assistant editor under Father Atwell from 1965 to 1967. He said that Father Atwell's brilliance as an editor and a writer were enhanced by the times. The Second Vatican Council, the Rochester race riots of 1964, the formation of FIGHT (Freedom, Integration, God, Honor, Today) and the arrival in 1966 of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen all contributed to the mid-'60s "an interesting time to write about the church," Father Kanka observed.

Throughout 1966 and '67, however, the liberal Father Atwell and the conservative Bishop Sheen disagreed about the paper's direction. At one point, the bishop suggested closing the paper and purchasing a regular advertising supplement in Rochester's daily newspapers. Finally, in November, 1967, Father Atwell left the paper to become pastor of St. Agnes of Avon.

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