



**Father Robert F. McNamara climbs the stairs to his second floor office at St. Thomas the Apostle Rectory twice a day, despite severe rheumatoid arthritis. In order to continue his work as a diocesan archivist. In addition, the author and historian is finishing a historical murder mystery scheduled for publication this summer.**

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

## Diocese adopts policy changes for priests' retirement, benefits

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester is phasing in a policy that, under special circumstances, will allow priests to retire from administrative duties at age 67.

The customary retirement age for most diocesan priests will remain 70.

The new policy also clarifies the option for priests to remain in administrative ministry until 75 — the customary retirement age cited in canon law.

The new retirement policy was approved by the diocesan Priests' Council at its May meeting. It allows priests who are unable to function effectively — for reasons of health or other personal circumstances — to request early retirement with full benefits at age 67, and partial benefits at 65. The new retirement minimum age will be phased in over the next three years: 69 in June, 1991; 68 in June, 1992; and 67 in June 1993.

According to Father Robert Schrader, diocesan director of priests' personnel, the new policy was designed to ensure financial justice for priests who are unable to continue in administrative positions, but who would suffer loss of part of their pension if they retired early.

Once the new policy is fully implemented, priests could also retire at age 65 under special circumstances, but would only be able to receive 90 percent of their pensions. Under the old policy, priests retiring at 65 would have received

approximately 75 percent of their pension benefits.

Father Schrader emphasized that the policy only covers retirement from administrative duties. "When a priest retires, he is not retiring from priesthood," he said, noting that many of the 82 retired diocesan priests remain active in priestly ministry by assisting at parishes.

The new policy also makes it clear that priests need not retire from administrative duties until they reach 75, Father Schrader said. The old policy allowed priests to continue in administration past 70 — and three priests above that age are currently still serving as pastors, he said — but the policy was not clearly stated. "The new policy acknowledges that this is a right that the priest has," he said.

The change marks the second time the priests' council has changed the customary retirement age for diocesan priests. In 1982, the body voted to approve retirement at age 70. "Back then, looking at the general population, not many of our peers had to wait until they were 75 to retire," Father Schrader observed.

The Rochester diocese is not alone in allowing early retirement, Father Schrader said. He noted, for example, that the Diocese of Cincinnati is currently phasing in a policy that would allow priests to retire with full benefits at age 65.

— Lee Strong

## College lauds author with Founder's Medal

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Among alumni of Rome's North American College from the mid-to-late 1930s, Father Robert F. McNamara will always be remembered as "69."

"We were known by our laundry numbers," Father McNamara explained. "(School faculty members) could never pronounce our names."

But on June 12, the Rochester priest received a distinction that easily supplants his laundry number in the annals of the prestigious college.

On that date, the school's board of governors awarded Father McNamara the first Founders' Medal of the Pontifical North American College, to recognize the contribution he made by chronicling the college's history in his book *The American College in Rome, 1855-1955*.

In a citation accompanying the award, the board of governors said the book "serves as a monument to (Father McNamara's) scholarship, to his love of Alma Mater and to the noble accomplishments of the college and her sons during a century of change and growth in Church and Nation."

Father McNamara attended the Roman college from 1933 to 1937, at the time earning a licentiate in sacred theology from the Gregorian Institute. He returned to Rochester, joining the St. Bernard's Seminary faculty as a professor of church history in 1938.

While teaching at St. Bernard's in the early 1940s, Father McNamara said, he was suddenly inspired to write a history of the North American College.

"It's unique," he said of his alma mater. "There's nothing like it in the history of American Catholicism that's quite the same."

The North American College was founded in 1859 by Pope Pius IX to serve as a residence for U.S. seminarians seeking pontifical degrees that would certify them to teach in seminaries. At the time the college was created, no institutions in the United States were certified to issue such degrees. (Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., is currently qualified to confer them.)

The property on which the college was built was loaned to the institution by Pius

IX and, in 1948, Pope Pius XII made the land an outright gift to the college. The two popes thus are the "founders" for whom the award was named, and their images grace the medal presented to Father McNamara.

Father McNamara began his research for the history of the college during World War II, although he could not travel to Rome because of the fighting. Since the college's board of directors is composed exclusively of U.S. bishops, however, he was able to conduct most of his work in the United States. The college's administrative offices were also located in the United States, housed at the National Catholic Welfare Conference (now the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops) in Washington, D.C.

The history was finally published in 1956 after 13 years of work.

Father McNamara said the book is valuable in that it presents a picture of Rome in the years before the Second World War. "(Rome) was still somewhat medieval," he said. "You got the feeling of being in a medieval university — that was part of the charm of it."

After writing the college's history, Father McNamara went on to write a history of the Diocese of Rochester (1968) in addition to his 1948 book on St. Mary's Parish, Corning. In 1976, he was appointed the diocese's archivist.

Currently living in the St. Thomas the Apostle Rectory in Rochester, Father McNamara now shares archivist duties with Father William Graf, pastor of Church of the Most Precious Blood, Rochester.

### DIOCESAN APPOINTMENTS



#### Addendum

Due to incomplete information provided to the *Catholic Courier*, the new address for Father James P. Collins, who retired last month as pastor of St. Anthony Church in Elmira, was not included in the record of 1990 clergy appointments (June 28 issue). Father Collins' new address is 809 W. Water St., Elmira, N.Y., 14905.

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