

Director to leave Notre Dame Retreat House

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The nature of Father William Gaffney's work will not change, just the site where he performs it.

Father Gaffney, a Redemptorist who has served for the past two years as interim director of Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, will return to Philadelphia Aug. 13 to become part of his order's mission band — which presents retreats and 18-35 years old, and retreats that included Gaffney was a member of the band before coming to the Rochester diocese.

Father Timothy Keating, CSSR, who served at Notre Dame for six years in the mid 1980s, will become the retreat center's new rector.

Although he is moving on, Father Gaffney will continue what he called his primary ministry of leading people to "personal conversions."

"That was the mission of St. Alphonsus, the founder of the Redemptorists," Father Gaffney explained.

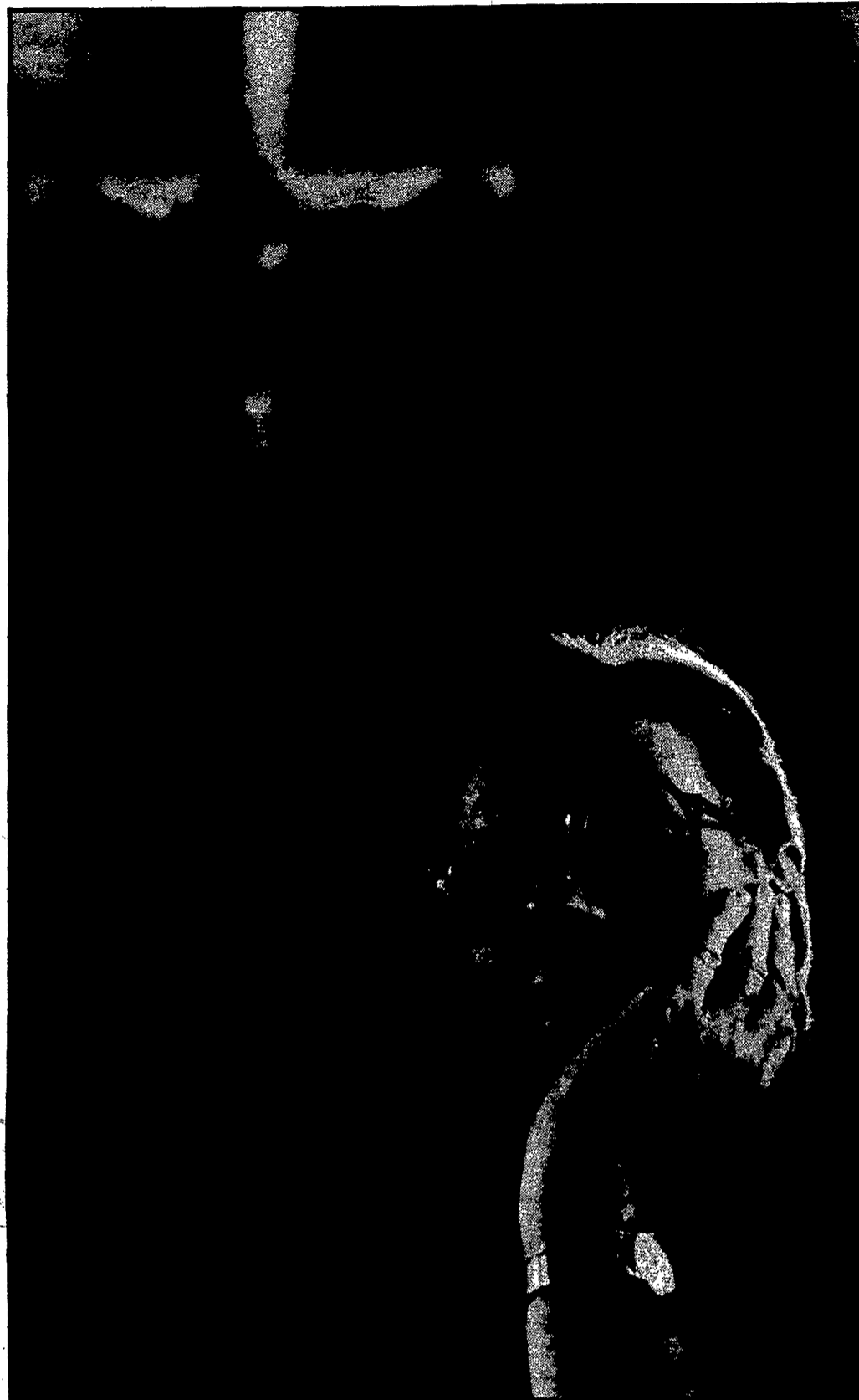
The departing rector first came to Notre Dame in 1988 when the then-rector Father Thomas Barrett, CSSR, became unable to complete his term due to illness. In addition to completing Father Barrett's three-year term, Father Gaffney was given another mission of his own.

"One of the reasons I was sent here was that the provincial asked me to be creative and to introduce new ideas and new programs, and to try to touch as many people as possible," Father Gaffney said.

"What we tried to do was gear the retreats toward spiritual conversion," he noted. Among the programs offered at Notre Dame during Father Gaffney's tenure were monthly Medjugorje nights, empowerment weekends to help people discern their gifts, retreats for youth, "Boniface weekends" intended for people 18-35 years old, and retreats that included both teens and adults.

"We're finding that one of the needs of young adult Catholics is a holistic relationship with an adult Catholic other than their parents," Father Gaffney remarked.

The priest, who has been involved with Marriage Encounter for many years, also initiated more retreats for couples at



Father William Gaffney sits in one of his favorite spots — the chapel at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua.

Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Notre Dame. In fact, his departure date was originally scheduled for Aug. 7, but he is staying on for an extra week to direct an encounter weekend.

Father Gaffney has also had more than a 20-year involvement with the Charismatic Renewal, and since the early 1970s, has conducted a healing ministry as well. Both activities played a part in the retreats he gave in the Rochester diocese. On July 12, of this year, he conducted a charismatic healing Mass at Letchworth State Park for more than 270 people. Dozens of people sought healing for ailments ranging from toothaches to migraine headaches.

"(Father Gaffney) is a person who believes God is right here right now, and he shares that with people," observed Elmira Richard McGill, a St. Casimir's parishioner who has attended a number of retreats at Notre Dame in the past few years.

"There were guys who went up to the healing service who would have been rooted to the pews at other services," McGill said of a retreat Father Gaffney directed May 18-20 of this year. "And by the end, there were guys crying."

In addition, McGill praised Father Gaffney for his willingness to leave the retreat center to direct retreats and say Masses at parishes, noting that the priest had visited St. Casimir's. "I think Father Gaffney has been willing to extend himself," McGill observed. "He has (also) pushed to get the priests (from Notre Dame) out to the parishes."

Art Farren, a longtime member of the Notre Dame Retreat League, said the departing director will be sorely missed.

"Father (Gaffney) has been a refreshing presence at Notre Dame," Farren said. "His spirituality — especially his devotion to Our Lady — has affected all who have met him."

Although he is looking forward to returning to the mission band's ministry, Father Gaffney acknowledged he will miss being at Notre Dame. "I felt privileged working with the people in the Diocese of Rochester," he said.

McGill, who was saddened to learn that Father Gaffney was leaving, said the people going to Notre Dame will be missing someone special with the departure of Father Gaffney.

"He just radiates," McGill said. "I know a lot of people who are close to God do that — and (Father Gaffney) is one of them."

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