

# Picture-perfect hobby links priest to people

By Barbara Ann Homick  
Staff writer

GREECE — Most people wouldn't blink an eye at a priest who collects holy cards or rosary beads, but they may raise an eyebrow to a priest who has amassed more than 90 autographed pictures of entertainment figures.

Father Dave J. Faraone, parochial vicar at Our Mother of Sorrows Church, is accustomed to seeing the look of surprise on the faces of people when they enter his office in the rectory at 5000 Mt. Read Boulevard.

The priest's collection of signed photographs adorns three of the four walls in his office.

The priest said his hobby helps him relate to the people he counsels. "For kids coming into get married who have never talked to a priest one on one ... or have never been in a rectory, it sets a nice tone," he said, adding that he hopes the pictures — along with other touches such as burning candles and incense — create a non-threatening atmosphere.

"I tell them a few silly stories about meeting famous people, and it's kind of a connection. I like that," Father Faraone said. "It puts them at ease more than anything else."

The priest said he has always loved the theater with its intriguing public figures. In fact, at age 7 he sent a sympathy card to Jacqueline Kennedy after the president's death. He received a response from the first lady, which he said made him a big hit at show-and-tell.

Many years later, while studying at Immaculate Conception Seminary in New Jersey from 1981-1983, Father Faraone often visited New York City on weekends. He obtained an autograph or two from such celebrities as Dustin Hoffman, Lauren Bacall and Raquel Welch. A trip to Los Angeles in 1986, however, fueled his interest in his collection, he said.

The priest traveled to California with three friends — one of whom was fascinated with Lucille Ball. This friend wrote to "Lucy" before the trip, asking if she would have lunch with the four men. To their surprise, the movie star responded in the affirmative.

Because of her heavy schedule,



Father Dave J. Faraone, parochial vicar at Our Mother of Sorrows Church in Greece, stands in the office he shares with 90 autographed pictures of public figures.



Photographs of Lucille Ball and James Stewart hang next to each other because they were neighbors in real life.

sent a request to Pope John Paul II, a disappointed Father Faraone was informed by the Vatican that they "don't do that sort of thing."

One of his most recent requests went to rock singer Madonna, whom the priest said he finds to be a complicated and fascinating person.

"One minute she can be deeply spiritual, and the next she is purely sleaze," the priest said. "But some of what she says has a contribution to make, especially in terms of the struggle between good and evil."

Although Father Faraone — who came to Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in June, 1990 — said most parishioners find his collection harmless, he recalled one incident at St. Joseph's in Penfield — where he served from 1988-1990 — in which one man found his hobby offensive.

According to the priest, a couple wishing to be married in the Catholic church came to him for counseling.

"After the session, the man said, 'As a priest, I would think that you would have the lives of the saints on the wall, instead of this filth,'" the priest recalled. "I didn't even have to answer because his wife said, 'But honey, then he wouldn't be able to get their autographs.'"

Glancing at his collection of pictures — which ranges from George Burns to Michael J. Fox and Whoopi Goldberg to Bing Crosby — Father Faraone said it is hard to miss the social commentary that celebrities such as these make through their work. "In some ways, they are the prophets of today," he remarked.

Although he said he does not condone the lifestyles of some celebrities, Father Faraone said people should look at the good that many public figures accomplish. For instance, he said Sting works to save the Brazilian rain forests, Ted Danson is involved in saving the whales and preserving the environment, and Al Lewis — the character "Grandpa" from "The Munsters" — has been instrumental in the fight against AIDS.

"We have to look at the good and hope that the good will win out over evil," he stressed, noting none of us are without sin.

And even though Lucy Petraitis, a parishioner at Our Mother of Sorrows for 25 years, admitted that Father Faraone's hobby is different, she said she finds absolutely nothing wrong with it. "It's just an avocation of his," she stated.

She emphasized that it does not affect or interfere with his priestly duties.

Bob Fitzgibbon, who has been at Our

Continued on page 18

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however, Ball was unable to dine with Father Faraone and his friends. Instead, she invited them to a taping of an episode of "Life with Lucy."

After the taping, Father Faraone received his autographed picture of Ball, which he said has become the pride of his collection. "We had a really great experience that day," the priest remarked.

But if traveling around the country is not always possible, how does one collect celebrity autographs? Father Faraone said he has it down to a science.

"I go for characters that intrigue me," he mused. "Are they all religious in some way? No."

Although the priest had the opportunity to meet more than 30 of the celebrities whose photos decorate his walls — including singer Sting, dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov and actress Michele Lee — he had to write for 60 other signatures.

According to Father Faraone, the solicitation process starts with a request to one of his two friends who own photo shops — one in New York City and the other in Beverly Hills — for a photo of a specific star. Then the priest writes a personal letter, which affirms the celebrity's contribution to the entertainment world.

Although most of his requests have been fulfilled, Father Faraone has a list of about 40 stars who haven't replied. He noted that men respond more quickly than women, and the majority of outstanding requests are of female stars.

Some of the delinquent respondents are Bette Midler, Elizabeth Taylor and Mary Tyler Moore. Katherine Hepburn and Julie Andrews flatly refused. And although he