

Bishop Hogan recalls both burdens and joys

EDITORS' NOTE: This year marks Bishop Joseph L. Hogan's 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. Staff writer Lee Strong interviewed the retired bishop at his Victor home on May 15.

Here are excerpts from that interview:

Looking back at your childhood, what led you to become a priest?

Most vocations are born in a family environment, and we certainly had a fine one. No, pushing or anything like that, but just good example. You knew that if this was your choice — and it had to be your choice — the family would feel honored, but there was no pressure.

Also, I had the advantage of our parish school, St. Rose in Lima, and three wonderful sisters. The school at that time had eight grades of grammar school and one year of high school, and in all those years I had three teachers: Sister Lucinda, Sister Hermine, Sister Teresita.

Then, of course, the influence of the parish priest. I recall particularly, Father John Farrell. By the time I entered the seminary, also, the dear old man, Father Patrick Neville. He wrote the letter of recommendation (to the seminary).

It was a very simple letter — he was a very simple man. It said, "He's 6-foot-tall, and I think you'll like him."

One who proved to be later one of my teachers was a weekend helper in Lima, Father Henry Manley. He spoke to me seriously about entering the seminary.

So I guess all of those (were) influences.

You were known as a good student, and spent many years as a teacher.

I was always interested in teaching, but once I got sent to a parish — St. Mary's in Elmira — after I got that pastoral experience, I lost my interest in teaching, although I was selected to teach.

Indeed, you were involved in education from 1951-65 at St. Andrew's, Geneva DeSales High School and St.

Bernard's. Then you were named first rector of Becket Hall, which at that time was a college seminary program located at St. John Fisher College. How did you end up returning to parish ministry at St. Margaret Mary Parish in 1968?

I told Bishop Fulton J. Sheen (bishop of Rochester from 1966-69) that I would like a parish if anything opened. So he sent me to St. Margaret Mary's.

That was a wonderful experience. I loved it. I loved the variety of parish life, especially the administration to the sick and to the shut-ins.

But that only was for a year-and-a-half, then I was called to be bishop of the diocese.

Had you any inkling that Bishop Sheen was going to resign in 1969, and that you would be named his successor?

He made it clear that I was his own personal choice.

The first I knew of it was I got word he wanted to talk to me. I called him, so he told me.

I was stunned by the whole thing. That was the first time that I knew that he was actually leaving.

When you became bishop, what did you perceive as problem areas in the diocese?

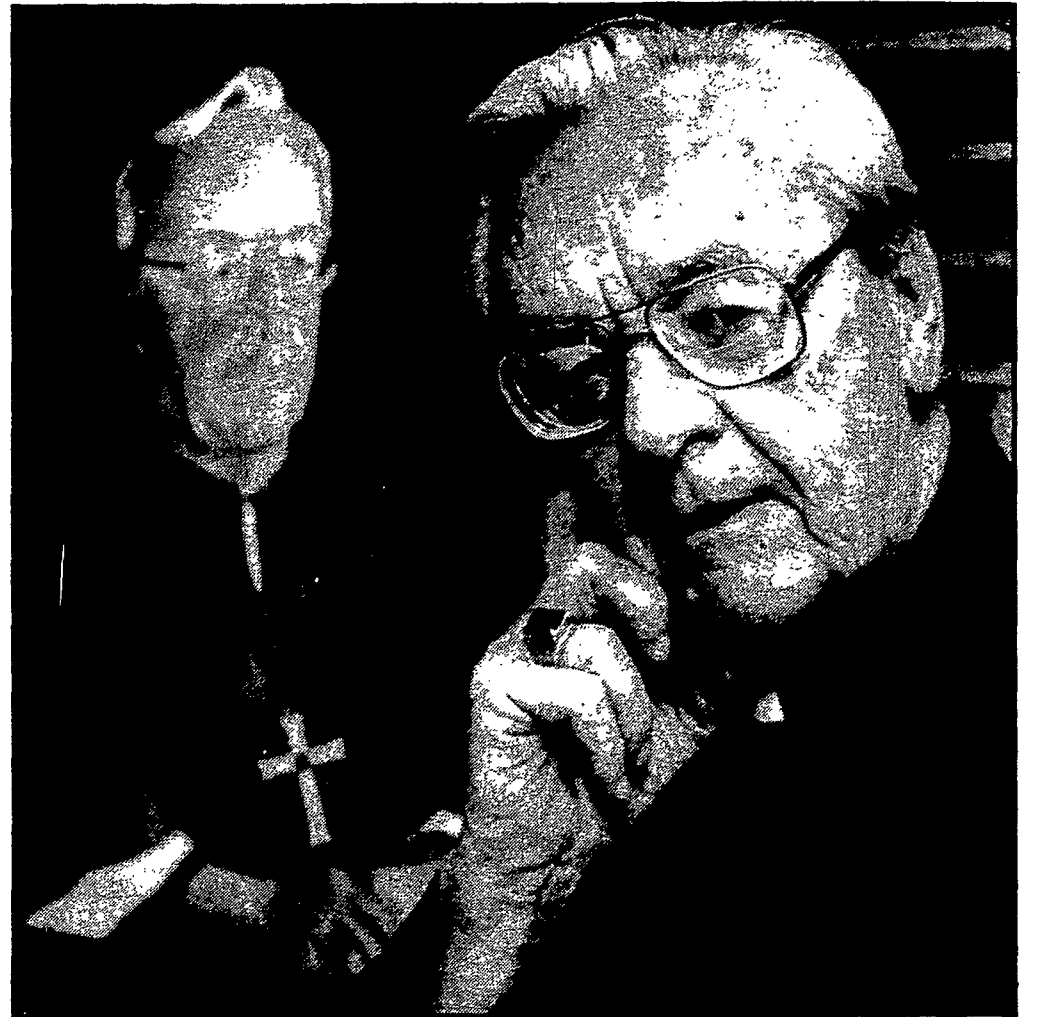
I knew first of all that the inner city was going to be a tremendous problem.

The church tried to maintain what the people needed — a good educational system. But I couldn't get the funds to support it. That was a great disappointment.

Probably my heaviest burden was the eventual decision that had to be made to close St. Bernard's Seminary.

I spent as student and teacher 16 years of my life there, so I had a lot of personal investment.

I knew the decision had to be made. What happened is that — as it happens to many of our schools today — we relied on people, personnel, faculty



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan relaxes in his Victor home May 28. On June 6, he will mark the the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

That was my hope, that I would be able to incarnate in the Diocese of Rochester the vision of church that had been given to me by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Lima native celebrates 50 years

Joseph L. Hogan was born March 11, 1916, in Lima, the son of Michael C. Hogan and Mary Shaw Hogan, both of whom are deceased. His brother is Father Michael Hogan, pastor of St. Mary, Our Lady of the Hills Parish in Honeoye.

After attending St. Rose School and Lima High School, he studied at St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries in Rochester. He was ordained to the priesthood June 6, 1942, at Sacred Heart Cathedral by then-Bishop of Rochester James E. Kearney.

His first assignment was as assistant pastor at St. Mary's, Elmira, from 1942-45. From 1945-49, he taught Latin and social studies at St. Andrew's Seminary. At the same time he was pursuing graduate studies at Canisius College in Buffalo, completing a master's degree in 1949.

After studies at Rome's Pontifical University from 1949-51, Father Hogan earned a doctorate in sacred theology in 1951. He then returned to St. Andrew's, where he taught until 1953. From 1953-55, he served as principal of DeSales High School

in Geneva, then joined the faculty at St. Bernard's Seminary from 1955-65.

In 1965, he was named first rector of Becket Hall, the diocesan college seminary at St. John Fisher College. He remained at Becket Hall until 1967. In 1966, he was also named a monsignor.

He returned to parish ministry in 1968, becoming the pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish in Irondequoit, where he remained until 1969. On Nov. 28 of that year, he was ordained and installed as the seventh bishop of Rochester.

On Nov. 28, 1978, Bishop Hogan resigned as Bishop of Rochester due to ill health.

He remained active after retirement, however, teaching a course in church history at St. John Fisher College for several years, and working with shut-ins through St. Mary's Church, Rochester, from 1979-82. Over the past 13 years, he also has shared confirmation duties with Bishops Matthew H. Clark and Dennis W. Hickey.

Since the early 1970s, Bishop Hogan has resided at the former convent of St. Patrick's Church, Victor

that were religious, diocesan. And as you know, the pay was minimum. We never built into it security for a day when we had to be giving people a just wage.

Beyond tensions that resulted from the school closings, you were involved in a number of controversies during your time as Rochester's bishop.

Probably the most public of those controversies was over women's ordination. The Vatican in 1977 came out with a statement opposing it, and you issued a response.

There came a time when the Episcopal Church was making that very divisive decision about the ordination of women, so I thought it was a timely topic to say that we're going to have to face it, too.

That was so unusual for a Roman Catholic bishop to make a statement on that.

How did the Vatican react to your statement?

Nothing was sent. I never got any statement from Rome — that seems to be a much more recent trend. I never had any warnings from Rome on anything that I had done.

One of the things you received national attention for was your 1975 pastoral letter, "You Are Living Stones." What motivated you to write the letter?

Encouragement, particularly by the staff and the personnel at the (pastoral) office, to put into writing in one document my vision of church.

That proved to be a very successful document. It made national headlines. I began getting letters from people

from far away places, thanking me for the document saying that they were using it as a teaching tool about what church should be about.

I think (people) really felt that (Rochester) sounded like a diocese that was alive, where the decrees of the Second Vatican Council are being implemented. That was my hope, that I would be able to incarnate in the Diocese of Rochester the vision of church that had been given to me by the fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

Most of the things that I called for are a reality today, some not as advanced as they should be, but nevertheless, underway.

You served as bishop for only nine years, then resigned suddenly in 1978 to the shock of many people.

Doctors said there was evidence that the pressures of office were beginning to show. They encouraged me (to resign).

The decision I made, I've never had any doubt about it. Never regretted it, and health wise, it's been a great help. I've been busy for the 13 years that I've been out of office.

In looking back in your career as priest and bishop, what memory has most touched you over those 50 years.

I have fond memories of every place that I've been and the people who have supported me along the way.

My greatest joy as bishop was the ordination of priests.

They were generally celebrations where the candidate chose the parish where he had done his internship and it became a special one-on-one celebration. Those to me were great moments of great joy.