

DIOCESAN NEWS

Ailing priest in Corning recognized by Rotarians

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Last week, the Rotary Club of Corning honored Father Thomas F. Brennan for his many works in the community.

Yet no task has required more effort from Father Brennan than the one that's faced him in recent months.

The 91-year-old priest has been terminally ill since last fall, when he was diagnosed with colon cancer. He was not expected to survive into 1996 — yet was still greeting visitors with smiles and kind words last week.

Those guests have been abundant, according to Deacon Raymond Defendorf, pastoral associate in the Corning-Painted Post Roman Catholic Community. Deacon Defendorf said that parishioners have taken turns spending time with Father Brennan by reading to him, praying with him, or just simply chatting.

Parishioner Jim Rossettie estimates that nearly 100 people have assisted Father Brennan over the past several months, with at least one person present "every second." The retired priest resides at St. Mary's Church, one of four cluster churches.

Rossettie — whose family has been close friends with Father Brennan for several years — said the priest consistently returns the well-meaning actions of his guests.

"You get a blessing, and away you go," Rossettie remarked.

Rossettie added that Father Brennan's longevity can be attributed to his spiritual strength.

"He has a terrific interior spirit; a perfect faith," Rossettie commented.

Father William V. Spilly, the former cluster pastor, has returned several times to visit Father Brennan since moving to Rochester in late June to become pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church on Humboldt Street. Despite the cancer's deteriorating effect on the rest of Father Brennan's body, Father Spilly remarked that his friend has "one of the strongest hearts I've ever seen."

Father Brennan has been largely confined to his room as his cancer has worsened. He decided to forgo chemotherapy in early December, and is currently under hospice care.

This year the Corning Rotarians recognized Father Brennan as recipient of the Paul Harris Fellow Award. This is the



highest honor bestowed by individual Rotary clubs.

John and Betty Wahlig, parishioners at St. Mary's for more than 30 years, had high praise

for Father Brennan in their nominating letter for the Rotary award.

"His humility has hidden years and years of kindnesses to others, Catholic and non-Catholic, that no one but he will ever even know," the letter said. "(We) love this man for the human being he is, for the example he has set for (our) children, for the kindnesses he has shown others, for the inner goodness he radiates even as he lies ill, for the energy he has given to everything he participates in."

Deacon Defendorf, president of the Corning Rotary, and Father Michael Conboy, pastor of the Corning-Painted Post cluster, accepted the award on Father Brennan's behalf during a Rotary meeting July 11. Father Conboy later took the award to Father Brennan.

During a visit last weekend, Deacon Defendorf recalled that Father Brennan greeted him with a big smile, saying, "I'm just very pleased; would you please thank everyone at the Rotary for me?"

Father Brennan is the oldest living diocesan priest. He became the pastor at St. Mary's in 1953, a position in which he served until his 1975 retirement. He has continued to reside at St. Mary's ever since.

Though he had been almost completely bedridden for months, Father Brennan was in attendance for a special liturgy at St. Mary's on June 8. The Mass honored both Father Brennan's 65th anniversary in the priesthood and the ordination of Father Douglas Della Pietra, a former transitional deacon in the Corning-Painted Post cluster who was ordained a priest June 1. Father Brennan gave blessings from his wheelchair for Father Della Pietra and for the rest of the gathering.

"The congregation gave him a standing ovation of at least five minutes," Rossettie recalled.

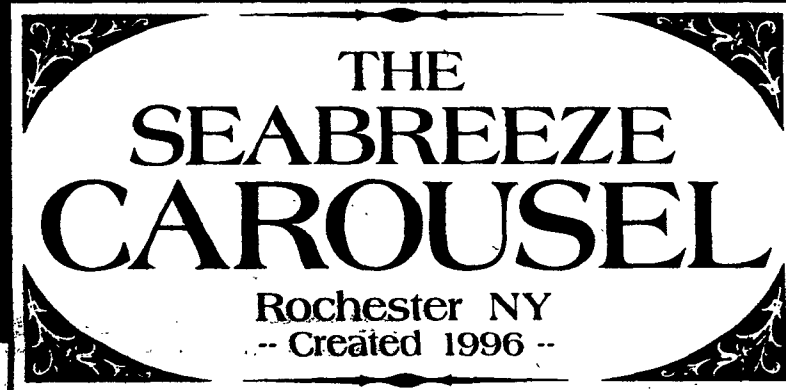
"It's a remarkable outpouring of love for a man who has been an icon in this community for years," Deacon Defendorf remarked.



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Centennial celebration

In honor of its 100th anniversary, St. Felix Church of Clifton Springs celebrated an outdoor Mass July 14 in the Village Park Pavilion. Father Edward Dillon (above) offers Communion to Jean Landschoot, who was dressed in period clothing to commemorate Clifton Springs' first Sulphur Springs Festival. The July 10-14 festival, which Landschoot said she organized, marked the 100th anniversary of the Clifton Springs Sanitarium & Clinic. The facilities drew visitors for decades.



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Obituary

Sister MacCarthy; longtime theology professor

Sister Mary Lourdes MacCarthy, SSJ, a theology professor for 25 years at Nazareth College of Rochester, died July 2, 1996, at Park Ridge Hospital in Greece. She was 89.

Sister Mary Lourdes taught at Nazareth College from 1958 to 1983, and was awarded the title of professor emerita in 1983. She continued to assist at the college by tutoring Cambodian students in English.

Prior to her arrival at Nazareth College, Sister Mary Lourdes taught at the following diocesan schools: St. Patrick's Cathedral in Rochester (1926-37); Nazareth Academy in Rochester (1937-46); De Sales Institute in Geneva (1946-48); and Elmira Catholic High School (1948-55).

Sister Mary Lourdes was a native of Elmira and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1923. She earned her bachelor's degree from Nazareth College; her master's degree from St. Bonaventure University; and a doctorate in sacred science from the University of Notre Dame.

Upon her 70th anniversary as a Sister

of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Lourdes shared the following reflections in an article she wrote for the congregation's newsletter in 1995:

"The past 70 years have been years of significant change — in the church, in the congregation (of the Sisters of St. Joseph) and in myself," Sister Mary Lourdes stated.

"I have been witness to a congregation well-directed, extremely prayerful, confident in its mission, successful in its enterprises, totally dedicated to God in the classroom and the hospital, and respected in a most unusual way by those it served. In these later years, the face of the congregation has changed. Let us not stop changing!"

The funeral Mass for Sister Mary Lourdes was celebrated July 6 at the congregation's motherhouse. Msgr. William Shannon presided, and Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, served as homilist.

Sister Mary Lourdes is survived by nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, and her sisters in the congregation of St. Joseph.

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