

## CONTINUED...

## Priests

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continued to be involved with community service organizations. He is currently a member of the Lions Club in Owego, and also belonged to the Rotary Club while stationed at St. Anne's Church in Palmyra in the early 1980s.

"My feet have to be in a community of human beings," he emphasized.

Another advocate of Rotary involvement is Father Robert G. Smith, chaplain of the Butler Correctional Facility in Red Creek. Father Smith has been a Rotarian in nearby Wolcott during the 10 years he has served in the Wayne and Cayuga County area.

Rotary groups, Father Smith noted, "give you immediate contact with the leaders of the community. You almost automatically know people in a short period of time."

In the 1970s, Father Smith also served in a community role not normally reserved for priests. While pastor of St. Januarius Church in Naples, he served a five-year term on the village's school board — and was even its president for one year.

Father Smith said that such roles are not uncommon for priests in small communities. On the other hand, his workload ruled out community service while he was pastor of St. Margaret Mary Church in Irondequoit in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

"That was a 2,000-family parish," he explained.

Father James F. Doyle is another active volunteer in a small-town environment. He has been involved with the Lima Fire Department all 27 years of his pastorate at St. Rose Church in Lima, and was also chaplain of the Rochester Fire Department for six years.

"Some people enjoy golf, and some enjoy reading. But I enjoy this," he remarked.

Father Doyle is on the scene of as many as 10 emergency calls per month. As a member of the Fire Police, he maintains traffic and crowd control at the scene of accidents in both Lima and nearby Honeoye Falls. His role is so vital, he remarked, that he has occasionally postponed weekday Mass in order to respond to emergencies.

"In a bigger community, you've got paid people who handle these things," Father Doyle said. "In a small community, there is a greater dependence upon one another."

On the other hand, suburban priests such as Father John J. Steger are adamant about volunteer work as well. Father Ste-

ger, pastor of St. Jude's Church in Gates, has been an active member of the Gates-Chili Fire Department since 1964.

Father Steger is also an elected fire commissioner in the town of Gates. He serves as chaplain for the New York State Association of Fire District Commissioners, and is a charter member and past president of the state Association of Fire Chaplains.

In addition, Father Steger has been chaplain of the Rochester Bowling Association since 1956. He also established an apartment complex for senior citizens which opened across the street from St. Jude's in 1995.

Father Steger stated that his commitment to community service is a natural extension of parish duty.

"The parish is a part of the community. Most assuredly, I want to support the community in which I live and reach out to the other things that are happening," Father Steger said.

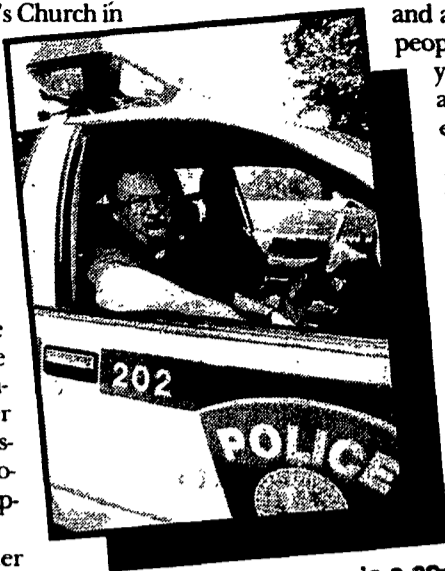
Priests based in urban environments, also, find ways to reach out to the community. For instance, Father Patrick L. Connor, pastor of Elmira's Eastside Catholic Parish, spends a few evenings each week riding in a Elmira Police Department patrol car.

Father Connor remarked that officers frequently pick him up at his residence, prompting neighborhood children to "wonder if I'm under arrest."

Though most excursions are fairly calm, Father Connor notes that the potential for danger is always around the corner. He was once involved in a high-speed chase, and has also served as mediator during such tense situations as domestic disputes.

Father Connor — who is in his third year as co-chaplain of the police department — said that patrol duty helps him better understand the emotions of the population he serves.

"It's an educational thing," he said. "It sensitizes you as to what might be going on in your parish. It gives me a better appreciation of the problems in the community,



Father Patrick L. Connor is a co-chaplain of the Elmira Police Department.

and a better sensitivity of the people. In domestic disputes, you kind of see that raw anger and it's just a real eye-opener."

Father William B. Leone, pastor of the Northern Cayuga Cluster, takes his community service beyond diocesan borders. For the past 16 years, he has served as diocesan chaplain for the U.S. Army National Guard.

Last month, Father Leone took part in his annual two-week training duty at Fort Drum, N.Y. He also performs monthly drills with the 108th Infantry in Auburn. The priest noted that in the

event of war, he would be required to travel with his battalion if it were mobilized.

Because he was not drafted during the Vietnam War, Father Leone said, he feels an obligation to serve in some other military capacity.

"I was deferred because I was in school," he explained. "I had some friends who were pretty badly injured over there. I always felt that I owed the country some service."

Father Leone acknowledged that he has formed good friendships with military personnel of many faith backgrounds.

"A high percentage of the people do not have any religious affiliation. This is an opportunity for them to have some contact with the church and religion," Father Leone said. "I find it a continuation of my parish work."

Working with non-Catholics was common for Father Smith, also, during his days in Naples. At that time, he estimated, the village population was only about 10 percent Catholic.

"I think I was the first Catholic ever on the school board," he said. He added that his appointment to the board reflected a wave of local ecumenical efforts during that period.

Father Benedict A. Ehmman was also responding to a wave of involvement when he became active in the community. But in his case, that activism extended to social justice causes.

As a young priest in the 1930s, he arranged to have famed Catholic activist

Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, give two lectures in downtown Rochester. Father Ehmman also promoted community forums on Depression-era topics.

"Many times I would give talks, and there would be discussions on social matters. There would also be talks on the Bible," recalled Father Ehmman, who now resides at Holy Apostles Church in Rochester.

Father Ehmman's other civic efforts included his founding of the former Catholic Evidence Library in downtown Rochester. The library provided Catholic reading during an era when few Catholic books could be found in public libraries. Father Ehmman also helped establish Rochester-based shelters for the poor such as St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker house that is celebrating its 55th anniversary this year.

Another priest with a focus on the impoverished was Father Kreckel, who served at Rochester's Immaculate Conception Church from 1960 to 1973. Father Kreckel belonged to several civic organizations addressing the plight of inner-city residents, and he was also moderator of the Catholic Interracial Council.

Father Kreckel said that in his dual role as activist and priest, he understood African-Americans from both a social-action and a pastoral point of view.

"I knew that black people hurt and grieve and rejoice the same as we all do," Father Kreckel commented.

The list of priests, and the range of their volunteer activities, is undoubtedly vast. However, in light of the growing priest shortage, will priests continue to be able to block out the time for community involvement?

"I think it's going to dwindle a bit," Father Weis predicted. "The commitment requires a great deal of time."

"Some of my school board meetings would last until 1 in the morning," Father Smith recalled. "You've only got so much time in a day."

Yet Father Smith said it's important for priests to stay in touch with the community at large, if at all possible.

"You've got to be seen," he said.

Father Ehmman agrees that if time can be made available, both the priest and his community should maintain a close relationship.

"It's not very complicated at all," Father Ehmman said. "As long as he can do his main job well, he should be free to take on other matters — especially if it's linked with his parish."

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