



Catholic Courier

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A brush with fame

Celebrity bishop arrived 30 years ago

By Associate Editor Lee Strong

The Nov. 11, 1966, edition of the *Catholic Courier Journal* — an earlier manifestation of the *Catholic Courier* — contains an unsigned piece entitled, "Why 'Microscopic' Rochester?"

The piece commented on two articles by New York City journalists. Those journalists were puzzled by the news that Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, an internationally known writer, speaker, and radio and television personality, had been named by Pope Paul VI to succeed Bishop James E. Kearney as bishop of Rochester. (Bishop Sheen would become an archbishop in 1969.)

According to the piece, *World Journal Tribune* writer Paul Hoffman referred to Rochester as "microscopic." And Hoffman suggested that the staff at the Propagation of the Faith in New York, of which Bishop Sheen was the director, were walking around with "faces that seemed to be mutely asking, 'Why? Why Rochester?'"

Whatever the reason, the pundits of the world beyond the diocese were not alone in being stunned by the news that Bishop Sheen would be officially installed as Rochester's bishop Dec. 15, 1966 — 30 years ago this week.

"Why is he coming to Rochester?" retired Auxiliary Bishop Dennis Hickey recalled thinking.



Part I of a series examining Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's lasting impact on the Diocese of Rochester. Next: his efforts to implement Vatican II reforms.

"It was such a surprise," noted the bishop, who at the time of the news was a monsignor and pastor of St. Theodore's Church, Gates, but who would soon become Bishop Sheen's vicar general. "That we were going to get a new bishop, no surprise, but when we heard he was coming, we all asked, 'Why Rochester?'"

"When it was announced, it certainly was a surprise to the diocese," recalled Msgr. George Cocuzzi, then-chancellor of the diocese, in a telephone interview from St. Raymond Rectory, Bronx, where he lives.

Msgr. Cocuzzi said people had been speculating who might succeed Bishop Kearney after the 81-year-old submitted his resignation to Pope Paul VI in accordance with a recent decree. The decree required bishops who headed dioceses to submit their resignations once they reached their 75th birthdays.

"Any expectations of who it might be were certainly confounded," the monsignor said. "Certainly no one expected a national figure to be appointed to the diocese."

Yet Rochester, which Bishop Hickey described as, at that time, "an average diocese kind of tucked away in upstate New York," was to be the on-

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File photos

Bishop Sheen listens (above left) during his Dec. 15, 1966, installation at Sacred Heart Cathedral. Above, Bishop Sheen takes time to meet some members of an enthusiastic crowd that greeted him upon his arrival at Rochester's airport Dec. 14, the day before the installation ceremonies. At left, Rochester's sixth bishop distributes Communion during his installation Mass.

Fund aids bishop's legacy

Allyn Smith is convinced that the *Catholic Courier*/Catholic Charities Christmas Appeal helped to save a life.

"We had a woman who had a stroke who got placed in a nursing home because (her home) had no indoor plumbing," recalled Smith, executive director of the Bishop Sheen Ecumenical Housing Foundation, Inc.

The woman would have died, she predicted, if kept from returning to her own home.

But the housing foundation used Christmas Appeal monies to help begin work on the

woman's home and to obtain additional funding to finish the work. As a result, the woman was able to return home, and is now being helped by neighbors.

"It gave her her home back," Smith said. "She can live a healthy life because she is home."

The housing foundation is one of the agencies that share Christmas Appeal funds. For the past 27 years, appeal funds have been used to help people when other emergency aid was not available, or when people have had to wait

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