

FEATURE

Priest enjoyed everyday duty



Father John J. Philipps hasn't exactly hopped from job to job during his 44 years as a priest. He has logged only five assignments during that time, all in parish duty.

"I've enjoyed that. Just the ordinary, everyday parish work," said Father Philipps, 70, who is scheduled to retire this June from St. Bridget/St. Joseph Parish in East Bloomfield, Ontario County.

Father Philipps was born Jan. 21, 1929. He grew up in Rochester's Immaculate Conception Parish and attended St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries. He was ordained June 4, 1955, by Bishop James E. Kearney.

He served as assisting priest at St. Michael's Rochester, from 1955 to 1958, and then assisted at Blessed Sacrament, Rochester (1958-66) and St. Louis, Pittsford (1966-73).

Father Philipps' first pastorate, at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Brockport, lasted from 1973 to 1987. He has also logged a lengthy tenure at St. Bridget's/St. Joseph, where he has been pastor since 1987. (The parish has operated out of a single church building, St. Bridget, since the closing of St. Joseph in 1990.)

Father Philipps noted that while both his pastorates have been located in somewhat rural settings, Brockport was "a little livelier" because it was located in a college town. When this reporter noted that he had attended college at SUNY Brockport in the late 1970s, Father Philipps cracked, "Were you one of those kids who kept me up all night?"

Father Philipps is completing his second two-year term on the diocesan Priests' Council. He is also a former board member of the *Catholic Courier* as well as Finger Lakes Social Ministry. In addition, he is a former diocesan regional coordinator for the Southeast and Yates-Ontario-Wayne regions.

A retirement celebration for Father Philipps is scheduled to take place Sunday, June 27, after the 11 a.m. Mass at St. Bridget/St. Joseph. Rather than head off to a banquet hall, well-wishers will party at a picnic — right on parish grounds.

"We figure we can get the kids in easier that way," Father Philipps explained.

Father Philipps' devotion to children has also been reflected in his promotion of children's liturgies over the years.

"Working with little kids — they're always enjoyable, so open and free," Father Philipps said.

In retirement, Father Philipps plans to move to St. John of Rochester Church in Perinton, where he intends to assist by conducting Masses and making home visitations.

"I'm looking forward to being, hopefully, useful in the church of Rochester for at least a few more years," Father Philipps said.

He is also anticipating the chance to take "a college course or two" in either literature or music. In addition, he said, "Nothing specific, but I do hope to do a little travel."

As he looks back upon his career as a diocesan priest, Father Philipps said he is grateful to have served during, and after, the Second Vatican Council.

"It's a different church now, and it's going to be different yet," Father Philipps said. "It's been exciting to see the church change in the late 1960s and early 1970s — maybe not growing in numbers, but growing spiritually."

— Mike Latona

Pastor grateful he 'gave it a try'

Life was flowing along nicely for Father Raymond Booth some 50 years ago. He had a steady girlfriend. He was a student at Villanova University.

Then on a retreat in his sophomore year, he mentioned to one of the retreat staff that he had thought of becoming a priest, but had put the thought aside. The staff member suggested he try the seminary anyway.

"You probably won't know if it's for you unless you try it," the priest reported the staff member as saying.

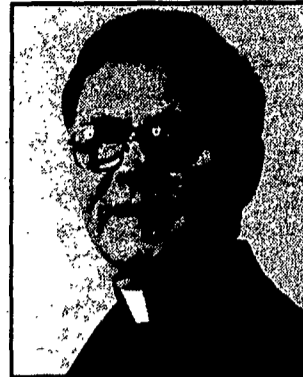
Father Booth did — and has never regretted the decision.

"I really have been happy in every aspect of my ministry," he declared.

That ministry will enter a new phase this June when Father Booth retires from active priestly ministry. He will move from St. Paul's Church, Webster — where he has been pastor since 1988 — to St. Louis Church, Pittsford. At St. Louis, he will help with Masses, hospital calls, visiting the sick, and other tasks as needed. But he will also have time for reading, golf and travel.

"I've never been to the Grand Canyon," he reflected. "That's one of the things I promised myself I'd do."

The Rochester native — who will mark his 70th birthday May 27 — noted that he's been blessed in that his 42 years of priest-



hood have been spent entirely in parish ministry. "I really think that's the only place to be, as far as I'm concerned," he noted.

After his June 8, 1957, ordination, he served as assistant pastor at St. Mary's of the Lake, Ontario (1957-60), St. Joseph's, Penfield (1960-66) and Holy Family, Rochester (1966-70). He was co-pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (1970-75), then pastor of St. Christopher's, Chili (1975-88) before beginning his tenure at St. Paul's.

But whether the parish has been small town, city or suburban, Father Booth acknowledged one constant.

"I really have been very happy in every parish where I've been," he declared. "I've learned something in every one."

One of the joys, he said, is interacting with the parishioners one-on-one.

"I think one of the wonderful things about ministry — and the priesthood in general — is the acceptance of people," he said.

"The parish is where you are a part of the lives of the people."

A parish priest, he explained, is with people in the joyful moments — such as marriages and baptisms — and the less joyful ones.

"You do the first-line counseling with people," he explained. "You do the first contact with people, often through the times when they are most needful."

His own parish ministry has included lighter moments. At St. Paul's, for example, parishioners hold an annual fundraising golf tournament — the Ray Booth Golf Classic (it will be held May 16 this year).

"They give me a hard time, not because I am a great golfer, but because I love the game," he observed.

Although he will miss his parishioners, Father Booth acknowledged some aspects of being a pastor he won't miss.

He noted, for example, that in recent months as he's faced such problems as leaking roofs and a breakdown in the heating system, he kept thinking: "Another reason to retire."

But even as he leaves active ministry, Father Booth had advice for anyone who has considered the priesthood.

"I would recommend it highly for any person thinking of it to give it a try," he said.

— Lee Strong

Retiring pastor put heart into ministry

For Father James Doyle, being a priest has always been a matter of the heart.

"A lawyer or a doctor helps people," he said, "but a priest reaches into the heart, reaches into the soul."

Father Doyle has been touching people's souls as a priest since he was ordained by Bishop James E. Kearney on June 11, 1949, at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester. A little more than 50 years later, on June 29 of this year, Father Doyle will retire from his pastorate at St. Rose of Lima Church in Lima, a position he has held for 30 years.

The parish will mark his retirement at the 11:15 a.m. Mass on Sunday, June 6. The liturgy will be followed by a reception. Later that day, the parish will also fete him with a dinner at the Lima Country Club, he said.

Unfortunately, the priest doesn't know what the future holds since he recently underwent surgery for a spinal condition. Currently in recovery, and living with family members in Chili, the priest said the surgery may affect his ability to walk. Nonetheless, the priest said he will continue to minister no matter what the outcome.

"I'll continue to do work in any parish I am asked to go to," Father Doyle said.

Born in 1925, Father Doyle grew up attending Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Rochester, and went to the parish school.



He noted the experience shaped his desire to become a priest.

"I was inspired by the sisters and the nuns in Catholic school," he said. "That was always my goal in life — to become a priest."

In addition to serving at St. Rose Church, Father Doyle also worked at a number of other parishes, beginning in 1949 at St. Mary of the Lake Church, Watkins Glen. He subsequently was assigned to Holy Trinity Church, Webster, in 1951; then to Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Brockport, 1951-57; Holy Rosary, Rochester, 1957-62; Holy Redeemer Church, Rochester, 1962-65; and St. Ambrose Church, Rochester, 1965-69.

When he came to St. Rose in 1969, he said the church and its grounds were in a state of disrepair, and he made it his goal to fix the parish up.

"All the properties here now are in good physical condition," he said, noting, for example, that the parish spent \$400,000 to renovate the church ceiling.

He added that the parish cemetery "is one of the finest and most well-kept cemeteries in the diocese."

But Father Doyle is just as proud of his work with the people at St. Rose as he is with overseeing the rehabilitation of its property. In particular, he enjoyed working with the parish's young people, he said.

"You teach them by what you say and by what you do," he said. "So often, living in a materialistic world, the goal is money or rank. But there are young people today who have bigger goals."

He added that he also tried to set a Christian example for his fellow citizens of Lima, whom he served as a fire department chaplain.

"I enjoyed working with other people in the community, people who were not of my faith," he said. "At least my presence among them was an opportunity for them to learn about the Catholic Church."

As for his own faith community, Father Doyle said he delighted in serving them as well, especially as their sacramental minister for their marriages, baptisms, Masses and confessions.

"That was very, very rewarding, to be able to bring them God's gifts and reach into their hearts, and make them into happy Catholic hearts," he said.

— Rob Cullivan

Father Metzger looks back on 'satisfying' career

As a young priest, Father Edwin Metzger had a dream of serving in Africa. That dream was put on hold for 33 years as he engaged in parish and seminary ministries.

But from 1988-98 he lived that dream as a Maryknoll associate priest in Kenya.

"It was very, very satisfying," the 69-year-old priest said in his typical low-key way.

Father Metzger is now ready to venture off into new territory: retirement.

"To keep meeting people in the Eucharist — I have no plans except to do that somewhere in the Diocese of Rochester," the Rochester native said.

The Eucharist was one of things that led him to become a priest in the first place.

"I just enjoyed the remarkable power of bringing people together in church and inspiring them and giving color to their lives and excitement to their lives," he said.

Ordained June 4, 1955, by Bishop James E. Kearney, Father Metzger first shared this "remarkable power" with the people of St. Mary's Parish, Auburn, as assistant pastor (1955-57), then at Christ the King Parish, Irondequoit (1957-63) and St. Anne Parish, Rochester (1963-68).

During those years, he followed activities at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

"As the church began to develop, I certainly embraced everything enthusiastically," he said. "I was excited about everything that was happening."

In 1968, Father Metzger became the director of field education at St. Bernard's Seminary. He remained there until 1975, when he became pastor of Holy Redeemer Church. In 1980, he became pastor of St. Francis de Sales Parish, Geneva.

During his years at St. Francis, he came

across some literature from the Missionaries of Africa, and his old desire resurfaced. He eventually hooked up with Maryknoll, which offered an associate priest program.

He found the Kenyans full of spirit and faith. When his Kenyan sojourn ended in 1998, he became an assisting priest at the Southern Cayuga Catholic Community.

"What it turned out to be was a perfect reentry to the U.S. because the people were so hospitable," he observed. "I would compare them to Kenyans."

Now that retirement is upon him, Father Metzger is looking forward to time to travel to visit family. He also looks back at his years of priestly ministry with satisfaction.

"People speak of loneliness," he reflected. "I've never experienced a deep loneliness. I've enjoyed being with people."

— Lee Strong