

FEATURE

Being a priest a 'pretty big deal'

Father Conrad Sundholm, 69, was born in Jamestown, and was raised in Holcomb and Rochester.

A priest with several hobbies, including computers, music and raising birds (40 at one time) and dogs, he said he now intends to pursue another: "sunshine." He plans to retire to Spring Hill, Fla., and continue his ministry in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

His home parish was St. Salome's, Rochester.

"The faith was very strong in our home," he said. He was born about the time the stock market crashed and the Depression ensued, he noted. His father, a glazier who had been in business with his own father, became unemployed for about six years.

"We said a big novena to St. Joseph in March of 1936," he said. "He got a job, so we have been forever grateful to St. Joseph. We moved to Rochester and he worked the rest of his life for Eastman Kodak, and my mother was a school-teacher."

"The family was close and depended very much upon God. I always thought about being a priest," he said.

"When I was in eighth grade — Bill Shannon and I lived about two doors away from each other — and Msgr. Shannon was ordained. I thought jeez that's a pretty big deal. That's when I decided to do it."



He was ordained June 4, 1955, by Bishop James E. Kearney, Msgr. Shannon preached at his first Mass at St. Salome's, he added.

"That's one thing we lack now, you were attracted by other young guys your age going into the priesthood," he said, mentioning several other friends who became priests.

Father Sundholm's first assignment was assisting at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rochester (1955-60).

He also assisted Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence Casey at Sacred Heart Cathedral (1960-65), and assisted at St. Mary's, Auburn (1965-71), and at St. Cecilia's (1971-73). His first pastorate was at St. Salome's (1973-82) and his second, at Holy Family (1982-99).

He also was pastor of St. Aloysius from 1982 until its closing in June 1995.

"There are two things I think I do fairly well," he said. "Preaching — I have a nice loud voice. My mother always said, 'My son could work miracles, he could

make the deaf hear.' And I've always done well with business management."

Father Sundholm oversaw the renovation of St. Salome's sanctuary and the interior of Holy Family while serving those parishes. The St. Salome's work came about rather unexpectedly, he recalled. One thing led to another.

One morning he awoke to the news from a janitor at St. Salome's, who said, "They stole Jesus."

The tabernacle had been stolen overnight. It would be found three years later in a dumpster in Rochester, he said. But at the time of the theft, television coverage created much sympathy.

"People were sending me money," he said.

Explaining that the church had been built modestly, he said he decided to have a new altar built. He matched it, as well as the lectern and tabernacle pedestal, with the church's red brick walls.

"Every cloud has a silver lining," he commented.

More literally, the skies over his retirement home will contain fewer clouds, however. He will move with his brother, Jeremiah, to a house they have bought north of Tampa. He doesn't anticipate returning to the area, he said.

"I throw out an anchor and I stay there."

— Kathleen Schwarz

Pioneer marks seventh decade

Father Benedict Ehmman is the dean of the 1999 jubilarians — both in terms of age and years of service. The 94-year-old is marking 70 years as a priest.

His career is marked by the prominent role he played in the liturgical reform movement that preceded the Second Vatican Council, his helping in bringing the Catholic Worker movement to Rochester, and the influence he had on generations of priests as a professor of church music at Rochester's seminaries.

The Rochester native was ordained June 6, 1929, at St. Patrick's Cathedral by Bishop John O'Hern. He was immediately assigned to St. Andrew's Seminary, where he taught English and church music. In 1938, he became the director of music and liturgy at St. Bernard's Seminary. Along the way, he studied at the Pius X School of Liturgical Music in New York City.

Father Ehmman was actively involved with the Liturgical Conference, an association begun in 1940 to promote greater understanding of the liturgy and greater involvement of the laity in it.

"Way back in the earliest days, the Mass was celebrated quite formally," Father Ehmman recalled. "In fact, there was not much attempt to get the people involved, even just responding to the prayers. That was one of the big things I wanted, to get the people answering."

Many of the changes the group proposed — especially the active involvement of the laity — became part of the reform of the liturgy and the church promulgated by the Second Vatican Council.

Even before the council, however, Father Ehmman had begun to implement his ideas when possible. In 1947, he became pastor of St. Mary's of the Lake, Watkins Glen, and in 1961 of St. Michael's, Rochester.

As ideas poured out of the council, he began implementing the changes. "They were always accepting of what I was trying to do," he said of the people in the parishes. "I didn't push them or rush things quickly."

Among the innovations he introduced was providing a homily for weekday Masses — something not regularly done in the preconciliar days — including a procession at the beginning of Mass, facing the people as much as possible and using English when possible.

Father Ehmman was also responsible for helping to encourage another kind of lay involvement. He attended a summer school session of Catholic Action — which encouraged lay social activism — in New York City in 1933, and met Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. Back in Rochester, he encouraged the Catholic Women's Club to invite Day to speak in Rochester. At the time, he was also meeting with a group of local lay people to study the social encyclicals of the church. He encouraged them to hear Day when she came. After the talk, they began to serve food to the poor. In 1941, they opened St. Joseph's House of Hospitality on South Avenue.

"I'm very happy to say that still exists on South Avenue," Father Ehmman said.

Father Ehmman retired in 1974 and moved to Holy Apostles Church, where he remained actively involved in the parish's liturgical life for many years. He moved to the St. Joseph's Convent Infirmary in 1997.

Father Ehmman still keeps up with developments in the church.

"One of the very nice things that's happened in recent years was the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church," he declared, pointing to a copy on his bookcase. "That's beautifully written — just a marvelous book."

— Lee Strong

Duo celebrates 65 years of priestly ministry

The Diocese of Rochester has two priests celebrating 65 years of priestly ordination in 1999.



Msgr. Joseph A. Cirrincione has long been identified with the Rosary for Peace, marking its 49th year.

But the priest has an even longer affiliation. He was assigned to St. Francis of Assisi Parish in 1934 after his June 10 ordination by Bishop (later Cardinal) Edward Mooney, and remains there to this day.

"I never asked for any change," the 89-year-old priest declared with a chuckle.

But while he did not seek change for himself, he did transform the parish in which he served as assistant pastor (1934-35), administrator (1935-37) and pastor (1937-77).

Under Msgr. Cirrincione, the parish purchased a number of properties in and around the church to house programs, and to provide a rectory and a convent. Parishioners even built the parish hall — a task undertaken at the Depression's end in 1940.

"We asked for members who had skills in

masonry, carpentry, and lo and behold, we got experts to do the construction," he said. The building was completed in 1941.

The building had become necessary because of the success of the parish's religious education program under the monsignor — who taught the children himself, and continued to teach until his retirement.

"I was sent here by (Bishop) Mooney," he explained. "He told me to catechize."

Of course, his parish and catechetical duties came on top of the activity for which the monsignor is best known: the Family Rosary for Peace. He made a pilgrimage to Fatima in 1948, offered a series of talks about Fatima on WSAY radio and in 1950, arranged to broadcast the rosary nightly.

Msgr. Cirrincione led the rosary program for the next 40 years. Along the way, he was named a monsignor (June 24, 1966). He retired from active parish ministry in 1977 to live in the former parish convent, where he still resides.

In 1990, a heart attack forced him to cease live broadcasts — taped programs were briefly substituted. Then for several years, the program was broadcast live from the Sisters of St. Joseph, but when they could no longer lead it, he provided taped programs. Those taped programs are still

carried nightly in Rochester on WWVG and in Buffalo on WXRL. He also offers them for sale so that people can pray along with them whenever it is convenient.

The monsignor said that the tapes mean his devotion to the rosary will continue for a long time to come.

"It ensures that we're alive even after I die," he concluded.



Father Gerald G. Kelly spent much of his priestly ministry involved with the military.

The 90-year-old Bergen native was a chaplain in the U.S. Navy from 1943-46, then was chaplain at the Veterans Medical Center in Canandaigua from 1948 until he retired in 1973.

Father Kelly was ordained by Bishop Mooney June 9, 1934, at St. Patrick's Cathedral. He served as assistant pastor at Immaculate Conception Church, Ithaca, (1934-38), and Our Lady of Good Counsel, Rochester, (1938-43), before enlisting. After returning from the service as a first lieutenant, he served as assistant pastor at Holy Apostles Church, Rochester, (1946-48) before assuming his duties at the Canandaigua Medical Center. He also helped at St. Mary's Church, Canandaigua, and St. Catherine's Church, Mendon.

After retiring, Father Kelly remained in Canandaigua, helping local parishes. He also played golf and traveled with friends.

Father Kelly began to spend more time in Florida each year, and when his health declined, moved there. He suffered a stroke in January 1997, and a second in January 1998. He moved to the Noreen McKeen Nursing Home in West Palm Beach in October 1998.

— Lee Strong

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