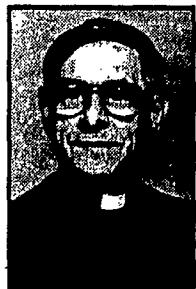


## FEATURE

## Two still on the go after 55 years



**Father Gennaro "Ace" Ventura, 80**, born in Rochester, grew up at Holy Apostles Church. He has been retired since 1989.

"(To) all the guys who say, 'How's retirement,'" he observed, "I say every-

body should live long enough to retire. But don't be a person with nothing to do, you'll die of boredom."

Father Ventura is not bored. A resident of Wayland, he has been assisting at St. Joseph, Wayland; St. Pius V, Cohocton; Sacred Heart, Perkinsville; and St. Mary's, Dansville.

"Sometimes you wonder where you are and who you are," he said. One constancy, however, is hearing confessions every Saturday at St. Joseph's.

He also keeps a strict exercise routine since learning he had artery blockage years ago.

"You better believe it," he said. He exercises 40 minutes — on the treadmill, rower, stair-climber and other machines — as often as six or seven times a week.

Father Ventura was ordained Dec. 18, 1943, by Bishop James E. Kearney, with four other priests from the class of 1944.

"We were sort of odd ducks, we were the war babies," he said. The five were ordained six months early because many priests were leaving for military service.

In January 1944 he became assistant pastor at Rochester's Mt. Carmel Church, then was named assistant pastor at St. Francis Xavier Church, Rochester, seven weeks later. In 1947 he returned to Mt. Carmel as assistant pastor.

In 1956 he became administrator at St. Lucy Church, Rochester, and in 1957, pastor. In 1961 he was named pastor of Mt. Carmel Church — his third time there.

"You come back later and all of sudden discover the buck stops with you," he recalled.

"Mt. Carmel was my spot," he said, adding up his 18 years there. "You put that many years in and can't help but have some feelings.

At all three he offered homilies and readings in Italian.

Baptized at St. Anthony of Padua Church, he grew up in Holy Apostles, around the corner from the home his parents bought and the barber shop his father opened.

"I served on the altar as soon as I was old enough," he said. "And you see the priest, and somewhere along the line it rubs off. Before long you're saying, 'Gee, Mom I'd like go into the seminary.'"

Father Philip E. Golding encouraged him, labeling him a seminarian before he left Aquinas, he said.

Father Ventura's pastorates also have included St. Francis de Sales Church, Geneva, (1970-80) and Holy Ghost Church, Gates, (1980-89).

Today his retirement work includes two diocesan youth retreats each year.

"I love it," he said. "I relate to the youth and they help keep me young. ... I have to fall on my face before I say I can't do it anymore."

**Father John T. Walsh, 80**, born in Geneva, was raised in St. Stephen's Church, Geneva.



After his June 3, 1944, ordination, he served a series of assignments as an assistant pastor: Immaculate Conception Church, Ithaca (1944-50); Holy Cross Church, Charlotte (1950-51); St. Margaret Mary Church, Irondequoit (1951-54); St. Mary's Church, Elmira (1954-59); St. Joseph's Church, Penfield (1959-60); and St. Mary's Church, Auburn (1960-67).

In April 1967, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen appointed him the founding pastor of St. Paul's Church, Webster. He served there until retiring in 1988.

"It was a wonderful time. You start from scratch," he said. "Vatican II was over and we started from there. We were just starting to realize what it meant," he said.

"Bishop Sheen said we could spend \$150,000," he recalled, adding, "People spend more than that on homes today."

Just this month when Paul O'Connell, architect for the church, came up from Florida for the funeral of his brother, Father James F. O'Connell, the two visited.

"We had a great reunion about putting up a building for that kind of money," Father Walsh said. In the end, he said, they spent \$220,000 "and almost didn't get a mortgage."

Father Walsh also founded the campus ministries at Ithaca College and Elmira College, where he served as chaplain from 1944 to 1950 and 1955 to 1959, respectively. He was Cayuga Community College chaplain, Auburn, from 1960 to 1967.

"It's an important work," he said of ministering to college students. "Reaching that level is really tough, because you don't find them much in parishes."

Upon retiring, Father Walsh lived at St. Margaret Mary for 10 years and moved to Our Lady Queen of Peace, Brighton, in 1998.

"I sort of 'back up' here," he said, adding with a chuckle, "And that's fairly regularly."

"I still feel fulfilled doing priestly activities," he continued. "I am happy to be free from administrative duties, although I continue to believe that much evangelization today takes place at committee meetings. I considered parish council meetings opportunities for adult education."

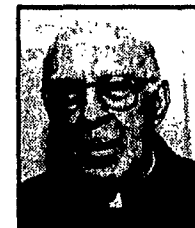
Father Walsh still has the nickname "Knobby Walsh."

"My name is John but most people don't know that," he laughed. He explained that the old Joe Palooka cartoon strip included a manager called "Knobby Walsh." The priest said fellow seminarians gave him the moniker in 1935 during seminary.

— Kathleen Schwarz

## Priest's 60th a time of joy

Father Joseph Matthew McNamara, 86, born in Montezuma, grew up in St. Michael's Church, Montezuma. He was ordained June 3, 1939.



Father McNamara was pastor of St. Anthony's Church, Groton, for 20 years until his retirement in 1981. He continued to help out there until moving to St. Pius X Home in Syracuse last June.

St. Pius X Home, he noted, was built and founded by Syracuse Bishop Walter A. Foery, a former Rochester priest.

"I tell the people here they are gravely indebted to the Rochester Diocese for their bishops," he said, noting Syracuse Bishop James M. Moynihan also is from Rochester.

Father McNamara served as assistant pastor at St. Mary's Church, Auburn (1939-43); chaplain at Cornell University (1943-46); and assistant pastor at the Pro-Cathedral (Sacred Heart before officially declared the cathedral) (1946-47). He became assistant pastor at St. Charles Borromeo, Elmira Heights in 1947.

In 1949 he became chaplain at the state's Classification Center, Elmira, a reception/diagnostic center for men ages 16-21 headed to prison or a reformatory.

In 1961 Father McNamara arrived in Groton, where he built a new church, rectory and hall.

"The people are very good there," he noted. But he's proudest perhaps of St. Michael's in Montezuma.

"I kind of bragged about it," he said. At least five men were ordained out of the rural parish, which was closed June 23, 1985.

Besides himself, another was his older brother — Father Elmer McNamara, who taught at St. Bernard's Seminary. The two came from a family of 10 children.

"Being a Catholic priest is the greatest of gifts," the jubilarian said.

"My only sadness is vocations are dwindling. We don't have as many as we would like to have, of course."

He said he was grateful for all God's gifts, "beginning with his making something out of nothing. About 86 years ago when I was nothing, God decided to make a little something out of me. Then to cap it all, to give me the great vocation to the priesthood."

— Kathleen Schwarz

## Father Leo Dunn, CSSR, notes 55th, 60th year

**Father Leo Dunn, CSSR, 82**, is currently serving at the Notre Dame Retreat House, Canandaigua.

Raised in Immaculate Conception Parish, Rochester, he entered the Redemptorist seminary at St. Mary College, North East, Pa., and completed his studies at Mt. St. Alphonsus Seminary, Esopus.

He was ordained June 18, 1944, in Esopus, N.Y., by Bishop William McCarthy.

This year is especially notable for him because in addition to marking 55 years as a priest, he is celebrating his 60th year as a professed Redemptorist.

"We live the profession," he said.

For his first assignment, he was sent to the Campo Grande Province of Brazil,



where from 1945 to 1961 he served in various missions "in the back woods."

"We had to go horseback riding to get where we were going," he said. "I was happy down there. I had a very interesting time in Brazil; I wouldn't have come back if my mother hadn't gotten sick."

Returning to in Rochester, he was appointed to St. Joseph's Parish, where he assisted, and helped convert the former St. Joseph School from a two-year to a four-

year business school.

In 1972 he was assigned to Tobyhanna, Pa., Retreat House. He left there as rector in 1981. His next assignment was Notre Dame Retreat House, where he served as rector for six years. In 1987 he became assistant at Our Lady of Victory, Rochester, until the Redemptorists left the parish. He then returned in 1996 to Notre Dame Retreat House, where he helps plan conferences, hears confessions and counsels.

Throughout his career, he said, "God has been patient with me."

"I always wanted to be a priest. No doubts," he said. Well, once he thought he might be a doctor. "But it didn't last long."

— Kathleen Schwarz

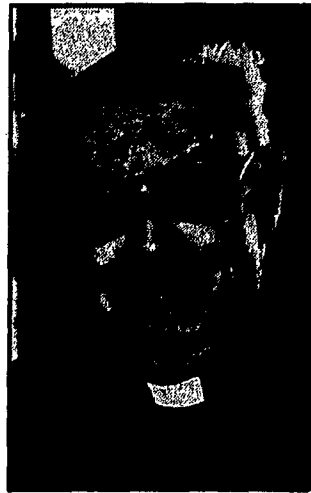
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