

FEATURE

Five clerics approach 50th with joy in their hearts

In addition to Father James Doyle, who is retiring this year and the subject of a separate feature, five other diocesan priests are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their ordination this year. All were ordained by Bishop James E. Kearney on June 11, 1949, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, and they gathered with Retired Auxiliary Bishop Dennis Hickey at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield on April 7, for a Mass and lunch to mark their jubilees.

Msgr. George A. Cocuzzi was about to retire 10 years ago when he asked to go for one year to assist at St. Raymond's Church in the Bronx. He wound up staying, and is still working at the huge Spanish-speaking parish where he serves as administrator.

"I think there are few priests who wish to retire from all priestly ministry," he said.

Msgr. Cocuzzi has led a long and fruitful life, including being the first person in the Diocese of Rochester to oversee its permanent diaconate program, begun in 1974. He noted this diocese insisted on deacon candidates including their wives in the diaconate training process.

"These were people with families, working in the ordinary work world," he recalled. "That was a source of tremendous inspiration. None of these men were abandoning their wives or families, but they themselves were such individuals of faith that that was felt in the families themselves."

Msgr. Cocuzzi is a native of Rochester and attended St. Patrick's Cathedral and Ss. Peter and Paul elementary schools.

After ordination, Msgr. Cocuzzi served as an assistant pastor at St. Jerome's

Church, East Rochester, until 1951. He then went to Rome, and obtained a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1954.

Msgr. Cocuzzi was named notary of the Diocese of Rochester in 1954, and vice chancellor in 1955. Pope John XXIII made him a papal chamberlain in 1959, and Pope Paul VI confirmed him in this rank in 1963. He became a monsignor in 1966.

Bishop Kearney appointed the priest diocesan chancellor in 1964, a position he held until 1966. Meanwhile, he had also been made pastor of Holy Family Church, Rochester, in 1965, a position he held until he became the diocese's urban vicar in 1971.

From 1974 to 1981, he headed the diaconate program, and during the 1980s, he served at both St. Lucy's Church in the Bronx and here in the diocese, helping out at various parishes when priests were on sabbatical.

Msgr. Cocuzzi said he's enjoyed his priesthood and recommended the vocation to young men.

"I still think the greatest thing about a priest's life is that even though he doesn't have a family of his own, he's a part of so many other families," he said. "Today, people are really searching for something in our society, and a sympathetic priest is somebody who can bring people to some kind of spiritual fulfillment."

Father Joseph W. Dailey currently resides at McAuley Center in Brighton.

Father Dailey is a native of Elmira, and attended St. Patrick's School there as a boy. After ordination, Father Dailey served at several parishes as an assistant: St. Patrick's,

Corning, 1949-51; St. Cecilia's, Elmira, 1951-52; St. Ambrose, Rochester, 1952-63; and St. Charles Borromeo, Greece, 1963-65.

While at St. Ambrose, Father Dailey oversaw the construction of a new church, and also directed the planning of the parish's school as well as its auditorium, which was named "Dailey Hall" in his honor.

From 1965 to 1966, Father Dailey served as the diocese's vice chancellor. He then became the diocese's episcopal vicar, a position he held until 1968.

From 1968 to 1970, the priest ministered at Holy Spirit Church, Penfield, and also served as co-pastor of Our Lady of Victory Church in Rochester. He then became director of Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester in 1971, a position he held until he was named pastor in 1973 of St. Mary of the Lake Church in Watkins Glen and St. Benedict's Church in Odessa. He was named temporary administrator of Corpus Christi Church, Rochester, in 1976.

In 1977, the priest became an associate pastor at Our Mother of Sorrows at Paddy Hill Church, Greece. In 1981, he was named associate pastor of St. Theodore's in Gates where he worked until being named temporary administrator of St. Bridget's, East Bloomfield, and St. Joseph's, West Bloomfield, in 1986.

In June 1987, he returned to St. Theodore's as parochial vicar, finally retiring in February 1989. Then, in August 1988, Father Dailey was named temporary pastoral administrator of Church of the Annunciation, Rochester, a position he held until October 1988. He then returned to St. Theodore's, where he served as parochial vicar until his retirement in February, 1989.

Father Dailey has served on many boards, including those of St. Bernard's Seminary and of the *Catholic Courier* (then known as the *Courier-Journal*).

Father Patrick Grace can't remember a time when he didn't want to be a priest.

"I'd tell any young boy, any young man, if you want a happy, productive life filled with satisfaction, become a priest," he said.

Father Grace has lived out this credo for 50 years, he noted, first serving at St. Monica's Church, Rochester, after ordination. However, having missed World War II because he was in the seminary, the priest said he had a yearning to live the military life, and became a U.S. Navy chaplain in 1953, retiring with the rank of captain in 1974.

While in the Navy, the priest served all over the globe, on ships that sailed the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans, and that travelled to Japan, Hawaii, Vietnam and throughout the Northern Hemisphere, he said. Often the only Catholic priest on board, he served multiple roles, Father Grace said.

"As the Catholic chaplain, I was the church," he recalled. "I was priest, bishop, pastor, everything, wherever I went."

Navy members needed pastoral aid, he said, because they were often separated from their loved ones for months on end.

"They don't have the roots that civilian people have," he said. "They don't have the stability that civilian families do normally."

Father Grace has lived in San Diego, Calif., since he left the Navy, where he has served as a chaplain at a girls' high school and a hospital. He also worked with Worldwide Marriage Encounter for a number of years, he said, adding that he is currently an assistant pastor at Sacred Heart Church in Ocean Beach.

The priest said he was humbled and grateful for reaching his 50th year of service.

"I'd start all over again if I could," he said.

Father Elmer J. McDonald seemed overwhelmed when asked why he liked being a

priest.

"What's so great about being a priest is that people are willing to let you into the most intimate details of their lives," he said. "That makes you go 'Wow!'"

A native of Rochester who was baptized at St.



Augustine's Church, Father McDonald has been wowed by the priesthood ever since he began his career by serving at Holy Rosary Church in 1949. In 1953, he became a chaplain in the U.S. Navy, a position he held until 1960 when he was assigned to St. Francis Church in Geneva. He served there until 1964, when he returned to work at his home parish of St. Augustine's.

In 1968, Father McDonald became the founding pastor of St. Christopher's Church in Chili, a position he held until he was named pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Greece in 1975. His last pastorate in the diocese was back at his home parish, St. Augustine, where he served from 1977 to 1979.

Father McDonald moved to Waco, Texas, in 1979, to become chaplain at a Veterans Administration Hospital. In 1982, he went to serve as a parish priest in Florida, where he has also become chaplain to the 250 Federal Bureau of Investigation agents from Orlando to Naples.

Currently, Father McDonald also does counseling at a home for unwed mothers. He noted as well that in the 1980s, he developed a 12-step program to treat veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. The program is in use in a number of hospitals, he said, and has helped to reduce the suicide rate among veterans.

Father McDonald, who currently resides in St. Petersburg, called the priesthood "the greatest gift that you can be given."

"You get back much more than you give," he said.

After 50 years as a priest, **Father Edward E. Steinkirchner** sees no reason to stop ministering.

"I think if I didn't remain active, I would wither and die," said Father Steinkirchner, currently in residence at St. Joseph's Church, Penfield. "This is one of the biggest (parishes) in the diocese, so I have enough to do."

Among his current duties at St. Joseph's, Father Steinkirchner said he celebrates daily Mass, and performs other sacramental duties.

"I think one of the wonderful things we are called to do is celebrate the Eucharist and the sacramental ministry," he said of priests.

A Rochester native, Father Steinkirchner grew up attending St. Augustine's Church. He was first assigned after ordination to Holy Trinity Church, Webster. He also assisted at the following parishes: St. Boniface, Rochester, 1951-57; St. Michael's, Rochester, 1957-59, and Holy Apostles, Rochester, 1959-68.

Father Steinkirchner became pastor of Holy Ghost Church, Gates, 1968. He stayed there until 1980 when he was named pastor of St. Michael's Church in Newark, a position he held until his retirement in 1995.

In addition to his parish work, Father Steinkirchner served as director of Parish Sodalties, 1951-57, and director of Deacon and Priest Intern Programs, 1971-84. He also served on the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, 1965-80, and on the Diocesan Synod Formation Committee, 1990-94.

Father Steinkirchner said he would encourage any man considering the priesthood to ponder it seriously.

"Try it, you might like it," he said of his vocation. "It's a wonderful life. You deal with people, and you can be part of their life in special times."

—Rob Cullivan

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