

A priest and priests' bishop

Bishop Hickey was held in high esteem by his former pastor, Msgr. William E. Cowen, and all the people of St. Mary's, Auburn, for his leadership and many fine qualities.

He was just a fine, wonderful priest and everybody thought so highly of him.

I can hardly find the words to say. I knew him well. I'm just sorry to see that he won't be with us anymore.

Elizabeth House, St. Mary's parishioner, Auburn

I have known Bishop Hickey since he came to St. Mary's (Auburn) in June 1940. He was moderator of our St. Mary's Sodality during my high school years, and I was president of the Sodality when Bishop Hickey left St. Mary's. He was a wonderful and devoted young priest at St. Mary's.

He and Father Norris came to my wedding when I married Jack Powers in May 1954. We were so happy to have them with us.

I have lost a dear acquaintance of many years. And it is a great loss to Bishop Clark and the people of the Diocese of Rochester.

Joan Scollan Powers, St. Bernard's parishioner, Scipio Center

Bishop Hickey entered St. Bernard's Seminary in the late 1930s. "I taught him for three years at St. Bernard's Seminary," Father Robert F. McNamara testified. "He was, of course, a good student. He may be the only Colgate (University) graduate who ever became a bishop," the diocesan historian continued. "He had an early exposure to university life, which most priests didn't have. I imagine it gave him a broadened outlook."

When Bishop Hickey entered St. Bernard's, Father Paul Wohlrab, a friend since those days, recalled, he said he was coming from the secular atmosphere of Colgate to a "monastic" atmosphere.

At St. Bernard's, he appreciated help from his fellow students. But, Father Wohlrab said, "I think he helped us more than we helped him. He had an attitude of littling himself and giving credit to someone."

In 1968, however, Bishop Hickey told the *Courier*, "Seminary studies required much more work than I had known at Colgate."

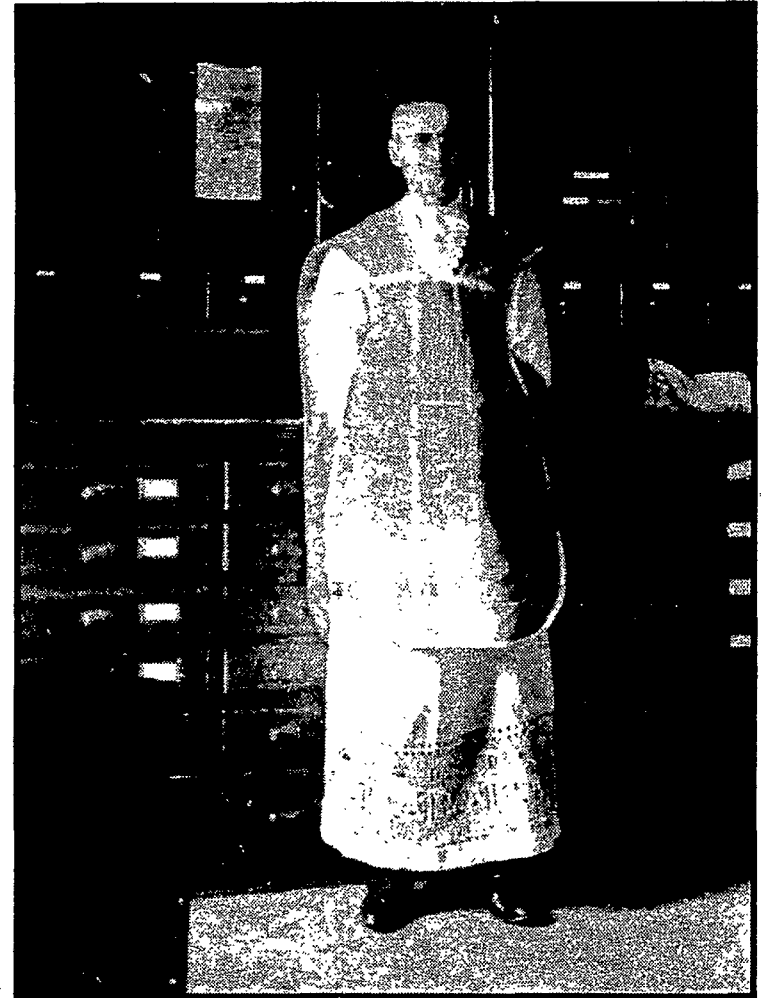
During those seminary days, his classmate Father Wohlrab continued, "We shared many things in our lives. We prayed together. He always enjoyed doing that. We used to walk together a lot. There would be two afternoons, 'walk days,' every week. That's when they would clean the building. We would walk to a church and say a few prayers."

Bishop Hickey was ordained June 7, 1941, at Sacred Heart Cathedral, by Bishop James E. Kearney, with Father Wohlrab and 10 other young men. Six are alive today — including the Gefell twins (Msgrs. Gerard and Joseph), who now reside in Cape Vincent and both spent many years away in the military service; Father John Nacca, now of Pensacola, Fla.; and Fathers Larry Sansom and Father James F. Slattery, who both still live in Rochester.

Bishop Hickey's first assignment was as assistant under Msgr. William E. Cowen at St. Mary's Church, Auburn, from 1941-46. Father Albert Shamon, longtime diocesan priest in that area and former diocesan vicar of education, recalled, "Dr. Cowen was very demanding, and yet I kind of think Father Hickey was the apple of his eye. (Bishop Hickey) did a nice job here at St. Mary's, and people always loved to go to confession with him, he was so gentle and so kind."

In an interview for his 1968 consecration as auxiliary bishop, Bishop Hickey told the *Courier* that "Dr. Cowen was way ahead of his times in ecumenism, emphasis on congregational participation in liturgy, and clerical sharing of community affairs. He drove his assistant with real pastoral zeal but he taught me to do many new things simply by sending me out to do them."

At that time, "I was just a youngster in grammar school," recalled Father Michael Conboy, who grew up in Auburn. "As an assistant



The young Father Hickey prepares for his first Mass at St. Patrick's Church, Dansville, June 1941.

pastor, (Bishop Hickey) visited the school every day and also taught religious education. He was very, very well-liked there. He took great interest in the young people. When St. Mary's found out he was going to become a bishop, it was a great source of pride for the community."

From 1946 to 1961 Bishop Hickey was secretary of the Diocesan Tribunal:

Evelyn Scherbyn, then secretary/religious-education

administrator at St. Francis Church, Phelps, recalled the assistance Bishop Hickey gave her during the late 1950s.

"I was seeking a divorce at the time and he happened to be the person that I talked to," she said. "He was extremely helpful, just a beautiful man, warm and understanding. When he came to Phelps a number of years later, I went up and spoke to him, and he knew who I was, which was amazing to me."

Regarding his tribunal work, Bishop Hickey observed in a 1968 interview, "The majority of the cases concerned the validity of the marriage: could the wedding vows be declared invalid and the marriage ties broken? The work offered me consolation only rarely because so often we had to tell the petitioners: 'No hope.' But it was wonderful and worthwhile when you could find a solution and give them freedom from unhappiness and a return to the sacraments, or sometimes even bring estranged people back together again."

In 1959, Father Hickey was named a monsignor and in 1961 he became pastor of St. Theodore's Church in Gates, where he served until 1968.

"I was assistant there from 1954. We were very close," recalled Father John J. Steger. "He was like a father, a spiritual father, and I was. I hoped, like a spiritual son to him."

"He came right out of the marriage tribunal to be pastor at St. Theodore's. We had this great building program, and he had to face up to (first) building a convent for about eight sisters," Father Steger continued. "He said, 'I don't

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