

DIOCESAN NEWS

One-man play recalls life of saintly Buffalo priest

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Charles Girard is convinced that Father Nelson Baker, a candidate for sainthood, was "the greatest man to come out of western New York."

Since 1997, Girard has been portraying Father Baker in 90-minute presentations in the Buffalo area, where the priest's ministry was centered. Girard will stage his second one-man performance in the Rochester Diocese at 2 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 7, at St. Mary's Church in Corning.

Father Baker served at the Corning church early in his priesthood, in 1881 and 1882, while the parish was still a part of the Diocese of Buffalo.

Girard, who resides in Marion, Wayne County, is hoping that churches, schools and other organizations outside of Buffalo will become interested in his portrayals.

"I will do these as long as people want to see them and learn about Father Baker," said Girard, who attends St. Anne's Church in Palmyra. He teaches computers, as well as a continuing-education course in Tibetan stress-relief techniques, at Finger Lakes Community College.

Father Baker was ordained in 1876, and died in 1936 at the age of 94. He is primarily known for his service in the city of Buffalo and its outskirts. He built a hospital and school; facilities for unwed mothers, their babies and other troubled youths; and the Basilica of Our Lady of Victory.

Today, the ministries he established are coordinated by Baker Victory Services in Lackawanna, which maintains a Web site at www.ourladyofvictory.org. And his basilica and national shrine in Lackawanna draw worshippers from hundreds of miles away.

Girard said Father Baker made staggering accomplishments while keeping nothing for himself.

"In the age we live, we exhort greatness in our athletes and give them untold billions of dollars," Girard observed. "Father Baker was a superstar in his own right."

Girard, a Buffalo native, hopes that a growing awareness about Father Baker will help support his cause for sainthood. The priest was introduced for canonization in 1987 by the Buffalo Diocese.

Father Baker has already been declared venerable for practicing Christian virtues to a heroic degree. This, according to Father Robert F. McNamara, Rochester diocesan historian, is the most difficult step to complete toward canonization.

The next step is beatification, which is based on a conclusive healing miracle naming Father Baker as intercessor. After beatification, one more proven miracle is required to qualify for sainthood.

Msgr. Walter Kern, Buffalo diocesan archivist and a promoter of Father Baker's cause for canonization, said the Vatican is "looking for an instantaneous cure for a very serious illness. When it does occur, it will be beyond any law of nature."

Father McNamara, a native of St. Mary's in Corning, wrote about Father Baker in his 1948 parish history, *A Century of Grace*. In it, he alluded to cures of three Corning residents — including his own aunt — in which Father Baker possibly played a part.

Father McNamara drove to Lackawanna in 1930 to meet Father Baker, who at the time was nearly 90 years old. He gave Father McNamara an aluminum medal of Our Lady of Victory.

"I never saw him again, but I treasured that moment," Father McNamara recalled. "I wore that medal until the Virgin and Child was almost erased and its ring worn through."

Father McNamara said 500,000 people attended Father Baker's wake and 25,000 attended his funeral.

"Could there have been a more striking tribute to his personal holiness?" Father McNamara asked.

EDITORS' NOTE: Organizations interested in scheduling an appearance by Charles Girard may contact him at 800/315-7649 or 315/926-4246, or by e-mail at charles@girard.net.

Day of the Dead



Mike Mergen/Photo intern

Local artist Antonio Cruz Zaveleta created a shrine and a sand painting to honor a child who had died, in the Mexican Day of the Dead tradition of honoring departed souls who return once a year to celebrate with friends and family. His work was on exhibit Oct. 29-31 at SUNY-Brockport.

Planning groups to receive \$35,000

The diocese has awarded nearly \$35,000 in grants to five parish groupings for needs they identified through Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium. The grants include funding from the Thanks Giving Appeal. The awards are as follows:

- \$20,000 — the first of a three-year grant to parishes of the Tioga planning group (St. James, Waverly/St. Pius X, Van Etten; St. John the Evangelist, Newark Valley/St. Francis of Assisi, Catatonk/St. Patrick, Owego; St. Margaret Mary, Apalachin). The grant is toward a director's position for a newly formed Regional Center that will provide adult education and lay-leadership training.

- \$6,000 — the first of a three-year grant to hire a part-time coordinator of youth ministry for Holy Rosary, Most Precious Blood and Sacred Heart Cathedral, Rochester.

- Up to \$4,000 — to the Western Livingston planning group for the creation of a youth-oriented program "The God Guys" to be broadcast on Avon radio station WSL-1040 AM throughout much of the diocese. Mike Sauter, youth ministry coordinator for the Western Livingston planning group, and the Rev. Corey Keyes, pastor of the West Bloomfield Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, are coordinating

the program. Recipient parishes are Holy Angels, Nunda; St. Lucy, Retsof; St. Mary, Geneseo; St. Patrick, Mt. Morris; St. Thomas, Leicester.

- \$3,360 — the first of a two-year grant for a quarterly regional newsletter to six parishes in King Ferry, Cayuga, Union Springs, Aurora, Scipio Center and Moravia, joined in one cluster and in transition to become one parish. The newsletter aims at improving communication in light of the distances between the communities: Our Lady of the Lake, St. Joseph, St. Michael, St. Patrick, St. Bernard and St. Patrick, respectively.

- \$1,500 — to create an audiovisual resource center and for evangelization training, to City East parishes (Annunciation, St. Andrews, St. George, St. Philip Neri and St. Stanislaus.)

"This new grant program will give parishes some of the financial means to work together creatively to address needs they have identified in their community," said Karen Rinefierd, diocesan planning group liaison.

Applications for a second round of grants are expected to be sent to parishes in January, and will be available through the diocesan Web site (www.dor.org), Rinefierd said.

Obituary

Mrs. Moynihan; pastor's mother

Mrs. Harriett S. Moynihan, mother of diocesan priest Father Jeremiah P. Moynihan, died Oct. 23, 1999, at Mercy Care in Hornell after a lengthy illness. She was 87.

Mrs. Moynihan was born in Auburn and graduated from Rochester's Nazareth Academy. She and her husband, Sgt. Jeremiah P. Moynihan, raised their eight children in Rochester.

"She was hard-working, and very loving and faithful," said Father Moynihan, pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Elmira. "She taught us to treat people the way we wanted to be treated."

Mrs. Moynihan had resided in Hornell for the last nine years, her son added.

Her funeral Mass was celebrated Oct. 27, at St. Monica's Church in Rochester.

Father Moynihan presided at the liturgy, and Father William Leone, pastor of the Northern Cayuga Cluster, was homilist. Also attending was Bishop James M. Moynihan, bishop of the Diocese of Syracuse, a nephew of Mrs. Moynihan's.

Mrs. Moynihan is also survived by sons, Michael (Gail), Thomas (Barbara), Martin, John (Rosemary) and James (Hiroko) Moynihan; 16 grandchildren; and several nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her husband and two daughters, Eileen and Katherine.

Interment was private. Donations in Mrs. Moynihan's memory may be made to Mercy Care, c/o Anita Jacobs, Bethesda Drive, Hornell, NY, 14843.

— Mike Latona

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