

DIOCESAN NEWS

Obituaries

Father Desmond O'Neill

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

Father Desmond R. O'Neill, pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Retsof, and St. Lucy's Parish, Leicester, since June, died March 31, 2000, after a brief illness. The priest, 67, was also sacramental minister for the Newman Community of the State University of New York at Geneseo, and a religious television pioneer in his homeland.

A native of Melbourne, Australia, Father O'Neill was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney in 1959, and received faculties in the Diocese of Rochester in 1995 after coming here to study at St. Bernard's Institute. While at St. Bernard's, Father O'Neill pursued a master of arts in theology and also served as an instructor in the school's Certification of Designated Ministry Program.

Those who knew during his brief time in the diocese described him as an affable, caring cleric who put people at ease.

"People felt, even on first meeting him, that they had known him all their lives," said Father William Gordinier, pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Geneseo. "He couldn't say 'no' to anyone, and this spirit showed in the many areas of priestly service in which he exercised his ministry."

Father O'Neill served as parochial vicar of St. Boniface Parish, Rochester, from 1995-97, and made quite an impression on parishioners and staff, according to Father R. Richard Brickler, pastor.

"He seemed to fit in any crowd," Father Brickler said, adding that the priest's warm personality was combined with a deep knowledge of Scripture, theology

and liturgy.

Father O'Neill lived at St. Theodore's Church, Gates, while working as a chaplain at Monroe Community Hospital in Rochester from 1997-1999. St. Theodore's pastor, Father Daniel F. Holland, also remembered the late priest fondly.

"He's one of those people of whom you say 'I should have lived with him years ago,'" the pastor said, adding with a laugh, "He also enjoyed a good bottle of wine, and brought us many."

Prior to coming to Rochester, Father O'Neill enjoyed a varied career as a priest. In addition to his work at various parishes in his homeland, Father O'Neill was the first Australian priest to direct on a commercial TV station, overseeing production of "The TV Mass" from 1968-74. The priest extensively lectured on communications, faith and audiovisual work at seminars, colleges and institutes throughout the 1970s and '80s in his native country and on various Pacific islands.

During the latter 1980s, Father O'Neill returned to parish work in Sydney and, throughout much of his career, served as spiritual director of retreats for the Curiallo movement, which encourages lay Catholics to develop their faith.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark celebrated a funeral Mass at St. Theodore's April 4. Interment took place at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Father O'Neill is survived by his brothers, John and Christopher, both of Sydney, and John's children and grandchildren. Memorial contributions may be sent to St. Thomas Aquinas/St. Lucy's Parish Fund, 175 Main St., Box 195, Leicester, NY 14481-0195.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

March to save a church

From left, Minerva Vadala and Frances Bondi march April 2 outside of St. Francis of Assisi Church, Rochester, whose parish council has voted to close the church, pending diocesan approval. The protesters want the decision reversed.

Sister Theresa Collins, SSJ; age 74

Sister Theresa Collins, SSJ, (formerly Sister Daniel Louise), 74, died Feb. 14, 2000.

She had taught in diocesan parochial schools for 38 years and was pastoral associate at St. Stanislaus Parish, Rochester, from 1994 to 1996.

Sister Theresa was a native of Elmira. She entered the Sisters of St. Joseph from St. Cecilia's Parish, Elmira, in 1946. She earned her baccalaureate degree from Nazareth College and her master's degree from St. Bonaventure University. She also held state certification in special education in learning disabilities.

She taught in diocesan parochial schools including St. Francis Xavier, St. Joseph's Villa, St. Margaret Mary, all of Rochester; and St. Mary, Elmira.

Sister Theresa was a member of the

board of directors of the Catholic Family Center, 1989-1995, and a member of its Elder Services Committee, 1995-1996.

"She was a very lovable person, you couldn't help but like her," said Vicky Ceter, secretary at St. Stanislaus. "She touched so many people in so many ways."

Father Michael Brown was principal celebrant at Sister Theresa's funeral liturgy Feb. 18 in the motherhouse chapel. He was assisted by Msgrs. William Shannon and Emmett Murphy, and Fathers Timothy Brown, Michael Conboy, Kevin McKenna, James Yeager, Thomas Wheeland, Bruce Ammering and Peter Bayer.

Sister Theresa is survived by nieces and nephews, and her congregation. Contributions may be made in her memory to the St. Joseph Convent Infirmary.

William W. Buechel; led charismatics

Diocesan Catholics once active in the charismatic movement say William W. Buechel was "on fire for the Lord." He and his wife, Mary, began one of the diocese's first Catholic charismatic prayer groups around 1969, and at times hosted 80 or 90 people in their former Rochester home.

Mr. Buechel died at the age of 90 at St. Mary's Hospice on Feb. 24, 2000. He had been diagnosed with cancer.

"He's really a very holy person," said Father Anthony Mugavero, who presided at Mr. Buechel's Feb. 28 funeral Mass at St. Charles Borromeo Church, Greece.

Father Mugavero and his sister Rosalie Angie had attended the Buechels' prayer group for several of its 12-year existence.

"At that time people were going to different prayer groups and some people were leaving the church," he said. "In terms of his prayer group, it was a very balanced one. He would speak about the church, talk

about the saints. He had devotion to Mary. Those elements were not common within the charismatic movement."

"People would be spilling out of the doors, sitting on the stairs," recalled Kathy DeMott. "He was very strongly Catholic and encouraged people to stay close to the church."

A retired postal clerk, Mr. Buechel had written an estimated 700 articles that were published in such Catholic magazines as *Liguorian*, *Franciscan* and *Sacred Heart*.

"He was always interested in theology, and studied all his life," his wife of 65 years said.

Mr. Buechel is survived by his sons, Bill (Bobbie), Paul Joseph (Marlene), and daughters, Rosanne Young and Mary Ellen (Anthony) Holbrook; 18 grandchildren; 14 great-grandchildren; one great-great-grandson; and several nieces and nephews.

—Kathleen Schwarz

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