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Called by God

For Msgr. Brietske serving God's people a joy

Mary Stadnyk
News Editor

Msgr. Richard C. Brietske has had 50 "exciting and fulfilling" years since he was ordained a priest May 26, 1962 by Bishop George W. Ahr in St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral, Trenton.

Not only did he enjoy many and varied assignments, Msgr. Brietske, who retired as diocesan chancellor in 2007, especially appreciated those where he was challenged to "start something new."

"There isn't a thing I haven't done," he mused. His previous duties over the years included being the founding principal of a high school and the founding director/co-director of three diocesan offices.

Reflecting on his priestly vocation, Msgr. Brietske, who was born in 1936 in Perth Amboy, was a senior in St. Mary High School, Perth Amboy, and grappling with decisions about his future. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be a teacher, a lawyer or a priest. The one-week retreat he made to a Trappist monastery in Kentucky, however, provided him the atmosphere and time he needed to prayerfully consider his decision to become a priest.

To this day, he acknowledges his family for being "very encouraging" and respectful of his decision to be a priest as well as other people including the parish community of Holy Trinity, Perth Amboy, and the religious sisters who staffed the parish school. He noted that although his family belonged to St. Mary Parish, Perth Amboy, they lived in a Slovak neighborhood and a block from Holy Trinity Parish, where as a child he developed close and lasting friendships with Joseph Holup, Florian Gall and Eugene Rebeck, all of whom went on to become priests.

"The sisters, priests and parishioners from Holy Trinity looked upon our group and identified us as future priests," said Msgr. Brietske.

"It was a time in the Church when a vocation to the priesthood was valued, supported and encouraged and, in turn, it made it a lot easier to respond to the call to the priesthood than perhaps it is today."

He noted that Father Holup and Father Gall both served in the Metuchen Diocese and are now deceased. Msgr. Rebeck is pastor of St. Catharine Parish, Holmdel, where Msgr. Brietske has served as a weekend assistant since his retirement in 2007.

After graduating from high school in 1954, the young Richard began seminary studies in St. Charles College, Catonsville, Md. He then attended St. Mary Seminary and University, Baltimore, where he earned a bachelor's degree in 1958, and a bachelor's degree in sacred theology in 1960. He also holds a master's degree in secondary school administration and supervision from Seton Hall University, South Orange, and pursued graduate studies in The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

Sharing about what the priesthood means to him, Msgr. Brietske said that first and foremost, it is about a man having been called by God to be a priest. And then, it is about the man being called by the community to serve its people.




Fulfilling Priesthood – In retirement, Msgr. Richard C. Brietske is a weekend assistant in St. Catharine Parish, Holmdel. His 50 years of priesthood have included serving as a parish priest and numerous diocesan positions, including as diocesan chancellor. *Ken Falls photos*



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The many ways in which Msgr. Brietske had the "privilege and joy" to serve God's people began in 1969 when Bishop Ahr charged the 31-year-old Father Brietske with the task of becoming the founding principal of the new St. Thomas Aquinas High School, Edison. "Everything about it was brand new. The school was built from nothing," he said. Even though running a school was a daunting task, he particularly enjoyed the community of "kids who were wonderful, the staff was excellent and the parents were involved."

His next start was in 1978 when he was appointed a co-director with Mercy Sister Charitas Marcotte of the newly-formed diocesan Office of Evangelization. At the same time, he also served as the Catholic chaplain of Monmouth College, Long Branch. After serving as a pastor from 1982-1995, in two parishes Nativity, Fair Haven, and St. Gregory the Great, Hamilton Square, Msgr. Brietske was asked by Bishop John C. Reiss in 1996 to head the diocesan Millennium/Renew 2000 Office and coordinate the planning of the diocesan celebration for the Great Jubilee Year 2000 with Sister of St. Joseph Agnes Marie Gunn.

When the Jubilee celebration ended and the doors to the Millennium/Renew 2000 Office closed, the next start for Msgr. Brietske was when Bishop Smith asked him and Marianite of Holy Cross Sister Regina White to establish the new diocesan Office of Parish Life. It was an appointment that both Msgr. Brietske and Sister Regina embraced and saw as having great promise of being exciting and challenging. The office's mission was to enhance the quality of parish life through the development of small faith sharing communities, evangelization and lay ecclesial ministry formation.

Added to Msgr. Brietske's list of accomplishments was a list of "auxiliary assignments." He was: president of the Council of Priests, assistant to the director of the Priest Personnel Office, executive secretary to the Diocesan Commission for Parish Councils, chairman of the Diocesan Mission Statement Committee, a member of the Continuing Education Committee for the Council of Priests and the Diocesan Synod Preparatory Commission and chairman of the Diocesan Building Commission.

Msgr. Brietske's exemplary dedication to his priesthood earned him much deserved recognition in special ways. In April, 1997, Pope John Paul II named him a prelate of honor to His Holiness with the title of Monsignor. In 2001, he was appointed by Bishop Smith to be the chancellor of the diocese. Being named chancellor, he said, came as a "complete surprise" and a most humbling honor.

While Msgr. Brietske could be considered a trailblazer in his laying the foundation for many ministries and offices that would serve the diocese well into the future, he quickly credits his successors who, over the years, have "really built them up in a very fine way." Msgr. Brietske acknowledged Bishop Smith for allowing him to serve in so many "unique and varied ministerial experiences," and he extended appreciation for the opportunity to work with Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., in the past year as chairman of the diocesan building commission.

Besides his diocesan work, Msgr. Brietske treasured the time he spent as pastor of Nativity and St. Gregory the Great Parishes and the 12 years he lived in residence in Corpus Christi Parish, Willingboro.

"All the communities I served in were very special," he said. "I truly loved being among the people who were so welcoming, friendly and faithful."

In retirement, Msgr. Brietske continues as a weekend assistant in St. Catharine Parish, Holmdel. He also enjoys being the proud uncle to four nieces and nephews, seven grandnieces and grandnephews and 10 great grandnieces and great grandnephews. Some of his hobbies include reading all types of books, going for walks, fishing and watching sports on television.



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