

# Catholic Courier

## Father Austin B. Hanna, 97; noted chaplain

By Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier | 01.20.2006

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Father Austin B. "Gus" Hanna, who served as chaplain of St. Joseph's Villa in Greece for more than 30 years, died Jan. 9, 2006, at the McAuley Residence in Brighton. At 97, he was the oldest priest of the Diocese of Rochester.

Despite his failing health, Father Hanna was faithful to his duties to the end, according to Sandy Grocki, diocesan clergy-services coordinator. She said he concelebrated Mass at the Motherhouse on the day before he died.

Father Robert F. McNamara, diocesan archivist and historian, resides on the same floor of McAuley Residence where Father Hanna had lived, and noted the priest was a man of solid character.

"He realized he had his own devotion and his own talents, and he used them for the greater glory of God," Father McNamara said.

A native of Rochester, Father Hanna was the nephew of Archbishop Edward J. Hanna of San Francisco. He was baptized at the former St. Patrick's Cathedral and confirmed at St. Augustine's Church. Father Hanna attended St. Andrew's and St. Bernard's seminaries, as well as Harvard University, and was ordained on June 6, 1936.

From 1936-37, Father Hanna served as assistant pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Charlotte. Then, in 1937, he was assigned to St. Aloysius Parish in Auburn, where he also served as assistant pastor.

In November 1940, Father Hanna became a chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserves, leaving his post at St. Aloysius in December of that year. He was the first priest from the diocese to volunteer for service in World War II, and remained with the Army until 1946. During his time in the military, Father Hanna served with the First Division in Vermont and Massachusetts from 1940-42, then at the Army War College in Washington, D.C. He also served as an overseas courier for the chief of chaplains.

In 1945, Father Hanna became the first Catholic priest appointed to the Veterans Administration Chaplaincy Corps and was assigned to the Veterans' Hospital in Canandaigua. When he left the Army, he had attained the rank of lieutenant colonel.

From 1946-77, Father Hanna served as chaplain of St. Joseph's Villa, a residential and non-residential agency serving children and adolescents.

Father McNamara observed that Father Hanna was made to be a chaplain, both to young soldiers and young people.

"He had a rapport with young people that he used well," Father McNamara said, adding that the priest was known for his wit. "Nobody disliked him."

During his time at St. Joseph's Villa, Father Hanna also taught briefly at Aquinas Institute in Rochester; served as chaplain of the University of Rochester and the Eastman School of Music; and was active in the Kiwanis Club, the Elks and the American Legion. In 1962, Father Hanna was elected to head the Sweetland-Hill Post 1340 in Rochester, becoming perhaps the first priest in New York state to be named commander of an American Legion Post.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided at the funeral Mass for Father Hanna on Jan. 12 at the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse Chapel. Interment was slated to take place at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. Memorial donations may be sent to the Sisters of Mercy or St. Joseph's Villa.

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