

Now-closed Mount St. Alphonsus has a storied history



Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, center, Vatican secretary of state, ritually lays hands on the head of then-Redemptorist Father Joseph Tobin during an Oct. 9, 2010, Mass in which Father Tobin was ordained an archbishop at St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. Archbishop Tobin received his priestly formation at Mount St. Alphonsus, the former Redemptorist seminary and later retreat center in Esopus, N.Y., which was closed earlier this year by the congregation. (Submitted photo)

By Mary Ann Garber

The beloved "Mount" has a storied history.

Redemptorist priests and brothers at Mount St. Alphonsus, the former Redemptorist seminary and later retreat center in scenic Esopus, N.Y., educated seminarians to serve God and the Church for 75 years as well as served retreatants in search of spiritual growth for 26 years.

[Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin](#) received his priestly formation at the Mount from the Redemptorists, the religious order that he joined in the early 1970s.

He earned a master's degree in religious education in 1977 and master's degree in divinity in 1979.

The historic campus on Route 9 West was closed by the Redemptorists on Jan. 1, 2012, due to "pressing pastoral needs and an aging membership."

The congregation said the closing was a result of "re-examining their pastoral commitments in light of the increasing age of their members and the need to continue their primary ministry to the poor and most abandoned."

A video history of the major seminary, titled "[A Century of Blessings.](#)" is posted on YouTube. It preserves decades of memories with historical photographs of future priests studying in classrooms, and enjoying swimming, boating, fishing and ice hockey.

"The Redemptorists have been at Mount St. Alphonsus for more than 100 years since it opened as our North American seminary," Redemptorist Father Kevin Moley, provincial of the congregation's Baltimore Province, said in a February 2011 statement announcing the closing.

"Many of our confreres have wonderful memories of their years here so the decision to close was not an easy one," Father Kevin noted. "We are grateful to have so many years in Esopus, and to have served so many people through

our retreats and conferences. The Mount will always hold a special place in the heart of Redemptorists in the Baltimore Province.”

The huge brick seminary was built between 1904 and 1907 on top of a hill on property that grew from 235 acres to 400 acres on the west bank of the Hudson River. It had 92 bedrooms, large meeting and conference rooms, a library and other facilities.

More than 1,300 Redemptorist priests were ordained during the seminary years at its St. Alphonsus Chapel—an ornate Romanesque worship space with seven altars and beautiful stained-glass windows.

The Redemptorists were self-sufficient through farming and raising livestock.

The priests also provided pastoral care and catechetical ministries for members of Presentation Parish in nearby Port Ewen, N.Y., and Sacred Heart Parish in Esopus.

Because of declining numbers, the congregation transferred the seminarians to the Washington Theological Union in Washington, D.C., in 1985 to continue their formation.

The order of priests and brothers was founded by St. Alphonsus Liguori in Naples, Italy, in 1732 to serve the spiritual and material needs of the faithful, especially the poor. The order’s priests are known for their preaching.

About 300 Redemptorist priests minister in the U.S. and 5,300 of the order’s priests serve in other countries throughout the world.

When the congregation began its retreat ministry at the Mount in 1987, the Redemptorists began serving the faithful in and beyond Ulster County as well as in the greater New York area, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Retreat programming offered spiritual growth opportunities for men, women, seniors and recovery groups as well as a facility for Lutherans, Methodists, and other Christian communities to use for the formation and selection of their pastors.

After announcing the closure of the Mount in February 2011, the Redemptorists later issued a statement that they were pleased to lease the property to Church Communities—an international network of Protestant Christian communities founded in Germany in 1921—which plans to use the facilities to house a religious community and an educational center as well as farm the land.

The seminary and retreat center closings and new lease agreement mark the end of an era for the Redemptorists at Esopus, but the Mount’s enduring spiritual legacy continues in each of its graduates. †