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Retired priests provide valuable service to parishes

April 9, 2013

Posted by Site Administrator

On Good Shepherd Sunday – celebrated the weekend of April 20-21 – Catholics in the Archdiocese of New Orleans will have a chance to display their gratitude for the many years of devoted ministry of their diocesan priests by making financial contributions to the Retirement Collection for Diocesan Priests.

The collection will help raise money for the retirement and healthcare needs of 57 retired diocesan priests in the archdiocese, most of whom remain very active in helping out with parish ministry.

Father William O'Donnell, the founding pastor of Mary Queen of Peace in Mandeville in 1988, retired in 2009 as the pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Lacombe while in very good health at age 71. The former Maryknoll missionary said he prayed over his decision to retire, but he also used an interesting measuring stick to discern the right time.



“My general idea is it's time to retire while the people still like you and everyone says, ‘He's too young to retire,’” Father O'Donnell, 74, said while vesting for the annual Chrism Mass at St. Louis Cathedral. “That's better than hanging around and everybody's being nice to you and covering for you. Now, I still go back and say Mass at Sacred Heart when they need me. I define myself as a ‘quick-reaction’ priest.”

On call for emergencies

Usually, Father O'Donnell will get a call if an active priest is sick or has too many Masses to celebrate on a weekend.

“If a priest gets sick on Thursday and he's got two or three Masses on Sunday, I can go there real quickly,” Father O'Donnell said. “I'm bilingual, and I say Mass in Spanish at St. Margaret Mary in Slidell. This Easter, I did a Mass at St. Luke's in Slidell because they had seven Masses for Easter and only two priests. I do that for Christmas, too.”

Father O'Donnell, a native of Chicago, was ordained in 1966 as a Maryknoll priest, serving for four years in Guatemala, and later served as an Air Force chaplain. When his mother became ill with cancer, he decided to become an archdiocesan priest, and Archbishop Philip Hannan, an ex-WWII Army chaplain, gladly accepted him into the Archdiocese of New Orleans “by mail.”

“He said, ‘Come on in and stay or you can go back to the Maryknolls or you can do anything you want,’” Father O'Donnell said.

After breaking through and being accepted by those who had grown up in a south Louisiana culture, Father O'Donnell said he grew to love it here. He became a judge on the Metropolitan Tribunal, which handles marriage cases, and served there every Friday for more than 12 years.

No worries about roof leaking

Now that he is retired, he has more time to read and study on his own without worrying about whether or not the church roof leaks.

He said the collection for retired diocesan priests is important as a way to fund some of the major retirement costs such as health insurance. He said he hopes the example of Pope Benedict, who retired because of sagging strength, will become the norm in the future.

“When you can’t do it anymore and it’s not fun, it’s time to get out,” Father O’Donnell said. “I think it was marvelous. You never know what’s going on behind the scenes. Then we found out he had fallen and hit his head and he is losing his vision and he had a pacemaker. I bought all three of his books, and I read the second volume of ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ for Holy Week. It’s a tremendous book.”

More time to study



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Father Frank Carabello, who served for many years as the pastor of St. Joseph Church in Gretna, now lives in Terrytown and helps out in various parishes when he is available. He also likes the time he has to do extra reading and has become a big fan of Catholic sites on the Internet, including www.news.va, which provides daily updates on Pope Francis and the Vatican.

“I also can follow the pope on Twitter,” Father Carabello said. “It really keeps you up to date, especially when the conclave was going on.”

Father Carabello even downloaded a book on the descent of the Holy Spirit, based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, to his Kindle. In addition to his regular Masses, he teaches high school confirmation classes once a month at St. Cletus Church in Gretna.

Last year’s collection for retired diocesan priests netted more than \$240,000, a large increase from the previous year.

“The retired priests contribute so much to the archdiocese, so it’s important that we pay back to help them out in their retirement years,” said Father Otis Young, pastor of St. Joseph the Worker Church in Marrero and a member of the Priestly Life and Ministry Committee. “Without them, a lot of parishes could not continue on at the level that they are now. Sometimes a retired priest will go into a parish and manage it while the pastor is on vacation.”

Father Young said he was having lunch at Cafe Hope one day when Msgr. Allen Roy, the retired pastor of Holy Spirit Church in New Orleans, talked about ways in which he could help out. Msgr. Roy wound up offering to conduct a Bible study at St. Joseph the Worker.

“He’s been so good to help us out like that,” Father Young said.

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Tags: Father Frank Carabello, Father William O’Donnell, retired priests, Retirement Collection for Diocesan Priests, service, Uncategorized

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