



## BETWEEN OURSELVES

By EDWARD J. SHUGRUE

When he was a student in Waterbury's Crosby high school more than two decades back it was a question whether the Rev. Francis D. McKenna would follow his chosen vocation for the priesthood, or seek to fill a hidden desire to become a baseball player.

Religion won out, but it was a few years after he



THE REV. FRANCIS D. M'KENNA

was ordained that Father McKenna was actually forced to give up engagements on the diamond—and only because he won a championship game with a ninth-inning home run. That will be explained!

The Rev. Francis Donald McKenna, an eloquent speaker in addition, was born in Waterbury May 15, 1930, and seventh in line of 10 children born to Patrick and Mary McKenna.

He graduated from St. Mary's school in the Brass City in 1949, Crosby high school in 1948 and then it was into Holy Orders. He graduated from St. Thomas seminary, Brentford, in 1953 and finished his theological courses in St. Mary's seminary, Baltimore, and was ordained in St. Joseph's cathedral, Hartford, by Archbishop Henry J. O'Brien Dec. 21, 1953.

### 10 Years Assistant at St. Ann's

Father McKenna served in a temporary assignment at St. Bernard's, Sharon, four months, before being assigned to St. Ann's parish in Black Rock in July, 1958. He spent 10 happy years there as he was assigned with the late Rev. Henry J. Coleman, pastor, and the late Rt. Rev. James F. Murphy, first pastor of St. Augustine's cathedral, as his priestly associates.

He was transferred to St. Mary's, Norwalk, in 1955, St. Catherine's, Riverside, in 1957, and St. Patrick's, Bridgeport, in June, 1959.

### Baseball Only Major Sports Endeavor

Although he gave basketball a brief try, and shunned football, Father McKenna was a diamond addict from the time he was able to handle a bat, ball and glove. He really got started as a shortstop in St. Mary's school where the star of the club was George (Piney) Woods, who went on to finish for the Boston Red Sox.

Father McKenna won his baseball letter four years in a row at Crosby where he was coached one season by the popular Billy Scedoff and three years by "Jack" Masberitz. Billy Moore, brother of the famed Johnny Moore, played in the outfield for Crosby and the major game each season was against Naugatuck which had Spec Shea of Yankee fame as ace pitcher.

There surely was some exciting hand for leading boys of Crosby high in that era into the priesthood for eight classmates of Father McKenna have been ordained.

They include: the Rev. Walter Pranketts, formerly of St. George's Lutheran church this city, and now of New Britain; the Rev. John Homan, formerly of St. Patrick's here and now of St. Patrick's, Norwich; the Rev. Brian Benzavich, of Hartford; the Rev. George Hughes of Derby; the Rev. Thomas Russo, of Waterbury; the Rev. John D'Amico of Torrington and the Rev. Joseph Murphy of New Haven.

He played two years of baseball and basketball at St. Thomas' seminary. Adrian Brennan, prominent Hartford insurance executive, coached the cages, while the Rt. Rev. Michael J. Guerin of St. Mary's, Greenwich, was the baseball minister. Morty Quinn, a Bridgeport native, was a star catcher in local factory and city leagues, and was considered Major League timber because of his hitting ability.

At St. Thomas' his playing mates included the Rev. Raymond H. Giddens, now of Holy Trinity parish, the Rev. Vincent Lyddy, son of retired Police Supt. John A. Lyddy, the Rev. James Carwell, who became an Air Force chaplain, and the Rev. John McCall, a native Bridgeporter, who transferred to the Jesuit order.

Father McKenna's athletic days were supposed to end when he entered St. Mary's seminary in Baltimore, but like a lot of other men of the cloth (some in this area, who still say) he just could not keep away from the diamond.

### Home Run Ended Active Career

While a curate in Riverside Father McKenna managed to sneak away after services on Sundays to play second base in the Greenwich Post Courier Senior City league.

He used his own name and was "getting away with it" without the knowledge of his pastor until the championship game of the season. Then came the end of his active career in baseball.

His team was trailing by two runs in the ninth inning, had two men on base and up stepped Father McKenna to play out a game-winning home run. He does not remember whether it was the Greenwich Times or the Post Courier item which came out with this gem on the next day.

### FATHER M'KENNA'S HOMER WINS CHAMPIONSHIP.

At supper Monday night his pastor wanted to know who gave him permission to play baseball, and told him his career was now at a permanent end. He since has obeyed, although he still loves to coach kids.

He tutored during his decade at St. Ann's and had several championship combats in baseball and basketball over the seasons. He also served as school principal and coach when attached to St. Mary's, Norwalk. Since he came to St. Patrick's in the North End he has been forced to sit on the sidelines since the Rev. Thomas P. Guinan, who preceded him there, has been coaching all the CYO and parochial school units, and winning state and New England championships. Father McKenna has no "best" since he and Father Guinan, who he kiddingly calls "George", are super friends, and Father McKenna serves as chief scorer when he can find the time to attend performances of St. Patrick's teams.

It has been related that Father McKenna is an expert gardener, but he denies the acclaim, saying that "I planted a few trees and shrubs at St. Ann's and they grew and blossomed so undue credit has been tossed my way."

In addition to his duties at St. Patrick's, one of the largest parishes in the Bridgeport diocese, Father McKenna is chaplain of the Catholic Lawyers' guild; director of West Side of Fairfield County Casco Society; chairman of the parish ladies' Rosary Confraternity and a confirmed Yankee fan.

A longtime friend of Eddie Lopez he is rooting for the old "raining" pitcher to succeed Casey Stengel, when the "old man" decides to retire.