

Anchors aweigh for Erlanger priest

Pacifist to leave parish today, begin new life as Navy chaplain

BY DAVE BEASLEY
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The Rev. Larry B. Leslie was raised a Methodist. He was engaged three times, but never married. He is a pacifist, soon to turn 50, has the wanderlust and is looking for new adventure.

He also is a Catholic priest and today he will give up his post as associate pastor of Mary Queen of Heaven Church in Erlanger to join the U.S. Navy as a chaplain.

Leslie is a jovial, gray-haired, youthful 49-year-old. "I looked around and said there's a lot of active life in me yet, and I might as well get it all out."

But, he has a more profound reason for wanting to minister to sailors.

"Basically, I'm a pacifist and I don't believe in war or violence. There are a lot of young people in military service who have the same viewpoints.

"When Iraq invaded Kuwait I thought, 'What if we go to war? What are those people going to do?' Many enlisted in the National Guard for the education, not ever

thinking they would have to battle in combat.

"I would never advise them not to fight, but I thought they would need counseling and support."

Leslie had been a petty officer at the Norfolk Naval Station for four years in the 1960s.

He returns as an officer. He already has been commissioned a lieutenant. Leslie plans to leave today, after saying the 11 a.m. Mass, to spend a week with his sister in Ashland, Ky. Then he will attend chaplaincy school in Newport, R.I. From there he expects to be assigned to Guam or the Philippines, he said.

Leslie was raised in a non-church-going Methodist family in Ashland, but was surrounded by devoutly religious people, including

an aunt who was a Nazarene and an uncle who was a Holiest Church minister.

He graduated from Ashland High School and held numerous jobs, including selling home appliances, and, after starting as a janitor with the local telephone company, rose to be an engineer.

Leslie said he lived a carefree life as a young man, and came to Catholicism later in life.

"I dated, roamed a lot, partied a lot. . . . I used to drive for a friend who dated a Catholic girl, who would get dates for me. Once we went to a Catholic church to watch a confirmation ceremony.

Former Covington Bishop Richard H. Ackerman was there.

"I was in awe of the reverence of the people for what they were

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— Rev. Larry B. Leslie

doing, for their sense of the presence of the Lord in that church.

"Then when the bishop entered, the pageantry hit me. I felt at home, even though I was standing in the back of a crowded church."

He later entered St. Pius Seminary in Erlanger and attended a seminary in Philadelphia, from where he graduated with a master of divinity degree. He was 39. He began teaching at St. Stephen School in Newport, then taught at St. Anthony in Bellevue, St. Bernard in Dayton and at Newport Catholic High School.

Four years ago, he decided to go into full-time pastoral work and was assigned to Mary Queen of Heaven Church. "I deal with people on a personal level and share the Lord differently than when I was teaching," he said.

Last year the Persian Gulf crisis, his restlessness, and the Navy's recruiting brochure all came together. With the permission of Covington Bishop William A. Hughes, he enlisted.

"The bishop encouraged me and told me to support our people in the military," Leslie said.



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The Rev. Larry B. Leslie addresses parishioners during Mass on Saturday at Mary Queen of Heaven Church in Erlanger.