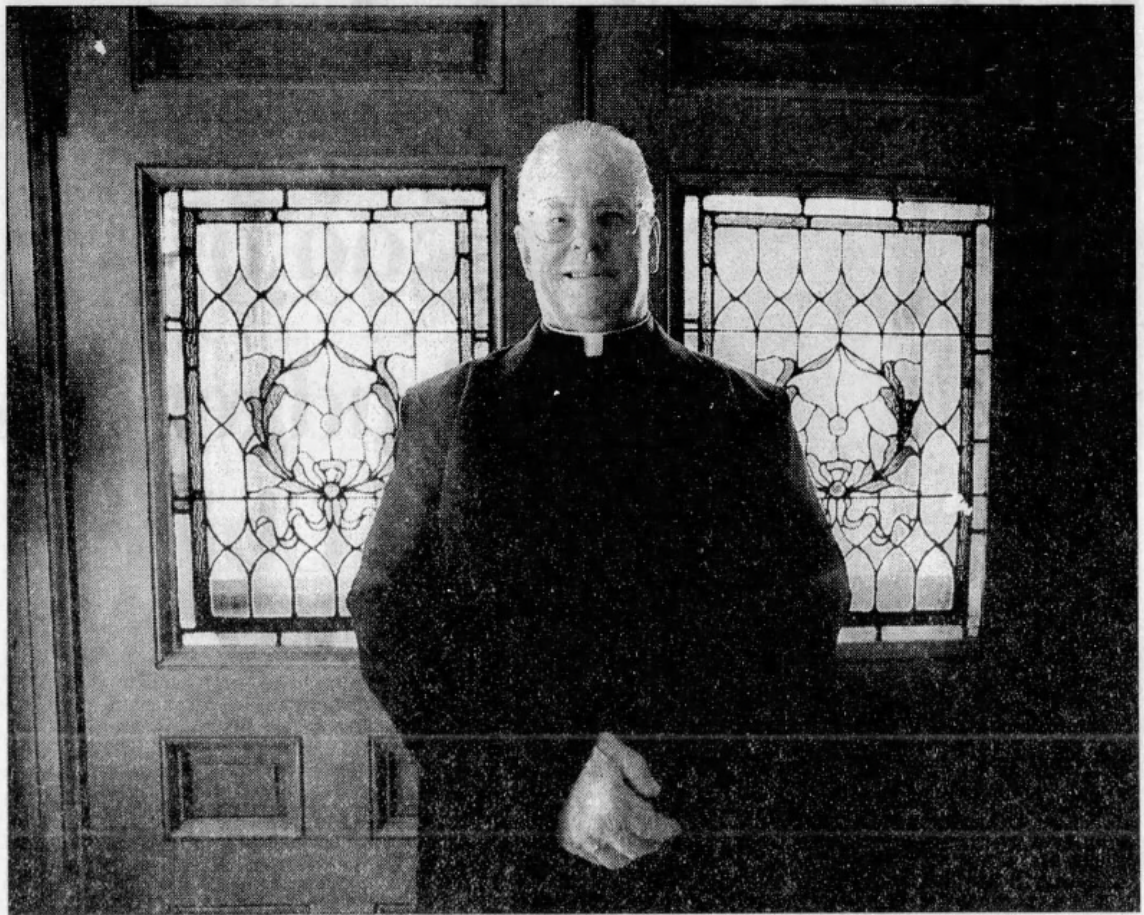


"I have lived a quiet life as a priest," says The Rev. Ronald P. Lussier, who has spent 47 years helping others.

Staff photo by MORRIS J. KENNEDY



## Priest reflects on long career

The Rev. Ronald P. Lussier is unable to estimate the number of weddings, funerals and baptisms at which he has presided, but says his life as a priest has 'been wonderful.'

By PAMELA H. METAXAS

Staff writer

CHICOPEE — His laughter is infectious, and he is a man who says he has no regrets about his 47 years as a priest.

The Rev. Ronald P. Lussier, 71, who was ordained in St. Michael's Cathedral in Springfield in 1952, shows no sign of slowing down or retiring.

"We have a wonderful parish. We have a lot of elderly. There are good people," he said of his parishioners at St. George's Church, 7 Belcher St.

Lussier, who lives in the rambling rectory at 202 East Main St., the former Caldwell Mansion, plays piano, swims, golfs and used to play tennis with his late brother, the Rev. Leon Lussier.

He graduated from the former Assumption Preparatory School and Assumption College, both in Worcester, then continued his studies at the Seminary of Philosophy and the Grand Seminary, both in Montreal, Canada.

His first parish was St. Thomas Aquinas in Springfield, where he served as assistant pastor and was also a chaplain at the former Springfield Hospital (now Baystate Medical Center) for 14 years.

"It was murder. They called us into the hospital at night. It was usually for the last rites," said Lussier, who remembers once sleeping on a gurney, because the medical staff told him he would be needed during the night as several victims of an accident were coming in.

"It was to console. I held the hands of people who were dying," he said. Not all were Catholics, he said, but they all were searching for some spiritual relief.

Then, he served for two years as assistant pastor at St. Rose de Lima Church in Chicopee and as administrator at Notre Dame Church in Adams.

His first assignment as pastor of his own church was the Holy Family Church in North Adams.

He later was assigned as pastor of St. George, his current post, where he has served for the past 24 years. "I'm part of the furniture," he quipped.

Three years ago, due to a declining enrollment (there were only 125 students), St. George's parochial school merged with St. Joan of Arc parochial school in Aldenville.

"It's worked out wonderfully" with St. George students making

the transition and "most of our teachers were hired to teach there," said Lussier.

Alderman-At-Large Lucille G. Ouimette, who attended the former St. George School, and was married to her husband, Raymond in the church, praised Lussier.

"That whole neighborhood is very close to my heart. That's where I was raised. I hope he stays as long as we can keep him. He is a wonderful parish priest, and he liked by all the parishioners. He is dedicated to his job. He does good work, and we all love him," said Ouimette.

Once thinking of a medical career, Lussier selected the priesthood after two college roommates considering the vocation kept talking about it. One did become a priest and the other became an attorney, according to Lussier.

His 95-year-old mother, Eva Lussier, still lives in the family home on Bell Street. His sister, Anita Perry, is secretary to the Rev. Gerard LaFleur at Assumption Church. His late father was Odias Lussier.

An avid tennis player for many years, he was forced to stop at about 50 years old because of degenerative arthritis in his knees.

"I'm a recreational golfer, and I swim at the Marriott Health Club," he said. He likes to visit Florida with his mother during the winter.

And, he likes to find the time to get away to his cottage on Lake Wyola in Shutesbury.

When he needs help, he enlists the assistance of fellow priests, the Rev. Leo Hoar and the Rev. Ernest Moreau, who is retired, and the Rev. Clarence Forand.

"I have no regrets whatsoever. It's been wonderful. I have lived a quiet life as a priest," he said.

Lussier is unable to estimate the number of weddings, funerals and baptisms at which he has presided. Nor can he count the number of people he has consoled over the years, but the worst have been the funerals of young people.

"It kills me when I see people dying so young," he said.

Lussier sees many societal and other problems stemming from a breakdown of the family and an overemphasis on money and power.

If more families prayed and spent time together at meals and activities, there would be more harmony and less violence, he believes.