

Gael of the Year Father Eugene Riordan

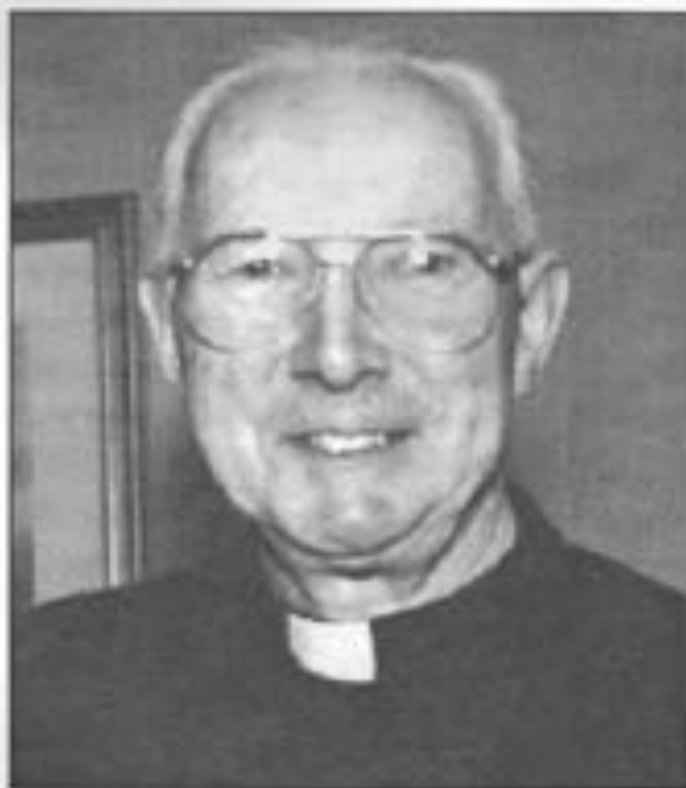
by Joe Barry

The St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee is proud to honor, educator and missionary, Father Eugene Riordan, as it's 1996 Gael of the Year.

Riordan, eldest son of eight children, was born in Kilmichael, County Cork and raised in the farming community of Coachford, picturesquely set overlooking the River Lee. There young Eugene spent many hours along side his father helping to work the family farm. Some of his fondest memories from early childhood centered around attending local and county fairs, for which, he had labored so diligently to prepare. His mother, raised in Coolea Gael, West Cork, had a great love for Irish culture and language, which she readily shared with all of her children.

Riordan entered the local National School at Coachford, where the school master's fascination with local lore, legend and history of the area proved infectious. Studies continued at the Irish Christian Brothers Secondary School, in the city of Cork, before entering their Teacher Training College in Dublin. Eugene Riordan had compiled a superior academic record, and upon graduation elected to teach for the following six years. Riordan found this career choice very rewarding, but knew this alone would not be his life's work. For many years he had a strong feeling, that his vocation was to enter the priesthood, so Eugene Riordan requested admission to the Society of African Missions (S.M.A.).

The S.M.A. was founded in Lyon, France in 1856, by Bishop Melchior Marion de Bresillac, and quickly spread to many European countries, dividing itself into national jurisdictions called provinces. The society's founder in a letter to Rome described conditions the first six missionaries to Sierra Leone, West Africa encountered. "A few days ago we were six, now we are two, the excellent Father Raymond and myself. May the will of God be accomplished." A week later Bishop Bresillac, and Father Raymond had joined their confreres in death, victims of the dread fevers, which at that time earned the title "The white man's grave." The whole band was wiped out, the venture a seeming disaster before it could really begin its work. Such was the beginning of the S.M.A. mission venture. The small group left at home, eight in all, were overwhelmed by the news of the tragedy, but far from being discouraged, their resolve to continue the venture was rather



strengthened, confident as they were that they had "advocates in heaven who will plead our case."

Riordan joined the S.M.A. and was assigned to the American Province, which had been established in 1941. Archbishop Richard Cushing of Boston invited the S.M.A. to create it's seminary at Dedham, Massachusetts, and here Eugene Riordan began theological studies. Later he completed his seminary training at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, and was ordained to the priesthood at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in 1953. Studies completed, father Riordan fully expected to be assigned to the order's Liberian mission in Africa, but S.M.A. elected to use his talents elsewhere, and for the next sixteen years was to serve in dual capacities of educator and fund-raiser at the society's seminary in Dedham, Massachusetts.

Missionary groups, by their very nature, rely heavily on the fund-raisers at home to support mission activities, and Father Riordan proved quite successful in his efforts to raise money. Fundraising techniques included dinner dances, concerts, field days, and direct contributions from the particularly generous people of the greater Boston area. Entertainers, such as, Cindy Lord, Minnie Hines and Jerry Vale performed at these events.

Riordan, was also a full time theology professor at the Dedham seminary during his sixteen years there.

Seventeen years from the date of ordination his dream was finally realized with assignment to the Liberian mission.

An S.M.A. missionary, that had gone to Liberia described his first encounter with the poverty and people in an African village. The priest stated, "I traveled for many hours over dusty, rut filled roads, with my car damaged, clothes dirty and disheveled, with burning sun searing my skin arriving angry and inconvenienced only to have the people of the village apologize to me for the distress I had suffered. How could I as an outsider, well educated, well fed, well heeled, dare to proclaim to these poor people a gospel, that God cared for them?" Entering a room he saw men and women offering the husband what little money they had to defray the cost of hospitalizing his wife and child—the child who was to die in spite of everything. "Slowly, it dawned on me what was happening— God was opening my eyes to see with faith and trust. To see him totally involved with his people, with me."

"My fears, inadequacies and doubts, seemed to

fade away as I sensed my roll as missionary was perhaps not so much to bring something new to people, as much as, to help people see what was already there all the time."

The missions in Liberia have created and operated a network of medical clinics, a general hospital, schools from kindergarten through college, vocational training centers, and a leprosarium.

In 1984 Father Riordan was taken ill and returned to the United States, after spending, as he described, "Fourteen wonderfully happy years in Liberia." Fully recovered Riordan lead a relief team in 1990 to the Ivory Coast to minister to the fleeing refugees from the Liberian Civil War. Father Riordan returned to the order's Formation Center in Takoona Park in 1992.

Riordan has played hurling and Irish football with teams in Boston, Washington and his native Ireland.

Father Eugene Riordan, exemplifies the many admirable traits associated with the Irish, intellect, stubborn determination to overcome adversity, and a strong sense of purpose. Father Riordan thank you for celebrating with us. — Joe Barry is a member of the parade committee.

ANGELS—1996

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Wray

Peg O'Beirne, HMLA

Mary Anne Sheridan Dolinbusch



Matt Lee

Always there when
needed
God love 'em