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The Rev. Wilfred Diamond said he once shined shoes for Mafia leader Legs Diamond.

From Hell's Kitchen to heaven's calling

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LA LUZ, N.M. — He grew up in New York's Hell's Kitchen and says he rubbed elbows with members of the Mafia.

Now he is a master of the 60-second sermon.

The Rev. Wilfred Diamond's career in the Roman Catholic Church spanned 50 years, half of that time at St. Jude's Parish in Alamogordo.

It was in Alamogordo that he developed his 60-second sermons.

"One Sunday morning it was so hot, so just for fun, I took off my wristwatch and timed the sermon."

He told the people that anytime the temperature went over 95 degrees he would have a 60-second sermon.

"They loved those little sermons, and they always let me know if I went over my time," he said.

Diamond was born in England in 1913. His family came to the United States in 1926.

The family lived in a section of New York City known for its

gangster activity.

"It was called Hell's Kitchen," Diamond said. "It was Prohibition, and this was where the gangsters lived, where they did their bootlegging and where they made their bootleg whiskey."

Diamond said he used to shine shoes for Legs Diamond, a Mafia leader.

"Since we had the same last name, he wanted me to be a member of the gang and deliver whiskey for him."

He was 13, he said.

"My mother said, 'Don't you dare,' and I didn't."

After working a number of years in New York parishes, he joined St. Jude's Parish in Alamogordo in 1967 and remained there until he retired last year.

The first Sunday of retirement, Diamond said he cried in his coffee, sitting on his porch all alone.

"How could the church really go along without me after all those years?"

After he got used to the shock of retirement, he began to like it.