

Retired pastor counts 35 years of blessings

By CATHY BUGMAN

In his 35 years as a priest, the Rev. Bernard Haddican has shared the joy of weddings, heard confessions and consoled mourners at funerals.

He is ready to share with anyone a book of anecdotes filed away in his mind.

The retired pastor, who helps out at Our Lady of the Mount Roman Catholic Church in Warren Township, will reflect on his years in the clergy when he is honored today on the 35th anniversary of his ordination. A reception will mark the occasion following the noon Mass.

The pastor, Msgr. William Benwell, who will preach at the service, spoke fondly of Haddican.

"The most remarkable things about him are that he is such a dedicated priest and that he has shown remarkable peace and acceptance about his illnesses," Benwell said.

Haddican, 61, had a quadruple heart bypass six years ago, has a paralyzed vocal cord that makes his voice weak and is on kidney dialysis.

"He does not dwell on the fact that he has health problems," Benwell said. "He just realizes he's been blessed in new ways; he has a family he cares about a lot."

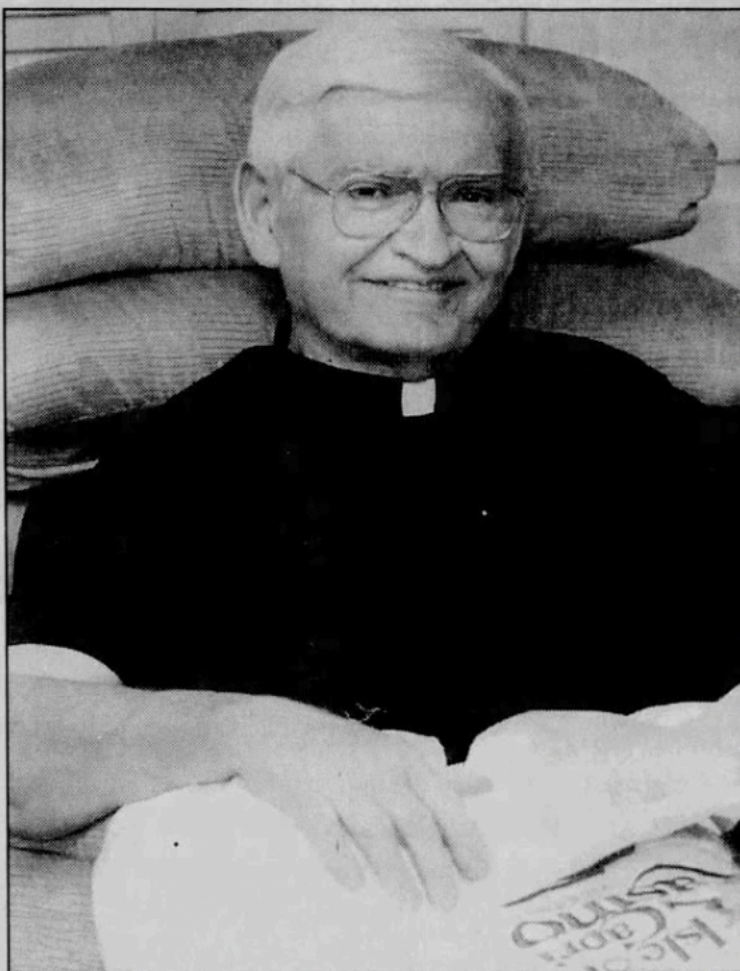
Haddican lives in the Warren home of his brother, Patrick, who with his wife, Eileen, have four children.

Many of his family members—he was the fifth of six children—plan to attend today's commemoration.

When he was hospitalized for 17 months after his bypass operation, his family "came to Mississippi 31 times to visit me, and they never stayed less than four or five days. All the hospital people said my family kept me alive."

Born in Brooklyn to Irish immigrants, he stayed there until age 17 when he heard about Southern missions and traveled there.

There was never any doubt that Haddican would pursue a religious life. He knew in the fourth grade that he wanted to be a priest. He mentioned



(Photo by Robert Sciarino)

The Rev. Bernard Haddican, assistant pastor at Our Lady of the Mount Church, will be celebrating his 35th year in the ministry today. Here he recuperates in his home from surgery

his aspirations in an essay he wrote that his teacher plastered with gold stars and hung on the bulletin board.

"I love people and I figured that being a priest is the best way I can serve them," he said. "I love going to the Bridgewater Commons to sit on a bench and watch people and talk to them."

After high school, Haddican jour-

neyed to Louisiana, where he enrolled in St. Joseph's Seminary in a town near Lake Pontchartrain.

He then attended another seminary in Little Rock, Ark., and did some graduate work at Notre Dame and Fordham universities.

Haddican was ordained 35 years ago today in St. Mary's Cathedral in Natchez, Miss.

"I was one of five boys in an Irish family, and priests were always looked on as something special," he said. "My mother and father went into orbit when they learned I wanted to be a priest. They were encouraging."

Haddican spent much of his career in Mississippi, serving as a full pastor at 31 in a church in Oxford and holding a variety of other posts, including chaplain at Mississippi State Penitentiary.

One particularly poignant memory he has of his time in the South occurred when he put out the trash at a rectory one night at 11 o'clock.

"A young man was sitting there and I asked him, 'Are you waiting for someone?'" Haddican recalled. "He

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—Rev. Bernard Haddican

said no. I then asked him if he wanted to get in the student center nearby, but again he said no.

"He told me he had been sitting there waiting for two hours to talk to me," Haddican said. "We sat there and talked for two or three hours."

"From that day on, there never was a night that I didn't check to see if there was someone outside before I went to bed," he said.

What he likes about being a priest is the "unremunerated thanks I get from people. They make you part of their families. Just knowing you can make a difference in comforting them is meaningful."

Benwell said, "His priesthood defines who he is. He doesn't want to take it easy. He enjoys being involved in the parish."