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Father Michael Burns celebrates Mass in Assumption Church, worship site of St. Isidore the Farmer Parish, New Egypt. Concelebrating at right is Redemptorist Father Dariusz Paszynski who presented a mission appeal in that weekend. Mike Ehrmann photo

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Father Michael J. Burns' 50 years of following God's path

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By [THERESA SHUBECK](#)
Correspondent

In the spring of 2022, Father Michael J. Burns walked 150 miles over the course of 12.5 days on the El Camino de Santiago, following the trek that pilgrims have traced for more than 1,000 years. Similarly, through his 50 years of priesthood, he has followed in the faithful steps of his parents, received encouragement from prominent priests in the Diocese of Trenton and been open to the path to which God has called him.

[PHOTO GALLERY-Father Michael Burns- 50th Anniversary](#)

The oldest of five siblings, Father Burns – known as Mike in childhood – and his brother and sisters grew up in a family where faith and the Church were at the forefront, with parents Joseph and Anne bringing them to Sunday Mass and praying together as a family before meals and bedtime. They were all called to “helping professions:” Two sisters became librarians, one a teacher and one brother worked for the federal government. Father Burns followed God's call to the priesthood, largely influenced by his maternal grandmother, whose piety and practices took root in her young grandson.

Model Mentors

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Bishop's Corner

His Sacred Heart, Our Hope:
Renewing America through the
Sacred Heart of Jesus

As a student in Notre Dame High School, Lawrenceville, he came into contact with two priests, Msgr. Leonard R. Toomey and Msgr. William J. Capik, who influenced his path to the priesthood. Msgr. Toomey was then pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Trenton, when Mike worked as a counselor in the Mercer County CYO Day Camp in Yardville. Msgr. Capik was the athletic director at Notre Dame and Mike, following his passion for athletics, was the sports editor of the student newspaper, The Coronet.



From the Pope

Pope Leo renews calls for humanitarian help for people of Gaza, discusses AI and warfare



Father Burns receives a warm greeting following Mass in Assumption Church, Wrightstown. Mike Ehrmann photo



Remembering time spent with his father listening to the University of Notre Dame games on the radio, Mike dreamed of attending the college in South Bend, Ind. Through a combination of a partial academic scholarship and a student loan, Mike was able to realize his goal to attend the university, where he subsequently encountered the Fathers of the Congregation of Holy Cross. At the time, a significant portion of the brothers were young, and that fact firmed it up for Mike “to give it a try.”

Father Burns first studied at St. Meinrad Seminary, South Bend, Ind., and was subsequently ordained a priest May 26, 1973, by Bishop George W. Ahr in St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral, Trenton. Beginning with his CYO camp days, Father Burns wanted to work with young people, and in his first assignment at Sacred Heart Parish, Trenton, under the tutelage of Msgr. Toomey, Father Burns taught eighth grade religion in the parish grammar school.

Proximate to Trenton State Prison while at Sacred Heart, Father Burns was named the prison's chaplain and, as he described, “learned as I went along.” At the prison he interacted with hardened criminals, including one imprisoned for murder who was subsequently paroled and with whom Father Burns kept in touch.

His most notable event at Trenton State was one in which he believed that he was protected by God. On a January day in 1976 when he was scheduled to go into his office at the prison, he instead celebrated a funeral Mass; meanwhile that same day, inmates rioted and took over the education wing of the prison where Father Burns was typically stationed.

Learning Experiences

Following Sacred Heart, parochial vicar assignments followed in St. Paul Parish, Burlington (now part of St. Katharine Drexel Parish) and St. Hedwig Parish, Trenton. From 1990 to 2017, Father Burns was pastor of St. Mary Parish, Bordentown, now part of Mary, Mother of the Church Parish, Bordentown.



Looking back, Father Burns related that each parish had its challenges, which provided opportunities for him to develop a variety of skills that served him well when he later became a pastor. Upon his arrival in St. Mary, he discovered the need for significant renovations and restoration and the requirement to raise \$1.5 million. He found the entire process “a real eye opener.”

Common among all his assignments has been the “wonderful priests and deacons, and the faith and inspiration of people in support of their parish and their pastor,” he said. Initially frightened at preaching a homily in his early days, he learned to adapt. And he felt that although he was shy as a kid, it taught him to be a good listener. This openness inspired parishioners to bring to him ideas for new ministries, including a community food pantry begun in St. Mary's, which continues to feed 100 families weekly.

Grateful to remain active in retirement as a weekend assistant in St. Isidore the Farmer Parish, New Egypt, he advises those considering the priesthood to “always be open to where God leads you.”

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