

Msgr. Francis Growney Dies; Active in Theater

Msgr. Francis A. Growney, 78, who left an acting career for the priesthood and later guided the growth of St. Williams Church in West Seneca, died today (Aug. 18, 1975) in St. Jerome Hospital, Batavia.

Msgr. Growney's colorful career began in South Byron where he was born. As a youngster he played semi-professional baseball before he took to the footlights as an actor and producer.

In the early 1900s he toured with the Bonstelle Stock Company, appearing on stage with Katherine Cornell. When he became a priest in 1921, he continued his theatrical interests.

THEN, THOUGH, his talents took a different tack. One of his foremost accomplishments was producing the annual Passion Play for the Diocese of Buffalo in the old Shea's Buffalo at Court and Pearl Sts.

The widely acclaimed production often attracted stars such as Ethel Barrymore, Helen Mencken, Margaret Ryan and Bert Lytell. He founded the Catholic Theatre Guild and directed its activities for 15 years.

He also had a radio program which was broadcast in Western New York and on a world-wide network to servicemen.

In June 1954, Msgr. Growney was made Papal Chamberlain to Pope Pius XII. His heart remained close to the theater and when he celebrated his 50th anniversary as a priest, the late Bishop James A. McNulty, observed:

"You could have been a great actor. But you are a greater priest."

MSGR. GROWNEY graduated from Canisius College and



MSGR. F. A. GROWNEY
Guided St. Williams

the Seminary of Our Lady of the Angels at Niagara University.

He had been chairman of the Priests Committee of the Diocesan Union of Holy Name Societies, spiritual director of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Men and a professor of English at the Little Seminary of St. Joseph and Little Flower.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated by Bishop Edward D. Head at 10:30 AM Thursday in St. Williams Church, Arcade Rd., West Seneca.

Survivors include two sisters, Loretta and Genevieve, both of Batavia, two nephews and a niece. Burial will be in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Batavia.

Services will be held in the Bohm Funeral Home, 308 E. Main St., Batavia.