

## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Father Anthony Kohlmann, S.J. (1771-1836)

By **MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY**

### FIRST IN A SERIES

**P**ope Pius VII established the Diocese of New York in 1808, but it remained an ecclesiastical orphan for the next seven years—a diocese without a resident bishop. Archbishop John Carroll of Baltimore came to the rescue by appointing Father Anthony Kohlmann, a 42-year-old Jesuit and a native of Alsace, the temporary administrator of the new diocese. Kohlmann has a good claim to be considered the real founder of the Archdiocese of New York.

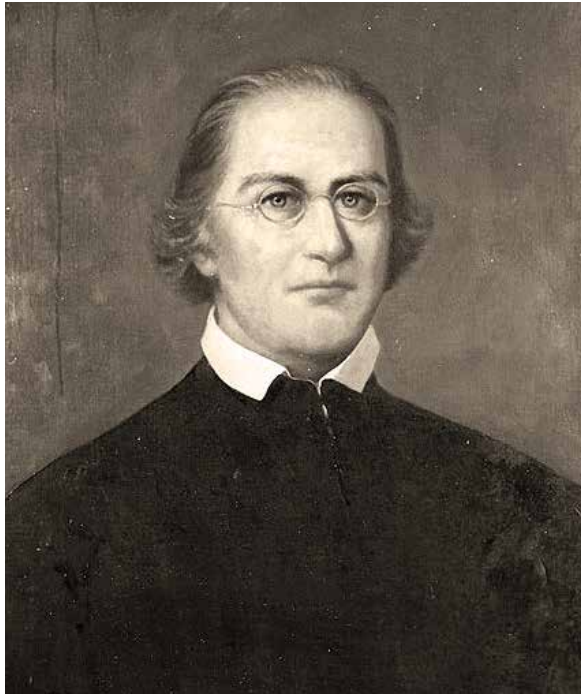
Father Kohlmann gave New York Catholics their first cathedral, which is known today as the Basilica of St. Patrick's Old Cathedral, located on Mulberry Street in lower Manhattan. Kohlmann brought with him to New York five additional Jesuits, a priest and four seminarians, who opened an academy, the New York Literary Institution, which Kohlmann hoped would develop into a full-fledged Jesuit college.

Unfortunately the school was forced to close when the Jesuits were recalled to Maryland to assure the survival of newly founded Georgetown College. Generations of New York Jesuits have gleefully quoted Kohlmann's protest to his superior that the future of the Society of Jesus was to be in New York and that Washington would always remain "a poor beggarly place."

Perhaps Father Kohlmann's greatest claim to fame was his role as a defendant in a trial in June 1813 that was to have to have national repercussions. He had been indicted for refusing to reveal the identity of a person who had returned stolen property to him in the course of a sacramental confession. Father Kohlmann's defense was that he was obliged to remain silent because of the "seal of confession," the requirement of his Catholic faith that he must never disclose information obtained in the course of hearing a sacramental confession.

The presence of Kohlmann as a defendant in the trial is apt to be misunderstood. He was not the victim of religious persecution or anti-Catholic prejudice.

Both of his defense attorneys were Protestants. William Sampson was an Anglican and native of Derry, who was extremely popular among both Catholics and Protestants in the New York Irish community because of his role in the revolt of



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1798 in Ireland. He published a verbatim account of the trial shortly after its conclusion in 1815, "The Catholic Question in America." He has been described as "America's first civil rights lawyer, preceding Clarence Darrow by almost a century."

Kohlmann's other attorney, Richard Riker, the city recorder and a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, cleverly argued that, if the state constitution assured Catholics of religious freedom, this assurance must include the protection of the secrecy of confession. Otherwise, he claimed, "this important branch of the Roman Catholic religion would be thus annihilated."

The attorney general, Barent Gardinier (another member of the Dutch Reformed Church) began the trial by apologizing to the court for prosecuting the case. He was loath to do so, Gardinier said, because "it was not of so much public

importance that the offence [sic] charged against the accused of receiving stolen goods should be punished, as that the repose of a respectable religious sect should be threatened with imprisonment or even a token fine."

Gardinier explained that he would never have prosecuted the case, "if he had not received a very earnest request from the Roman Catholic Church, urging him to bring the point now before the court to a decision." Kohlmann's trial was a collusive affair concocted beforehand by co-operative Catholic and Protestant New Yorkers.

The civil authorities were eager to drop all charges against Kohlmann, but the lay leaders of the small Catholic community, the trustees of St. Peter's Church, where Kohlmann was pastor, refused to accept this generous offer. Instead, they called for a trial in order to establish a precedent that would protect the seal of confession from future legal challenges.

They were confident that any New York court would return a verdict favorable to Kohlmann. They were not mistaken. On June 14, 1813, when

Mayor DeWitt Clinton, the presiding judge, delivered the unanimous verdict of the court acquitting Father Kohlmann, he summed up the decision in a lapidary phrase: "If [Father Kohlmann] tells the truth, he violates his ecclesiastical oath—If he prevaricates he violates his judicial oath...The only course is for the court to declare that he shall not testify or act at all."

A further guarantee of the inviolability of the seal of confession in civil law was added by

the New York state legislature on Dec. 10, 1828, when it passed a statute that declared that "no minister of the gospel or priest of any denomination whatsoever, shall be allowed to disclose any confession made to him in his professional character in the course of discipline enjoined by the rules or practice of such denomination."

The governor who signed this bill into law was DeWitt Clinton. The New York statute of 1828 was widely imitated elsewhere in the United States. As a result, Father Kohlmann's trial in New York City in June 1813 left a long and beneficial legacy in American religious history especially for Catholics.

*Msgr. Shelley, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is emeritus professor of Church history at Fordham University.*

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## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Father Thomas Farrell (1823-1880)

By **MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY**

### SECOND IN A SERIES

Father Thomas Farrell was the rarest of rare birds among the diocesan clergy of the archdiocese of New York in the mid-19th century. He was an Irish-born abolitionist and a Radical Republican at a time when most of his clerical confrères were indifferent to the existence of slavery on American soil and ardent supporters of Tammany Hall.

William McCloskey, a New York diocesan priest who became the bishop of Louisville, called Farrell “a good man, but crazy on some points,” a reference to his liberal views on a number of issues. It would be accurate to describe Father Farrell as a civil rights advocate, but not as a civil rights leader, because he was a lonely figure, a general without an army.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War, in October 1861, Archbishop John Hughes warned Simon Cameron, the Secretary of War, that, if Catholics were asked “to fight for the abolition of slavery, then indeed, they will turn away in disgust from the discharge of what would otherwise be a patriotic duty.”

After the end of the Civil War, in 1869, Father Farrell and his like-minded friend, Father Sylvester Malone, a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, made a tour of the Southern states to assess the status of the Freedmen, as the emancipated slaves were called.

The bishop of Richmond, John McGill, a native of Philadelphia, got wind of their activities and criticized them severely for their efforts.

Bishop McGill complained to Archbishop John McCloskey, Father Farrell’s superior, that Farrell was guilty of *negrophilia* (literally love of black people) as if it were a sin or a crime instead of a virtue. McGill also accused Farrell of “stirring up the negroes,” which really meant that Farrell was encouraging African Americans to assert the civil rights (including the right to vote) that were legally guaranteed to black men by the three Civil War amendments to the Constitution.

After the disputed presidential election of 1876, the last federal troops were withdrawn from the former Confederate states, enabling white-dominated Southern legislatures to erase the gains that African Americans had made during the previous



*Father Thomas Farrell marched to a different drummer—his own conscience. As the pastor of St. Joseph’s Church on Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village during the Civil War, he defiantly displayed the Stars-and-Stripes on the façade of his church to advertise not only his support of the Union but also his detestation of slavery. It was a courageous gesture in a city where the majority of voters twice rejected Abraham Lincoln’s bid to win the Presidency of the United States.*

decade and to create the racially segregated Jim Crow South that was to last for the following 90 years until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of the following year.

To compound the plight of African Americans in the late 19th century, by the 1870s many Northern abolitionists lost interest in the fate of black people in the Jim Crow South. Father Thomas Farrell was an honorable, if humble, exception. He could do little to prevent racial discrimination in the South, but he made a modest effort to come to the aid of African American Catholics in New York City where they were often made to feel unwelcome in Catholic parish churches.

For example, in the summer of 1842, Pierre Toussaint, the leading figure in New York’s minuscule Catholic African American community, was insulted by a white usher because of his pres-

ence at Mass in St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral. When Louis Binsee, the French-speaking chair of the parish trustees, heard of the incident, he offered Pierre Toussaint an apology, but the apology revealed the unconscious racism that prevailed among even the best-intentioned white Catholics. “If God by His will has created you and your wife with black skin,” said Binsee, “by His grace he has also made your heart and soul as white as snow.”

In 1989 Cardinal John O’Connor introduced the cause of the canonization of Pierre Toussaint in Rome, exhumed his body and placed it in the crypt beneath the high altar of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. The following year, Pierre Toussaint was declared Venerable, the title that he now enjoys in the Church’s liturgical calendar.

Long before the canonization of Pierre Toussaint was ever envisioned, Father Farrell decided to establish an African American parish in New York City where black Catholics could feel welcome in their own spiritual home.

He left \$5,000 in Alabama state bonds for this purpose in his will. Aware of Cardinal McCloskey’s lack of enthusiasm for a black parish in his archdiocese, Farrell shrewdly added a codicil to his will specifying that, if the \$5,000 was not used for that purpose within three years of his death, the legacy would go to the Colored Orphan Asylum, a non-Catholic institution.

For three years after Farrell’s death, McCloskey did nothing. Then, two of Farrell’s closest clerical protégés took action. Edward McGlynn pleaded with McCloskey not to let slip “this golden opportunity.” Richard Burtzell offered to purchase a former Protestant church on Bleecker Street at his own expense. The result in November 1883 was the establishment of the Church of St. Benedict the Moor, the first Catholic African American church in New York City and the first Catholic African American church north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

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## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Msgr. Robert F. Keegan (1887-1947)

By **MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY**

### THIRD IN A SERIES

**A** lurid headline appeared in a New York City newspaper in 1916: “Orphans and Pigs Fed from the Same Bowl.” The article claimed that the children at the Mission of the Immaculate Conception on Staten Island (Mount Loretto) were fed from the same pails as the pigs in the institution’s farm.

The story was later proved to be a fabrication, but this article and similar allegations gained traction because of numerous city and state investigations beginning in 1914 of private child-caring institutions in New York. These allegations included many accusations against Catholic institutions that shocked New Yorkers and left New York Catholics reeling to defend themselves.

Auxiliary Bishop Patrick J. Hayes, who became the archbishop of New York in 1919, made it one of his highest priorities as archbishop to restore public confidence in the vast charitable network of the Catholic Church in New York. He commissioned a professional survey of the almost 200 charitable institutions and agencies in the archdiocese. The results were published the following year and disclosed many instances of underfunding of Catholic institutions as well as wasteful overlapping and duplication of services.

The principal conclusion that Archbishop Hayes drew from the survey was the need for a central coordinating and supervising agency for the Catholic charitable network in New York. As a result, on June 12, 1920, he incorporated the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York.

The survey also brought to light the extraordinary generosity of New York Catholics in supporting their charitable institutions. It disclosed in 1920 that they contributed \$4.4 million annually, twice the amount that the institutions received in government subsidies. This led Archbishop Hayes to introduce an annual fundraising drive in every parish. It had been intended to last for only three years, but it proved to be so successful that it became a permanent feature of Catholic life in the Archdiocese of New York.

One of the most important decisions that Cardinal Hayes (he received the red hat in 1924) made during his 19 years as archbishop of New York was the appointment of an executive director of the Catholic Charities of New York.

He selected for the position a young priest, Robert F. Keegan, who had been ordained only



COURTESY OF ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

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three years earlier. Keegan, a graduate of the New York School of Social Service, proved to be an inspired choice. He introduced and enforced modern standards of accountability in social service programs in the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York.

Msgr. Keegan made the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York a model for other dioceses in the United States and earned the respect of social welfare administrators throughout the nation. He himself was elected the president of the prestigious National Conference of Social Work in 1936. At the time of Keegan’s death in 1947, one official of that organization commented: “Under the auspices of his diocese, [Keegan] developed the social work program of Catholic Charities until its

standards were second to none in that city.”

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, Keegan was an outspoken supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. Cardinal Hayes scrupulously avoided involvement in partisan politics, but he never muzzled Keegan and seemed pleased when his silence was interpreted as tacit endorsement of Keegan’s views.

Cardinal Hayes’ attitude was not surprising because, a decade earlier, in 1919, Hayes, while still an auxiliary bishop, had signed the famous *Bishops’ Program of Social Reconstruction*. It was a remarkably progressive manifesto from the American hierarchy, calling for such innovations as a federal minimum wage, social security, subsidized housing for the poor, equal pay for women and a host of other social reforms, many of which were to be enacted 15 years later as part of the New Deal.

The *Bishops’ Program* provoked predictable complaints from those who thought that the document would pave the way for a socialist America. One of Hayes’ most powerful hometown critics was Nicholas Brady, a wealthy banker and generous benefactor of many Catholic charities, who feared that the bishops were undermining “a sane individualism.” Rather than confront Brady directly, Hayes responded with a soft answer calculated to turn away wrath. Archbishop Hayes assured Brady, “We are now able to talk to our own people as we were not able (to do) before we manifested an interest in their problems.”

Although Keegan was a very capable administrator, Cardinal Hayes unwisely allowed him to turn Catholic Charities into his own personal fiefdom. It was a regrettable decision because Keegan was a notably imperious and irascible character whose rages were legendary.

One of his assistants, Father E. Roberts Moore, said that when Keegan lost his temper, which was a frequent occurrence, “all the neighbors and the neighbors’ children took to the bomb shelters.”

Msgr. Keegan became an autocrat who expected to be treated with appropriate deference. Each morning, when he left the rectory of Blessed Sacrament Church on West 71st Street in a chauffeured car for the Catholic Charities building on East 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, where the sole elevator in the building was held at the ground floor until his arrival. Keegan met his match with the arrival in New York on May 5, 1939, of a “new Pharaoh who knew not Keegan,” the new archbishop of New York, Francis J. Spellman, who would not tolerate private fiefdoms in his archdiocese.

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## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Monsignor Albert A. Lings (1844-1915)

By **MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY**

### FOURTH IN A SERIES

**T**wo years after the end of the Civil War, a young German-born priest, Father Albert A. Lings, arrived in Yonkers to serve as the assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church, the sole Catholic parish in what was then a little village of some 8,000 people. He remained in Yonkers for the rest of his life, dying in the middle of World War I, when Yonkers had become a bustling industrial city of more than 80,000 people.

In his lifetime, Father Lings witnessed an amazing transformation in the Catholic community in Yonkers, from one parish in 1867 to 15 parishes in 1915. He was responsible for the establishment of many of them.

The spectacular increase in the population of Yonkers was due mainly to the enormous influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe seeking employment in the numerous smokestack industries of the city. They turned Yonkers into a miniature Chicago or Pittsburgh. Many of these immigrants were Catholics whose numbers and diversity posed a daunting pastoral challenge to Msgr. Lings who became the de facto leader of the Catholic community in Yonkers long before he was officially appointed the dean of Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties in 1896.

Lings made his own personal contribution to the expansion of Catholicism in Yonkers in 1871 when, at age 27, he established St. Joseph's Church, the second Latin-rite Catholic parish in the city.

In 1891 three gentlemen with foreign accents approached Lings and told him that they had purchased property for a church for their ethnic community. They described themselves as "Austrians" because they were often mistaken for Czechs, Hungarians or Poles. In fact, they were Slovaks, the first Slovaks Lings had ever met. Lings was sympathetic to their request and obtained permission from Archbishop Michael Corrigan for the establishment of the Slovak parish of the Most Holy Trinity. Lings then spent the next 10 frustrating years searching for a satisfactory pastor for them.

In 1891 the Capuchin Friars expanded their monastery chapel in north Yonkers into the parish Church of the Sacred Heart. Since many of the friars were of German origin, their presence and that of Lings precluded the need for a German national parish in Yonkers, although some



ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH

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German-Americans tried unsuccessfully to persuade Msgr. Lings to establish a German national parish in the city.

In the 1890s, there was a major expansion in the size of the Polish community in Yonkers. As a result, Lings encouraged a popular young Polish-born pastor in the Bronx, Father Joseph Dworzak, to move to Yonkers in 1903 and take charge of St. Casimir's Church. Dworzak became a leading figure in the Yonkers Polish community until his death in 1951.

The biggest pastoral challenge that Msgr. Lings faced was accommodating the so-called "Greek Catholics" in Yonkers. They were not ethnic Greeks at all, but Byzantine-rite Catholics from the eastern provinces of the vast Austro-

Hungarian Empire. Their forebears were Russian Orthodox Christians who had reunited with the Catholic Church and acknowledged the authority of the pope several centuries earlier.

The architecture of their churches and their liturgy were indistinguishable from those of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. They also retained their ancient tradition of both a celibate and married clergy, which caused major problems when their bishops attempted to send priests to America to minister to these Byzantine-rite Catholics in cities like Yonkers.

To complicate the situation further for Lings, there were two rival Byzantine-rite Catholic communities in Yonkers: the Ruthenians and the Ukrainians. Their mutual antipathy was due largely to old-world political differences that were incomprehensible to anyone not eager to delve into the opaque ethnic complexity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In 1899, Msgr. Lings took the bull by the horns and decided to make a 4,445-mile journey to visit the homelands of these recent immigrants to Yonkers. The highlight of his journey was the enthusiastic reception he received from the clergy in the city of Lemberg (present-day Lviv), then and now, the spiritual capital of Ukrainian Catholicism.

Lings was a person open to wider perspectives. He returned from Lviv with an enhanced appreciation of the merits of a married clergy as practiced by Byzantine-rite Catholics. From his experience in Yonkers, he had already assured Archbishop Corrigan, "It is certain that married priests have shown themselves as effective in church work as unmarried ones."

In the 1880s, when the new Croton aqueduct was under construction in Yonkers, either Lings or his assistant celebrated Mass every Sunday in the construction camps of the workers. He explained to the archbishop's secretary, "It is necessary to go there. These men are almost all Catholic, who as a rule cannot go to church on account of bad clothes, and in fact they are mostly tramps."

Lings' most satisfying moment in Yonkers may have occurred on May 17, 1891, when a huge crowd descended on the city for the blessing of the cornerstone of the new Dunwoodie seminary. Lings' archrival, the pastor of St. Mary's, arrived at the seminary grounds in the first carriage seated next to the mayor. Lings upstaged him by arriving on horseback at the head of two brass bands.

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## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Venerable Felix Varela (1788-1853)

By **FATHER MICHAEL P. MORRIS**

### FIFTH IN A SERIES

Since its inception in 1808, the Diocese (later Archdiocese) of New York can count among its priests and bishops spiritual giants, caring and generous pastors, scholars, admirals, social reformers, brick and mortar titans—and Father Felix Varela, the “Benjamin Franklin of Cuba.” Varela was born on Nov. 20, 1788 in Havana, Cuba. Varela’s father, a Spanish subject and his mother, a native of Cuba, both died by the time Felix reached age three. Felix was raised in St. Augustine, Fla., by his grandfather, Lieutenant Bartholome Morales, who in 1796, served briefly as interim governor of East Florida, 13 years after Florida had been returned to Spanish rule after the defeat of the British by the fledgling United States. Destined for a military career, young Felix sensed a calling to the priesthood and, at age 14, returned to Havana to attend San Carlos y San Ambrosio Royal Seminary. Varela was ordained a priest in 1811 for the Diocese of San Cristobal de la Havana and within a year, the academically gifted Father Varela was appointed to the faculty of the seminary in Havana.

Father Varela instituted necessary reforms at the Havana seminary, such as a renewal of the study of Thomistic philosophy in the seminary (two generations before Pope Leo XIII issued his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, reviving the study of scholasticism in seminary training). Although a philosophy student and teacher by training, Varela had a keen interest in such varied subjects as politics, economics, history, physics, chemistry and agriculture.

In 1821, Varela was elected as a colonial delegate to the Spanish *Cortes* (parliament) where he labored in Madrid for the abolition of slavery and increased autonomy in the Spanish colonies. Varela and like-minded members of the *Cortes* evoked the ire of King Ferdinand VII, who subsequently dismantled the *Cortes*. Varela fled Spain and, barred from Spanish-ruled Cuba, sought political asylum in the United States. Varela arrived in New York in December 1823 and spent the next two years translating Thomas Jefferson’s *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* into Spanish, and studying chemistry and agriculture.

In 1825, Varela moved to Philadelphia, at that time the intellectual capital of the United States. There, Father Varela founded *El Habanero*, believed to be the first Spanish-Catholic newspaper in the United States. Varela was one of the first Cuban intellectuals to call for independence



*Once in New York, Father Varela effortlessly transitioned from academia and politics to parish work, serving among the Irish community at St. Peter’s on Barclay Street. Shortly thereafter, Varela solicited funds from friends to purchase nearby Christ Episcopal Church on Ann Street.*

from Spain. A proponent of what he called a “war of reason,” Varela eschewed violence and bloodshed. One year later, Father Varela was welcomed to New York by Father John Power, who had become apostolic administrator of the Diocese of New York upon the death of the second bishop of New York, John Connolly, O.P. Father Power discerned that this Cuban priest-intellectual and patriot would prove a great asset to the fledgling diocese which encompassed all of New York state and northern New Jersey. According to the late Msgr. Florence Cohalan, author of “A Popular History of the Archdiocese of New York,” Varela was the first Spanish-speaking priest to serve in the Diocese of New York.

Once in New York, Father Varela effortlessly transitioned from academia and politics to parish work, serving among the Irish community at St. Peter’s on Barclay Street. Shortly thereafter, Varela solicited funds from friends to purchase nearby Christ Episcopal Church on Ann Street. In 1833, Christ Church was disbanded and the existing congregation became St. James parish on James Street and Transfiguration Church on

Mott Street, the latter served by Father Varela. His pastoral success, particularly with the burgeoning Irish immigrant community in New York, attracted the attention of the third bishop of New York, John Dubois who, in 1829, named Varela vicar general of the Diocese of New York.

On Sept. 20, 1829, Bishop Dubois left New York for Rome, returning to the United States on Nov. 20, 1831. During his two-year absence, Father Varela served as administrator of the diocese, and represented Dubois at the First Provincial Council of Baltimore (1829) and the Third Provincial Council of Baltimore (1837)—the 19th century precursors to the modern-day bi-annual meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In 1831, Father Varela was asked to participate as a founding member of New York University, an offer he declined. Ever the parish priest, Varela counted as one of his closest friends, Father Alessandro Muppiatti, a Carthusian monk who left Italy in search of political asylum in New York. Believed to be the first Italian priest to serve in New York, Father Muppiatti served as Father Varela’s assistant at Transfiguration from 1842 until the former’s death in 1846.

Exhausted from pastoral and administrative duties, and emotionally spent from his energetic and passionate defense of the Church in the wake of a growing and virulent anti-Catholicism in the United States, Father Varela returned to St. Augustine in 1850. There, Varela took as his residence a small wooden shed adjacent to St. Augustine Cathedral school, living in sickness, obscurity and crushing poverty. A group of Cuban friends heard about Varela’s plight, collected a large sum of money, and sent the gift to Varela, only to find that Father Varela had died on Feb. 25, 1853. The money was used to build a mausoleum in the city’s historic Tolomato Cemetery. Before the outbreak of World War I, Varela’s remains were transferred from St. Augustine and reinterred at the University of Havana.

In 1983, the Congregation for the Cause of Saints charged the Archdiocese of Havana with the investigations into the heroic sanctity of Father Varela. In the late 1990s, Father Varela was declared “Servant of God,” and on April 12, 2012, the Congregation for the Cause of Saints granted Varela the title “Venerable.” Well on the path to beatification and sainthood, this hero of the Cuban people made his mark as the apostle to the Irish immigrants in New York and a beacon of religious, political and intellectual thought and freedom.

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## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Father Francis P. Duffy (1871-1932)

By **MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY**

### SIXTH IN A SERIES

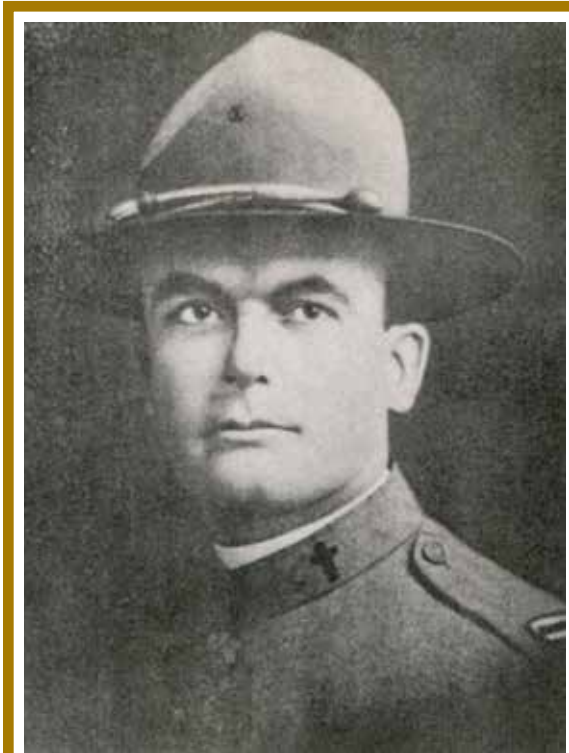
The only statue of a Catholic priest in New York City on public property is the statue of Father Francis P. Duffy in the northern area of Times Square appropriately called Duffy Square. Duffy is not wearing a cassock or Roman collar, but the uniform and trench coat of a U.S military chaplain of the Sixty-Ninth New York Regiment in World War I. It was one of many contributions this Canadian-born priest made to his adopted country during his 36 years as a New York archdiocesan priest.

As a young priest, Duffy spent 14 years teaching philosophy and theology at St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie. In 1901 he wrote, "The old faith does not change and does not need to change, but we must find new approaches to it and new ways of presenting it." If those words sound familiar, it may be because Pope St. John XXIII used similar language in his often-quoted address at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in October 1962. Duffy anticipated John XXIII by 61 years.

After the entry of the United States into World War I, the 69th Regiment of the New York National Guard became part of the 42nd (Rainbow) Division, commanded by General Douglas MacArthur. In October 1917, when the Division deployed to France, Duffy could probably have obtained an exemption from service abroad because of his age (he was 47) and he was in chronically poor health. (He was only 61 when he died.)

Duffy went to France with the Sixty-Ninth, a decision he never regretted. "After all, he said, "a priest's home is in the parish he is assigned to, and the Old Sixty-Ninth is a mighty comforting home." At the time of Duffy's death in 1932, General MacArthur issued a statement in which he said, "Father Duffy's record in the 42nd Division was unsurpassed by anyone in that unit."

One of Duffy's proudest moments in his wartime service occurred while he was talking with several French army officers as a detachment of the Sixty-Ninth marched past them. "But you know them all," the French officers exclaimed, "and they all know you, and they seem so pleased to see you." In a letter to Cardinal Farley from "somewhere in France," Duffy admitted that in fact he did know the soldiers personally, but he added, "I know that if it were not for my priesthood, I would not count for much with them. And that's the way I like it best."



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After the war Duffy became pastor of Holy Cross Church on West 42nd Street. By happenstance, he became involved in the run-up to the presidential campaign of 1928 when the Democratic candidate was Governor Alfred E. Smith, the first Catholic to run for President.

A year earlier, an article appeared in the April issue of the Atlantic Monthly written by Charles Marshall, an Episcopalian layman and constitutional lawyer. Marshall claimed that a conscientious Catholic could not serve as President of the United States because he would be

obliged to place the teachings of his Church above the constitution of the United States.

Governor Smith was devastated by the accusation and turned to Father Duffy for help. Duffy was happy to oblige. Governor Smith's reply to Marshall appeared in the next issue of the Atlantic Monthly. The words were Smith's, but the ideas were Duffy's. Smith's article was a resounding success even in the Deep South.

Smith assured the readers of his response to Marshall that American Catholics were fully committed to freedom of religion for all and separation of church and state. "I think you have taken your thesis from the limbo of defunct controversies," Duffy told Marshall through the pen of Al Smith.

In the 1920s, Father Duffy became the Catholic Church's ambassador of good will to New Yorkers of many faiths and none. In 1921, the Jewish financier and philanthropist Otto Kahn said of Duffy, "He belongs to the Catholic Church, and springs from the Irish, but we claim him, all of us."

Improbable as it may seem, one of Duffy's foremost admirers was the acerbic literary critic Alexander Woolcott, an outspoken atheist, who once said, "To all things clerical, I am allergic." However, Woolcott made an exception for Father Duffy. Woolcott had first met Duffy as a war correspondent in France and admired him because of Duffy's friendly outreach to those in partibus infidelium, by which Woolcott meant non-believers like himself.

Woolcott called Duffy "The Great New Yorker" and left a memorable portrait of Duffy in the post-war years. "This city is too large for most of us, but not for Father Duffy," Woolcott said. "When he walked down the street, any street, he was like a curé striding through his own village. Everyone knew him. I have walked beside him and thought I had never before seen so many pleased faces...Father Duffy was of such dimensions that he turned New York into a small town."

When Father Duffy was buried from St. Patrick's Cathedral in June 1932, Woolcott was one of the mourners standing outside the crowded cathedral. He noticed that one woman spotted an empty place on the sidewalk and attempted to stand there. A police officer told her politely that she would have to move elsewhere. "But, officer," she protested, "I was a personal friend of Father Duffy." The officer replied, "That is true, Ma'am, of everyone here today." Alexander Woolcott said, "Let that be Father Duffy's epitaph."

**ABOUT THIS SERIES** The articles in this series on priests who have served in the Archdiocese of New York are planned to run monthly throughout 2021. Father Michael Morris, pastor of Regina Coeli parish in Hyde Park, and Msgr. Shelley will write the profiles.

## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Father George Barry Ford (1885-1978)

By **MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY**

### SEVENTH IN A SERIES

**D**r. Henry van Dusen, president of Union Theological Seminary, one of America's premier Protestant seminaries, said on one occasion in the late 1940s that, if the Catholic Church had a more persuasive representative than Father George Barry Ford, he had yet to meet that person.

Ordained in 1918, Ford became the chaplain to the Newman Club and advisor to Catholic students at Columbia University in 1929 while assigned to St. Aloysius Church on West 132nd Street in Harlem. When the pastorate of Corpus Christi Church on West 121st Street in Morning-side Heights fell vacant in 1935, Ford was appointed pastor. Although the nation was in the depths of the Great Depression, Ford promptly asked Cardinal Patrick Hayes for permission to build a new church and school on the existing site.

He explained to the cardinal his reasons for what may have seemed to be a foolhardy request. "This is not just another parish," he said, "but a strategically situated one where the best that the Church can do ought to be done." He mentioned that there were eight world-famous institutions located within the boundaries of the parish: Columbia University, Barnard College, Union Theological Seminary, Jewish Theological Seminary, Teachers College, Cathedral of St. John the Divine, St. Luke's Hospital and Riverside Church.

The new Corpus Christi Church was completed within 18 months and was dedicated by Cardinal Hayes in October 1936. It was a combination church-and-school, but unlike so many utilitarian structures of that type erected in the Archdiocese of New York during the 1920s and 1930s, Corpus Christi Church really looked and felt like a church both from the outside and from within, with splendid stained-glass windows and tasteful interior decorations.

The highest pastoral priority for Father Ford was the solemn celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy in all its splendor. For that reason, he encouraged the development of a choir, which established a reputation for its professionalism and extensive repertoire of sacred music that endures to this day and attracts Catholics from across the city.

During Ford's initial years at Corpus Christi, Mass was still celebrated in Latin. Ford attempted to overcome the language barrier and facilitate the active participation of the laity in the



A portrait of Father George Barry Ford in Ford Hall at Columbia University.

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Mass in a unique way. He posted a priest in the pulpit that provided a simultaneous translation into English of the words of the celebrant at the altar (except for the Eucharistic Prayer). The faithful loved it, but alarmed diocesan authorities outlawed the practice for arcane reasons that they took with them to the grave.

Ford made other practical pastoral innovations at Corpus Christi. He was one of the first pastors in the archdiocese to eliminate tedious pulpit announcements by publishing a weekly bulletin. He also inaugurated a monthly news-

letter, the Corpus Christi Chronicle, which made available to his parishioners short essays by some of the best contemporary American and European Catholic writers.

Many Catholic educators regarded Teachers College (located a stone's throw from Corpus Christi Church) with fear and loathing because they considered it to be the citadel of the "progressive education" they associated with John Dewey. Father Ford adopted a more nuanced position.

When he noticed women religious in full pre-Vatican II religious habits studying for graduate degrees at Teachers College, he inquired about the identity of a religious congregation of women that had the temerity to send their young sisters to Teachers College. When he discovered they were Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, Wis., he quickly obtained their services for his own school, where they soon set new standards of academic excellence in the elementary schools of the Archdiocese of New York.

Father Leo J. O'Donovan, the distinguished Jesuit theologian and president emeritus of Georgetown University, who grew up in Corpus Christi parish in the 1940s, was a witness to the transformation of the parish under Father Ford. He described Ford "as one of the heroes of my life" and said that "it would take another lifetime for me to express even somewhat adequately my gratitude to Corpus Christi."

As for the Sinsinawa Dominicans in Corpus Christi School, Father O'Donovan said that they "changed my life forever...In effect they took the best of John Dewey and blessed us children with it."

Father Ford had more than one dust-up with diocesan officials, but he managed to combine respect for ecclesiastical authority with resistance to bullies. He assured one vicar general that he had "instant respect for the historic and important office you hold," but he added, "when it becomes a police station where suspects report, it no longer enjoys esteem."

In an article on Father Ford that John Cogley published in *Commonweal* in 1958, he said, "Of course, Father Ford has not always escaped criticism. A man of his temper would not want to; a man of his accomplishment could not hope to. He has always been just a step ahead of the crowd—a little more tolerant, a little more daring, a little less given to cant. It is even possible that from time to time he moved too fast—a happy enough fault in a society of people who move too slowly."

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## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# The Servant of God, Father Vincent Capodanno, M.M. (1929-1967)

By **FATHER MICHAEL MORRIS**

EIGHTH IN A SERIES

*Go forth, farewell for life, dearest brothers;  
Proclaim afar the sweet name of God.  
We meet again one day in heaven's land  
of blessing.*

*Farewell brothers, farewell.*

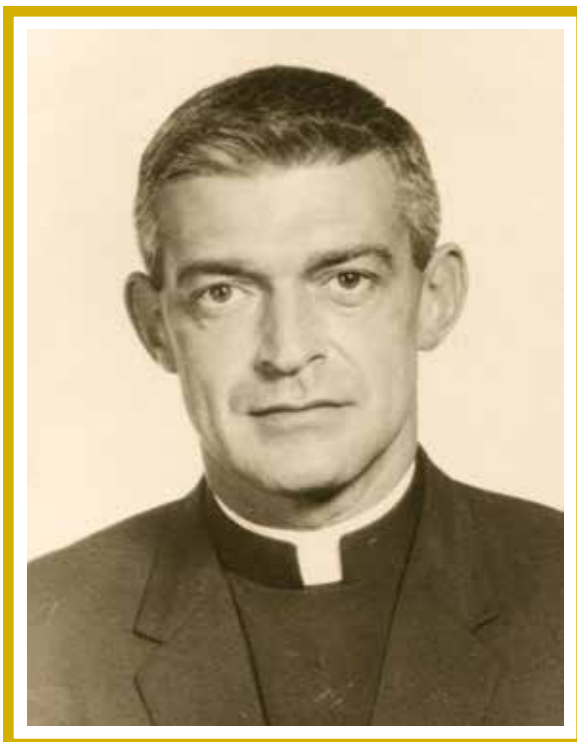
"DEPARTURE HYMN" THE CATHOLIC FOREIGN  
MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF AMERICA (MARYKNOLL)

**H**oliness is the goal for all Catholics. The Church has so many men and women—canonized and not canonized—who inspire us to heroic sanctity. Saints can be found in the most unlikely of places. Father Vincent Capodanno, M.M., a native of Staten Island and a priest of the Catholic Foreign Missionary Society of America (Maryknoll) attained blessedness among wounded and dying United States Marines on the fields of fire in Vietnam.

Vincent Capodanno was born on Feb. 13, 1929 in Elm Park, Staten Island, to Vincent Capodanno Sr. and Rachel Basile, who came to American shores from Italy at the turn of the 20th century. The youngest of nine children, Vincent grew up in pre-Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge Staten Island. Athletic and devout, young Vincent demonstrated no outward inclinations toward religious life or the priesthood. Graduating from Curtis High School in 1947, Vincent went to work for the Pearl Insurance Company on Maiden Lane in Lower Manhattan, and began studies at Fordham University. He continued to attend daily Mass, a practice he had begun while in high school, accompanied by a classmate from Curtis High School, William Richter. In time, Vincent confided to his friend that he had a vocation to the priesthood. Vincent also asserted that Bill had a vocation to the priesthood as well, a notion Vincent's friend roundly dismissed. Yet, Vincent's instincts were indeed correct. Bill Richter later entered Maryknoll, but soon realized that missionary life was not his calling. He was ultimately ordained a priest of the Diocese of Toledo, Ohio, where he became a pioneer in Hispanic ministry before his death in 2004.

Moved by the accounts of missionaries published in the Maryknoll periodical, *The Field Afar*, Vincent applied to Maryknoll and was formally accepted to the missionary society in 1949. After nine years of study, prayer, and discernment, Vincent Capodanno was ordained to the priesthood at Maryknoll in Ossining on June 14, 1958 by Cardinal Francis Spellman, Archbishop of New York. On Aug. 4, 1958, the newly ordained Father Capodanno departed for the missions in Taiwan, Republic of China, along with five other Maryknoll missionaries.

Friends and family were amazed and perplexed by Father Vincent's desire to serve God as a missionary. Forever attentive to detail, Father Capodanno always presented himself in perfectly tailored clerical suits and cassocks—not the norm in the hardscrabble mission venues. The Taiwan-



ese Hakku dialect presented great challenges to Father Vincent and most Maryknollers. The Taiwan missions did present some understandable difficulties and when the possibility of service in the Hong Kong missions did not come to fruition, Father Capodanno was discouraged, but undeterred. It was a critical year in American history, 1965. President Lyndon B. Johnson had authorized an increase in American military presence in war-torn South Vietnam in the wake of the Gulf of Tonkin incident of August 1964.

With widespread American opposition to the war in Indochina still a year or two away, Father Capodanno did not hold any political or social views on the war. As a priest, he knew that young American military service members needed pastoral care as would civilians in parish life and in the missions—perhaps even more in the face of such dangers. On Dec. 28, 1965, Father Capodanno was commissioned a lieutenant in the United States Naval Reserve. Upon completion of the eight-week course at U.S. Navy Chaplain School in Newport, R.I., in early 1966, Father Capodanno received permission to serve Marines stationed in Vietnam, a rare assignment for a newly minted chaplain. Arriving at Da Nang, South Vietnam, during Holy Week, April 1966, Chaplain Capodanno was attached to the Third Battalion, Fifth Marines, Seventh Marine Division.

His unswerving devotion to the Marines earned him the sobriquet "The Grunt Padre." When not in the field, Capodanno would hear confessions, counsel Marines, correspond with the anxious families of his "flock" and distribute snacks, cigarettes, soft drinks and an occasional beer. By his own account, he would offer at least 15 Masses a week in the field and in various duty stations. Chaplain Eli Take-

sian, a Baptist minister and friend and colleague of Father Capodanno, upon peering out of his tent, watched Father Capodanno offer Holy Mass, recounting: "It was almost like seeing a ballet—the utter grace and sureness. It was mesmerizing."

Ministering to wounded and dying Marines engaged in "Operation Swift" in Quang Tin Province, South Vietnam, Father Capodanno was killed in action on Sept. 4, 1967. In a letter to Father Capodanno's sister, Pauline Costa, Third Marine Division Chaplain John J. O'Connor (who in 1984 would become the eighth Archbishop of New York) wrote:

I am sure you would like to know that very recently I made a trip to Vietnam and talked to a number of men who had lived and worked with Vince. I never heard a priest praised more consistently. One of his great admirers, as you probably know, was an Episcopal Chaplain—Chaplain Krulak. I talked at length with Chaplain Krulak, and he confirmed my impressions—that the manner of his death, just as in the way he lived, Vince inspired men as few others have done.

The future Archbishop of New York concluded:

This was a heroic priest in life and in death. I have no doubt that he is enjoying the reward of that heroism at this moment.

On Jan. 7, 1969, Father Capodanno was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Two other Marines who died in "Operation Swift," Sgt. Rodney Davis and Sgt. Lawrence M. Peters also received America's highest military award. As Sgt. Peters lay mortally wounded, Father Capodanno administered Last Rites to the dying Marine, one of Father Capodanno's last priestly acts.

In 2002, then-Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of the Military Services, USA introduced the cause of canonization for Father Capodanno. On May 21, 2006, Father Capodanno was decreed "Servant of God" at a special Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

Life is a series of "what ifs." What would have become of Father Capodanno had he remained in Taiwan or had been sent to the missions in Hong Kong? His inner goodness, generosity of spirit and love for the Lord, the Church and the priesthood would have continued to have reaped much fruit in the vineyard. But what would have become of those Marines who were recipients of his heroic and selfless pastoral care? Perhaps many of the wounded and the dying Marines would not have had the opportunity to receive the sacraments on the battlefield. The United States Navy and Marine Corps would have numbered one less Medal of Honor winner among its ranks. And perhaps, though it cannot be said for certain, the Church might be minus one Servant of God, well on the way to canonization.

Father Capodanno's mortal remains rest along with his parents' in St. Peter's Cemetery in West Brighton, Staten Island. The otherwise inconspicuous burial site has become a place of pilgrimage for faithful Catholics, veterans and those who treasure the heroic virtue of Father Capodanno.



## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

# Msgr. John P. Chidwick (1863-1935)

By **FATHER MICHAEL MORRIS**

### NINTH IN A SERIES

Cuba's quest for independence from Spain reached as far back to the mid-19th century. Although the Spanish crown had granted a degree of autonomy to the island colony, there were three "liberation wars" between 1868 and 1895. The third, the "Cuban War for Independence" began in 1895 and culminated in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Both the Cuban revolutionaries and the Spanish government could be quite ruthless in attaining their strategic goals. Capitalizing on the tenuous political situation in Cuba, William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the *New York Journal*, goaded his journalists into submitting news reports exaggerating atrocities committed by the Spanish colonial forces. Subsequent riots in Cuba and the steady stream of Hearst's "yellow journalism" resulted in President William McKinley's dispatching of the American battleship U.S.S. *Maine* to Havana Harbor. On Feb. 15, 1898, three days after the *Maine* steamed into Havana, the battleship mysteriously exploded, killing 260 sailors. Although a 1974 investigation led by Admiral Hyman Rickover concluded that the ship's magazines had been ignited by a spontaneous fire in a coal bunker, American public opinion, fanned by Hearst's appetite for sensationalism, blamed the Spanish government for the blast and on April 25, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain. And onboard the doomed ship that fateful night of Feb. 15, 1898 was the ship's chaplain, Father John P. Chidwick, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York.

John P. Chidwick was born on Oct. 23, 1863 in New York City to John Badgley Chidwick, a Civil War veteran of both the U.S. Army and Navy, and Margaret O'Reilly Chidwick. Both were natives of Clonakilty, County Cork. A gifted baseball player, Chidwick graduated from Manhattan College in 1883 and that same year, entered St. Joseph's Provincial Seminary in Troy. Upon ordination in 1887, Father Chidwick was assigned to St. Stephen's parish, East 28<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan, then one of the largest parishes in the United States. There the young Father Chidwick established a branch of the "Young Man's Union," a precursor to the Catholic Youth Organization. One of the tasks of the Union was to distribute Catholic literature to members of the American Army and Navy. This, coupled with the influence of his Civil War veteran father, piqued young Father Chidwick's interest in possible service as a military chaplain.

In the spring of 1895, Chidwick received his naval commission, the third Catholic priest to receive such in U.S. Naval history. Father Chidwick's first assignment was to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and attachment to the U.S.S. *Maine*.



ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK

**IN TRIBUTE**—Rear Admiral Charles D. Sigsbee, former captain of the U.S.S. *Maine*, and Msgr. John Chidwick, who served as a chaplain of the vessel, attend the annual memorial service for the *Maine* in New York City May 30, 1919.

Three years later, Father Chidwick would become an active participant in a monumental event in American history. A press dispatch, issued in the wake of the explosion, summed up the heroic role of Father Chidwick amidst the chaos and carnage of the wreck of the *Maine*:

"The self-sacrificing of Chaplain Chidwick deserves all praises. He was at the Machine Wharf, paper and pencil in hand, taking notes of the smallest identifying marks on the bodies as they were being taken from the water...to obtain all clues to their identification. Since the disaster, he has not rested a moment. When he is not examining bodies and helping to recover others, he is consoling the wounded at the hospital."

In an official commendation in the wake of the explosion, United States Secretary of the Navy John D. Long wrote: "You have set an example for the emulation of every chaplain of the Navy and are entitled to gratitude of the department and every American citizen." Father Chidwick was recognized throughout the United States as the first hero of the Spanish-American War.

Before leaving the sea services in 1903, Father Chidwick was assigned to the protected cruiser, U.S.S. *Newark*, where, according to Msgr. Thom-

as Shelley in his 1993 work, "Dunwoodie: The History of Saint Joseph's Seminary," the normally reserved and dignified cleric, when publicly insulted by an enlisted crew member, instructed the offending sailor to meet with him after breakfast. The complying sailor was stunned to meet the chaplain who was carrying two sets of boxing gloves. The sailor backed down and apologized.

Chidwick remained active in Spanish American War veterans affairs. On March 16, 1912, he offered the requiem Mass at the Havana Cathedral over the remains of the 65 sailors recovered when the *Maine* was raised in Havana Harbor. In 1916, he was named chaplain of the New York State Society of the United Spanish War Veterans.

On April 1, 1904, then-Archbishop John Farley appointed Father Chidwick pastor of St. Ambrose parish on West 54<sup>th</sup> Street along with duties as chaplain to the New York City Police Department. In 1909, Archbishop Farley named Msgr. Chidwick third rector of St. Joseph's Seminary. A watershed appointment, Chidwick was the first priest of the Archdiocese of New York to serve as rector. When Dunwoodie opened its doors in 1896, the seminary was administered and staffed by priests of the Society of St. Sulpice (Sulpicians).

Msgr. Chidwick was the second-longest serving rector of Dunwoodie, from 1909 until 1922. Although his tenure witnessed a steep increase in the seminary student body, from 165 students in 1909 to 219 students in 1922, the seminary was not free of challenges. Dunwoodie was not immune to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century trend in American seminaries toward rote learning with a heavy emphasis upon memorization. With the appointment of Archbishop Patrick Hayes as the fifth Archbishop of New York in March 1919, Dunwoodie was subject to severe budget cuts. Compounding the financial constraints with overcrowded conditions—as well as the outbreak of the Spanish Influenza pandemic—made for very harsh living conditions for the seminarians. In 1922, Msgr. Chidwick resigned as rector, the first and only such leader to voluntarily leave that office at the seminary.

That same year, Msgr. Chidwick was named pastor of St. Agnes Church on East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Manhattan, where he established the parish high school and summer camp. In 1924, he was named president of the College of New Rochelle. Msgr. Chidwick died on Jan. 13, 1935. His fame and notoriety necessitated his Funeral Mass to be offered at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Msgr. Chidwick's name lives on among students and alumni of St. Joseph's Seminary to this day. Many seminarians have traversed "Upper Chidwick" to play softball, touch football or soccer on "Lower Chidwick," the two spacious fields to the west of the seminary named for him.

## MAY THEIR MEMORY BE A BLESSING

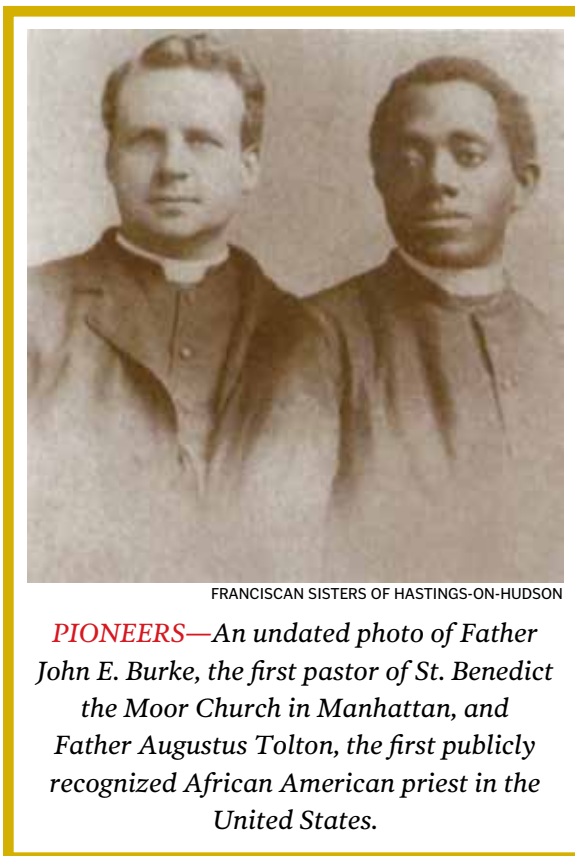
# Msgr. John E. Burke (1852-1925)

By **FATHER MICHAEL MORRIS**

TENTH IN A SERIES

On Aug. 19, 1903, Father Joseph Anciaux, a Belgian priest who a year later would join the American Josephites, sent a 44-page booklet titled “Concerning the Wretched Condition of Negro Catholics in America” to all the archbishops and bishops of the United States. In what came to be known as the “Red Book” (because of its red-colored binding), Anciaux brought to light the crushing barriers placed before African Americans in early 20th century American society. Anciaux condemned segregation practices in the Catholic Church and took to task the American hierarchy, claiming that with only a few exceptions, the bishops of the United States failed to defend the rights of African Americans for fear of a backlash from a public steeped in prejudice. Anciaux’s “Red Book” prompted Mother Katharine Drexel, the Philadelphia heiress, missionary in service to the Native American and African American peoples, and future canonized saint, as well as the Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Sebastiano Martinelli, to adapt a more focused and urgent strategy to combat racism in the Church and American society. With encouragement from the Congregation *Propaganda fidei* (the office of the Holy See charged with care of the missions—the United States was considered mission territory until 1908), on April 26, 1906, the Catholic Board for Mission Work Among the Colored People was established at the annual meeting of the American archbishops of the United States in Baltimore. Prominent board members included James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore, Archbishop (later Cardinal) John Farley of New York, Archbishop Patrick Ryan of Philadelphia, Bishop Thomas Byrne of Nashville, Tenn., and Bishop Edward Allen of Mobile, Ala. The board’s first director was Father John E. Burke, a New York priest, who had distinguished himself in his service to African Americans in New York City.

John E. Burke was born on Jan. 2, 1852 in Brooklyn to John and Katherine Burke. The senior John Burke later served as an officer in the Union Army during the Civil War. The family moved to Manhattan and young John attended St. Ann’s School, St. Francis Xavier College in New York City, Mount St. Mary’s College, Emmitsburg, Md., and the American College (later North American College) in Rome. Ordained in Rome on Aug. 4, 1878, Father Burke was assigned to Epiphany Church, Manhattan, where the pastor, Father Richard Burtzell, a disciple of Father Thomas Farrell, pastor of St. Joseph’s Church, Greenwich Village, and early proponent of an African American apostolate



FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON

**PIONEERS**—An undated photo of Father John E. Burke, the first pastor of St. Benedict the Moor Church in Manhattan, and Father Augustus Tolton, the first publicly recognized African American priest in the United States.

in New York, purchased, with his own funds, the former Third Universalist Church on Bleecker Street for \$40,000 and renamed it St. Benedict the Moor Church. On Nov. 18, 1883, St. Benedict the Moor was dedicated, with Father Burke as its first pastor. Although African American Catholic parishes (albeit segregated) were prevalent in such states as Louisiana and Maryland, St. Benedict the Moor was the first African American parish located north of the Mason-Dixon Line. A vibrant parish, St. Benedict the Moor attracted African American Catholics from Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and New Jersey. According to Father Jack R. Arlotta, in his 1992 master’s thesis from St. Joseph’s Seminary, Dunwoodie, “‘Before Harlem,’ Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of New York and the Church of St. Benedict the Moor,” St. Benedict the Moor was a “diverse parish,” whose ranks included domestic workers, laborers, and political and governmental leaders—most noted, Dr. John E.W. Thompson, the United States minister and consul general to Haiti from 1885 to 1891. Many non-African American Catholics also attended Mass at St. Benedict the Moor, making it a truly integrated worshipping community. In 1886, Father Burke opened an orphanage on Bleecker Street, St. Benedict Home, for African American children denied residence in city-run, as well as Catholic, child-care institutions. In 1891, St. Benedict

Home moved to Rye and served the needs of African American orphans for the next 50 years, before closing in 1941.

In 1887, Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan appointed the newly ordained Father Thomas O’Keefe, who had served as Father Burke’s altar boy at Epiphany Church, as curate at St. Benedict the Moor. Like Burke, O’Keefe was dedicated to the African American apostolate and succeeded Father Burke as pastor in 1907 when the latter was named director of the Catholic Board for Mission Work Among the Colored People.

Beginning in 1907, Msgr. Burke directed his energies particularly toward African Americans in the South—later expanding the focus to African Americans who had moved from the South to the urban centers of the North as part of the “Great Migration” after World War I. Msgr. Burke traveled extensively through the United States, establishing nationwide collections, booklets, pulpit announcements and parish missions, heightening awareness of the plight of African Americans in the 20th century. During his 18-year tenure, 80 mission churches and 66 schools were established, many of which were funded through Mother Katharine Drexel’s vast personal wealth. Known for his kindness and generosity, Msgr. Burke inspired numerous priest pioneers in the civil rights movement, including the founder of the Catholic Interracial Council of New York, Father John LaFarge, S.J., and Msgr. Patrick O’Boyle, a New York priest who in 1948, as the first resident archbishop of Washington, D.C., desegregated Washington archdiocesan schools six years before the United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, outlawing racial segregation in the United States.

Msgr. Burke died on May 7, 1925. In the funeral oration at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Msgr. Burke’s friend and protege, now Msgr. O’Keefe, said:

“Back in the days of the Civil War...there was a little boy serving Mass regularly down in St. Ann’s Church. His father, an officer in the Union Army, was fighting...for the liberation of the slaves. That little boy now lies dead before us, after 40 years of fighting in the Army of the Lord for the spiritual salvation of the same race that his father helped to free from the bondage of slavery.”

One of the many priests who attended Msgr. Burke’s funeral was a young Msgr. Joseph Rummel, pastor of St. Joseph’s Church on West 125th Street in Harlem. Ten years later, Rummel would be named the ninth archbishop of New Orleans. Archbishop Rummel would go on to be one of the outstanding figures of the civil rights movement in the mid-20th century Church and nation.