
2024 CENTENARY - 100 YEARS OF CATHOLIC MINISTRY AT DARTMOUTH



AQUINAS HOUSE

A NOTE FROM THE CHAPLAIN

This January marks one hundred years of Catholic ministry at Dartmouth College. The simple history we know is as follows. In 1924, the pastor of St. Denis, Fr. John Sliney, teamed up with Dartmouth professors and students to join the National Newman Club Federation.

Sliney was beloved and an intellectual, the first Catholic priest to receive an honorary degree from Dartmouth in 1947 after serving at the parish for 25 years. Names and photos of the first overseers remain in our archives but no further biographies.

The daughter of Frank Kennedy '25 visited last year to find her father's portrait in our library and that of his friend Irish Flanagan '23 whose real name was Sidney. She donated a chalice and told old football stories and not more. Most of the Catholic students then were football or hockey players, recruits from

Irish Catholic high schools but whose social standing was still on the outs. Catholic faculty provided them moral lectures in the parish basement as well as reading lists of Catholic books. They also formed a choir for Sunday Masses.



Fr. John Sliney, founder of Dartmouth's Newman Club, and his brother Fr. Francis Sliney

By 1950, a younger brother, Fr. Francis Sliney, was the next pastor when a young assistant arrived, Fr. Bill Nolan. I was able to interview his younger brother Paul this year, who isn't so young anymore! He lives outside of Boston and still sings in his parish choir. Providence connected us in a poetic way. Paul's daughter Kate Levesque attended Mass here two summers ago. On her way out she noticed our campus minister, Corinne Murphy, who had worked with Kate at Ursuline Academy in Dedham where she is President. The two reconnected, and then she told us her dad was Fr. Bill's younger brother. Only God orchestrates these moments!



Paul Nolan, Fr. Bill's younger brother

Over the phone, Paul told me: "The Redemptorists at that time were conducting parish missions and as a result they were living out of a suitcase. That part of the life was not what Bill wanted." At the time, when he wasn't traveling for missions he was living just across the river in Norwich, as the Redemptorists ran four parishes in Vermont. He had given two missions before at St. Denis, and it was there that Bill Nolan was sent when he transferred to the Diocese of Manchester, primarily to serve as a hospital chaplain at Hitchcock. The pastor didn't want him and even sent the janitor in his place to greet Fr. Bill on the rectory steps. The Newman ministry by then had declined, reduced to a monthly communion breakfast for the Holy Name Society. Nolan wanted to gather students again but wasn't sure how to begin. In his 1984 master's thesis, Ron Clemo records Nolan's own telling of the next chapter.

The pastor left for a vacation in Florida, only to feel sick on his first day of driving and turn back. At midnight he arrived to see the church basement lights on and found Fr. Bill hosting students for a keg of beer. All were dismissed and Nolan spent the night at a nearby motel, before driving to Bishop Matthew Brady in shame, who then promoted him to chaplain for college students! The detailed version is that he was simply sent back to resume parish ministries but was soon appointed chaplain when the college's new Tucker Committee had Amos Blandin '18 petition the bishop for a full-time priest.

Long before he was chaplain and then founder of what he would name Aquinas House, William Liguori Nolan was born in 1916 in Boston, with his older brother Francis born in 1919. That same year their mother Anna died, and both boys were shipped west to Iowa, to live with their father's sister Julia in Cedar Rapids. Bill would be sent to other relatives in Colorado until their father remarried in 1925 and both boys returned east to West Roxbury just outside of Boston. They spent their childhood at St. Teresa of Avila Parish.

Paul was the third brother born in 1930 while Bill was already fourteen years old. One of his first memories is seeing his older brother, the president of his senior class at Boston Latin School, reading the Declaration of Independence from the balcony of the old State House in Boston. He only knew him on occasional visits from seminary, Mount St. Alphonsus on the Hudson River: "He was my big brother. He knew everything, and I knew nothing."

It wasn't until years later when the two brothers grew close. "My dad came down with cancer, and Bill had him transferred to the Hitchcock hospital up in Hanover. He died up there in January of 1954. I can remember running back and forth to Hanover many weekends, and Bill put me up at Aquinas House ... I didn't get to see much of Bill after my dad died as I was on active duty with the Navy and away from home for nine months at a whack ... But the next year in 1954 he and my brother Frank officiated at my wedding. At the time he had a broken leg, I remember that with distinction. He had a bracket on the wheelchair so he could hold his leg out straight." The second brother, Frank, had become a Passionist father and would spend much of his life in the Philippines. The family would later joke that the second wife, Gertrude, had a hierarchy: God first, then her two adopted priest sons, then her own son Paul!



1977 photo with the Newman banner, Fr. Bill seated next to Amos Blandin, a judge in the New Hampshire Supreme Court and a former lumberman from the Moosilauke region

From 1950 until his death in 2000, Fr. Bill dedicated his life to Dartmouth students: his first three years as chaplain operating at St. Denis, then opening Aquinas House on Choate Road in 1953, then our present site in 1962. It's impossible to count the many students who had their faith nurtured in Hanover, since the Sliney brothers, to Fr. Bill and the chaplains who followed him. I sit and think about this at times, that my work with students is downstream of a great history, one of great men and women and also the Holy Spirit's work every day of those hundred years, from the big Easter Masses or retreat outings, to quiet nights of study for students and chaplains both.

Fr. Bill is at the center of that history. Students remembering his compelling sermons, "like he were starting a revival," one said. Some recall his strong stride coming down the hallway. Kate Levesque remembers his sweet tooth and love of cream puffs. They remember his friendship with Cardinal Cushing, President John Sloan Dickey, and with Fr. Ted Hesburgh who was told upon visiting campus here that Aquinas House had more priestly vocations than all of Notre Dame. Paul adds: "That put the hook into him, and he ran home quick and found out that was accurate." There was always his friendship as well with the college, awarding him an honorary degree in 1973. Battling Alzheimers in his late age, his family visited him at the retired priests' home in Manchester. Paul adds, "He could still sit down at the piano and play anything from memory ... Once a school group visited to sing carols without accompaniment. He motioned to them to push him over closer to the piano - he was in a wheelchair at the time - he cocked his head, and then he started to play the Christmas carol perfectly in the key that the group was singing. He played many more carols that way. It was all between the ears." Kate remembers one nurse telling her he was a night owl, and when she was up late doing laundry, Fr. Bill would keep her company and help fold the socks.

His funeral Mass at Aquinas House was for Paul "a combination of a celebration and a sad trip. He drew a pretty good crowd."



*My favorite photo of Fr. Bill with all sides of the priesthood represented:
a shelf of books for study, framed photos of the people he loved, and on his desk, business!*



1983 celebration of Fr. Bill's 40 years of priesthood, Fr. Joe Devlin, S.J. presenting the cake as assistant chaplain.

I am writing this essay on Thanksgiving Day to be published in a few weeks. I am thankful every day for Fr. Bill and all other chaplains who have lived here. A former student, Fr. John Connolly '81, remembers searching late one night for Fr. Bill but instead finding his assistant, Fr. Joe Devlin, S.J. That conversation set him on the path to priesthood, then by God's sense of humor he has been assigned as pastor of Fr. Bill's childhood parish in West Roxbury! I think of all the ministers, secretaries, and the many students who have brought life to Aquinas House. Every person shares in the history here, as ones who have been blessed by God within these walls and have also become instruments of blessing to others by all usual manner of things: conversations, encouragement, laughter, tears, praying with and for each other. Deep down I thank God, the Mover of our hearts. None of our history here would have come about had his grace not continually moved many hearts like a mountain breeze, those of

priests and those of students thirsting to love God more and their neighbor. Aquinas House is God's story. Like so many others, I am glad to just be a part of it. It helps me love Christ to see him draw students to himself year after year, every face, every life. He is still attractive. He still fascinates. He still pours out wisdom in many minds and peace in many hearts. He develops deep friendships. He is the way, and the truth, and the life, even here.

May you feel Christ near you this Christmas.

Let's pray for each other,
Fr. Timothy, O.P.

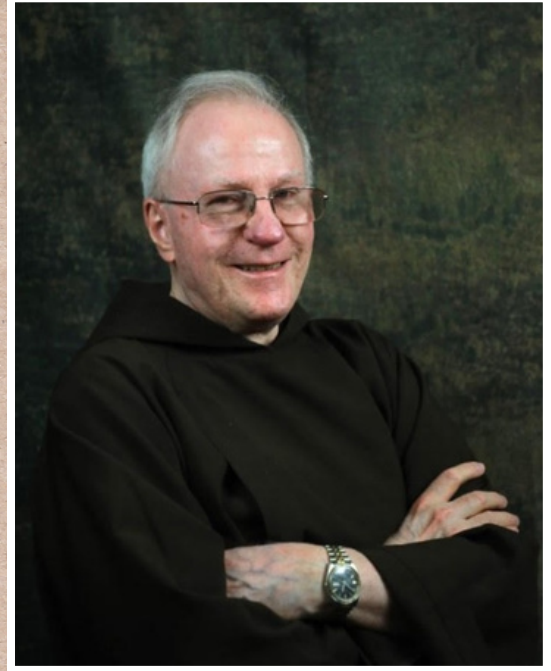
Refer to our website's History page which will be updated continually this year with more articles, historic photos, etc.
www.dartmouthcatholic.com



A GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

St. Francis of Assisi exhorted his brothers to live in this world as “pilgrims and stranger,” guests, if you will, passing through the world as we know it on their way to their true and eternal home with God. This attitude of itinerancy became a distinguishing characteristic of Franciscan spirituality as opposed to, say, the spirituality of Benedictine monks who commit themselves to a stable life in a particular monastery. In that spirit, Capuchin Franciscans (yes, I’m one of those Franciscans) elect new leaders every three years. We like to keep them on a short leash. That, in turn, precipitates a round of new assignments throughout our New York - New England Province. As a result, most of us expect to pack up and move every 3-9 years or so. One might therefore opine that I beat the odds - or overstayed my welcome - in my seventeen-year tenure at Aquinas House (1985-2002), which I look back on as the “crown jewel” of my life in ministry...and as a very great grace.

Fr. Timothy suggested that there might be some AQ alums and benefactors interested in knowing where Franciscan itinerancy has taken me since my departure from AQ. So, here it is in a nutshell:



Fr. John F. McHugh, O.F.M. Cap.

What precipitated my departure from Dartmouth was my unexpected election to a three-year term on our Provincial Council which met every month at our headquarters in White Plains, NY. To get me closer to that location, I was simultaneously appointed pastor of a vibrant parish, St. Joseph the Worker, in East Patchogue, NY (on Long Island). Six years later, I was elected vicar provincial minister, which meant moving to and living in White Plains for three more years. After that, I returned to campus ministry this time at St. Joseph's College in Standish, ME, where I remained for the next six years. After those six years, our newly elected provincial minister asked me to return to the Capuchin parish in my hometown of Yonkers, NY, in order to assist a new and inexperienced pastor. Six years later (this past September) I requested and was granted “senior friar” status, which means that, after fifty four years as a priest, and at the ripe old age of eighty, I have retired from full-time ministry but continue to offer pastoral assistance as needed. I remain at Sacred Heart in Yonkers and, in my dotage, I have started to rekindle a modest presence in college life by offering Masses at Manhattan College (which, ironically, is in the Bronx.)

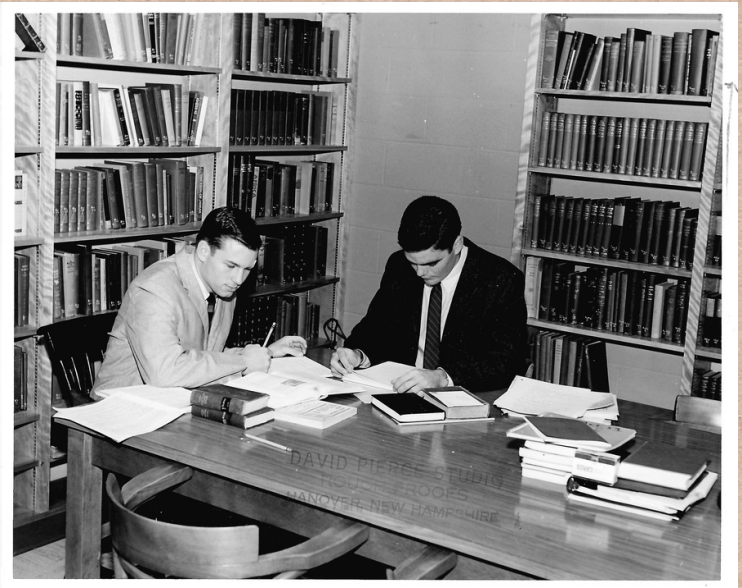
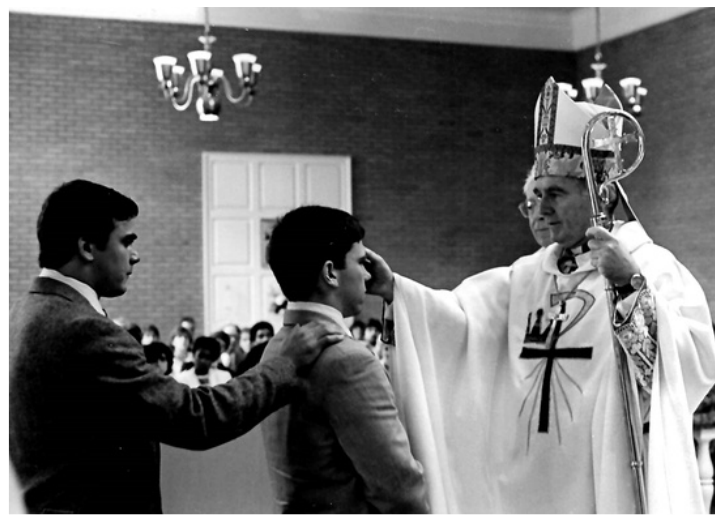
Over the years, I have been fortunate to remain in contact with quite a few AQ folks, and, to my great delight, many of them were able to join in the celebration of my fiftieth jubilee of priesthood here in Yonkers in 2019. However, many more have faded into the mists of history. If you are one of them, and if ever you are traveling through the hill country of Yonkers (recently dubbed “Hollywood on the Hudson” after Lionsgate established a film production facility here), you would be most welcome to visit!

I can be reached at:
Sacred Heart Friary
110 Shonnard Place
Yonkers, NY 10703-2226
johnpmchugh01@gmail.com

May God bless each and every one of you!
Fr. John McHugh, O.F.M. Cap.

SOME VIEWS FROM AQ

THROUGHOUT HISTORY & TODAY





CETENARY EVENTS

You always have a home here at Aquinas House! During our centenary celebrations, we have several events planned to give you a chance to come back and come together.

Friday, May 3rd

5PM - Holy Hour

St. Clement Chapel at Aquinas House

6PM - Happy Hour

with drinks, hors d'oeuvres, and live music

Saturday, May 4th

Morning Hike with Students

Trustees Meeting

Overseers Q&A

4PM - Vigil Mass with Bishop Libasci

5PM - BBQ with Students, Open Mic Storytelling

Sunday, May 5th

11AM - Community Mass

12PM - Brunch with Students

Class of 1953 Commons

Mini Reunions

Washington D.C. - August 29

New York City - August 30

Boston - August 31

Email us if you live in those areas and would like more information.

All events are not ticketed, and are free to all guests. We do ask that you RSVP in advance so that we can be prepared to welcome you. Please RSVP to aq@dartmouth.edu.