

IN THE PARISH SPOTLIGHT

By Bernie Beglane



A change in plans!
Happens every day, correct?

For Monsignor Dennis M. Regan, it happened halfway through McGill University in Montreal.

“I had plans to go to medical school,” stated the pastor of St. Rosalie’s Parish, “but halfway through college, I thought about the priesthood.

“There was no bolt of lightning or anything like that. As a matter of fact, I belonged to a fraternity (Sigma Chi) and was having a ball. I was even a pledge trainer.

“Never for a moment have I ever regretted that change in plans. There have been ups and downs, just as in any calling in life, but I have been happy ever since.”

Father Dennis grew up in Holy Name Parish, Valley Stream, and attended Valley Stream Central H.S.

Once that change of plans took place while enrolled in the Canadian university, he was accepted to study for the priesthood by the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

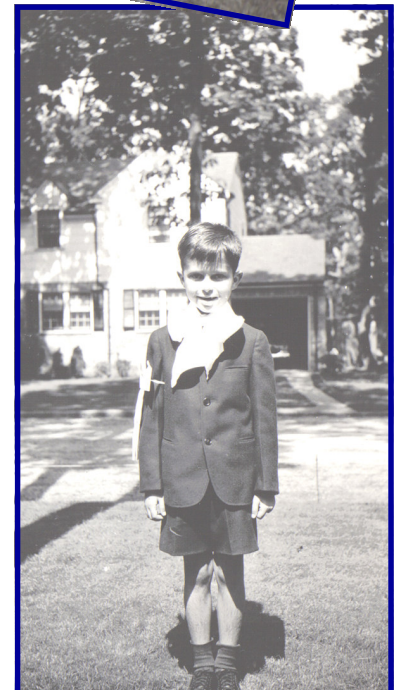
Instead of attending the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, Huntington, which trained young men not only from our diocese but also from the Diocese of Brooklyn, Father Dennis was sent to St. Bernard’s Seminary in upstate Rochester.

“There were a lot of guys from the Northeast at St. Bernard’s and it was easy to establish lasting friendships,” explained the pastor.

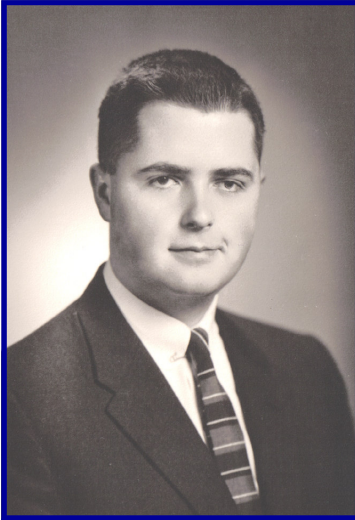
Ordination by Bishop Walter P. Kellenberg took place on May 30, 1964, in St. Agnes Cathedral and Father Dennis’ first assignment was Sacred Heart Parish, North Merrick.

“I had hoped that I was going to remain a parish priest the rest of my life,” continued Father Dennis, but after three years, Bishop Kellenberg had other ideas.”

Once again, Father Dennis’ plans were changed. He was sent to Rome to study for a doctorate in sacred theology. In 1970 he achieved that from the Pontifical Lateran University (Academia Alfonsiana).



Father Dennis after making his first Holy Communion.



Our pastor in his days at McGill University.

“Moral theology is tremendously valuable,” continued the pastor. “God frees us through faith and truth and the life that should flow from them.

“To me, that’s the essence of moral theology.”

Arriving back in our diocese with his doctoral degree, any thoughts...or plans...of returning to permanent parish work were---yes, you guessed it---changed.

Bishop Kellenberg sent him to the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception as a professor of moral theology...and more.

He became the academic dean and then president/rector, serving in those two positions during 14 of his 18 years there.

Our pastor also was an adjunct professor of moral theology at St. John University, Fordham University and C. W. Post College.

“There were a great many challenges,” continued Father Dennis, who, while at Huntington, was elevated to Prelate of Honor (Monsignor) by Pope John Paul II in May, 1980.

“I gave it what I could, and in 1988, asked Bishop (John R.) McGann (Bishop Kellenberg’s successor) to return to parish work.

“He assigned me as pastor at Infant Jesus Parish (Port Jefferson), but with a proviso...I would still teach at the seminary for a few years.”

Bishop McGann, in 1997, established Catholic Health Services of Long Island, bringing the five hospitals, nursing homes, hospices and home care which had a combined 14,000 employees under one umbrella.

“He asked me to be Director of Healthcare Ethics (1998-2000),” offered Father Dennis, “and then asked me to also become Senior Vice-President, Mission and Ethics, in 2001. I held both positions at the same time.”



Ordination day was a happy occasion for the Regan family...W. Kenneth and Isabella, the proud parents of Father Dennis.

All the while, our pastor kept abreast of what was happening in the diocese. He, as well as the faithful, were aware of the shortage of priests in general and pastors in particular.

“Last year there was a need for 10 pastors,” explained Father Dennis, “and I offered to help.

“I was fortunate enough that Bishop (William J.) Murphy assigned me to St. Rosalie’s. I feel very much at ease on the East End.

“My parents (Isabella and W. Kenneth) had a small home in Easthampton and two aunts resided in Sag Harbor, so coming to St. Rosalie’s was like coming home.”

Lest one gets the impression that it has been all work and no play for Father Dennis, there certainly have been a variety of interests that occupied his free time.

“For 30 years I played racquet ball until damaging my right ankle in 1997,” he related.

“I had several operations and fusion was necessary. So now there is no more racquet ball.”

Maybe so, but there are still other interests---whitewater canoeing and rafting ever since high school for example.

To say nothing of a nine-day trek (longer than expected since a guide got lost) in the Golden Triangle Jungle that borders Thailand, Laos and Burma.

Certainly some fascinating diversifications for someone who had a change in plans!



It took a lot of soap and water for Father Dennis to look this good following his nine-day journey through the Golden Triangle jungle.