

RETIRED PRIESTS REMAIN ACTIVE

BY TIM PUET

Reporter, Catholic Times

Several retired priests who reside at the Villas of St. Therese in Columbus say that although they no longer are part of the day-to-day life of a parish, they gain great satisfaction from their continued involvement with former parishioners.

“Just because you’re not an active priest in the sense that you’re no longer assigned to a specific church, it doesn’t mean you have an inactive life,” said Msgr. James Nugent, 88, who has been a priest for 57 years, serving in the Diocese of Steubenville. He moved seven years ago to the Villas to join his brother, Msgr. Michael Nugent, a Columbus diocesan priest, who died in 2009.

“One of the best things about retirement is that you no longer have the obligations you had to deal with as a pastor, but can do things at your own pace,” he said.

“In retirement, I’ve found the best of both worlds,” said Msgr. Frank Meagher, 78, who moved to the Villas six years ago on his retirement and has been a priest for 53 years. “You’re no longer a pastor, but you still have the same feelings that made you be a priest in the first place. You’ve always been a part of people’s lives and you still care about them. Retirement doesn’t change that.”

One thing that does change for most priests in retirement is that they don’t have to deal with the multitude of responsibilities that result from being in charge of a parish. That’s an aspect of a pastor’s life which none of the priests at the Villas appears to miss.

“Meetings – they’re the one thing I’m happy to have put behind me,” said Msgr. Robert Noon, 90, a resident of the Villas for seven-and-a-half years, who was ordained 62 years ago and has been retired for 20 years. Msgr. Meagher agreed, adding a humorous note by

saying, “If I die and there’s a meeting going on, then I’ll know I didn’t make it to heaven.”

“You do have the sense of being ‘free at last,’ except for sacramental duties, and you don’t want to be free of those,” he continued. “It’s nice to be able just to say Mass and let the pastor pay the bills.”

“Priests do have to make some adjustments that are somewhat unique to them,” said Father Michael Nimocks, 71, who retired last year after 17 years in the priesthood. “It depends on your situation, but when you’re living in a rectory, a lot of times you have your meals prepared, your laundry done, and your house cleaned. Once you retire, it’s all up to you, and I’m having to get used to that again.” He said that adjustment was easier for him than it might be for other priests because he had lived as a single adult for 30 years before studying for the priesthood.

The number of priests in the Diocese of Columbus is smaller than it has been for some time. That may change in coming years with the ordination of many of the 38 men currently studying for the diocesan priesthood (the largest number since 1979), but for now, there’s no shortage of service opportunities for those retired priests whose health and driving skills allow them to help at other parishes.

Msgr. Robert Schneider, 82, a resident of the Villas for 11 years and a priest for 56, was a weekend assistant at Granville St. Edward for seven years and continues to say Mass on occasion at Columbus Christ the King Church and Mother Angeline McCrory Manor, next door to the Villas. In addition, he also hears confessions and takes part in men’s and women’s conferences at St. Therese’s Retreat Center, also adjacent to the Villas. Msgr. Saulius Laurinaitis, 91, a priest for 65 years, moved to the Villas a year ago, but before that, he was in resi-



From left: Msgr. Robert Noon, Msgr. James Nugent, Father Michael Nimocks, Msgr. Frank Meagher, Father Saulius Laurinaitis, and Msgr. Robert Schneider. CT photo by Tim Puet

dence at Hilliard St. Brendan Church for many years.

Msgr. Noon celebrates Masses every two or three weeks at the Seton Square East senior citizens community in Reynoldsburg and retains his longtime involvement with the Columbus Catholic Charismatic Renewal. “I don’t travel as much as I used to, and I do miss that,” he said. “It’s nice once in a while to go to a parish for Sunday Mass, especially to a place you’ve served, and get some of that feel for the people and their concerns that was a daily part of your life for so long.”

Msgr. Meagher and Father Nimocks, as well as many other diocesan priests who live on their own, have assisted at parishes throughout the diocese and are available on request to serve as weekend assistants, to help in the temporary absence of a pastor for medical, vacation, or other reasons, to offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation at penance services, and to serve other spiritual needs.

Msgr. Meagher in recent months has celebrated Mass or heard confessions in Mount Vernon, Circleville, Wheelersburg, New Boston, Newark, and Danville. Father Nimocks has assisted at parishes in Somerset, Heath, Dresden, Mattingly Settlement, Lancaster, Washington Court House, Marysville, Logan, Marion, and Columbus since retiring. “I don’t want to be attached to any one parish,” he said. “There’s always a place where I can help, and I’m happy to be able to go wherever I’m needed.”

Mass is celebrated at the Villas every morning, and the priests living there take turns as celebrants. Besides those mentioned, other priests residing in either the independent or assisted living sections of the Villas are Msgr. Thomas Bender, Msgr. Carl Clagett, Msgr. James Geiger, Father Joseph Losh, and Father Francis Stanton.

“Living here with other priests is a great advantage,” said Msgr. Noon. Msgr. Meagher said he feels fortunate to be at the Villas because the facility has a waiting list of people who would like to move there in response to the quality of care provided. “The sisters and the whole staff here do their best, and I appreciate all they do,” he said.

Retired priests have many opportunities to continue fellowship with their colleagues in the priesthood, both active and retired. Msgr. Noon belongs to a group of priests who meet once a month in a different rectory. Father Nimocks and other priests gather on the first Tuesday of the month at a different restaurant. Such regularly scheduled gatherings of priests, known as Emmaus groups, have taken place since 1982, when they were begun through the encouragement of the late Bishop Edward Herrmann.

Father Nimocks said deanery meetings and parish penance services provide other chances for priests to get together and share their concerns, with the penance services frequently including a meal before or after the service.

“I’m most grateful to my colleagues in active ministry for the way they’ve reached out to keep me involved and aware of what’s happening in their own parishes and throughout the diocese,” Msgr. Schneider said. “Their thoughtfulness and that of my former parishioners who visit and send cards is much appreciated.”

All the retired priests interviewed for this story said another benefit of retirement has been the opportunity to have more time for prayer and spiritual concerns. “I’m a great reader,” Msgr. Noon said. “I had 20 years of reading to catch

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