

Father George Zahn – Celebrating Fifty Years of Priesthood

Contributed by Brian P. Hegarty Jr.

Father George credits his parents and grandparents for giving him a solid Catholic foundation which led to his vocation to become a priest. As the oldest of six children, he observed that his parents took an active part in their parishes in Maryland and Washington, D.C. They frequently invited their parish priests to their homes and one priest in particular who had an influence on Father George was Bishop John Russell. Father George said “of the six children I had an inclination to the priesthood since grade school. The vocation which I attribute to the Lord started in our home, our family. It was living in a family where prayer was very much a part of our life.”

During the months of May and October after supper, the Zahn family would pray the rosary kneeling in the living room which had a shrine to the Blessed Mother. The family was very close and always active in their parish.

The Sisters of Saint Francis, in Pennsylvania, were also an important part of Father George’s early life as teachers at Nativity School. He remembers there were 13 sisters in the convent who would all come over to visit his family. He said, “I felt so close to the priests and some of the nuns.”

Father George’s only sister, Agnes, entered the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1961 where she remained for 15 years. “It became natural for us to be drawn to their way of life”, he said, describing the path to a religious vocation for him and his sister.

After attending Nativity School in Washington, D.C., Father George entered Archbishop John Carroll High School graduating in 1959. He then went to Kings College in Pennsylvania graduating in 1963. He went on to Saint Meinrad Seminary in Indiana. He completed his theology studies at the former Trinity Seminary in Washington, D.C.

After being ordained Deacon, he served at Saint Rita Parish in Alexandria, Virginia. He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Richmond by Bishop Russell on May 11, 1968. His first assignment was at Cathedral of the Sacred Heart as associate pastor. Monsignor Walter Sullivan was the rector. He became rector at the Cathedral and stayed in that role until 1976 when he became pastor of Holy Trinity Parish in Norfolk. In 1981, he was appointed pastor of Saint Bede in Williamsburg where he served for 12 years. He then served as pastor of Saint Augustine Parish in Chesterfield County. In 1994, he became the pastor of Saint Paul’s in Richmond where he served for 21 years. Father George retired from Saint Paul’s July 31, 2015.

Father George was initiated into the Dooley Division April 3, 1990. In 2015, he was named “Gael of the Year” which is awarded to a Hibernian who has shown great and exemplary contribution to the Dooley Division. Father George’s family has had a long connection with the AOH. His father was National Director of the AOH in the 1970’s and his mother was a member of LAOH for many years.

Father George, on behalf of The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Dooley Division, we are honored and humbled by your presence. You are an inspiration and you have made each one of us better people. As they say in Irish, *go raibh míle maith agat* (A thousand thank yous or may you have a thousand good things).