

# Church Activities

EDITED BY—MARY C. KITCHIE

## Father William Bresnahan Sees Blessing in Malady **Polio Lengthened Life?**

An increasingly familiar figure around the corridors in St. John's Hospital these days is a dark-haired man of pleasant, scholarly countenance, who spends part of each day in visitation.

"I just wheel down the halls and when I see a door open go in and visit awhile. Sometimes the patients are strangers and sometimes it turns out they recognize me or I remember them as former parishioners."

The visitor also is a patient and is confined to a wheelchair—a victim of polio.

When a doctor in Weiser, Idaho, told the Rev. William Bresnahan, O.S.B., one fateful day last August, "I believe you have polio," Father William hastily replied, "Oh, no, doctor, I'm too old."

He was then 46—he reached his 47th birthday last New Year's day—but the physician was right. There was no denying that the strength had gone from his legs and the muscles would no longer respond to commands. The priest's arms were weakened, too, the left more than the right, and oddly, the thumb of his right hand was more affected than any other finger.



—News and Leader Staff Photo  
Patient visits patient . . . Father William comforts a former parishioner, Robert Farguherson, 265 East Olive, at St. John's Hospital.

"That's the strange thing about polio," the Benedictine priest explained, "it can hit you in different places and affect one part of the body more than others."

Father William did not have the bulbous type that calls for an iron lung or special respirator—the life-saving breathing apparatus used when the lungs are involved.

But the disease nevertheless felled a man who was powerful figure—a man of 5 feet 10 1/2 inches weighing around 250 pounds when he was pastor of St. Joseph's parish here.

Father William admits that there were times when he weighed more than that and herein is a practical demonstration of a blessing.

Father William in those days was combating—not very successfully—diabetes, and was dependent upon frequent use of insulin.

The exercise which definitely was not a factor. But the perfect reason Father did love to eat, and eating was something he neglected to do seriously.

Now, the priest's weight is 198 pounds—a loss that indeed was accomplished the hard way and under the guidance of an unforeseen and unseen spiritual force. And the diabetic condition is under control.

No less an authority than Dr. Harold Neu, head of the polio rehabilitation center at St. Joseph's or Creighton Memorial Hospital in Omaha has pronounced that being stricken with polio "has added 10 years" to Father William's life.

An ironic turn of event physiologically and of philosophical impact, certainly.

But there is the long road back to restoring life in the leg muscles and each day there are two one-and-a-half hour sessions of physical therapy. Taking personal charge of the priest in these daily "workouts" is Ray Tricia, registered physical therapist, who is known by others for his dedication to his work and devotion to patients.

"I am extremely grateful to him for all he is doing for me," Father William emphasized.

The medical agenda for the priest calls for a gradual loss of 40 pounds. "You see, the less weight my legs have to carry the better off I'll be."

His right leg now flexes in directed motion but the left one is less responsive. He showed the difference by juggling at each. Father William also explained that there was no actual paralysis—never a complete numbness. Nearly normal strength has returned to his arms, and he can use his hands to answer the telephone and to help himself in many ways. Boxes of letter paper and other writing equipment in his room gave evidence that he spends time in correspondence.

It still seems puzzling—and rather like a nightmare dream—how it happened that this stal-

wart man of the cloth crumpled. Accompanied by a sister, Miss Ann Bresnahan, a school teacher in Des Moines, and a niece Mary Ellen, 6, daughter of his brother, James Bresnahan, also of their home state of Iowa, Father William was on a vacation motor trip on the west coast last August.

There were days when he didn't feel very well and he noticed a loss of appetite, but he didn't attach any particular significance to these upsets. His little niece became quite ill, but that could be attributed to something about food eaten while traveling. Later, of course, the child's illness was thought of in a different light and the family recalled gratefully that she had had her Salk vaccine shots.

Father William continued his planned itinerary of the western states and proceeded to Weiser, Idaho, where by previous agreement he filled in for a priest on Saturday and Sunday, the 15th and 16th of August. He remembers he felt a little sick then.

He then left for a short trip to Eugene, Mount Angel and Portland, Ore., returning on Thursday, the 20th. "All these dates seem to stick in my mind," he mentally remarked.

On that day he felt much worse and "my left leg gave out." He was taken to the city hospital in the small Idaho town and when efforts were made to lift him in a high hospital bed the older kind that can't be raised and lowered) he made the shocking discovery that his right leg no longer functioned.

Then came the diagnosis by the doctor. On the following day Father William was taken by ambulance to St. Alphonse Hospital in Boise, Ida., and was placed in isolation for several days.

After 2 1/2 weeks he was transferred across town to the Elks Rehabilitation Center, a newly opened institution where he was the only polio patient at the time. Immediately physical therapy was commenced in meeting the challenge to bring back strength to his muscles. While he wasn't stricken with the worst type of polio the priest's whole body was weakened and his breathing was cut down more than half.

From then on there have been the careful manipulations to restore vitality in the affected areas, primarily the legs, a fight that will be pursued for some time. As the days passed he lost weight, but his general health improved and tone and color returned to his face. On October 14, accompanied by his brother, Father William traveled by plane to Omaha, where he underwent treatment at the Creighton Memorial rehabilitation center—one of five patients there. Through that time his care and treatment had been primarily under the auspices of the Polio Foundation.

Last month Father William came back to Springfield "at the charity of the Sisters of Mercy" and the special invitation of Sister Chrysothem, administrator of St. John's Hospital.

Frequently she looks in to see how the cleric in the wheelchair is getting along—she can find him in his room. The nurses have no trouble with him, at least as far as taking pills, for he gulped down a handful scarcely breaking off a sentence during an interview.

At one point he showed off a new pair of black walking shoes clamped to leg braces—another measure of progress.

Father William, who was born in Alton, Iowa, has spent many years in Missouri for he attended high school and two years of college at Conception Seminary, Conception, Mo. He entered the monastery there and after three years went to Rome where he studied for two years at the Pontifical Institute of St. Anselmo, a college of the world-wide Benedictine monastic order.

He returned to Conception where he was ordained a priest on

May 22, 1937, and in the same ordination class was the Rev. Robert Ready, who in 1956 became Father William's successor at St. Joseph's Parish here. The Benedictine priests customarily are known by their first names in the Order.

After he was ordained, Father William taught for two years at the seminary in Conception and then was sent to Brawley, Calif., where he was in charge of a Mexican mission until 1942. Once again he returned to Conception Abbey, this time as procurator, or business manager.

After about a year he was appointed, in October, 1945, as assistant priest at St. Joseph's Parish and served as chaplain at old St. John's Hospital. He left in 1946 to serve as pastor of Conception Parish in the community, which is near Maryville. He returned to Springfield as pastor at St. Joseph's serving from October, 1956, until May, 1958.

That summer he assisted in the establishment of a minor seminary and monastery at Elkhorn, Neb., and was appointed prior of the monastery and in addition was spiritual director and teacher in the seminary. At that time there were 12 priests and four brothers in service there. The first year's enrollment of boys was 120 and during the last school year there were 200 enrolled.

There Father William was to have fulfilled his talent for teaching and his ability as an administrator—an ecclesiastical career that has been temporarily halted.

But Father William is on the road back. Each day in the beautiful chapel at St. John's he says mass at 11 a.m. Although he cannot yet carry out the full office, there is belief that someday he will once again walk to the altar.

### Christian Science

Spiritual treasures are available to all—this is a theme of the Lesson - Sermon entitled "Substance" to be read at Christian Science services today.

The divine source of true substance will be brought out in passages to be read from the Bible, including the following:

"Treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but righteousness delivereth from death. The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked. The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." (Proverbs 10: 2, 3, 22).

From "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy, the following will be read (431:14): "Man walks in the direction towards which he looks, and where his treasure is, there will his heart be also. If our hopes, and affections are spiritual, they come from above, not from beneath, and they bear as of old the fruits of the Spirit."

### Pastor at Lebanon Is Lenten Speaker

The Rev. Arnold Prater, pastor of First Methodist Church, Lebanon, will be the guest speaker tonight at the 7 o'clock service at Grace Methodist Church, the second Sunday evening Lenten service.

The Lebanon pastor attended George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and Northeast Missouri State College at Kirksville. Following his graduation he served as teacher and football coach at LaPorte, Tex., and Centralia. He entered the ministry in 1948 and has served pastorates at Centralia, Corider and Belton prior to going to Lebanon.

During World War II the Rev. Prater served as a radio operator-gunner on B17s with the 6th Air Force stationed in England.

He is the author of several articles which appeared in "School and Community," the state Teachers magazine, and in "Shepherd," former national magazine of the Methodist Board of Evangelism. The Rev. Prater also is the author of a book of sermons, "Model Y King."

**at 40 Days**

**STER (APRIL 17)**

**the sepulchre at the sun."**

Mark 16:3

illies bloomed in prisms . . . Three women at dawning light . . . To sweet spices for the dead despite the fact that He had rise . . . Their hearts were eyes . . . They did not seek but Easter morn but they hills. A spouse stayed away devotions pay.

**JULIEN C. HYER**

[ Editor. (Mar. 12, 1960). Father William Bresnahan Sees Blessing in Malady - Polio Lengthened Life? Springfield Leader and Press. Source: <https://www.newspapers.com/image/298183409/> ]