

Basilica rector to retire after more than 50 years as a priest

Though Monsignor James V. Hobbs will officially retire Feb. 1 after more than a half century as a priest, he plans to continue serving parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Having served as rector of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Baltimore, since 1992, Monsignor Hobbs plans to move into the Thurmont house he was born in 76 years ago and assist pastors in the area parishes, like Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Thurmont, and Shrine of St. Anthony, Emmitsburg.

"I'm looking forward to going back to my roots," he said. "I'm looking forward to retirement after 51 years, but I'm also looking forward to helping out in the parishes where there is a great shortage of clergy."

A special farewell Mass for Monsignor Hobbs will be celebrated Jan. 27 at 10:45 a.m. at the basilica to give parishioners an opportunity to celebrate their rector's tenure.

When the 50th anniversary of his ordination arrived last year, parishioners of the basilica insisted on having a celebration honoring him, even though he initially resisted any kind of fuss being made on behalf of the occasion.

"He's a very gentle man, and he doesn't ever see the need to be in the spotlight," Michael J. Ruck Sr., a longtime parishioner of the downtown Baltimore church, said in an interview with The Catholic Review last spring. "But, we told him that wasn't acceptable. We wanted this celebration."

Educated by the Daughters of Charity at St. Anthony School in Frederick County, Monsignor Hobbs graduated from St. Charles School, Catonsville, before studying theology at St. Mary's College on Paca Street in Baltimore and entering St. Mary's Seminary, Roland Park, in the 1950s.

Following his ordination on May 25, 1957, Monsignor Hobbs' first assignment was

at St. Mary, Cumberland, where he served as an associate pastor for 15 years before becoming pastor of St. Rose of Lima, Brooklyn, from 1972 to 1978.

From 1978 to 1992 Monsignor Hobbs served as an associate pastor of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, before becoming rector of the basilica.

His term as rector of the basilica has been eventful, with visits from both Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa to the Baltimore landmark, a \$32 million restoration and more than 100,000 visitors since it re-opened in November 2006.

“Monsignor Hobbs’ contribution to the restoration was critical to the work that was achieved,” said Mr. Ruck, a Hunt Valley resident who is also chairman of The Basilica of the Assumption Historic Trust. “He labored over the details and made sure the liturgical structures were accurate.”

Though he said he would miss the basilica and living in the cardinal’s residence on Charles Street, Monsignor Hobbs said the prospect of a more rural setting was appealing as he prepares for retirement.

“I’ve enjoyed every moment of my ministry,” he said. “I believe I’ll also enjoy this new chapter of my life.”