

Chaplains epitomize service to God, country

On Sept. 8, in Washington, D.C., Father F. Richard Spencer, an Archdiocese of Baltimore priest, will be ordained an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese for the Military Service. The following are excerpts from the official history of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA.

Catholic priests served American armed forces with distinction since Revolutionary War times.

After the Spanish American War, a commission of the U.S. bishops, under (Baltimore's) James Cardinal Gibbons, was established to recruit priests of the military chaplaincy.

In the United States, as in other countries, the military constituted a vast diocese with no regularly constituted head until Pope BENEDICT XV authorized each country to have an *episcopus castrensis*, or bishop for the military. On Nov. 24, 1917, he appointed Patrick Hayes, an auxiliary bishop of New York, to be "Ordinary of all Catholics who fight in the Army and Navy during the present war."

During World War II, 2,453 priests served as army chaplains and 817 as navy chaplains, of whom 676 died in service. After World War II, as realities dictated an American presence in outposts far from home, the jurisdiction of the Military Ordinary was expanded to include civilians serving the U.S. government overseas.

On April 25, 1951, an instruction of the Holy See, *Sollemne Semper*, established norms for canonically establishing a permanent vicariate for the apostolate to military personnel. It was made specific for the United States in a subsequent decree, *Mysticam Petri Naviculam*, of Sept. 8, 1957.

On Oct. 6, 1983, the Holy See determined that the military vicariate should have its own independent status, not as an added role for the archbishop of New York, but with its own full-time ordinary, to function as any other diocese.

(Most Reverend Edwin F. O'Brien served the Archdiocese as archbishop from 1997 to 2007, when he became the Archbishop of Baltimore.)

The Archdiocese receives no funding, due to the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution, from the United States Government. Rather, the Archdiocese is solely funded from the generosity of its chaplains, men and women in uniform and private benefactors.