

Edgewater pastor retires after 25 years of priesthood

In retiring July 9, after 11 years as pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Edgewater and 25 years as a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Father Joseph Cosgrove received an answer to a prayer he had offered before his ordination.

"I made a promise to Christ that if he gave me 25 years of life, I would give him 25 years of priesthood," Father Cosgrove said.

He was not bargaining to extend his life, and it was not his intention to set a limit on his priesthood.

It was a prayer of thanksgiving.

"It was, 'This is how I'd like to pay you back, but I'll need your help,'" Father Cosgrove explained.

A former bank officer who was raised in a family of 12 siblings in Dorchester, Mass., Father Cosgrove arrived in Baltimore to study medieval history at Johns Hopkins University.

Although he grew up Catholic, he truly discovered the faith as an adult, he said.

While at Hopkins, Father Cosgrove became a parishioner of Ss. Philip and James Church in Baltimore and came under the influence of two of its pastors, Bishop William C. Newman and Monsignor Martin R. Strempeck.

"It was my active involvement in that church and getting to know those priests that drew me to the church," Father Cosgrove said. "Both (Bishop Newman) and (Monsignor Strempeck) were wonderful pastors for their leadership in building up the community itself. ... They were open, generous-with-their-time people."

Father Cosgrove has employed a similar approach at Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

"He is more than a priest and a pastor to us," said Lee Heath, president of the

parish's pastoral advisory council. "He is a friend and as close to a brother as I could experience."

"I don't think a lot of people realize all the sacrifice priests and religious go through to support all of us," Heath added. "He is definitely included in that."

Sister Kathleen Collins of the Sisters for Christian Community, pastoral associate of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, used the word "empathy" to characterize Father Cosgrove.

"I always tell people that if you're concerned about something or you need to go to confession, he's an excellent person to hear your confession," she said. "If someone's dying, he's the first person you should call, not only to administer the sacraments but also to comfort the family."

The first Mass celebrated by Father Cosgrove she attended was a funeral Mass.

"When I heard the way he interacted with the family, and his homily, I thought, 'Wow, this is the person I want to work with.'"

Father Cosgrove previously served as pastor of St. Peter in Hancock and St. Patrick in Little Orleans. Before that, he served associate pastorships at St. Jane Frances de Chantal in Pasadena, St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park and St. Joseph in Fullerton, in reverse chronological order.

He said he has learned first-hand that "people have a need for God in their lives."

"You realize when people experience a tragedy, they need to be reassured that God loves them," said Father Cosgrove, who has learned from his parishioners and they from him.

"The first thing you do is lay the foundation in what you preach, how you act and what you encourage," he said, adding that, from there, "you empower people so they can do it and sustain it themselves."

The philosophy parallels Cosgrove's favorite Scripture passage, in which St. John the Baptist declares the authority of Jesus:

“He must increase; I must decrease” (Jn 3:30).

Father Cosgrove, therefore, does not take credit for the growth and development that has occurred at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, including a ministry of assistance to a parish in Haiti, St. Elizabeth of Hungary in the village of Perodin, and a Hispanic ministry, which includes a Saturday vigil Mass in Spanish.

Father Cosgrove said he will miss “the people” of his parish the most when he moves to Mercy Ridge in Timonium.

“This is a very friendly parish, and I didn’t make it that way,” he said. “It’s a wonderful place to be a priest.”