

# Reflecting on 55 years as a priest, Father Rafferty says God ‘works in crazy ways’

PASADENA - Having completed his yard chores, Father Brian Rafferty showered, donned his clerical attire and drove to St. Agnes Hospital.

“Who do you wish to see, Father?” the receptionist asked.

“I wish to be seen,” he replied.

It was June 1989, and the chest pains Father Rafferty had experienced turned out to be a heart attack. His actions that day illustrate the resolve and faith that have marked his 80 years on the planet, 55 as a priest.

“The Lord,” Father Rafferty said, “works in crazy ways.”

The end of 2017 will bring his retirement from Our Lady of the Chesapeake Parish, where he has served as pastor since July 1992. Father Rafferty will continue to live and serve nearby, administering the sacraments at Christ the King in Glen Burnie.

“I have no desire to retire from the priesthood,” he said. “I’m having too much fun.”

That spirit has taken him from an idyllic childhood in West Baltimore to three parishes in Baltimore County; one in Howard County; the chairmanship of the archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in the 1970s; and Anne Arundel County the last 25 years.

“Our motto is ‘Think, Think, Think,’ ” said Tim Janiszewski, the youth minister at Our

Lady of the Chesapeake. “In his homilies, he tells us what he thinks, not what we should think.”

Father Rafferty’s parents, Bernard and Jane, “thought for themselves.” He traces his affinity for social justice to them, and his vocation to the parish of his youth, St. Bernardine, where the “caliber of the priests” inspired him.

In August 1963, Father Rafferty was a month into his first assignment, at Immaculate Conception in Towson, when the pastor, Monsignor Joseph Nelligan, “a mover and a shaker,” nodded yes when Father Rafferty asked to join the March on Washington led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

A lesson in preconceptions came during his four years at Our Lady of Hope in Dundalk.

“I was told, ‘everybody was going to be different’ there, and they were,” Father Rafferty said, of an era when steel production at Sparrows Point boosted blue-collar parishioners. “Their houses were all paid for. When I watched Monday Night Football with them, they served lobster and Heineken.”

He is a proponent of Vatican II and the confessional.

“People relax and talk,” Father Rafferty said. “It’s the most rewarding thing a priest can do. “

His role as a confessor is strengthened by his willingness to expose his own feet of clay.

Three packs a day of Marlboros contributed to that heart attack. A recovering alcoholic, three times he took leave from archdiocesan assignments to seek treatment.

“The archdiocese has been very good to me,” Father Rafferty said. “Cardinal (William H.) Keeler let me come back here after the third time (in 1999).”

“Young people in their 20s and 30s come in, they’re so down on themselves. I was in my early 60s when I had the guts to say, ‘I can’t handle this.’ I stop and thank the Lord, how Jesus entered my life and has been with me every step of the way.”

Holy Family in Davidsonville is among the parishes in Anne Arundel County where he has shared sacramental duties.

“He’s very conscious of supporting other priests, and conscious of the welfare of the church,” said Father Andrew Aaron, pastor of Holy Family. “There is something old-fashioned, about his devotion to the church.”

Father Rafferty is grateful for lay people, such as the Church of the Resurrection parishioner, a CPA, who showed him how a bond initiative could erase a \$360,000 debt at the parish which he opened in 1974, and the hordes who have made Our Lady of the Chesapeake an annual host of the Arundel House of Hope’s Winter Relief program, turning its parish hall into an overnight shelter for one week every January.

“That’s all done by our lay leadership,” Father Rafferty said. “Thank God for the laity.”

Their pastor, conversely, has been accessible to them.

“I’ve been here 20 years,” said Janiszewski, the youth minister in Pasadena. “I can count on two hands the meetings I’ve had with young people that he has missed.”