

Priests recall memorable experiences as they celebrate 25, 40, 50 and 60-year anniversaries

Monsignor William A. Collins said he has had many pleasant experiences during his 50-year vocation, including serving at parishes, ministering in the tribunal and being named a monsignor. But as the Baltimore native indicated in his 50th anniversary homily, “they don’t compare with the experience of becoming a priest.”

Across the Archdiocese of Baltimore, men are celebrating 25, 40, 50 and 60 years of priesthood.

Monsignor Edward M. Miller, pastor of St. Bernardine in Baltimore and one of six remaining members of the 1971 ordination class for the archdiocese, admitted that he feared oversleeping on his ordination day after 12 years of seminary training, and that he would have to wait another year to be ordained.

He didn’t oversleep, and he still recalls the overwhelming feeling of the day.

“You get so caught up in it,” he said. “It’s almost indescribable.”

Monsignor Miller, who comes from a religious family, with one brother who is a Christian Brother and one who is a Holy Cross Brother, has spent all but four years of his ministry at St. Bernardine and said parishioners are like family members to him. He loves his lifelong calling to the priesthood.

“It’s just an incredible gift of joy and happiness,” he said. “It’s got its moments of sorrow, but just helping people come to know the Lord, deepen their faith and change their lives is incredible. God is using you for his kingdom and to do his work.”

Father Joseph G. Bochenek, Father Joseph F. Breighner, Father Lawrence K. Frazier, Monsignor Thomas L. Phillips and Father Michael J. Roach are also celebrating 40 years of priestly ministry.

Fifty years of priesthood has gone by quickly for Father Salvatore Livigni, who began his ministry in the Diocese of Trenton, N.J., and has been in Baltimore for 19 years. He has had many experiences during his half-century vocation, but among the most meaningful are when he served as chaplain for Johns Hopkins Hospital, and the years that followed.

“Being near people who needed help and who needed the passion and love, that has been the greatest gift to me,” said Father Livigni, who served at Johns Hopkins for nearly 15 years. “I was there in a time when they needed me.”

It has been six years since he left Johns Hopkins, but people continue to approach Father Livigni to tell him what his visit meant to them. He always gave an angel or Jesus statue to the children he visited, and several still have the statues as adults.

“That’s a pleasant surprise how you touch people in that regard,” Father Livigni said. “You never know at the time what you do for people, but they tell you what that visit meant to them. That’s a great reward.”

Father Livigni, who had a reception celebrating his anniversary June 12 at St. Michael the Archangel in Overlea, said as he has matured in the priesthood, he can see what the Lord has given him.

“I try each day to think of that gift and hold it close to my heart,” said Father Livigni, who continues to celebrate Masses at St. Michael; St. Athanasius in Curtis Bay and St. Joan of Arc in Aberdeen. “He has blessed me.”

For Monsignor Collins, who grew up in St. Dominic in Baltimore, the work that has been most meaningful to him is his time in the tribunal.

“Once I got into it, I realized that’s a great contribution to people who are alienated to some degree by the church,” he said.

He said that divorced Catholics often feel looked down upon and he was able to reach out to many of these individuals to be reconciled to the sacraments of the church.

Others celebrating 50-year anniversaries include Father Joseph C. Simmons, pastor

of Holy Spirit in Joppa and Father Joseph V. Messer, who is retired.

Monsignor Arthur W. Bastress recently marked his 60th anniversary of ordination, as the pastor of Shrine of St. Alphonsus celebrated with his Baltimore parish in early June. Next week's Catholic Review will explore Monsignor Bastress' reflections of his memories of priestly life and what keeps him enthusiastic about his vocation.

Father Frank J. Brauer, pastor of the Catholic Community of St. Francis Xavier in Hunt Valley, celebrated his 25th jubilee May 7. Father Thomas Gills, Monsignor J. Bruce Jarboe and Father John B. Ward are also celebrating 25-year anniversaries.

The archdiocese has long been a place where order priests have been fostered as well. Capuchin Franciscan Father Blaine Burkey of Denver, a native of Cumberland, will celebrate Mass marking the 50th anniversary of his ordination at Ss. Peter and Paul's Church, Cumberland, June 19.

Father Burkey has written and published histories of the works of the St. John Neumann, Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos, and the Capuchin Franciscans in Western Maryland. He is writing a lengthy study of the early history of the church in antebellum Western Maryland from 1750 to 1850.

Third Order Regular Franciscan Father Peter Lyons, pastor of St. Wenceslaus and St. Ann in Baltimore, is celebrating his 50th anniversary of religious profession this year.

Third Order Regular Franciscan Father Robert Sisk, pastor of St. Elizabeth of Hungary in Highlandtown since 2002, has traveled the world during his 50 years of ministry.

Born and raised in Johnstown, Pa., Father Sisk was ordained May 27, 1961, and the following year went to Brazil, where he served for 17 years. From there he went to South Africa for 10 years and then served as a pastor in Arlington, Texas, for four years. After that, he was off to Rome for six years, where he served as secretary general of the missions. During that time, he visited the foreign missions for the Franciscans, Third Order Regular. He went to Sri Lanka, Germany, Bangladesh, Paraguay and the Philippines among other countries.

“It’s been a wonderful, tremendous journey,” said Father Sisk. “I’ve been very blessed. I’m grateful to God, for calling me and sustaining me for all these years.”