

Retiring longtime Crofton pastor known for compassion, sincerity

By Maria Wiering

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After serving St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Crofton for 25 years, Father Edward C. Connelly is retiring July 1. For some people, Father Connelly is the only pastor they've ever known, said Jack O'Malley, the parish's pastoral administrative associate.

"He'll be greatly missed. He's been an important part of many peoples' lives," he said. "Being here this long, he's baptized a lot of people and seen them grow up and get married."

Father Connelly, 79, encouraged lay leadership in the 1,400-family parish, O'Malley said.

"(Father Connelly) doesn't micromanage you," he said. "He really gives you the opportunity to do your job and be creative, and he's always supportive in that way. I think that's what's formed the staff over the years and made us a strong staff."

Father Connelly also encouraged parishioners to take responsibility for the parish, which led to growth in volunteer numbers and ministries in the parish, O'Malley said.

A native of Bangor, Maine, Father Connelly attended the University of Maine before joining the U.S. Air Force Band, where he played clarinet and saxophone while stationed at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., from 1953 to 1957. After leaving the Air Force, he attended St. Jerome's College in Kitchener, Ontario, and St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore.

Father Connelly was ordained in Portland, Maine, in 1965, joining the Sulpicians, a

society of diocesan priests dedicated to priestly formation. He returned to Baltimore to teach at St. Mary's Seminary from 1966 to 1969, which overlapped with his graduate studies at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., from 1968 to 1971.

He taught at St. Mary's College Seminary in Catonsville from 1972 to 1976 while serving part time as an associate pastor of St. Pius X in Rodgers Forge. In 1976, he became a full-time associate pastor of St. Pius X, where he ministered until he was named pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in 1987. He was incardinated to the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1979.

As a pastor, Father Connelly is compassionate, with an aptitude for counseling his parishioners in times of grief, as well as a good homilist and confessor, said O'Malley, who has been a parish staff member since 1995.

Pastoral council president Bill Sapero agrees.

"You can hear it in his voice. He's very sincere, he believes what he's saying," he said. "You couldn't ask for a better person to be a pastor."

Father Connelly has "a heart for social justice," O'Malley said.

The priest oversaw the addition of a food pantry during the parish's 2007 renovation and expansion, and built relationships with a sister parish in Haiti and St. Gregory the Great in Baltimore. Three years ago the parish also began hosting homeless men at night for a week through Anne Arundel County's winter-relief program.

Father Connelly declined an interview request, but in 2009 he told the Catholic Review that "I think that the parishioners here have got the message of Jesus that you don't come to church just to receive, but you come to give."

Sapero said he hopes Father Connelly, who plans to stay in the Annapolis area, will sometimes still celebrate Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton after his retirement.

"As a kid growing up (in Baltimore City), I know you never got used to a pastor, because they used to be changed every two to three years, maybe four, if you're lucky," Sapero said. "Now, with Father Connelly being there for 25 years . . . it's like losing a member of the family."

Father Paul Sparklin, a Johns Hopkins Hospital chaplain, will become St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's administrator July 1.