

Fall 1989

New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter, Vol. 8, No.3

New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission

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Recommended Citation

New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission, "New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter, Vol. 8, No.3" (1989). *New Jersey Catholic Historical Commission newsletters*. 26.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/njchc/26>



New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME VIII NO. 3

AUTUMN 1989

Archbishop Peter L. Gerety named commission chairman



Archbishop Gerety in front of the main entrance to Sacred Heart Cathedral, Newark, 1966.

In November 1989, Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick of Newark appointed his predecessor, Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety, to the chairmanship of the Commission. The naming of Archbishop Gerety brings to the helm of the Commission the man who, in his years as archbishop of Newark, was instrumental in the establishment of the Commission and who has always been its firm supporter.

Archbishop Gerety's parents were residents of Hudson County when they met and subsequently married in St. Brigid's in North Bergen. Shortly after their marriage, the young couple moved to Connecticut, where their nine sons were born. The eldest of the group was Peter Leo, who attended the public schools of Shelton, Connecticut, where

he won scholastic honors and also captained the high school football team. He was admitted to St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield, Connecticut, and was subsequently chosen for study abroad at the Seminary of St. Sulpice in Issy, France. He was ordained in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris on June 29, 1939.

Father Gerety was first assigned to the parish of St. John the Evangelist in New Haven, where, in addition to the usual parish work, his duties included ministering also to the Yale New Haven Hospital. For the next 27 years, he was an active parish priest, a role he thoroughly enjoyed and one which he later described: "A parish priest has to be a general practitioner of all sorts of things. It demands a well-rounded personality." But as a bishop looking at the work of the parish priest, he also noted that it is a burdensome and time-consuming task, especially in a large metropolitan parish.

It is also a task whose specific challenges are modified by societal changes. In 1942 Father Gerety was tapped by Bishop Henry O'Brien of Hartford to establish an inter-racial center to pioneer work among the blacks of New Haven. He founded the Blessed Martin de Porres Center in a former police station, and began identifying black Catholics in the area. The focus of his ministry was spiritual, but he did not neglect the material needs of his flock and among the parish organizations was a credit union and a civil-rights organization. When Father Gerety became aware of the influx of Puerto Ricans into New Haven, he expanded his apostolate to include them, learning Spanish in order to do so and eventually convincing Bishop

O'Brien to expand the Spanish apostolate. The Martin de Porres Center became a parish in 1956, with Father Gerety as its pastor.

Ten years later, Monsignor (by now) Gerety was designated coadjutor to the ailing bishop of Portland, Maine, Daniel J. Feeney, and was ordained bishop on June 1, 1966. Less than a year later he became administrator of the Portland diocese on the incapacitation of Bishop Feeney, and in September 1969 succeeded to the See upon the latter's death.

Portland embraced the entire state of Maine and Gerety traveled it far and wide, to meet priests and people and to assess needs. He divided the diocese into 17 deaneries to facilitate ministry to the faithful, mandated parish councils, sent teachers to three Indian reservations and established a "campus parish" to serve students at the state's 27 colleges and universities. When tensions rose in the French-speaking community, his fluency in the language enabled him to conciliate and mediate.

Nationally, he became more active in the civil-rights movement, and supported other efforts to establish justice in American society.

On April 2, 1974 Bishop Gerety was named to succeed Archbishop Thomas A. Boland, who was retiring after 21 years as Archbishop of Newark. He visited his new See frequently in the next weeks, meeting its clergy and people, and beginning to assess its needs. At his installation on June 28, 1974 in Sacred Heart Cathedral, the third archbishop of Newark asserted that "one of the great tasks of a bishop . . . is to preside over the communion of love

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Archbishop Gerety places his hands on the head of Sister Rita Margaret during a spiritual renewal program for diocesan personnel in 1977.



Bishop Gerety after his consecration with Archbishop O'Brien, consecrator, and Bishops Feeney and Hackett.



Archbishop Gerety with members of his "cabinet" in 1977.

in such a fashion that the gifts of the spirit can be freed." Over the next dozen years he reiterated that view in both words and actions.

One early problem was to deal with the archdiocesan debt which by the time of his arrival amounted to \$23 million, most of it accumulated in the Church's effort to deal with the social problems of the cities in the 1960s and in parish efforts to maintain schools and other apostolates. By streamlining operations and adopting austerity measures, by consolidation of the debts, by instituting a yearly fundraising effort which eventually became the Archbishop's Annual Appeal, the dismaying debt was reduced to manageable proportions.

Restructuring the archdiocese meant a reorganization of diocesan offices and often the consolidation of two

or more under one umbrella. More, it meant the establishment of each of the four counties—Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Union—as a vicariate supervised by an auxiliary bishop, and the creation of 25 deaneries—clusters of neighboring parishes with a dean elected by the priests of the deanery and a council which included laity and religious. It was an opportunity to free the gifts of the Spirit and to tap the talents of the people of the Church of Newark. Parish councils were implemented by April, 1976 in still another call upon the laity to become more active in the Church. New ministries—catechist, lector, Eucharistic minister, youth minister, religious education coordinator—were expanded.

The focus of all efforts remained the spiritual growth and well-being of each person in the archdiocese. And new

apostolates were developed: in 1975 the Ministry to Divorced and Separated Catholics, in 1977 the "Father's Embrace" program, to reach out to Catholics who had lost contact with the church. In the following year, Renew, a small-group program, was held in the parishes of the archdiocese, and subsequently grew to become an internationally used device for enhancing the spiritual life of individuals and groups.

Archbishop Gerety's interest in the civil-rights movement continued throughout his tenure in Newark and was manifested most visibly, perhaps, in his chairing the regional meetings held throughout the nation in preparation for the 1976 "Call to Action" conference. The conference was part of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' program in observance of the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence, and sought to identify and deal with those problems which hindered realization of the Founding Fathers' ideal of "Liberty and Justice For All."

Archbishop Gerety retired after 12 strenuous years at the helm of one of the largest archdioceses in the nation on June 1, 1986. His life-long interest in history manifested itself during his years as Ordinary of Newark not only in the support and encouragement which he gave to the Catholic Historical Records Commission, but in his impetus for the writing of a short history of the archdiocese, *The Bishops of Newark*, and in his establishment of the Gerety Lectures in Church History, given at Immaculate Conception Seminary twice each year by outstanding scholars. The Commission looks forward to continued growth and effectiveness under his leadership.



Histories sought

Each year parishes, schools and other Catholic institutions in New Jersey celebrate many anniversaries. A good number of these occasions are commemorated by the publication of festive books or booklets recalling the past and celebrating the present of the institution.

The New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission continues to offer its assistance to any institution interested in preparing its own history. At the same time, the Commission urgently requests that one copy of any history published be deposited with it. The history of Catholicism in New Jersey can only be fully written and understood when the tesserae of the smaller communities are integrated into the mosaic of the larger.

For assistance in preparing a history, contact the Commission at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2696, attn: Professor J.F.

Mahoney. Copies of histories may be sent to the same address.

Father Gerety gives his blessing after his First Mass at Shelton, Connecticut, 1939.



Father Gerety concludes the Mass at which Archbishop O'Brien, in background, administered Confirmation in the original Martin de Porres Center, in New Haven, Connecticut.



Archbishop Gerety answers questions of religious education coordinators at Assumption in Roselle Park in 1976.



Father Gerety with members of the New Haven Catholic Interracial Council in 1951.

Archives personnel changes

Barbara Geller has resigned as University archivist and preservation officer as of December 15, 1989 to take a position with the State of New York. Her many friends, on the Commission and elsewhere, wish her success and satisfaction in her new work.

Effective December 16, 1989, the dean of University Libraries, Doctor Robert Jones, re-structured a portion of library operations, combining archives, rare books, other special collections, records management and resource preservation under the heading Special Collections. Reverend Monsignor William N. Field assumed the position of director of Special Collections, including the duties of University archivist and preservation officer.

Monsignor Field has master's degrees in both library science (Columbia University) and archival management (New York University). He has worked with the Vatican Archives and recently directed the assembly and preparation of a major bicentennial exhibit, "Reflections on the Experience of the Church in the United States, 1789-1989," on display from November 1989



Monsignor William N. Field

to May 1990 at the North American College in Rome.

From 1963 to 1980, Monsignor Field was director of the Seton Hall University Library. Subsequently he served as curator of archives, rare books and special collections. In 1988 he received the Distinguished Service Award of the College and University Section of the New Jersey Library Association. Monsignor Field can be reached at (201) 761-9126 or 761-9426.

Published by the New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission, Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2696.

Most Reverend Peter L. Gerety, D.D., **Chairman**; Bernard Bush, Reverend Mark Dobrovolsky, Reverend Monsignor William N. Field, Reverend Monsignor Charles J. Giglio, Reverend Raymond J. Kupke, Joseph F. Mahoney, Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F., Reverend Monsignor Robert Moneta, Miriam L. Murphy, Reverend Monsignor Theodore A. Opdenaker, Carl E. Prince, George L.A. Reilly, Sister Thomas Mary Salerno, S.C., Bernhard W. Scholz, Reverend Monsignor Francis R. Seymour, Reverend Monsignor Edwin V. Sullivan. **Consulting Member:** Barbara Geller.

Newsletter Editor: Joseph F. Mahoney

Jo An Cotz, who has been organizing the papers of Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety, is now also serving as a part-time archivist. She obtained her master's degree in history from New York University and has extensive experience in archival, archaeological and museum work. She can be reached at (201) 761-9476.



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