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New Jersey Catholic Records Newsletter

VOLUME XII NO. 1

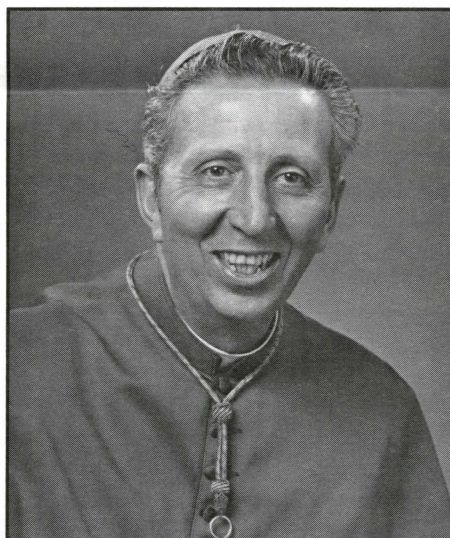
AUTUMN 1992

New chairman of the Commission appointed

In May 1992 Archbishop Emeritus Peter L. Gerety resigned as chairman of the New Jersey Catholic Historical Records Commission. In his two-and-one-half years as chairman, Archbishop Gerety provided vigorous leadership and revived the Commission's committee structure. He was also instrumental in establishing and expanding the Commission's Board of Consultors. His tenure as chair will continue to have significant impact on the Commission's future activities.

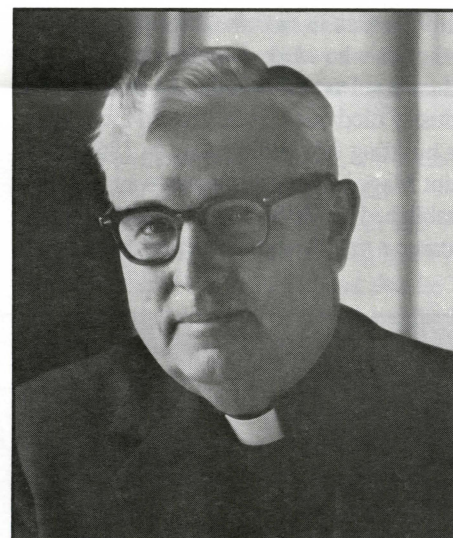
Archbishop McCarrick appointed Most Reverend Dominic A. Marconi, S.T.L., D.D., regional bishop for Union County, as his successor. Bishop Marconi, a native of Jersey City, completed his undergraduate studies at Seton Hall University and his theological studies at Immaculate Conception Seminary and Catholic University, receiving the licentiate in theology from the latter. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1953.

His first assignment was as associate pastor of St. Anthony Parish in Union City, where he remained in pastoral work for 13 years. During this time he also undertook advanced study in pastoral counseling at Immaculate Conception Seminary. In 1966 he became associate director of the Family Life Apostolate in the Archdiocese of Newark and four years later was appointed director. During these years he also served as chaplain at St. Joseph's Home for the Blind in Jersey City. In 1975 Father Marconi became co-director of the Division for Services to the Elderly of the archdiocese's Associated Catholic Charities.



Most Reverend Dominic A. Marconi, D.D.

On June 25, 1976, Father Marconi was ordained to the episcopate and appointed episcopal vicar for Union County, where he now holds the office of regional bishop. In addition to his numerous duties in this position, Bishop Marconi has served on several committees of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, including those on Women's Concerns for Church and



Most Reverend Peter L. Gerety, D.D.

Society, on the Parish, and on the Laity. He has also been a board member of Alexian Brothers Hospital in Elizabeth and currently serves as chairman of the New Jersey Catholic Health Association.

The Commission welcomes Bishop Marconi and looks forward to continued growth and expanded service under his leadership.

Funding the mission: A look at Catholic fundraising during economically depressed times

The Panic of 1873 was followed in the United States by a long period of economic depression, recovery not beginning until 1880 at the earliest. Despite the hard times, Catholics in New Jersey faced the need to expand their facilities for a rapidly growing population. Just before

"Black Friday" in September 1873, there were 67 churches with resident priests and another 48 missions; by 1880, when times began to improve, there were 142 churches with resident priests and 40 missions. Despite the poor economy,

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Funding the Mission

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then, New Jersey's Catholic population managed to address some of its physical requirements. But the process imposed on both clergy and laity strains which often resulted in ill-feeling and dissatisfaction on both sides of the altar rail within a given parish.

A series of letters in 1875 from the pastor of St. Mary Magdalen, parish, Millville, to Bishop Michael A. Corrigan, allow us some insight into the problems. There had been a Catholic church in the Millville area in the 1840s for the Catholics who worked in the glass industry at Port Elizabeth. As that industry died out people moved away and the building fell into disuse. In 1861 Saint Mary Magdalen church was established in Millville and in 1864 became a parish with Father Martin

Gessner as pastor. Gessner also attended the missions of Cape May, Bridgeton and Egg Harbor, in addition to visiting small groups of Catholics at Dennisville, Malaga, Port Elizabeth and Vineland.

Initially most of the parishioners were of Irish or German descent, but, as the 1870s progressed, increasing numbers of Italian and Polish immigrants found their way to the area. Italians came particularly to Vineland as a result of the recruitment efforts of Charles K. Landis, an extremely active land developer. In January 1873, a Dutch-born priest, Father Theophilus Degen, who had worked in England for 15 years, was assigned as pastor at Millville, and a French priest, Peter Vivet assisted him, particularly with the rapidly growing congregation at Vineland. In 1874 Bridgeton became a separate parish with Degen as pastor, and Vivet succeeded him at Millville. The latter also administered Vineland, which

was in the process of becoming a separate parish.

The new pastor inherited two problems: a shortage of money and dissatisfaction in the parish over Degen's administration. The former pastor had dismissed the two lay trustees of the parish and had then been unable to find two parishioners willing to accept the office. Just before his departure, he had promised an election to fill the vacancies. Vivet himself tried to appoint new trustees, but faced the same adamant refusals and the question, "Why don't you hold the election Father Degen promised?" He finally did, contrary to diocesan regulations, but received Bishop Michael A. Corrigan's subsequent approval of his action. The election, however, did not end the ill-feeling, and its aftermath undoubtedly exacerbated the financial problem.

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The people are poor and tired from giving money and I know they have not money, but however by good management and looking them I hope to receive as much as Father Degen did last year.

\$1614. 96

from this I have to pay =

to the Life Insurance Co and profits	454. 00
already to Miss Keating interest	56. 00
for Bridgeton Road, field	129. 00
to John M. Corrigan. Interest	14. 00
to M. M. Corrigan. Interest	24. 50
to the Merchants Insurance	25. 00
	<u>\$702. 50</u>
for the School teacher.	<u>336. 00</u>
	<u>\$1038. 50</u>
	<u>\$576. 46</u>

As you see I remain with \$576. 46. to meet the Church's expenses and myself, for one year. If I don't get more than Father Degen last year, there is no hope for my salary.

Catholic Church
Millville
N. Jersey

May 28th 1875.

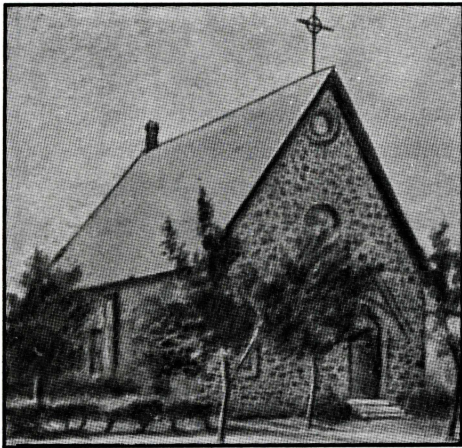
The Right Rev. Corrigan
Bishop of Newark.

My Lord,

I am willing to settle with the Rev. Father Degen as quietly as possible and without any more disturbance; but I find this one of the greatest difficulties, for you know I cannot sign any bond without the trustees, if your lordship and her Vicar-General don't sign it with me. Some days ago, the Rev. Father Degen wrote to me, asking to send at once a bond of 150. Dollars to Miss Keating, saying he had your approval

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Church of the Sacred Heart in Vineland, New Jersey.

In a letter dated May 28, 1875, to Corrigan, Vivet laid out his financial problems at Millville. The first of these was the poor economic situation. Wages in the area had been reduced, and the glass factories had been closed since February. "The people are poor and tired from giving money and I know they have not money," he wrote, but he also hoped that by good management and coaxing his parishioners he might bring in as much as Degen had the year before—\$1,614.96. Against this hoped-for income, he had a series of fixed expenses: \$479 for insurance costs, \$336 for the school teacher, \$94.50 already paid as interest on loans to the church from parishioners and \$129 for the purchase of a lot for church needs. This left him \$576.46 for all the church expenses (heating, lighting, supplies) for a year, as well his subsistence and salary. As he noted, unless he could obtain more than Degen had the previous year, in a somewhat better economy, "there is no hope for my salary."

Vivet faced an even bleaker economic future than these figures suggested, because of demands for repayment of loans. Father Degen was pressing him for \$200; a Miss Keating had loaned the church \$700, payable 30 days after demand, and two McCorriston's had loaned a total of \$350 on the same terms. Miss Keating had already visited Bishop Corrigan to push for repayment of her note and to advise him she was going to hand it to a lawyer for collection, but was,

at least temporarily, delaying that action. Degen, too, had approached Corrigan about payment of the debt to him and in April 1875 was urging Vivet to obtain a loan of \$150 from Miss Keating in order to pay him! Vivet seemed to think that Miss Keating would do so—she "is willing to lend her money to Vineland," he wrote Corrigan, "but not to Millville's church"—but thought it imprudent. The McCorriston's had already asked for their money so they could build a new home to accommodate growing families but had agreed to let the loan ride for a short while longer because the church had trouble borrowing. If Vivet borrowed from Keating to pay Degen, the McCorriston's would soon know and then demand their payments. Moreover, the whole parish would be upset because the people thought Degen had already received more than enough.

Vivet's only source for borrowing money was a recently arrived Italian immigrant, who was willing to let the church at Vineland have \$500 for four years. But the expenses of finishing the interior of the church — plastering, heating, etc. — would more than use up this money, so Vivet notified Corrigan he could not expect to finish that church in 1875.

Vivet's letters to Bishop Corrigan at this period furnish one example of the hand-to-mouth existence of many parishes in their early years. Money was never easy to come by and pastors and parishioners often had to be juggling wizards in order to keep the parish from financial disaster. Vivet and many others like him were oppressed by the unending need for money to build and maintain the church and operate a parish school, and at the same time fully aware that their parishioners for the most part were equally pressed financially and he was reluctant to keep asking them for support. Parishioners able to do so did lend the parish money, only to find it difficult to recover their funds when they needed the money.

By judicious management, Vivet and his churches did survive and regain financial health. Corrigan noted in his diary on May 11, 1879, that Vivet had cleared the debt on Vineland and that he had permission to return to France. His further career there is obscure and the last reference we have to him is Father Flynn's notation that he died there. Father Degen, on the other hand, continued to be active in southern New Jersey, serving as pastor of Our Lady, Star of the Sea in Cape May from 1878 until his death in 1900.

Upcoming Gerety Lectures to begin in October

The seventh annual series of lectures on ecclesiastical history sponsored by the Archbishop Gerety Fund at Immaculate Conception Seminary will begin on October 15, 1992. At 8 p.m. that evening Reverend Timothy M. Dolan, Ph.D. will speak on "Papal Representation in the United States." Father Dolan teaches at the Kenrick-Glennon Seminary of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. The talk will take place in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd in Lewis Hall on the campus of Seton Hall University and will be followed by a question-and-answer period.

The second lecture in this year's series will feature Reverend John Meier, S.S.D., speaking on "The Historical Jesus as Storm Center of Controversy," and will take place on February 18, 1993 at 8 p.m. in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd.

All are welcome.

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Most Reverend Dominic A. Marconi, D.D., *Chairman*; Reverend Monsignor Joseph C. Shenrock, *Vice Chairman*; Bernard Bush; Dr. Rita C. Carney; Jo Ann Cotz; Reverend Augustine Curley, O.S.B.; Reverend Monsignor William N. Field; Reverend Monsignor Charles J. Giglio; Sister Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C.; Reverend Michael G. Krull; Reverend Raymond J. Kupke; Joseph F. Mahoney; Sister Margherita Marchione, M.P.F.; Reverend Monsignor Robert Moneta; George L.A. Reilly; Sister Irene Marie Richards, O.P.; Sister Thomas Mary Salerno, S.C.; Bernhard W. Scholz; Reverend Monsignor Francis R. Seymour; Reverend Monsignor Edwin V. Sullivan; Reverend John F. Wrynn, S.J.; *Consulting Member*: Barbara Geller

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