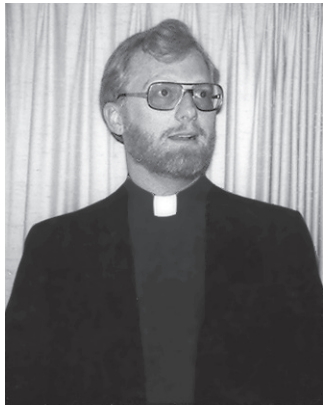


# Cell Retires from Active Parish Ministry



Father Cell begins at Blessed Sacrament in 1982

“I am a priest seeking a cure” wrote a curate to the Rt. Rev. William Stevens in November, 1981. “I have been informed by friends back east that you may have vacancies in the Green Bay area.” Such a vacancy did exist. Who would have known, except for the Holy Spirit, that Fr. John Cell, SSC would serve the people of Blessed Sacrament, Green Bay for the next 28 years. At services early in October, 2010 and through a letter to the congregation, Fr. John announced plans to retire from active parish ministry at the end of the year after “much prayer and the seeking of divine guidance.”

Born in Philadelphia, John Cell was raised in the church and felt an attraction to ordained ministry in his mid-teens. Graduating with a degree in education from Temple University he served three years in the Army and worked for a decade of secular employment before testing his vocation. With a Masters of Divinity from the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Kentucky, John was ordered Deacon in May, 1978 and Priest in December, 1978.

From September, 1978 through February, 1982, he served as Curate at St. Paul’s, Muskegon, Michigan under the Rev. Robert A. Shackles, Rector. In late 1981, Fr. Shackles agreed with Fr. Cell that it was time for him to “strike out on his own.” Fr. Cell noted in his letter to Bishop Stevens that he “had learned a lot [at St. Paul’s], but one cannot remain a curate forever.”

Fr. Cell accepted the call to serve as Rector of Blessed Sacrament, Green Bay, arriving in March, 1982. His Institution as Rector was on June 20th, 1982. Over the next 28+ years he served both congregation and diocese faithfully.

As Rector he was pastor to the people. The Holy Eucharist was offered almost daily throughout his tenure. He made pastoral calls at the drop of the hat, both for reasons of illness or death and for celebrations and others achievements. He welcomed people with open arms and, according to one parishioner, he “works with grace and cheery humor” and was “always ready to pray with you.” He was involved regularly in community activities, and a willing participant in Blessed Sacrament’s Booyahs, often hauling wood for the kettle.

As priest of the diocese he served in many ways: Summer Camp Chaplain, Executive Council, Trustee, Commission on Ministry, Stand-

ing Committee, Rural Dean, Cursillo Spiritual Director, Vocare for Young Adults, Happening for Youth, Mission to Seamen Chaplain. He has also been a longtime member of the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC, Societas Sanctae Crucis). In recognition for his many years of service to diocese, congregation and community, he was awarded the Bishop’s Cross in 2009 by the Rt. Rev. Russell E. Jacobus. “He served as a good example of Godly sacrifice,” Bishop Jacobus said recently, “considering through it all he struggled with some significant health issues. But this never stopped him from serving God’s people.”

“When I was ordained I committed myself to the tasks of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and of fashioning my life according to his teachings.” Fr. Cell recently shared in an interview. “Preaching, teaching, pastoralia and administering the sacraments have been at the core of my thirty-two years of priesthood. I believe the adage of ‘once a priest, always a priest’ and with this understanding I will be content to follow where ever God leads. Needless to say, it is with some trepidation, as well as excitement, that I embark on this new adventure called retirement. More time for old passions, opportunities for new interests and endeavors, travel to intriguing places are all within the range of possibilities for the future and are exciting to contemplate.”

“Nevertheless, leaving active parish ministry is my new bitter/sweet reality,” he continues. “Yet my primary task has not really changed; what will be different is the manner in which it will be realized. And, even though my sacerdotal ministry will be altered, the task of proclamation and upward transformation into the likeness of Christ remains the same. So, I eagerly look forward to the unfolding of God’s plans for the remainder of my life and ministry.”

While his plans are not certain at press time, Fr. Cell expects to move back to Philadelphia to be close to his family. Since he is one who loves language, it seems fitting to conclude this article with words he recently submitted reflecting on his retirement:

So, what will I do?

I don’t know, but God does.

Where will I live?

I don’t know, but God does.

How will I continue to love and serve God’s people?

I don’t know, but God does!

And, when the time is right, so will I.

*Matthew P. Payne is Lay Canon for Administration for the Diocese of Fond du Lac. He is also Diocesan Archivist and member of St. Thomas, Menasha.*



Father Cell received the Bishops Cross from Bishop Jacobus in 2009



Father Cell holding a baby baptized in a home.



Father Cell (center) serves on Monarch Cursillo 32 in 1991. Also pictured are Fr. Ray Ryerson (left) and Deacon Russ Johns (right).