

# Religious leaders at high points

## Longtime pastor set to retire from OLA

By Bayard Stern

LYNNFIELD -- After more than two decades of leading his congregation and giving guidance in good times and bad, Rev. John Edward Farrell, known to many as Father Jack, is retiring as pastor for Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in August.

"I'm 75 and looking pretty close at 76," said Father Farrell smiling. "Seventy-five is the mandatory retirement age for being a pastor, but there's no retirement age for being a priest. I could have stayed on a little longer, I wished, but I get tired so the time is right."

Father Farrell said that his education laid the groundwork for his entire career. He went to Boston College for both his bachelor's and master's degrees and went on to earn a doctorate in theology from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He was ordained as a priest in 1962.

"I taught at St. John's Seminary in Brighton across the street from Boston College for 27 years," said Father Farrell.



**Father John Edward Farrell**

I enjoyed academics, preparing for classes at the graduate level and teaching the young men preparing for priesthood. The goal of the students who were thinking of entering the priesthood was usually ministering for the rest of their lives in the middle of groups of people and that was always my goal as well. It wasn't a tradition in the seminary for people to stay there until God called them home. They are two different ways of serving the Lord and the church and luckily I got to experience both."

When Father Farrell decided to leave teaching and seek a parish, he was assigned to the Lynnfield church in 1990, where he would stay to this day. He recalls his time at the church, not with personal accomplishments, but with the countless connections he has made over the years with parishioners, students and people from the community.

"We consider ourselves to be an extended family," Father Farrell said in regards to the approximately 2,400 families registered in the parish. "It's a cycle that hasn't changed since I started 22-years ago. I get to know couples that are about to be married, young families as they arrange for their children's baptisms, first Communion, education and confirmation. And of course we are here for more difficult times such as when people lose loved ones and prepare for funerals and many other types of hardships. So it's very much a family experience. Being pastor means spending time with people's burdens and joys. They

—FARRELL

continued on page 12

## Father 'lack' cherished spending time with parishioners and community

### — FARRELL

continued from page 1

invite you to share their lives of faith and everything that goes with it."

When asked about his accomplishments during his tenure, Father Farrell is characteristically unassuming and gracious.

"There's nothing a pastor does all by himself," he said. "It's always done with the participation and generosity of families and parishioners. If you're going to paint the church, put a new roof on, plant flowers or involve people to work on outreach programs, it's always done with parishioners. The pastor seems to be the face of the community, but without the hands and hearts and minds and generous pocketbooks, no good works of faith would be possible in the long run."

Father Farrell takes delight in speaking about the church's Our Lady of Assumption School. The school has students from pre-school to eighth grade,

with two classes of each, and an enrollment that ranges from 400-460 students.

"I'm often at the school daily and I meet with the principal at least once a week," he said. "The students are always eager to talk and I enjoy visiting classes. The kids not only come from Lynnfield, but 16 communities around the area. And I enjoy watching the kids mature. We have an assembly once a month for Mass, and each class takes its turn hosting and preparing everything that goes with it. In the elementary years they need the guidance of the teachers. But as they get older, sixth, seventh and eighth grade, they know what they want to prepare and they really throw themselves into it. And the sports program is very active and they are often winners in the various leagues they compete in and I'm proud of that.

When Father Farrell retires, The Rev. Thomas Powers, pastor of St. Maria Goretti Church, will be the pastor for

both churches, beginning on Aug. 2. There are approximately 30 parishes in Our Lady's diocese that share one pastor for two parish communities.

"Now the two parishes will be coming together," Father Farrell explained. "He will be the pastor for both places, meaning one pastor, one parish, but two church buildings. This type of thing is happening in many areas of the Diocese and this is because of a shortage of priests. The community needs a father figure and the priest is a father figure. One way to put it is if you don't have enough fathers to go around, you have to make an adjustment and give dad a bigger job, so to speak."

Father Farrell said he is particularly pleased with the amount of community service members of his parish participate in.

"Many folks are very actively involved with service and outreach to others," he said. "Sharing their time, talent and treasure with people, outside of

our own borders so to speak, is important. We are involved with North Shore Catholic Charities based in Lynn and Salem and we work regularly with local food pantries such as My Brother's Table in Lynn and Haven from Hunger in Peabody. We support those wonderful groups who work to help those in need.

After retirement, Father Farrell plans to spend time at his home, visit family in Nova Scotia and volunteer as needed. As for his parish, he said he knows they will be fine and has some exciting hopes for them.

"I hope they continue to praise God and do good works of justice and speak words of peace to people and give them hope in the midst of challenges that come their way," he said. "The goals are to preach the gospel and to enjoy the company of the Lord's friends. That may sound very pious, but I think that's the way it should go."