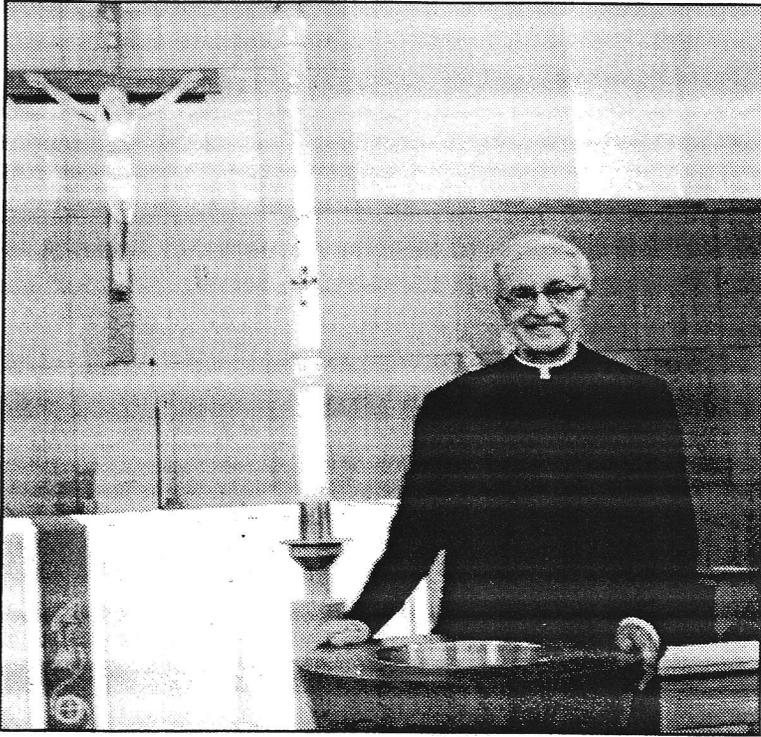


Retiring Pastor John Farrell says serving OLA parishioners for 22 years has been a "wonderful" experience



REVEREND JOHN FARRELL, Pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Church for the past 22 years, will be retiring August 1. (Villager photo by Dan Tomasello)

By Dan Tomasello

Reverend John Farrell is very calm and relaxed, which is often unusual for a man getting ready to begin a life changing event. Fortunately for Fr. Farrell, his kind and gentle nature will serve him well after he retires as the pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption Parish early next month.

Fr. Farrell, often referred to as Fr. Jack by his friends, has been OLA's Pastor since 1990. He announced in early June about his upcoming retirement as a Pastor after he received his retirement information from the Arch Diocese after reaching the mandatory retiring age for priests, which is 75.

Fr. Farrell will officially be retiring from OLA around August 1.

"I am looking forward to it, but it's bittersweet because I have enjoyed it so much," said Fr. Farrell. "I am thinking about the bitterness of leaving, but the sweetness beyond. It's been a wonderful time the past 22 years being with all these people in this parish."

The beginning

Fr. Farrell was born in Somerville and is the son of two parents who originally from Nova Scotia, Canada. He attended Boston College High School and graduated in 1954. He went on to attend Boston College. His educational accomplishments also include receiving a Master's degree from Boston College in

Classics and obtaining a Doctorate in Theology from Catholic University in Washington, D.C..

The retiring pastor was first ordained a priest in February 1962. He said he and his family were involved with church related activities when he was young and also developed close relationships with priests, who he said served as mentors.

"There never was a great revelation," said Fr. Farrell about his decision to become a priest. "It was something that developed slowly in me and it took me awhile to think about it. I eventually said yes, and I have been very content and very happy ever since."

After he was ordained a priest, he was assigned to St. Joseph's Parish in Wakefield, where he worked for 18 months.

After concluding his tenure at St. Joseph's Parish, Fr. Farrell taught at St. John's Seminary in Brighton for 27 years. He taught patristic theology, which teaches the history of the Roman Catholic Church from 70 A.D. to 800 A.D., as well as Greek and Latin.

"I thoroughly enjoyed meeting these young men who aspired to be priests and seeing their enthusiasm and faithfulness over the years while teaching them," said Fr. Farrell.

Welcome to OLA

Fr. Farrell officially became Our Lady of the Assumption's pastor on June 12, 1990, succeeding Rev. Robert

McAuliffe. Fr. Farrell said the church's parishioners accepted him as their new pastor with open arms.

"The people were very welcoming," recalled Fr. Farrell. "They were gracious, hospitable, and very cordial. The parish is like a big family. It's awesome preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and trying to live it with his disciples who are parishioners here."

Fr. Farrell also serves as pastor for Our Lady of the Assumption School, which includes 400 students and 30 full-time teachers. He also works closely with the schools' principal.

"I visit the school quite a bit," said Fr. Farrell.

Fr. Farrell has been active supporting local, national, and international charities during the 22 years he has served parishioners at OLA. He said the parish has worked with organizations such as North Shore Catholic Charities, based in Lynn and Salem, as well as local food pantries such as My Brother's Table in Lynn and Haven From Hunger in Peabody.

"We are very much involved with those programs," said Fr. Farrell. "As part of our confirmation program, our young people go out and do service time at those places."

Fr. Farrell said he has been able to develop close personal relationships with OLA's parishioners over the past 22 years, which he said has been incredibly rewarding and will miss deeply.

"I will miss the association I have with people who are disciples of Jesus and I will miss that closeness in a parish setting," said Fr. Farrell "People come into our community for worship, prayer, school, social life, baptisms, marriages, and funerals. I will miss the presence and activity of being part of people's lives during the high moments of life, and I will miss being present during those moments."

Fr. Farrell also said he will miss working with young people at the parish. "Being with young people and preparing them for confirmation has always been a joy," he commented.

When asked what he believed his legacy at OLA is, Fr. Farrell

commented; "the vitality of the parish, the enthusiasm of the people, and the hospitality the parish offers people in need."

A milestone celebrated

Fr. Farrell celebrated his 50th anniversary of his ordination on

Feb. 2. The celebration of Fr. Farrell's milestone resulted in the church filling to near capacity and included Deacon Paul Dow retired priest Arthur Flynn, an Reverend Thomas Powers of St. Maria Goretti Catholic Church.

There were also several local clergy members who attended the Mass, including Reverend Dennis Bailey from Central Congregational Church. Rev. Bailey was seated on the altar to celebrate his close friends' anniversary.

After Mass concluded, Fr. Farrell received a standing ovation from the church's parishioners.

Looking forward

Fr. Farrell said after he retires as OLA's pastor next month, he said he will be taking his usual August vacation and is looking forward to visiting his relatives in Nova Scotia. He will also be spending time at his home in Dracut and also said he hopes to fill-in as a retired priest whenever he has the opportunity to.

"There will be a need to help here or help there, and some place may need a priest on a Sunday," he commented.

Fr. Farrell said Fr. Thomas Powers of St. Maria Goretti parish will succeed him as OLA's pastor after he steps down. Fr. Powers will be juggling pastoral responsibilities for the two churches.

"In time, we will have one parish and two churches," said Fr. Farrell.

Our Lady of the Assumption parish will be holding a Thank You reception for Fr. Farrell on Sunday, July 29 at 1 p.m., which OLA parishioners and local residents are encouraged to attend.

While Fr. Farrell is looking forward to beginning the next stage of his life, he said he will always look back at his experience at OLA with fond memories.

"It's sad leaving a place you have been at for 22 years," said Fr. Farrell. "But it's the work of the Lord and as he says 'come follow me, keep following me'. So I ask every day 'how may I help'? When you reach a certain age, you don't change the venue, you change the place."

Recycle this newspaper

