



Rev. Darling honored for 50 years in priesthood

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GREENFIELD -- Honest, beloved, affectionate, easy to talk to -- those are just a few of the ways that people in the community describe retired 84-year-old Rev. Franklin A. Darling.

Darling has lived in Greenfield since 1985 and has been a priest at churches throughout the Pioneer Valley, including Turners Falls, Springfield, Chicopee, Shelburne Falls and Greenfield.

He is celebrating 50 years of priesthood -- 13 of which he spent at Holy Trinity Church on Main Street.

Deacon Channing L. "Joe" Bete Jr. has known Darling for 30 years. Bete said Darling's energy and honesty are two of his most notable characteristics.

"He has always been a person who told you exactly what was on his mind," said Bete. "He was an easy one to talk to."

Bete said that Darling has served in this area, on and off, for a long time and during that time "his example of holiness to his people and his willingness to always be there for them" have been evident.

"People are drawn to him," he said. "He is a good and faithful priest ... a great example to his people."

Monsignor Ronald G. Yargeau said that Darling "has been a very faithful priest and a wonderful pastor here at Holy Trinity ... people consider him to be a beloved pastor here."

Pierre Belhumeur came to Greenfield in the early 1970s from New York and became a parishioner of Holy Trinity Church. Belhumeur described Darling as a "sweetheart ... a very kind, caring, spiritual man."

"His personal style is very engaging and his homilies and sermons are very much to the point and easy to understand and apply in our daily lives," he said.

"He is a very human priest."

He said he was disappointed when Darling retired but knew it was because of his health and said he was more upset that Darling was having health issues.

But, he said, he still sees Darling because he retired in Greenfield.

"He is still very accessible and that is wonderful," he added.

"I think the nice thing for the people of Greenfield is that this treasure of a person remains here," agreed Bete.

Darling retired in 1997 and since then has been filling in at churches throughout the county when needed and having one-day retreats.

He was born a Methodist and was raised on Cape Cod. He became an Episcopalian when he was 16 and a Roman Catholic when he was 23.

He was ordained a priest in 1958 and joined the diocese of Springfield in 1963.

"I really love being a Catholic priest," said Darling, as he sat in a chair recently with the sun shining on him through his window at his home in Greenfield. He said he especially enjoyed teaching Bible classes and preaching the word of God.

In his retirement, he said, he is also an avid reader and enjoys reading Charles Dickens, Agatha Christie and Western novels. He is a devout Red Sox fan and he proudly showed off a jacket that he was given at the celebration for his 50 years of priesthood -- a special Mass was held on Oct. 11. at Holy Trinity.

"The church was full," said Bete. "Whenever a church is full, you celebrate. It was just a wonderful faith-filled and joy-filled celebration."

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Darling concurred. "The celebration was marvelous," he said.

"I have never seen anything more perfect."