

Rev. Maurice T. Carlton—50 Years

Father Maurice T. Carlton has packed a full life of service into a half-century of his priesthood, focusing on three key areas of the faith. Initially ordained a Benedictine monk, after 20 years in an Abbey he became a diocesan priest. Reflecting on how his religious career began Father Carlton said he had “no inkling whatsoever” that he would enter the seminary.

“I was minding my own business, a typical wise guy and all of a sudden, I was compelled to try this,” he said of his decision to become a priest. “In 1960, I was God’s No. 1 draft choice.” His friends were giving long odds that his seminary stay would be short. His mother kiddingly told him she would become a nun if he became a priest. The young man who eventually became a priest did have doubt.

“You have to understand, when I went to high school, I held the record for demerits,” he said. But he persevered when one priest from high school encouraged him to follow God. “You have to listen to your voice,” he recalled the priest telling him. Encouraging words, a faith rooted in Catholic education and a supportive mother helped smooth the path to ordination.

Father Carlton, who turns 78 on Oct. 28, was ordained as a Benedictine monk at St. Mary Abbey, Morristown March 9, 1968. He said he still yearns for his days in the monastery, of challenging his fellow monks over Church readings and more. “I miss the routine. I miss the prayer. I miss the camaraderie” he said. But as a Benedictine monk, Father Carlton did not lead a cloistered life. Following his ordination, he taught at his high school alma mater, St. Benedict’s Prep, Newark, then worked with World Wide Marriage Encounter and later at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Ind. In 1988, he became a priest in the Diocese of Metuchen through a transfer process known as “incardination.” He was appointed the first chaplain of the Margaret McLaughlin McCarrick Care Center, Somerset, now known as Parker at McCarrick.

Father Carlton also served as parochial vicar at St. Mary Parish, South Amboy; and St. Philip and St. James Parish, Phillipsburg before being named pastor of St. Joseph Parish, High Bridge, in 2003 by then Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski. As a chaplain he has ministered to the police and fire departments in South Amboy, South River police and the 200 Club, a benevolent group that reaches out to families of injured or deceased first responders. Asked which he liked best, being a teacher, counselor or chaplain, he says he enjoyed each one. “Now I love being at St. Joseph’s, but every thing comes to an end,” said Father Carlton, who will retire from active ministry June 30. Father James A. Kyrpczak, administrator of St. Lawrence Parish in Lawrence Harbor, has been named St. Joseph’s pastor. The no-nonsense Father Carlton is also personable, willing to talk about anything from his very early morning routine (he awakens at 3 a.m.) to how St. Joseph’s celebrates the sacrament of baptism during Sunday Mass instead of holding the rite after Mass. His intention: involve the community in a Church-community event. He also spends time researching information about the deceased before their funerals — such things as obtaining the person’s baptismal record with the names of parents, godparents and more. “I tell people, ‘You might think the gathering for this funeral started last Tuesday, when [the person] died,’” he said. But it started years earlier, he said, when the deceased first entered the Church via baptism.

Commenting on his move from the “beldam” of living in Jersey City to the rural environs of Hunterdon County, he said it took some adjustment. That, in a nutshell, is Father’s Carlton mantra, perhaps: Adjust and move on. And listen to God and “your voice.”

(From the *Catholic Spirit*, 5/31/2018—**Anthony Salamone** ...he persevered when one priest from high school encouraged him to follow God.

“You have to listen to your voice,” he recalled.

CONGRATULATIONS
Rev. Maurice T. Carlton

*On your life long dedication
and faithful service to the church
as you celebrate your 50th Anniversary
of Ordination AND Retirement*

*We would like to thank you Fr. Maurice for making a difference
in our lives and for all you have done for us spiritually.
We will truly miss you and thank you for serving us
for the past 15 years. You will always be in our hearts and prayers!*

*From your staff and parish family at
St. Joseph Church, High Bridge*

Yet a man must so respond to God's call that, without consulting flesh and blood, he can devote himself wholly to the work of the gospel... Therefore, he must be ready to stand by his vocation for a lifetime, and to renounce himself and all those whom he has thus considered as his own, and instead to be "all things to all men."

Fr. Maurice's Ordination Card *- Vatican II, Missions #24*