

Father John P. Gallagher (1985-1996)

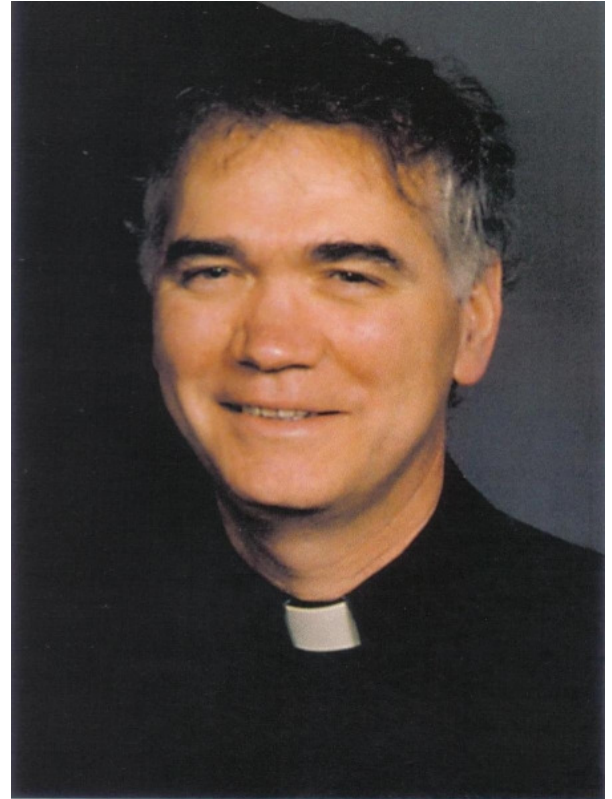
Father Gallagher became pastor of Assumption after serving the parish for five years as Parochial Vicar (1980-1985). Known affectionately as "Father G," he worked shoulder to shoulder with the parishioners to build the spiritual and corporal life of the parish. He had a great respect for its rich history and for the accomplishments of his predecessors. Father Gallagher's love Scripture was evident in his excellent homilies. A gifted preacher, he wove current events, sports analogies, jokes, and family stories into his homilies, and through these modern day parables, helped his congregation gain a greater understanding of Scripture and its relevance to daily life.

Father Gallagher was present to the parish in all that the word implies. He became a friend as well as a pastor in the more than 15 years he served at Assumption. In addition to his priestly duties, he could be found working with the festival crew, at the Friday bingo, or at the Lenten fish fry. Wherever there was a need, he stepped in.

Father Gallagher had a special reverence for the elderly and the gifts that they brought to parish life. He shared his faith with the young, teaching religion in the school and in the CCD program. The school, which had experienced a steady decline in enrollment since Vatican II, began to grow, with enrollment climbing to 235 students. All-day kindergarten was established, and a hot lunch program was offered to students. Many new spiritual and service programs were added, which greatly enhanced the life of the parish community. Parish ministries were enriched with the inclusion of women as Eucharistic Ministers and lectors. The position of Pastoral Associate was instituted.

Father Gallagher encouraged a spirit of ecumenism, hosting monthly breakfast and Scripture sharing sessions that brought together ministers from area churches. Father Gallagher's collaborative style encouraged others to assume leadership positions within the parish. Working closely with the Finance Committee, and through good stewardship, Father Gallagher ensured that the parish remained debt free. The beginnings of a new parish governance structure, the Parish Pastoral Council, were instituted toward the end of his time at Assumption.

It was with great sadness that the parish learned that Father G. was to be transferred, effective January 1996, to St. Ferdinand's parish in Cranberry Twp., Pennsylvania. Perhaps Father Gallagher's greatest legacy is the vibrant faith community that formed under his guidance, a community that was strengthened by his teaching and example,



and through his encouragement to seek Jesus in one another. At the time of his transfer, the following notice was written by a parishioner and published in the North Hills News Record, a local newspaper: "To the parishioners and community of St. Ferdinand's Parish in Cranberry Township; The Assumption Parish and Community of Bellevue have been blessed with the pastorship and person of Rev. John P. Gallagher over the past 16 years. We have cherished this man for his spiritual and temporal leadership and inspiration. We are now passing this treasure on to you in the spirit of love and Christian fellowship. God is granting you the honor we have known."