

North Country Memories

I am writing this article as I prepare to celebrate the 40th anniversary of my priestly ordination as well as my fifth anniversary as Bishop of Ogdensburg. I had thought that there might be many more anniversaries of the latter but my recent appointment to Syracuse has altered those plans. Therefore my 40th anniversary celebration at the Cathedral takes on a new meaning. Our time together is drawing to a close, but the esteem and affection I have for you will remain as long as God gives me breath. My anniversary is also a time of spiritual preparation for me as I prepare to assume new responsibilities.

The past five years have been a wonderful time of grace for me. I came to you as a stranger in your midst. On a beautiful sunny day in May I was ordained a Bishop and installed as the Bishop of Ogdensburg in our magnificent Cathedral. The preparations for that day, and the day itself, are etched in my memory. It was the beginning of a wonderful journey of faith and friendship.

These years, with its variety of seasons and events, have truly gone quickly. They have been happy and fulfilling years in the service of the church, especially this local church which I have been privileged to serve. Each day has been a day of grace. Although some days have provided unique challenges, all of them have taught me to rely on a loving God who knows our needs and sustains us in our journey of faith.

The past five years have provided so many North Country memories! These memories were formed from the faith and friendship of those I encountered in our North County. In no particular order, I present some of them to you today, as I offer gratitude for them.

- I have come to know the Diocese of Ogdensburg as a remarkable portion of the people of God. In its 12,036 square miles, from Alexandria Bay to Schroon Lake, from Adams to Rouses Point and in the dozens of villages, towns and hamlets in between, as well as in our cities, I have met dedicated women and men rich in faith and strong in their desire to serve. They have inspired me by their holy lives, supported me by their prayers and assisted me in a variety of ways as I have served the Church in the North Country.
- I have experienced the selfless dedication of our priests serving day in and day out in quiet and unassuming ways. They have sought nothing for themselves, but each of them, in his own way, has tried to bring people closer to Christ.
- I have enjoyed the beauty of our Cathedral, the quaintness of small country chapels, and in every place of worship the devotion of good people found in prayer.
- Our Catholic schools continue to educate the whole child not only in the human knowledge and skills necessary for life, but most importantly, they hand on the message of Jesus and the rich tradition and heritage of our Catholic faith. We are so blessed with dedicated teachers who touch the future as they form our children and young people.
- The women and men in consecrated life who serve our people are always an inspiration. Living their lives in poverty, chastity and obedience they point out for

all of us the way to Christ. They lift us up and our intentions in prayer. They enrich us by their lives of service.

- Our catechists in programs of Christian Formation and our commissioned lay ministers in service to their parishes provide a valuable witness in explaining the love of God and expanding the work of the church.
- Our deacons exercise a ministry of charity and service in parishes and prisons, hospitals, nursing homes and other institutions. In many cases they are supported in this vocation by their wives. I look forward to the day in September of this year when new deacons will be ordained to serve the people of this diocese. I remember, too, those deacons called home to the Lord during my time as your Bishop.
- I am encouraged by the young men who have entered the program of priestly formation and who hope eventually to serve in the Diocese of Ogdensburg. It has been and will continue to be my fervent prayer for new vocations to the priesthood to serve our people.
- As I write this column, I am conscious especially of the men I have ordained to the priesthood: Fathers Martin Cline, Jeffrey Hubbard, and Bernard Menard. I remember with grateful affection those who have been called home to the Lord: Father James Meehan, Father Cyril Rapin, Msgr. William Argy, Father Eugene Beaudet, Msgr. Thomas Robillard, Father Timothy Soucy, and Deacon Adam Crowe.

- I think of the outstanding work done by our Catholic Charities organization in the Diocese of Ogdensburg. I remember in prayer the people assisted and those who have helped me to help others. You have been so very generous to Catholic Charities and to many other requests that have come to your attention.
- Although this article concentrates on the past five years I think also of the 35 years of priesthood that preceded my service in Ogdensburg. I remember the priests and people with whom I have worshiped and worked in the Diocese of Buffalo. All of the people and associations we have, shape and form us for present and future dealings. I thank God for all that He has given me and all that is shared with me. I ask forgiveness of any whom I may have offended. All will remain in my thoughts and prayers in the future. Thanks for the memories! More importantly, thanks for being such good witnesses to the gospel and faithful disciples of the Lord. Please continue to pray for me!

Most Rev. Robert J. Cunningham
Diocesan Administrator
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