

Editor's note: Father Lauenstein's travels have yielded a number of oral histories, which he has kindly transcribed. Both the taped testimonies and the transcripts are now housed in the Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province.

A Canadian of Ideas and Action: James Dwyer

By M. C. Havey, Archivist, Edmonton-Toronto Province

In the Ottawa Valley farming settlement of Eganville, Ontario, hard work, an independent spirit, hijinks, straight talk and Irish Catholicism reigned supreme. James Dwyer inherited all of these Ottawa Valley traits, which he used to mould the English-speaking Redemptorists for two decades.

Born on June 2, 1900, James was a member of a staunchly religious family with five children entering the religious life – a Redemptorist, a Jesuit, a diocesan priest and two siblings in the Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. For James, attendance at a Redemptorist mission preached in his home parish of St. James the Less in Eganville led to studies at St. Mary's College, North East, Pennsylvania.

Considered the leader among five Canadian students, known as the “Bolsheviki” group, James with other future Redemptorists James Grannan and Walter McElhinney were known for their spirit of independence and involvement “in almost every racket.”

The troublesome Canadians remained at North East until 1918 when the Toronto Province was established. The “many problems with the Toronto boys” ended as they were shepherded to Toronto by Fr. Simon Grogan. James, part of this student class at the hastily-established temporary



minor seminary in Prescott, Ontario, completed studies in the first graduating class in 1920 of St. Mary's College, the newly-opened juvenate just outside of Brockville.

Returning to the United States, James entered the novitiate in Ilchester, Maryland, under Fr. William Knell and professed vows on August 2, 1921. Seminary studies followed at Mount St. Alphonsus, Esopus, NY (1921-1927), where he made a favorable impression with his intelligence and dedication. He was ordained by Auxiliary Bishop John Dunn of New York on June 13, 1926. The independence shown at North East and intelligence at Esopus were applied in his future appointments.

After seminary, Fr. Dwyer returned to St. Mary's College, Brockville (1927-1931) as a mathematics professor and later as *socius*. Leaving teaching, he attended Second Novitiate (August 1931-February 1932) under Fr. James McCandlish at St. Patrick's, Quebec City. Within days after completing Second Novitiate, he travelled to Corner Brook, Newfoundland, joining newly-established foundation of Holy Redeemer parish and the following year, he succeeded classmate Fr. Bernard Coffey as rector (1933-1939). In 1936, Provincial Superior James Fuller accompanied Fr.

1940, the students presented a play in honor of "their Very Reverend Father Rector, mold of their priestly character." On this seminary appointment, Consultor General Christopher McEnniry wrote to Fr. Fuller, "This will be a splendid opportunity for him to learn and to show whether he will someday make a good Provincial." During the war, he arranged that the students work on the farm in the Ottawa Valley settlement of Baroness Catherine Doherty at Combermere, Ontario to avoid conscription into the armed forces.

After the war, Fr. Dwyer stepped into

Fr. Dwyer as rector of St. Alphonsus seminary, shown here in the center with faculty, brothers and students on the seminary grounds, Woodstock, 1941.



Dwyer on a visit to the outmissions on a schooner from Curling to Bonnie Bay. Fr. Fuller described an overnight trip with its fog, brisk wind, temporary engine breakdown and sleeping quarters on the bare deck. "I don't think I slept more than a few minutes at a time but Father Dwyer's snores kept time with the engine."

From the ruggedness of western Newfoundland, Fr. Dwyer returned to Ontario just four months before the outbreak of the Second World War to St. Alphonsus seminary, Woodstock, (1939-1945) as rector and a lecturer on moral theology. In May

Toronto Provincial administration when appointed consultor (1945-1947) to Provincial Fuller. As consultor, he also wrote a number of reports, including an analysis of the Central Toronto People's Cooperative Store. He traced its failure to the war-time feelings that excluded the Germans who formed the majority of the people of the area and of St. Patrick's parish. Away from the consultor's desk, Fr. Dwyer continued to preach missions in the Toronto area. With an almost casual attention to some administrative details and obsolete rules, he worked for a modern Canadian

Redemptorist apostolate of missions and retreats.

At the end of the consultor's term in 1947, he was named mission superior and parish priest of Basseterre, St. Kitts, in the British West Indies upon the request of the Belgian Redemptorists of the Vice province of Roseau. For 17 months until November 1948, the Redemptorists preached missions in every parish in the diocese of Roseau. He recommended that English Canadian Redemptorists take responsibility of the Belgian-run missions in the British West Indies and expand to Jamaica and Trinidad. However, it was decided to open a foreign mission in Japan, where his nephew Redemptorist Fr. Patrick Hennessey served for more than two decades.

Back in St. Patrick's, Toronto, (1948-1949) he joined the mission band, then returned to Woodstock as *socius* to the Novice Master (1949-1950). When the Novitiate moved to L'Abord-a-Plouffe, north of Montreal, he was assigned parish and mission preaching at St. Patrick's, Quebec City (1950-1951). His mission at Valcartier Station inspired the English Catholics in Shannon, Quebec to press for their own parish, separate from St. Patrick's, Quebec City.

Two parish appointments in Western Canada followed at St. Alphonsus, East Kildonan-Winnipeg (1951) and to the outmissions (1951-1953) of Blessed Sacrament, Nelson, BC. Frustrated by the small foundations where Redemptorists worked mainly as parish priests instead as mission preachers, Fr. Dwyer strongly recommended that the Nelson foundation be closed.

After the appointment of Provincial Superior J. Arthur Ryan, Fr. Dwyer was recalled to Eastern Canada as rector of St.



Fr. Dwyer at the centennial celebrations at St. Ann's, Montreal in 1954, here speaking at the clergy dinner.

retreats and participation in the establishment of the Narcotics Anonymous International Foundation. Under his direction, week-long celebrations of the centenary of St. Ann's parish were undertaken in June 1954 with pomp and circumstance. In the centenary publication, he was described as the dynamic centenary rector – “a man of ideas and of action.”

Early Christmas Eve in 1956, Fr. Dwyer was found in distress in his room at St. Ann's and rushed to St. Mary's Hospital, where he died on December 26 at the age of 56. Following his death, the Montreal annalist recorded, “He will be long-remembered by those who knew him for his Christ-like charity and his many other qualities that made him universally loved.”

Cardinal Paul-Emile Leger of Montreal officiated at the Requiem Mass in St. Ann's church, filled to capacity by 100 clergy, family and friends. Burial took place in the Redemptorist plot at Cotes des Neiges cemetery, Montreal.