



THE CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Diocese of Amarillo



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All Were Together, Semingly Conspiring



This is a story about a bishop and five-in the end, six-priests. The bishop, Rudolph Aloysius Gerken, was German; the six priests were Irish. It is the human story of the beginning of the Diocese of Amarillo in 1926. Its reverberations continued through the administrations of four succeeding bishops, Robert E. Lucey, Laurence J. FitzSimon, John L. Morkovsky, and Lawrence M. DeFalco.

Word had been wafting on the winds of the Texas Panhandle, the South Plains, and the Permian Basin for some time that a new diocese was to be carved out of the Dioceses of Dallas, San Antonio, and El Paso. A Papal Bull issued by Pope Pius XI dated 3 August 1926, announced the new diocese, but not its bishop. "[We] constitute the City of Amarillo forever the episcopal seat, which therefore we raise to the dignity of an episcopal city, with all the rights and privileges which episcopal cities have and enjoy." The new diocese, formally erected 25 August, encompassed 72,000 square miles, from the southern border of the Oklahoma Panhandle, to the New Mexico border to the west and the Oklahoma border to the east, stretching south almost five hundred miles.

To the five active Irish priests it was exciting news, as they anticipated that one of them would be named the bishop. They made up almost half the

diocesan priests the new bishop was to have as co-workers. Father Thomas D. O'Brien was pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Amarillo, the only parish in the city (with Our Lady of Guadalupe as a mission church). His apparent episcopal ambition had the support of the other Irish priests. His older brother, Father Bartholomew, was chaplain of St. Anthony's Hospital in Amarillo. Fathers Florence Michael Higgins and Michael G. French were also working in the Panhandle. A fifth, Father Edward Clinton, ordained two years, was Father Tom O'Brien's assistant. The sixth was Father Edward Cussen. He had been suspended by Bishop Joseph Lynch of Dallas in 1923, but stayed on and played a role in a legal battle that erupted in the summer of 1927.

To the chagrin of the Irish priests, a German, Gerken, pastor of St. Rita's Church, in Ranger, was appointed on August 25, 1926, to head the new diocese. Gerken was 39, ordained to the priesthood nine years earlier, so that with the exception of Clinton, the Irish were his contemporaries.

For nine months after his nomination Gerken bided his time before setting the dates of his consecration

in Dallas and installation in Amarillo eight months later, but he was hardly inactive. He first tried to decline the appointment, pleading unfinished mission projects in and around Ranger, an oil-boom town, but Bishop Joseph Lynch of Dallas would have none of that. "It's God's will," he admonished Gerken. With that, the future bishop took stock of the task he was facing. As a dean himself, Gerken knew Tom O'Brien, Dean of the Amarillo area. Gerken was also a diocesan consultor and would have met priests of the western region of the diocese at retreats in Dallas and on other occasions. One, Higgins, had been his assistant in Ranger, as had Cussen. Gerken also had access to The Official Catholic Directory. Its statistical report for 1926 was hardly encouraging: 25,000 Catholics, 44 parish and mission churches, twenty-two priests, two hospitals, five Catholic schools, and a rapidly increasing influx of Catholic immigrants from Mexico. While he was still in Ranger Gerken received a letter from John Higgins in Ireland dated 12 April 1927, inquiring about the health and the address of his brother, Florence. John had not heard from him in two years and wanted to contact him to inquire when he might expect payment of a loan he had made to Florence years before. It was an omen of the trouble Gerken was to face with Higgins, pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Dalhart. There was also a letter from a committee of St. Joseph's Parish, Slaton, alleging financial mismanagement by French, their pastor. Gerken would have known the strange case of Cussen, the obstreperous ex-pastor in Canadian. In addition, while he was completing projects at St. Rita's Church in Ranger, the bishop-elect was also making plans to recruit priests for the new diocese, solicit funds from the Catholic Church Extension Society and from other bishops, and seeking volunteers to work in the new diocese.

After his installation on 28 April 1927, Gerken took action. On 30 June he issued letters of reassignment to Tom O'Brien, Bart O'Brien, Clinton, Higgins, and French. He planned to use the Cathedral rectory as both his chancery office and residence, with himself as pastor of the parish and Higgins as his assistant. He also planned to move Tom O'Brien from the cathedral to Slaton, French from Slaton to White Deer, Bart O'Brien from St. Anthony's Hospital to Groom, and Clinton from the cathedral to Dalhart.

Gerken's plan immediately ran afoul of four of the Irish priests. Living in the rectory with Gerken, O'Brien, hearing rumors of his reassignment to St. Joseph's Church, Slaton, went to Gerken's office and told him he would not accept an appointment to that parish, considering it a demotion. He added that French's predecessor in Slaton, Father Joseph Keller, a German, had been tarred and feathered in 1922 by masked men for criticizing Allied treatment of Germany after World War I. He, O'Brien, was not about to endanger himself; glossing over the fact that he was not German. Gerken instructed him to present his refusal in writing. The next day, 1 July, O'Brien did so. Gerken described the encounter. "I received his letter. After giving him his letter of appointment he left my office, and at once went to the assistant's (Father Clinton's) room with the other two, and shortly after there came the two sisters of the O'Brien's into the same room, where all were together, seemingly conspiring." The insubordination spread. Bart declined his transfer to Groom. Higgins refused his transfer to the Cathedral Parish



Rev. Thomas D. O'Brien

. Since Higgins had refused to leave Dalhart, Clinton's transfer there became a moot question. French was not present for this encounter. His transfer from Slaton to White Deer was put on hold until the issue of Tom O'Brien's refusal was resolved. Faced with an impasse, Gerken summoned Father Arnold A. Boeding, young pastor of St. Boniface Church, Olfen, 325 miles to the south, to come to Amarillo to serve as his pro-chancellor.

The archives of the Diocese of Amarillo contain copious notarized memoranda of the sessions Gerken had with the recalcitrant priests. Time and time again, he paternally admonished them to honor the promises of respect and obedience to the bishop that they had made when they were ordained. An example is one he wrote on the first Saturday of July 1927, two months after his installation.

On this 2nd day of July, 1927, I called Father Thomas D. O'Brien into my office to talk with him relative his letter of refusal of appointment to Slaton. After paternally and kindly admonishing him at great length to accept the appointment

I assured him that I did not wish to do anything that would impair his usefulness as a priest and that would make his life miserable and that only for this reason I would rather comply with his request to grant him a leave of absence from the Diocese than to press his appointment to Slaton. I then told him this Saturday I would give him a two-month leave of absence, provided he would turn over all the effects of the parish to me in a courteous manner as required by customs and law. I also requested that he saw to it that I was given the key to the P. O. Box through which I had been receiving my mail.

I officially warned him that he was hereby warned against using his influence over other priests against me, with whom he had seemingly conspired so that a young priest has been led to disrespect and gross insolence against me.

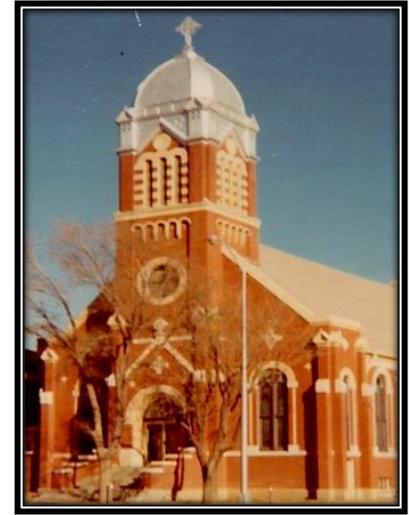
I briefly refuted the statements and allegations of his letter of refusal and told him that I had not been able to take him into my confidence because he had failed to invite same either before or after my consecration, by either word or his conduct toward me. I again asked him to consider if for the love of God and care of souls he would not accept the appointment. He said he would leave next week. I also told him he could write to me for an extension of his leave of absence.

On the following Monday, 4 July, Gerken penned a sequel to the memo of his Saturday session with O'Brien.

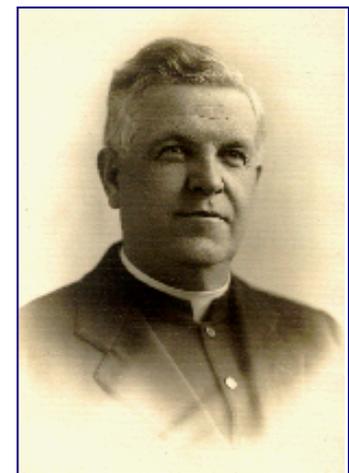
On July 2, 7:30 p.m. I left for St. Francis where I had an appointment for Sunday the same day at Borger, White Deer and Panhandle. I returned to St. Francis late Sunday night and stayed until Monday 9 a.m. When I arrived home, I found that the household had been discontinued. Culinary apartments had been left in bad shape, and a number of articles and boxes remained in the housekeepers' apartments. Hence, at about 2 p.m. I called Reverend T. D. O'Brien in my office and asked him if the household rooms of the housekeeper were fully vacated by 6 p.m. so I could have same fully occupied. I did tell him that it was very improper that he did not notify me in advance that the housekeeper and help would leave before he vacated the rectory. He gave me a discourteous reply and I then said: "I tolerated you for a long time and this is the thanks I get."

To compound Gerken's problem, three members of the cathedral parish presented a resolution to him.

On Monday 7 p.m. July 4, Neill, Walsh, and Lenihan with a petition signed by 24 requesting that I rescind, if possible, the removal of Reverend T. D. O'Brien. After explaining the reason for my action, they deeply regretted the petition and assured me of the whole-hearted cooperation of everyone who signed the petition. I have since been told by various dependable people who know all about the petition that was prepared and presented upon the insistence of Reverend Bart O'Brien. Mr. Shaughnessy told me that Rev. Thomas. D. O'Brien gave out the information last summer that he



could have had the Bishop of Amarillo but didn't want it. He also said when asked by Mr. Shaughnessy if he would be the Chancellor or Vicar General "that he would play second fiddle to no one." I am also told on good authority that he announced from the pulpit that three priests had refused the appointment to Bishop of Amarillo and that I finally accepted. On the following day, 5, July Gerken wrote to Lynch to ask



Bishop Lynch

Having been a very kind father to me in the past, and having so generously offered your assistance to me, I take courage to come to you for advice, and a favor at this time when prudence demands that I have recourse to one thoroughly experienced.

By reason of circumstances not unknown to you, and a situation becoming intolerable, I felt obliged to appoint Father Thomas D. O'Brien to Slaton. I did this in all prudence, having well informed myself first, following strictly the Sacred Canons. He declined the appointment, accompanied by a request to leave the diocese. After exhausting my powers of kind persuasion, I finally agreed to grant him a leave of absence for two months, upon condition, and for the purpose that he vacate this house and reconsider his appointment. He is all packed and will leave in a day or so.

I had appointed Reverend Bart O'Brien to Groom, which appointment he refuses for reasons of poor health, in a letter accompanied by a doctor's certificate. He also asked permission to leave.

I appointed Father Higgins to assist me here as vice rector, with the intention of making him Chancellor, if he accepted. He came in yesterday, and told me, in a nice way, however, that he would prefer to remain in Dalhart. I promised to let him know by Saturday.

Father Clinton has been very disrespectful and insolent toward me even before any appointment. I have not given him a new appointment yet.

I intend to meet Father Higgin's wishes, and appoint Father Boeding to assist me here, who is really my first choice, having appointed Father Higgins in the first place only, because they should not be able to say that I was partial to the Germans.

For the last month I suspected, and

now have strong reasons to believe, that there is a collusion between the four above mentioned, a conspiracy to place every obstacle in my way of governing the diocese. I will frankly say that I would be happy to release Father Thomas D. O'Brien later.

I wish to assure you, dear Bishop, that I have been in misery here the past month with all this I must leave for Sweetwater tonight, to meet the Texas & Topeka officials tomorrow, in connection with the fatal Crossing accident of Father Fernandez. I expect to return here Thursday afternoon.

Lynch responded in a letter dated 6 July 1927. He advised Gerken to appeal to the Apostolic Delegate. Gerken did so, giving a detailed account of his reasons for making the appointments.

The conclusion of this painful episode came swiftly and decisively. The Apostolic Delegate wrote to each of the rebellious priests in letters entrusted to Gerken. The Delegate asked Gerken to call the priests together and once more admonish them to accept their transfer. If they again refused, Gerken was to hand them their letters, in which Archbishop Pietro Fumasoni-Biondi informed them that their faculties to function as priests anywhere in the United States would be suspended. In a dramatic meeting in his office, Gerken once again admonished the priests to accept their assignments. They refused. Gerken gave them their letters and instructed them to go across the hall, read them, and return with their decisions. Tom O'Brien capitulated and went to Slaton; French was transferred to White Deer. Bart O'Brien pleaded a health problem. Gerken allowed him to remain at St. Anthony's Hospital. Higgins again pleaded his pastoral limitations, promised obedience and respect, and was permitted to remain in Dalhart. Clinton's reassignment was to follow later. On 14 July Gerken wrote to Lynch, "I can assure you that I have had considerable experience in the last two weeks but now I feel that I can live without having to dread oppositions etc."

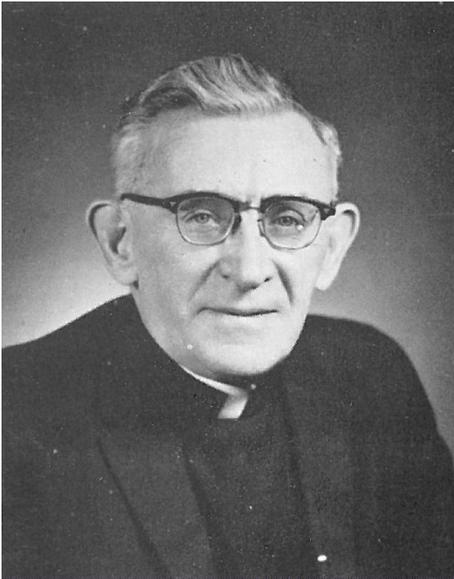
Rev. Edward Clinton

The experience did serve Gerken well in a long, painful encounter that followed. On 1 October 1927, he appointed Clinton, until then at the cathedral, administrator of Panhandle, Borger, and Canadian, with his residence to be at Sacred Heart Church in White Deer. Two days later, Clinton refused the appointment.

I hereby decline to accept the appointment for the following reasons:

1. I have labored in this part of the State of Texas during the last 26 months-driving ninety miles between Masses on Sunday. Hence, I feel I am entitled to some consideration in this Diocese. The Bishop of these parts and the former Pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Amarillo can testify to the good work done by me during my time as a priest in these parts.

2. My conscience would not permit me as a priest to live at White Deer with Reverend M. G. French and his niece, Miss Betty Reynolds. You know the escapades, they perpetrated in the Parish of Slaton. I am a young priest



Edward Clinton

and I value my reputation as something I hereby request permission to leave this diocese and labor for the Lord as a priest where I can safeguard my own reputation as a priestly priest and labor faithfully for the salvation of souls.

Gerken promptly asked Lynch to send him the proper canonical forms to deal with this new challenge. Upon receiving them he called Clinton into his office on 22 October and once again admonished him paternally to accept his appointment. Boeding recorded the encounter in a hand-written memorandum, read and certified by Gerken, in which he asked Clinton, "in the name of God and the name of Our Blessed Savior and in the name of the Church," to reconsider his "rash acts and accept the appointment."

Three days later, 25 October, Clinton was back in Gerken's office. He told him that his appointment was acceptable to him, except for the provision that he lives in White Deer. Gerken reminded him that in the previous meeting he had told him that residence in White Deer was

temporary and that if his misgivings proved to be true, he would be open to discussing a different arrangement. Clinton rejected the proposal. Records of the subsequent discussions cover five hand-written pages, at the conclusion of which Gerken gave Clinton 24 hours to reconsider his position.

Next day, 26 October, Clinton was back in Gerken's office to discuss a letter Clinton had presented to Gerken, in which he notified the Bishop of his intent to appeal his appointment to the Apostolic Delegate. Gerken advised him that he had nothing to gain by such a procedure. On the same day, Clinton also informing Gerken that he intended to do the work previously assigned to him at the cathedral until he heard from the Delegate. Whereupon the same day, Gerken wrote to Clinton.

I regret exceedingly that your obstinacy obliges me to impose upon you canonical precept under Canon 2310.

Wherefore take notice that unless you will have entered upon your duties as administrator and *beneplicitum Ordinarii*, of the missions of Borger, Panhandle, and Canadian, with residence with the Rev. M. G. French at White Deer, within a period of 15 days from this date, you will ipso facto incur the censure of suspension *a divinis*. Wherefore, be prudent and may Our Lord direct you to submit to the lawfully constituted ecclesiastical authority of this Diocese.

It is astonishing and painful to me to see the manner in which you deal with your bishop, especially in view of the fact that it is but two years since your ordination to the priesthood. I have carefully read the correspondence which has passed between you and your bishop; and I am constrained to say that you are condemned by the very evidence which you have presented to me. I am sure that on prayerful consideration of the matter you will realize the sad mistake which you have made thus early in your priestly career, and that you will now go to your bishop and, in a spirit of humble obedience, place yourself at his disposal for the work of saving souls.

At last, Clinton accepted the assignment and in the following three years did so well that on 19 September 1930, Gerken, in "recognition of his faithful services on the missions ... of Borger, Panhandle, and Canadian," appointed him pastor of Sacred Heart Church in White Deer. Clinton again served well, so that on 1 November 1934, Lucey, Gerken's successor as Bishop of Amarillo, appointed him pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Littlefield, with the added care of St. Philip of Neri Church in Pep.

By the middle of December, however, Clinton began to exhibit erratic behavior, appearing to be delirious at times. On 25 March 1935 James Lynch and John Stengel of Littlefield visited Lucey to report that "Father Clinton is subject to attacks which render him at times delirious and at other times make him so weak that he staggers when he attempts to walk, much to the disedification of those who see him." The latest incident, they said, had occurred the day before, on Sunday, 24 March. Clinton, on his way to Pep, had lost consciousness and driven off the road. A youngster with him told his

mother he thought he was intoxicated. After regaining consciousness, Clinton went on to Pep, celebrated Mass, and visited a catechism class. Again, he was delirious. A concerned mother took her son out of the class and others called for help. Stengel and Lynch reported that Clinton was intoxicated and had become belligerent. Father John Rogg Schmidt, chancellor, wired Clinton to tell him Lucey wanted to see him. Lucey sent him to see Dr. Winsett, whose diagnosis read: ardiac decompensation (failure of the heart muscle to compensate for a valvular or myocardial defect) and Vincent's angina [trench mouth]. Clinton responded to digitalis and medication for trench mouth and returned to Littlefield.

On 15 August, however, Mr. Stengel wrote to Lucey: "This morning he was not able to read the Gospel and preach and had to hold or brace himself at times to keep from falling. He was an extremely sick man, but he looked and acted like a man that was intoxicated. And of course, some people think so."

Upon receipt of this letter Lucey acted. On 20 August he ordered Clinton to report to St. Anthony's Hospital for a complete diagnosis, and at the same time invited Mr. Stengel to assemble "a small committee of men from either Pep or Littlefield" to visit him on Saturday, 24 August to advise him. Clinton failed to report to St. Anthony's, with the result that on Saturday Lucey wrote a letter to him, delivered by Father Gabriel Diamante, S.A. (Society of the Atonement), Dean of the Lubbock Deanery, ordering Clinton to report to the hospital by midnight. "Failing to obey this command," Lucey warned, "you will be ipso facto suspended 'a divinis' at mid-night tonight." Clinton checked in on time, was examined, and allowed to return to Littlefield. The next archival entry is a telegram sent by Schmidt to Clinton dated 1:15 p.m. Saturday, 28 September, informing him that Lucey did not wish him to stay in Littlefield in the late afternoon, and that evening he did check into St. Anthony's Hospital. Winsett treated him for two weeks, and on Friday, 11 October, Lucey permitted him to return to Littlefield.

The saga continued. On 5 November, Lucey wrote to Clinton to tell him a committee of his parishioners had again reported scandalous conduct on his part. Then the order: "You are hereby directed to assume your resi-dence at Price Memorial College, Amarillo, no later than Friday, November 8. You will please report to me in the Chancery Office at ten o'clock on Saturday morning, November 9"

The ax finally fell. On 9 November 1935, Clinton signed a terse statement: "In accordance with the wishes of my Ordinary, I hereby resign as pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Littlefield." Thereafter follow letters and memoranda filling three file folders detailing stays at treatment centers in the hope of "a cure" and brief periods of recovery in which he was given opportunities to minister in parish and hospital settings, but to no avail.

Although Gerken and his successors, Lucey, FitzSimon, Morkovsky, and Defalco, made painstaking efforts to help him, Clinton proved to be incorrigible to the end. Regularly described as a kind, gentle, and holy priest by his peers, by some parishioners, and by the Sisters of Mercy in Slaton, and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in San Angelo, Clinton was an alcoholic who never managed to live consistently in a state of recovery.

Having resigned his pastorate on 9 November, and thereafter in residence at Price Memorial College, Clinton fell into a pattern of asking for loans from people outside the circle of his relatives, as well as of writing bad checks and running up debts. He twice mortgaged his car, a prosecutable offense. Ordered by Lucey on 18 April 1936, to stop these practices, Clinton asked for and was given leave to go to Prince Edward, where he had been born.

A condition was that he sell his car in partial payment of his debts, a condition he accepted.

A year later, following an inquiry by Schmidt, Clinton informed him that he intended to return to Texas on 20 October 1937. Surprisingly, on 3 December Lucey appointed Clinton administrator of newly established Sacred Heart Parish in McCamey, an isolated oil town in the southwestern part of the diocese, more than 300 hundred miles south of Amarillo. The appointment turned out to be a prescription for disaster, one Clinton filled even before he left for McCamey on 2 December. He bought a bottle of liquor at the Post Office Pharmacy in Amarillo

and paid \$3.00 for it with a hot check. Informed of this, Lucey directed Clinton to meet him at a clergy conference in Rowena on 9 December. Clinton failed to show up.

By 27 December, it was all over. C. P. Becker of Crane, north of McCamey, wired Lucey: "Something must be done about Father Clinton at once. It is serious. You know the rest." Exasperated, Lucey recalled Clinton to Price College, relieved him of his assignment, and asked the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement in Graymoor, New York, to accept Clinton for custodial care. On 18 February 1938, Lucey filed a memorandum:

On Thursday, February 17, Bishop Lucey informed Father Clinton, who was staying in Price College, that he had permission from Father Paul of the Atonement Fathers to stay at Graymoor for a time. Father Clinton absolutely refused to go to Graymoor at the Bishop's request and insisted that he would go to Santa Fe. He stated he was leaving at six o'clock that evening for that city.

P.S. Father Clinton returned from Santa Fe yesterday, February 22, and expressed his willingness to go to Graymoor. He left for that monastery at 5:10 P.M., Thursday, February 23.

By June 1938, Clinton's time at Graymoor was running out. Lucey recalled Clinton to Amarillo on 17 September, and assigned him to Price College, where he was to learn Spanish. He also appointed him assistant pastor of Sacred Heart Cathedral Parish.

End of story? Hardly. On 24 February 1939, Lucey wired St. Benoit's Retreat in Wisconsin, asking the Director, Brother Omer, to accept Clinton. That he did so is remarkable in view of Lucey's description of Clinton.

Father Clinton has a weak will. By drinking he has given scandal to our people. I have tried to help him for five years to reform him without success. He leaves unpaid bills behind him, issues bad cheques in small amounts and has stolen money from the Cathedral collection. When he lives at home in Canada he does not drink.

Perhaps it was the last line that persuaded Brother Omer to say yes. He had no reason to regret his decision, as Father Clinton remained sober throughout his stay of 11 months. On 2 November 1940, Lucey recalled Clinton to Amarillo. When he arrived on 23 November, Lucey placed him at Price College to celebrate Mass daily for the Christian Brothers, and on 29 November named him also Assistant Pastor of St. Francis Church east of Amarillo, where Monsignor John Steinlage was Pastor.

But Clinton's troubles continued. On 14 March 1941, Lucey, now Archbishop-Elect of San Antonio, wrote to the Alexian Brothers Hospital in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to ask if their previous offer to treat Clinton for alcoholism was still valid. Meanwhile, Clinton himself wrote to the Samaritan in Houston, which offered free institutional care for alcoholics. Clinton was

patients, and was accepted. Lucey approved the offer.



Bishop Lucey

was back at Price in June, still not in recovery. Steinlage, having been asked by Monsignor Francis J. Pokluda, Administrator of the Diocese after Lucey's departure, to monitor Clinton, told him he would no longer be responsible for him. Pokluda then entrusted Clinton to Father John Dolje.

Father Newton T. Miller, Chancellor, wrote to Pokluda in Rowena: "Father Dolje decided to send Father Clinton to Houston to repeat the cure he took a short time ago" and that on his return he "be placed in the Slaton Hospital." Pokluda approved the arrangement, with the provision that "Father T. O'Brien kindly look after him little until some better arrangement can be made."

For reasons not disclosed, the plan did not materialize. Pokluda wrote to the War Department in Washington, D.C., inquiring about the possibility of Clinton enlisting in the Army as a Chaplain. After he read Clinton's resume, Monsignor Wm. R. Arnold, Chief of Chaplains, responded politely: "We regret to say,

Reverend Father, that we can give no consideration to such a man.” Pokluda then persuaded Clinton to enter Alexian Brothers Hospital in Oshkosh and directed Steinlage and Father Joseph S. Wonderly to take him there by car in early August.

FitzSimon, successor to Lucey, getting good reports from Oshkosh, wrote to Clinton on 4 April 1942 expressing his wish to give you the opportunity of making a fresh start under my authority. In other words, we shall forget the past, and I would like to have you return to the Diocese and have confidence that while I am your Bishop, you will do the right thing in the future I am therefore appointing you to the position of Chaplain at St. John's Hospital at San Angelo; this appointment to take effect immediately upon your arrival at that place where Father Bartholomew O'Brien is the present incumbent.

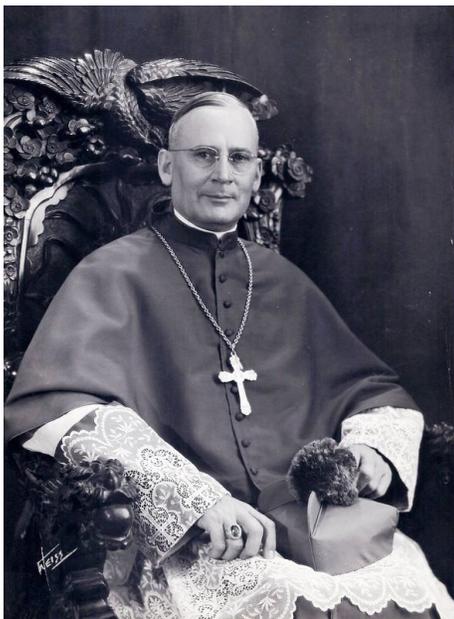
A year later, 13 April 1943, Pokluda was constrained to write to FitzSimon that Clinton “has been under the influence on the day of our conference, noticed by all the Fathers at the conference. I took him in my car and talk to him to be careful to remember what he was told.”

Two years later, on 16 December 1945, Pokluda again wrote to FitzSimon: “This information is not pleasant news. Father Clinton left the hospital last Friday evening about 5 p.m. and up this moment we do not know of his whereabouts he had been on his spell since last Wednesday, Sisters were watching him and doctoring him, but he slipped off.” Clinton had told the Sisters at the hospital where he would be, but had bound them to secrecy. Three days later FitzSimon rescinded Clinton's appointment and ordered him back to Alexian Brothers Hospital no later than 1 January 1946. The Sisters got the letter to Clinton, who then went to Amarillo to see FitzSimon, who refused to speak to him. In a follow-up letter to FitzSimon, Clinton said he had wanted to ask him for a six-month leave of absence, with the privilege of returning to the diocese, or, with his approval, to be transferred to another diocese. He invited the bishop to respond to him in care of the Sisters. FitzSimon declined. Clinton then surfaced in Houston. John J. Roach wrote to FitzSimon on 13 May, to inform him that five months earlier he had met. Clinton and had procured a job for him in the Lone Star Creamery, owned by James Studdert, “an exemplary Catholic layman and in as much as he had helped others in similar circumstances it was necessary to tell this good man his identity.” He added, “Since this time, Father Clinton has had no relapse whatsoever.” A year later, Clinton showed up at the Alexian Brothers Hospital in Oshkosh. Notified, FitzSimon reacted with surprise and resentment. In a letter addressed 12 May 1947, to Brother Julius, Director, he wrote: “Due to the fact that Father Clinton has disobeyed me, or taken over a year to conform with my orders, I do not recognize him as a priest of the Diocese of Amarillo and shall reject any claims your Hospital may have against the Diocese for his support.” Sobered, Clinton wrote to FitzSimon on 23 May,

“Please pardon all my foolishness and weakness. I have been sad and discouraged ever since I left San Angelo. I repent of all the mistakes I made. I promise to be obedient to all your commands. I never meant to be disrespectful to Your Excellency. If you consider my tardiness in writing offensive, please forgive me. With the help of God's grace, I shall try to lead a good priestly life. Please have patience with me and give me another trial.”

In a letter dated 27 May FitzSimon accepted Clinton's apology, and directed him to remain at the hospital to make a retreat, after which he could once again celebrate Mass.

A year later, on 2 April 1948, Clinton, saying that after a year of real penance here,” he was in good health sober, and had made “the firmest resolution to abstain from all drink - that chiefly was my downfall’ asked Fitz-Simon to give him “some work in your diocese, in whatever place and at whatever task you may kindly put me to.” FitzSimon allowed him to cool his heels, so that on 8 July, Clinton wrote to him again expressing disappointment and asking him to allow him to make a six-month visit, beginning 30 July, to his aging mother on Prince Edward Island. Fitz-Simon granted him a visit of one month, with an order to return to Oshkosh no later than 1 September.



† Bishop FitzSimon

Brother Julius, Rector of the Alexian Brothers Community, reported to FitzSimon on 24 September that Clinton was still absent and that, on his instructions, the hospital would no longer hold Clinton's room for him. With that, FitzSimon advised Brother Julius that if and when Clinton returned to the hospital, the diocese would not cover his expenses there. Clinton did not return, dropping out of sight for the next 12 years.

Morkovsky, FitzSimon's successor, acknowledged on 23 July 1960, receipt of a letter from a Father William H. Doucette in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Doucette told him he had been "asked by a relative of a Father Edward Clinton, who wished to be rehabilitated back into the priesthood in good standing" in the Diocese of Amarillo. Morkovsky responded affirmatively and asked Doucette to help Clinton secure a new passport and make travel arrangements. It was mid-November before the paperwork was done, and then Doucette accompanied Clinton to Amarillo.

On 15 December Morkovsky appointed Clinton Chaplain of Mercy Hospital and Convent in Slaton and assistant to Tom O'Brien. Reports on his conduct for the first several years were positive, but by 1965, it was evident that both the Sisters of Mercy at the hospital and O'Brien had not been disclosing Clinton's return to heavy drinking. On 25 September, Sisters Madeleva, Rudolpha, and Angelita stated the reality. "This is to certify that Father Edward Clinton, Chaplain at Mercy hospital, Slaton, Texas, is a very ill man due to his unfortunate addiction to liquor. This addiction, slight at first, is almost uncontrollable."



† Bishop Morkovsky

At Steinlage's request, Monsignor Peter Mosch, now Pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Slaton, took Clinton to Nazareth Sanitarium north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, 17 October. By 15 December, Clinton was back in Amarillo and told Monsignor A. M. Bottoms, Chancellor, that he left Slaton "because Father [Ladislaw] Walko was there and the sisters didn't want him."

Clinton was admitted to St. Ann's Nursing Home in Panhandle and resided there, sober at last, for the remainder of his life. In late April 1975, he was transferred to St. Anthony's hospital, where he died of heart failure on 2 May. He was buried 5 May, in the old Catholic section of Llano Cemetery, near FitzSimon, Defalco, and brother priests of the Diocese of Amarillo.

† Rev. Thomas D. O'Brien Again

Even though O'Brien had, under pressure, accepted his appointment to Slaton, his relationship with Gerken remained strained. There is evidence that he colluded with his brother, Bart, and conspired with Higgins, French, Clinton, and Cussen, the suspended priest, to challenge Gerken's decisions. His last open attack came on 18 February 1930, in a long letter to Fumasoni-Biondi, the same man who had chastised him in 1927.

"Some of the priests of this diocese have asked me to go to Washington, D. C. to lay before Your Excellency certain matters pertaining to this. Diocese of Amarillo. Not having the time or the money to make the trip, I told them that I would write, Your Excellency. The priests and laity are very much disgusted with the situation. Things are worsening and it is solely the welfare of the Church which urges me to write this letter."

About 22 priests have come to this diocese and left in less than two years ... they leave absolutely disgusted. About a year ago the Bishop organized what he calls "Mercy Workers." These women are expected to work among the Mexicans ... they consist of ex-nuns - divorcees. dopefiends etc....

Furthermore a very prominent Catholic layman made the statement publicly that this woman "is looked upon as the Bishop's wife."

One of those so-called "Mercy Workers" is regarded by the priests as the official Diocesan advisor of the Bishop and it is even said that she has revealed secrets from the diocesan archives. Furthermore a very prominent Catholic layman made the statement publicly that this woman "is looked upon as the Bishop's wife."

Two priests are blamed for ill-advising the Bishop - namely, Father Dolje and Father Krukkert.

Rambling on, O'Brien described Dolje as a heavy drinker, Krukkert as a poor financial manager, and Father F. X. Hillen as eccentric (Hillen was on loan from the Diocese of Indianapolis to serve on the faculty of Price Memorial College). O'Brien also accused Gerken of demoting" Higgins by reassigning him from Dalhart to Stanton. O'Brien ended his letter with an assurance that he had "barely scratched the surface," and added, "an immediate investigation would be most advisable."

Fumasoni-Biondi met with Gerken in St. Louis, heard his story, and asked him to put his response to the allegations in a letter to him. Gerken did so, candidly.

Eight of these (22 priests) were Mexican refugee priests (they had been driven from Mexico in the persecution of the Catholic Church in the Twenties), others were loaned to me by Bishops for a brief period of time. Five I had to drop on account of drunkenness, and only one left in disgust and that man was described to me by his own Bishop as somewhat demented.

Gerken did not bother to respond to O'Brien's allegations about Dolje, Krukkert, and Hillen. Instead, he described his disappointment with O'Brien.

Reverend Thomas O'Brien was Pastor of our present Cathedral Church at the time of my appointment as Bishop by Our Holy Father and was Dean of this district. Although he and I had known each other only in a distant way, he resented my appointment from the beginning, explainable only in this way, that the choice had not fallen on him instead of me. He made life most bitter for me during the first two months. He had an organized party of clergy to oppose me in all my efforts ... they fought every appointment I made and invited other priests faithful to me to fight their appointments. They have opposed almost every movement for progress I undertook in the Diocese. I made Rev. Thomas D. O'Brien a consultor of the Diocese upon his pledge that he be loyal to me and cooperate with me. But all in vain the malice of [his] charges is evident. His great endeavor has ever been to bring priests in opposition to me. He is spreading these and other calumnies about me in and out of the diocese to harm me. I will attach just one such specimen as a exhibit (there is no copy of this in the archives). He is fairly succeeding in making my difficult position in this vast poor Diocese so miserable that I am greatly tempted to discouragement.

On 31 May Fumasoni-Biondi replied to O'Brien. The investigation has been completed and it does not

reveal any matter in which the Right Reverend Bishop should be censured.

You state that you write at the behest of some of the priests of the Diocese. I would have thought that a priest in your position - a Diocesan Consultor and a Rural Dean - would have investigated these complaints before writing to the Delegation.

What the investigation does reveal, however, is that you have been disloyal to the Bishop since his appointment to the See of Amarillo and that you are a member of a small group that are opposing the actions and measures of the good Bishop.

Needless to say, I am deeply grieved at such conduct by a priest of God and I feel that it is my duty to remind you of the high vocation that is yours and of the promise of obedience and reverence, which you made to your Ordinary and his successors on the occasion of your ordination to the Holy Priesthood.

O'Brien remained in Slaton until his death, establishing a good record in pastoral care, blemished, however, by reports that he would not allow Mexican-Americans to come to the front door of the rectory nor participate in services at St. Joseph's, directing them to go instead to their own Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Yet, on 16 December 1932, he reported to Gerken that he had "validated marriage for Mexican cotton pickers at Posey. Both were extremely sick." On 3 October 1954, he was honored with the title of Monsignor by Pope Pius XII on FitzSimon's request. O'Brien had been born in Limerick,

Ireland, 1 January 1891, and ordained to the priesthood in Thurles, County Tipperary, 11 June 1916, for the Diocese of Dallas. His first assignment came 16 September as assistant pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Amarillo, where his brother, Bart was also an assistant, having been assigned the previous 24 June. The Pastor, Father David H. Dunn, died the following 3 October. With Bart subsequently serving as administrator, Tom stayed on at Sacred Heart until 6 November 1917, when he became pastor of St. Stephen's Church in Weatherford. On 4 April 1923, he was reassigned to Sacred Heart Church, Amarillo, this time as pastor, and remained there until his transfer to Slaton as pastor of St. Joseph's Church 8 July 1927. He spent the next 36 years there, until his death 4 January 1963. He is buried in the Slaton cemetery.



Rev. Florence Michael Higgins

Higgins' life began to unravel in 1929. Gerken had allowed him to remain in Dalhart after he refused to be rector of the cathedral. Complaints about his mismanagement of parish funds and of excessive drinking were being made by parishioners. On 31 July 1929, after again refusing a reassignment, this time to White Deer, Higgins was granted a leave of absence. For no recorded reason, he did not take it, for in January 1930, he was still in Dalhart, even though complaints about him were increasing.

Gerken knew that Higgins, who had been his assistant in Ranger, had a problem with finances that went back to the early 1920s. Higgins had lost a parish in the Dallas diocese because of it. In 1925, ironically, Gerken suggested to Lynch that he assign Higgins to Dalhart as pastor.

John Higgins in Ireland had earlier written a letter to Gerken in Ranger, thanking him for recommending his brother for a pastorate and sending him three hundred and fifty Irish pounds to cover a debt his brother had incurred. In that letter John expressed the hope that his brother, now a pastor, might be able to repay him a loan he had given him. On 12 April 1927, in a letter congratulating Gerken on being named Bishop of Amarillo, John asked, "how Florence is getting along," as he had not heard from him "long since" and wondered how he is "going on with his parishioners. Is he getting on as you would expect?" There is no record of Gerken's reply.

Two years later parish finances had worsened to the point that Gerken took them out of Higgins' hands and entrusted them to "the Parish Committee and the Building Committee," with Higgins, however, to be chairperson of both committees. The move did not improve matters. On 6 February Gerken relieved Higgins of his pastorate and appointed him chaplain of Mercy Convent in Stanton, more than 300 south of Dalhart. Higgins responded by sending Gerken, who was ill in St. Anthony's Hospital, an application form for 27 gallons of muscatel wine (during Prohibition a special permit was required to purchase Mass wine), with the request that he sign the form. When Gerken immediately ordered him to report to him, Higgins disappeared. Two weeks later, he sent a card from Niagara Falls, New York, to a parishioner in Dalhart. It said: "I am just departing for Canada." Gerken wrote poignantly to John in Ireland: "Just why Father Florence chose this manner of departing is not clear to anyone here nor to me. Since he had been my assistant in Ranger, I always dealt with him in exercising my duties of Bishop over him with exceeding kindness He, however, continued to contract personal and parish debts and never paid for anything."

Eight years later, on 9 April 1943, Gerken having died the previous March in Santa Fe, Higgins wrote to Tom O'Brien. He told him he was working as a hotel clerk in Chicago, and asked him to intercede with FitzSimon, successor to Gerken and Lucey, to allow him to return to ministry in the Diocese of Amarillo. FitzSimon indicated that he was willing to give him the opportunity. Higgins was eventually to be a pastor again, but it was to be by a long and circuitous route.

At O'Brien's urging Higgins wrote to FitzSimon. He told the Bishop that after he left Dalhart he went to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he worked for nine years as a practical nurse in a city hospital. In 1936 he went to New York City, where he worked in the same capacity until April 1942, when he went to Chicago. There he worked as a chauffeur, first for St. Bernard's Hospital and then for St. Xavier's Academy. Finally, in February 1943 he took a job as a hotel clerk. The following 21 May, he wrote to FitzSimon "I am writing you, as I understand you are willing and anxious to hear from

Rev. Florence Michael Higgins Continued...

me, and learn all the facts of my case, relative to my absence from the Diocese since February 1930. Allow me, dear Bishop, to say that I am submitting them to you in all sincerity and humility.”

Higgins described what he had been doing. He ascribed rumors of excessive drinking to gossip while he was pastor in Dalhart and acknowledged that he did not have a good relationship with Gerken.

When I received notification of my transfer (to Stanton) I decided that, since I was unworthy of that charge given me by Bishop Lynch, I would not accept any transfer and, knowing my presence in Dalhart would not be greatly beneficial to both parties concerned, I left there with the intention of securing adoption somewhere else. However, after a time the thought of what I had done as well as the hopelessness of my case made me to forget writing any Bishop and, as time passed, all hope seen to have passed away. How I have regretted my rash act nobody knows better than I Inexcusable as my conduct may seem I am cognizant of the fact that it deserves censure and am willing to accept whatever sentence you deem fit to impose. Yes, Bishop FitzSimon, I made a profoundly serious mistake and I realize it I am placing all in your hands for your wise and merciful consideration.

FitzSimon asked the Abbot of New Melleray Monastery in Iowa to allow Higgins to make penance there during the month of September 1943. Understandably, the abbot was not eager to project an image of the monastery as a place of penance but agreed to make an exception.

The next step for Higgins was a trial period in the Diocese of El Paso. From October 1943 to May 1944, he lived in the home of Bishop Sidney Metzger. On May 4, Higgins received a letter from FitzSimon. “With this appointment (as assistant to Father Matthew Schafle, pastor of Sacred Heart parish, Littlefield). I am welcoming you back into the Diocese of Amarillo and restoring you to the ranks of the clergy of this diocese.”

Not enough room in the Littlefield rectory, FitzSimon directed Schafle to take up residence in the St. Philip Neri Church rectory in Pep, then a mission of Littlefield.

Matters continued to get better for Higgins. In 1950 he built a church in Levelland and named it St. Michael's. Then he broke ground for a new Sacred Heart Church in Littlefield on 21 March 1954. It was to be the last year of his life. Late on the night of 12 October, while returning to Littlefield from Rowena, where he had attended the closing of Forty Hour's devotion, he failed to negotiate a curve in the highway near Sterling City, was ejected from the car, and died. He was buried in Littlefield.



† Monsignor Bart O'Brien with Tom. O'Brien

Bart O'Brien, born 19 November 1886, in Abbeyfeale, Ireland, was ordained a priest 14 June 1914, for the Diocese of Dallas. His first assignment was as an assistant pastor of St. Patrick's Church, Dallas. Two years later, on 16 June 1916, he was appointed assistant pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Amarillo, under Father David Dunn, pastor.

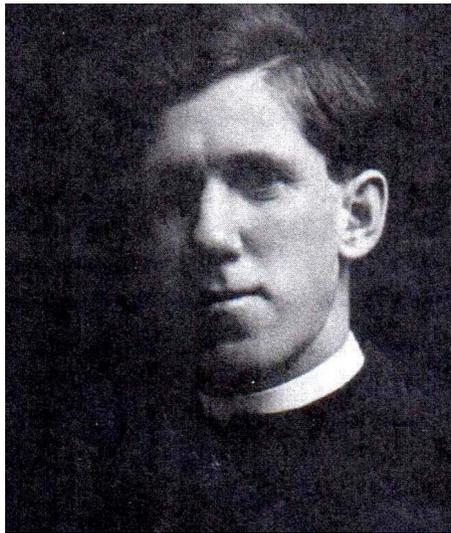
Dunn, who had directed the building of the first Catholic church in Amarillo at Fourth and Polk in 1903, named Sacred Heart, undertook the building of a new Sacred Heart Church at Ninth and Taylor in the spring of 1916. It was almost completed when he died unexpectedly at age 47. The first service held in the church was his Funeral Mass. Thereupon, Bart was named administrator of the parish and his brother, Tom, younger by two years, was now his assistant. In November 1917, when Bart became pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Cleburne, Tom was named the pastor.

On 1 May 1923, Bart returned to Amarillo, this time as chaplain of St. Anthony's Hospital. He also served as weekend missionary to churches

and stations, including, at various times, Canyon, Tulia, Hale Center, Plainview, Crosbyton, and Lubbock to the south; Channing, Tascosa, Perico, and Dalhart to the north; Miami and Canadian to the east; and Washburn and Claude to the southeast.

On 30 June 1927, Gerken appointed him pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Groom. Bart balked, alleging poor health. Gerken offered to arrange a medical examination for him and placed the appointment "in abeyance," with a warning. "I then formally admonished him against further activity in what seemed a formidable conspiracy against me, together with Reverend's Thomas O'Brien Clinton and Higgins. He then suggested that the entire trouble could still be adjusted. I told him that rested entirely with them and that he could well make a start by accepting his appointment. Doctor's Winsett and R. D. Gist examined Bart and concluded that he had degenerative inflammation of the muscular substance of the heart and hypoacidity of the stomach. With that, Gerken rescinded Bart's appointment to Groom and permitted him to remain at St. Anthony's, although he subsequently added the teaching of a history class at Price Memorial College to Bart's hospital and mission duties. Between September 1937 and April 1942, he served as Chaplain of St. John's Hospital in San Angelo, after which he again served as Chaplain of St. Anthony's.

Honored in 1954 with the title of Monsignor, he remained the hospital chaplain until he died in 1962, one year earlier than his brother, Tom. Bart is interred next to Clinton in the old Catholic section of Llano



Father Michael G. French

Cemetery in Amarillo.

Born in Chicago, French received his education in that city, graduating from Loyola University. He completed theological studies at Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis and was ordained there 6 June 1906, for the Diocese of Dallas. During World War I he served as a chaplain in the Third Division of the American Expeditionary Force. There are no records of where he was assigned in the Dallas Diocese, other than that in 1926, when the Diocese of Amarillo was established. At that time, he was pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Slaton, probably having served there since 1922. Keller had left that year after being tarred and feathered.

French accepted his transfer from Slaton to Sacred heart Church in White Deer. It appears that he did not, at least overtly, join the Irish rebellion against Gerken. But questions about French's management had been surfacing in Slaton. On 27 May, Gerken received a letter from three women protesting "the trouble which a band of agitators in this Parish have been giving our Resident Priest, the Reverend Michael G. French ... For Father French to

leave or to be forced to leave would be a distinct loss, as no priest has been as well liked by non-Catholics and he could do and has done so much good for the community at large we have never seen a sign of drink on Father French as long as he has been in Slaton Parish."

The records show that Father French did not, in fact, have a drinking problem. What he did have was a habit of not paying personal and parish bills, leaving behind a trail of debts that the parish and the diocese would have to clean up. On May 30, J. R. Houston, cashier for the State Bank in nearby Wilson, unaware that a new bishop was in charge, wrote to Lynch in Dallas. "The Priest at Slaton, M. G. French, made a note with us several years ago and we have been trying to collect ever since. We at last sued him and have judgment against him for \$200 and interest, together with court cost. We advised our attorney to levy on his car but suppose he has that tied some other place ... advise us."

Lynch sent a memo to Gerken concerning the \$200 loan, and added to that a string of other bills totaling \$195.45. French owed banks, not only in Wilson, but also in Amherst, Muleshoe, and Slaton; he had debts at grocery and drug stores and for Mass wine and clothing with suppliers in California and St. Louis. He owed Dolje for a personal loan. J. T. Matthews, secretary of the parish trustees, wrote to Gerken in early June: "Betty (Reynolds, French's housekeeper) bought expensive furniture and charged it to Church after the congregation asked the Furniture Co. not to sell on account and charge to the Church. There are bills all over town still unpaid made by Fr. French and Betty She was

She was dropped by the people of the town on account of the scandal she caused...

dropped by the people of the town on account of the scandal she caused.” Gerken added a comment to Matthew’s note: “Church committee agrees to pay all his debts in Slaton if he is removed.”

On June 10, Gerken filed a memorandum:

Amarillo, Texas. Record of canonical precept given verbally: On this 10th day of June 1927, I have for good and solid reasons, restricted the liberty of Reverend. M. G. French, to the effect that he shall not be permitted to contract debts or financial obligations, personally or in the name of parish wherever he may be. On 14 June French sent Gerken a notarized statement and bill of sale in which, in return for a loan of \$1,200.00 promised him by Gerken, transferred title to him to “one ‘Special Six Studebaker Roadster automobile, late 1925 model, now registered in Lubbock County, Texas; also all books comprising my personal library, now located in Slaton, Texas.” Along with a letter accompanying the statement, French listed additional unpaid bills, the total now \$1,303.34.

You will never know how humiliating it is for one to send this personal account. Had you not been so generous and kindhearted I could never do it. I need not express my gratitude or loyalty to it to be proven as long as I live.

I am sending bills of sale etc. on car and books in case anything should perchance happen and as an assurance I will not dispose of car without your permission. I have met priests and Bishops in the past and will again, but there is only one. On 23 June Gerken sent French a check for \$1,300.00 to pay the bills, requesting receipts and canceled notes on bank loans. He included a note for French to sign, with an interest rate of four percent, and added, “changes have been temporarily postponed.”

The changes Gerken referred to were those he had planned to make official 30 June, one appointing O’Brien pastor of Slaton. O’Brien had refused and Gerken had on 4 July, given him a two-month leave of absence to ponder his situation. French was to wait in Slaton for the outcome. On 7 July, O’Brien accepted his appointment to Slaton and French then transferred to White Deer, taking Betty Reynolds with him as his housekeeper despite her questionable record in Slaton.

On the Sunday after he arrived in White Deer, French, at Gerken’s directive, celebrated a Mass in Pampa in an unspecified facility. There was as yet no church there, but a building fund had been started and Gerken had instructed French to further the project. A year later the Pampa church committee reported what French had done on his first Sunday there in 1927.

Father French said his first Mass in Pampa July 10, 1927, and stated to the

congregation on that day that he wanted \$25.00 a Sunday for his services. He was advised that the collections did not amount to \$25.00 so he asked the Treasurer to make up the difference out of the building fund. This amount was paid regularly from July 10 to November 1, 1927. Father French promised to introduce the Envelope System which would put the church on a paying basis and create a growing building fund. On November 15, 1927, Father introduced this System, taking over the books and all funds from this system.

Multiple memoranda followed, describing bizarre fiscal management by French. Among other transactions, he was making payments on his new car from parish operating and building funds.

Meanwhile, the building of a church, Holy Souls, was underway. By 31 May 1928, the mission was in debt of more than \$25,000. Gerken requested French to report to his office on 11 June and told him that he would give him three months to settle the difficulties in Pampa, that his gross pay from then on would be 75 dollars a month, that the church committee would have charge of the parish books and treasury “under your supervision,” and that he expected him to live up to his promise “of doing whatever is necessary to handle the situation satisfactorily Father French gave solemn promise that if given a chance; he would be able to take care of the situation to the satisfaction of all.” Instead, French called a general parish meeting on the following Sunday. H. L. Pohl, a member of the church

committee, visited Gerken on June 23, and gave him a sworn statement. "He (French) set forth that the report made to the Bishop was a lie and that either the parties who made the said report had lied or the Bishop had done so, and that he knew the Bishop had not lied." Mrs. Lynn Boyd, Martin Muench, P. B. Mooney, and Martin. McGarrity, also members of the parish committee also gave sworn statements.

Gerken acted. On 27 June he sent a registered letter to French. "I hereby now, for the good of the cause of our Holy Religion remove you as Pastor from Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, White Deer, and Holy Souls Church, Pampa, and appoint you to the removable pastorship ad beneplacitum episcopi, of holy Angels Church, Childress, Texas, to which are attached Saint Mary's Church at Clarendon, as a Mission, and Memphis and Paducah as mission stations. This appointment will take effect on Saturday of this week, June 30, 1928."

Acknowledging receipt of Gerken's letter, French, having, as it became clear, enlisted the legal counsel of Ed Cussen, the suspended priest in Canadian, responded brusquely.

The foregoing letter is an extraordinary and amazing document, extraordinary in this, "that though I have searched the Canons of Our Holy Church, which are binding on both Bishops and priests alike, I find no authorization therein for the assumption by any Bishop of such arbitrary power, amazing, in this that, it is hard to believe that in this 20 th Century any Bishop in the United States of America, would arrogate to himself such power ... In conclusion let me say, that with the Grace of God, and God helping me, I stand on the Canons of the Church, and I fear no man."

Confronted with French's refusal to leave White Deer, Gerken, fearing serious trouble if French reappeared in Pampa, issued a precept separating the mission temporarily from White Deer, and invited French to come to the Chancery Office on 2 July. On French's arrival Gerken gave him a letter justifying his action in reassigning him to Childress. A memorandum written by Father Francis Kaminsky, pro-chancellor, who was present, records the reaction. "Father French stubbornly and vehemently refused to listen to reason and said that he had consulted a Canonist. The bishop said: "this character condemns you and your case because of his record." Father French made no reply. The Bishop invited him to report again on Friday, July 6 1928." Instead, French wrote to Gerken on 4 July:

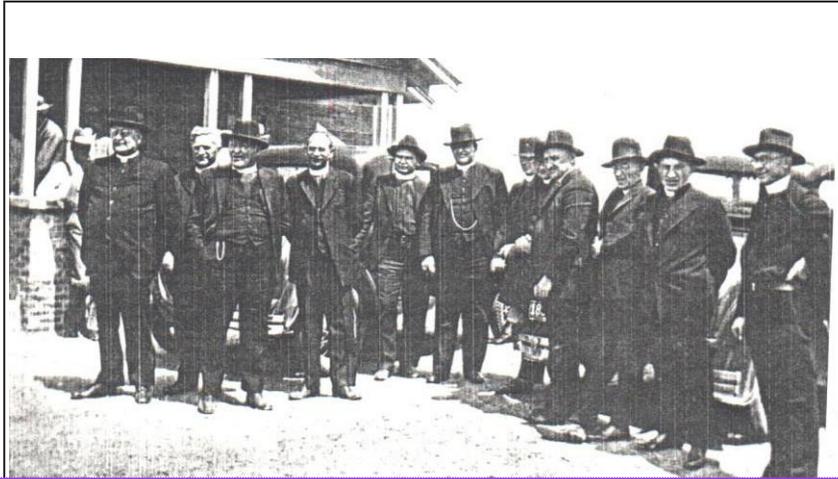
"You are hereby formally notified that I the undersigned Pastor shall take an appeal to the Holy See against your unwarranted and unjust action in dismembering Holy Souls Church, Pampa, Texas, from the Sacred Heart Parish at White Deer, Texas ... which I in obedience obeyed though the same was of no force and effect under the Canon Law of the Church."

Next day, 5 July, French wrote a long letter, this one couched in civil law terminology, to Gerken.

"Comes now M. G. French, Pastor of White Deer Parish and excepts generally to a certain letter of the Right Reverend Bishop aforesaid presented to M. G. French by F. Kaminsky, Pro-Chancellor, at the Chancery Office in Amarillo, under date of July 2nd, and says that the same is not sufficient in law to constitute a Canonical Removal under Titulus XXIX, and of this he puts himself upon the Canons."

The letter, undoubtedly crafted by Cussen, who had earned a civil law degree by correspondence from the University of Texas, went on endlessly, demanding nullification of Gerken's directives, but ignoring the fact that French's transfer to Childress was not his removal as pastor in White Deer, but a transfer to the pastorate of another parish. Gerken responded on July 7, "I regret exceedingly that your obstinacy obliges me to impose upon you canonical precept under Canon 2167."

"Wherefore take notice that unless you will have entered upon your duties as removable pastor "ad Beneplacitum Ordinarii," of Holy Angels Church, Childress, Texas, and the mission of Saint Mary's, Clarendon, and the Mission Stations of Memphis and Paducah, Texas, within a period of ten days. From this date the parish of Sacred Heart at White Deer, Texas, which you now hold shall be IPSO FACTO VACANT on expiration of the term specified. Wherefore be prudent and may Our dear Lord direct you to submit to the lawfully constituted Ecclesiastical authority of this Diocese. French retorted on 14 July, with another formal letter in which he charged Gerken with defamation of character and violations of Canon Law, threatened a civil lawsuit, "



| Bishop Gerken and his Priests

accepted the appointment to Childress and mission under protest (but did not leave White Deer), and served notice that he would appeal to Rome. On the very same day, in a second letter to Gerken, French petitioned for a leave of absence. As reasons, he cited illness, the impossibility of attending “so many missions so far distant” from Childress, and his “unwillingness to serve where the Pastor realizes he cannot give service by reason of illness. An immediate answer is requested.”

Next day, Gerken responded by inviting French to come to Amarillo to see him, saying he could see no reason why “the matter in question cannot by equitably adjusted.” To that French sent a telegram: “Am willing to stop all proceedings even now if only justice will prevail. Must have definite answer in writing by Monday noon, July 16, 1928.”

On the morning of that day French was examined in Pampa by three doctors who signed a statement recommending that French, because of a heart condition, take bed rest for up to six weeks. On the same day French wrote a letter to the Sacred Congregation of the Council in Rome protesting his transfer. And he met in the afternoon in the Chancery Office in Amarillo with Gerken, with Kaminsky present. According to the notarized record, Gerken told French that he would grant him a six-week leave once he accepted his appointment to Childress and celebrate Mass there on the following Sunday, 22 July. “The Reverend M. G. French agreed to this. Then shortly the Reverend M. G. French changed his mind and protested that the whole proceeding was unjust and unfair to him The Reverend M. G. French then walked out of the room without observing any of the customary civilities in making his departure.”

French apparently did leave White Deer, went to Childress, and celebrated the 22 July Mass. Before leaving White Deer he sent his appeal to Rome. There is no record to indicate that he took the six-week leave of absence. Responding to a 10 August inquiry from the Sacred Congregation of the Council, Gerken refuted each of French’s allegations against him. On 26 November, Rome ruled in Gerken’s favor. Correspondence with Father R. H. Kramer dated 8 March 1929, reveals that French was still in Childress, but thereafter departed for Brooklyn, where he obtained a position on the faculty of St. Francis College.

In 1935 he returned to Amarillo under Lucey, Gerken’s successor. Lucey assigned him to the staff of Price Memorial College, with the weekend care of churches in Vega and Dumas. After a year at Price, he had successive one-year stints at the cathedral in Amarillo, White Deer, and Odessa. In 1938, he was given permission to return to Brooklyn. There he served for 17 years as chaplain and religion teacher at St. Leonard’s Academy, a business school operated by the Franciscan Brothers of St. Francis Monastery.

There is no record that he ever again returned to the Diocese of Amarillo before his death on 14 August 1956 in

in St. John's Hospital, Brooklyn. His Funeral Mass, attended by an auxiliary bishop, fourteen priests, more than fifty brothers, and many alumni of St. Francis College and St. Leonard's Academy, was celebrated in St. Francis Xavier Church on 18 August. Father French lies buried in the Franciscan Brothers' plot of Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn.



Father Edward Cussen

Cussen, pastor of Sacred Heart Church, Canadian, had been suspended four years before Gerken was installed, but continued to live in a room attached to the church until 1929, claiming that he had personally paid for it. He never returned to ministry, became an attorney and Hemphill County judge, moved out of the room in 1930, and married a Presbyterian woman.

Becoming ill in 1958, Cussen asked to be admitted to the Veterans' Hospital in Amarillo. His wife, also ill, was a resident in a nursing home in Canadian. Visited by Tom O'Brien, Cussen asked to be reconciled to the Church and received the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Communion, and the Anointing of the Sick before he died 24 October. His widow refused to permit a Catholic Funeral Mass. A story that Bart O'Brien taunted

her, telling her she could have his body, "but we have his soul," appears to be apocryphal. Cussen was buried in the Canadian Cemetery after services in the First Presbyterian Church in Canadian.

The late Ben Ezell, editor of *The Calladiall Record*, began an article about Cussen with the words, "West Texas history is full of strange and unique characters, one of whom was a Catholic priest, Rev. E. J Cussen." Strange, indeed, as was the drawn-out encounter between a young German bishop and six Irish priests, all of whom played a role in the melodrama, and each of whom, by different routes, found his way home. By: +Leroy T. Matthiesen

Priest Killed in Car Mishap

No one apparently witnessed the accident that resulted in Father Florence Higgin's death. The Littlefield priest was returning from Rowena, where he had participated in a celebration honoring Monsignor W. F. Bosen. Near Sterling City, on a stretch of highway where the shoulder of the road had been hollowed out for repairs, Father Higgins apparently drove off the highway and lost control of the car, which turned over several times and threw the priest about 30 yards away. A passing motorist summoned an ambulance and the police. Father Higgins had apparently been killed instantly.

The body was brought to Bishop Springs, where Oblate Father William Moore, pastor of St. Thomas' Church, administered the last rites of the Church.

At the time of his death Father Hig

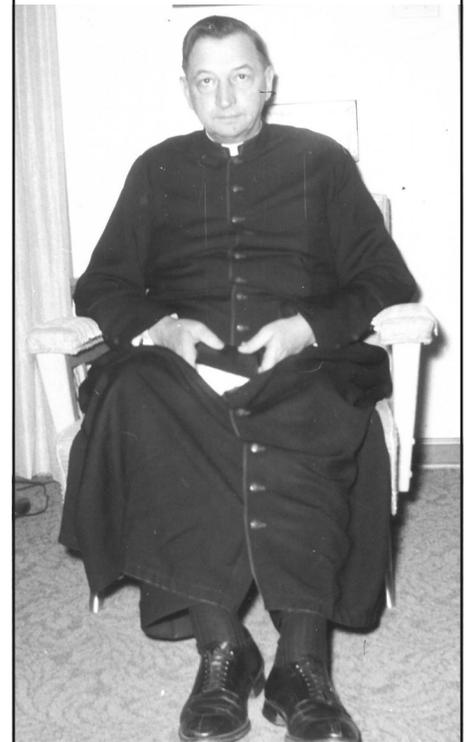
gins was directing the building of a new Sacred Heart Church in Littlefield, which will be completed soon. He was also pastor of St. Michaels' Church, Levelland, which was built under his guidance in 1950.

Father Higgins was pastor of the Littlefield and Levelland churches since 1944. In 1948, he celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. Father Higgins was born September 10, 1896.

He was one of the priests in the "Seemingly Conspiring Group."

HERE NO MORE

Once they were here, so much a part of our lives.



Monsignor John Steinlage -- Father John -- big and tall, purposeful, tense, gruff, given to moralizing (in a talk delivered at a St. Mary's - Price high school dinner he once advised the juniors and seniors not to excuse themselves eas-

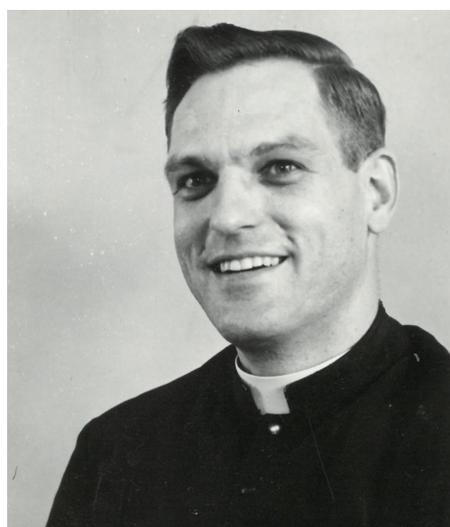
ures for fear “you may slide into hell on your “buts.”) He was a tower of strength and stern taskmater.

It is not difficult to conjure up a picture of old Sacred Heart Cathedra rectory and of Father John in his Monsignor’s cassock. Both are memories.



Monsignor Bart O’Brien – Father Bart-stained cassock and all, tackling endless prayers on at the end of Mass. Exhorting God to convert the Russians, bring rain down on the soil, and re-convert the strays, and marshaling an array of Irish and sundry saints in the unending battle of Holy Mother Church. His Bible was the Irish Ecclesiastical Review, copies of which he brought with him to deanery clergy conferences, to overwhelm fellow priests with the sheer weight of pages of argumentation, occasionally on the subject at hand.

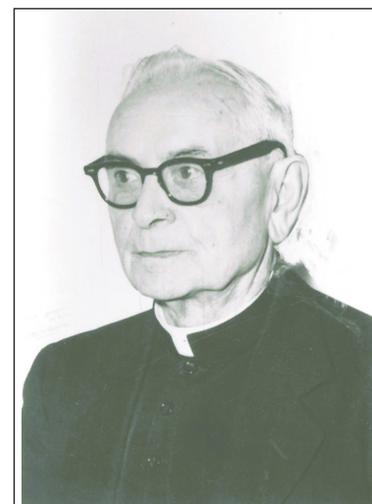
Fr. Ed Hartigan, big and blustery, with a broad Irish grin and a cigarette in hand. Quick-witted, articulate, friendly, he became a celebrity on “Religious Questions” when television made its debut in Amarillo in the early 1950’s. A good preacher and a mover (he began St. Joseph’s parish in 1953), he loved life and left it that way, suddenly.



Monsignor James Fitzgerald, energetic, quick of mind, with more theological depth than showed at first blush, ambitious for the Church, known to thousands in the diocese and throughout the country, loyal to those who helped him along the way. Most of thought he would be bishop – his mother was sure of it –but he died in the prime of his life shortly after he buried his mother. And many of our dreams went with him.



Father Hubert Halfmann, roly-poly, jolly, wise. We chortled the first time he played golf at Ross Rogers course in Amarillo, teasing him when he teed off at number four, hit a drinking fountain, and lost 50 yards on the drive. He took it good-naturedly, as was his way, only to come back in a few months to wipe out our foursome in a hail of pars and birdies. He had come out of the cow pastures of Olfen and the playing fields of San Antonio to fire balls at baffled batters and went from there to become a leader among his own in the diocese. He is painted in our memory with a philosophical smile on his face and a pipe in his mouth, at peace with the world and with himself.



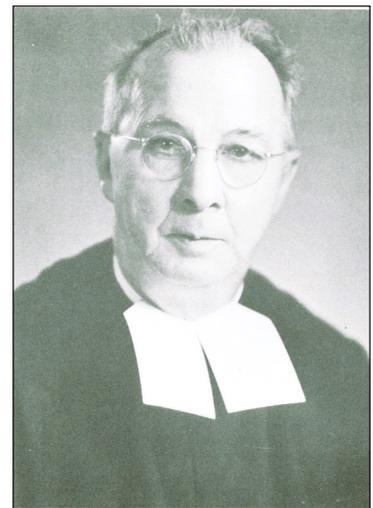
Father Andrew Quante, the good man who quietly went away one cold winter day in Panhandle. Gentle as rain, he nurtured the faith of those around him. His delight was to be with the children of men, even to the extent of doffing his cassock after Benediction on Sunday afternoons in Nazareth and donning a baseball uniform to pitch for the locals. His was a green thumb, and we were delighted to walk along the paths of his garden in Groom, to smell the flowers along the way.



Father Rupert Schindler, who lived out our philosophy professor's formula for a long life: Get a chronic illness early in life and take care of it. When we first met Father Schindler, it was in Groom in 1937, where Father Arnold Boeding had taken us to pick him up on our way to the Carlsbad Caverns. "A bad heart, you see," said Father Schindler as he declined to descend into the caverns with us. He stayed on top, to live another 30 years and more. They were curious years. He sometimes disappeared. Once he showed up on the farm of a parishioner, whom he had instructed not to tell anyone where he was. It was an effective way of getting away from it all. But, despite such idiosyncrasies, he lived and died a loyal priest.



Father Frank Kaminsky, in some ways the strangest of us all, yet with a depth of spirituality that wiped the smirks off our faces. He was given to passing out warm soft drinks ("cold soft drinks are bad for your stomach," he told us altar boys who had come to mow the rectory lawn in Olfen), drinking onion juice, eating Limburger cheese, sleeping on top of the dining room tables, and forbidding the men to enter the rectory with pipe in mouth (after which our father never entered the rectory again). One summer, when we were home from the seminary, we marveled at what he was doing in the pulpit: equipped with a stack of theological books, he announced to the farm folk that summer her would take them through the "School of the Holy Ghost." "He means well," people said. It was clear that Olfen was not ready for St. Thomas Aquinas and the like. Then one evening, years later, we had supper with him and teased him about the picky way he chose his food. Next morning, we found him dead in his chair.



Brother Paschal, for whom Paschal Stadium was named and who came in time to be known as "Brother Price." The affable eight grade teacher for years kept scrapbooks filled with clippings and pictures detailing every bit of the history of Price Memorial College and of the church in Amarill and it was his often-expressed wish to see St. Lawrence church built on the northwest corner of the school property, but he died in 1960, before his dream was realized.

Once they were here, so much a part of our lives, cherished, now remembered with fondness.

By: +Leroy T. Matthiesen

Thank you for
your generous
and
continued
support.



Fr. Gabriel E. Garcia, pastor at St. Joseph's Church, Amarillo, offers his homily May 9 in the parking lot at the Diocesan Pastoral Center, Amarillo, The Mass was celebrated after the performance of Coronado and Fray Juan de Padilla: A Pageant. In addition to presiding at the Mass, Father Garcia played the role of Fray Juan de Padilla in the pageant.

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**May - March
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Paulette Thomas	50
John Walsh	50
Don White	25
Amarillo Council of Catholic Women	0 200
Total	1340

MEMORIALS

Bishop Yanta by James Honea	100
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God our Father, Giver of life, we entrust the United States of America to Your loving care. You are the rock on which this nation was founded. You alone are the true source of our cherished rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Reclaim this land for Your glory and dwell among Your people.



You may stop by daily (Monday through Thursday) to view the museum. For a guided tour it is recommended that you make an appointment. The museum is open by appointment for church and school groups. This includes evenings and weekends.

Susan: (806)383-2243 Ext. 120 or even better: sgarner@dioama.org

Did You Know?

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