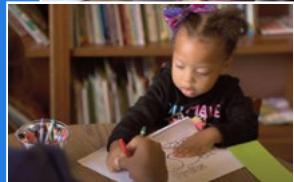
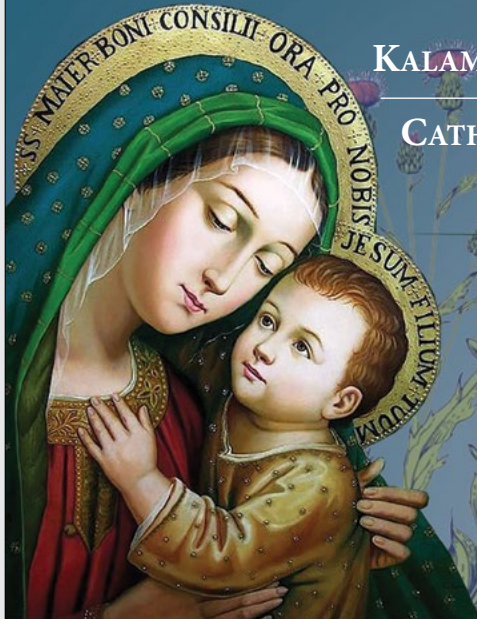


Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley

*Hear our prayerful blessings upon you
in recognition of your 50th Anniversary as a Priest.*

*We thank you for your precious gift
of the Holy Spirit.*

KALAMAZOO COUNCIL
OF
CATHOLIC WOMEN

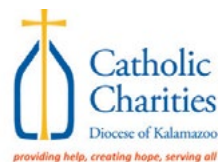


Bishop Paul J. Bradley,

We thank you for your
50 years of faithful service,
your guidance and support
of our Mission...

"We are God's hands
providing housing, health,
and hope to His children."

May the Lord bless you as you
have blessed so many and give
you continued peace and joy
in your service to God and the
community you lead.



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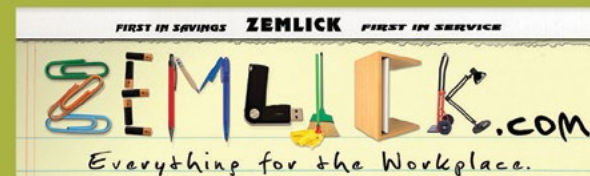
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CONGRATULATIONS AS YOU CELEBRATE
50 GOLDEN YEARS AS A GOOD SHEPHERD



Most Reverend
Paul J. Bradley

Your abiding devotion
and faithful service to
the Lord has touched
countless hearts and
inspired so many souls
— what a blessing you
are to the
Diocese of Kalamazoo.



ANNIVERSARY

YOUR STORY

*Thank you,
Bishop Bradley*

**Celebrating 50 years
of Priestly Ministry**

MAY 1, 1971 - MAY 1, 2021

Special anniversary feature

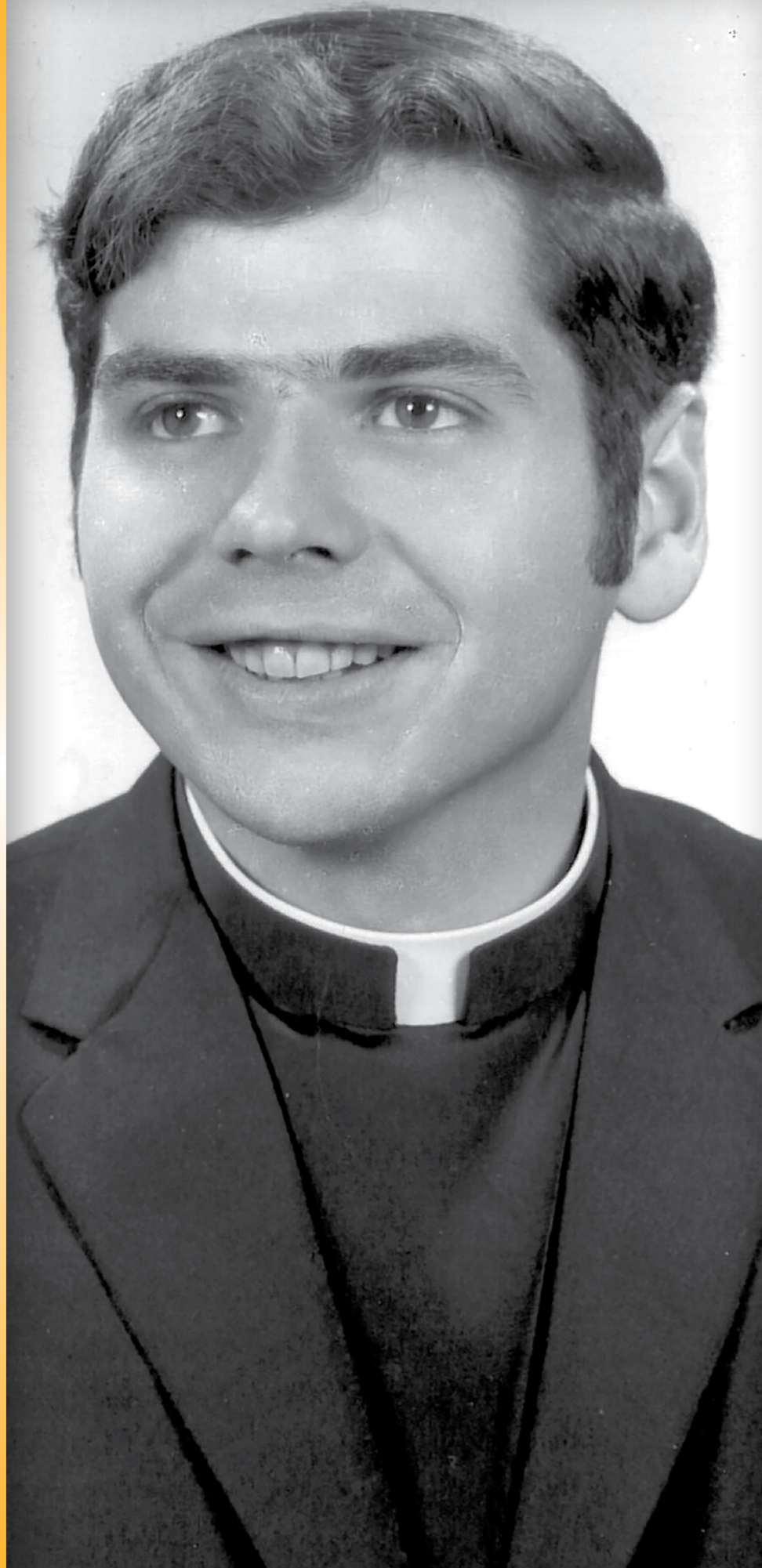
BY VICTORIA CESSNA

What was life like for a typical 25-year-old man in 1971? For those who weren't drafted and serving in Vietnam, they were likely working a job, bringing home a respectable \$10,000/year (average annual income) and saving for a house. For entertainment, they might catch the popular "Fiddler on the Roof," splurging the \$1.15 for the movie ticket. Or that year you may find them gathered around the television with family and friends, captivated by the Apollo 14 moon landing. And for Pittsburgh Pirates fans, they might be spending time cheering on their team during what would become their World Series winning season.

But there's nothing typical about Bishop Paul Joseph Bradley, who as a 25-year-old in 1971 was enjoying his last days of seminary.

For it was during this year that on May 1, Paul Bradley was ordained a priest at St. Paul Cathedral, Pittsburgh, along with eight other men, in an ordination class that was considered small in comparison to previous classes that boasted anywhere from 15-22 men.

And little did then Father Paul know during this same year, in a place almost 400 miles away in southwest Michigan, Pope Paul VI would call for the founding of the Diocese of Kalamazoo on July 21 — and that his priestly journey would connect with this diocese, bringing them to the year 2021, where together they get to celebrate their 50th Jubilee Years.



Early years

When reflecting on the roots of his vocation, Bishop Bradley oftentimes speaks of the faithful example of his own parents, John and Cecilia, who raised their eight children at 226 Monongahela Avenue, in Glassport, Pa., with a deep devotion to their Catholic faith. When not working or corralling eight children, his parents were avid volunteers at St. Cecilia's Parish in Glassport, Pa., just 12 miles outside Pittsburgh. The Bradley Domestic Church proved fruitful for vocations. His two older sisters heard the call to the religious life, Sister Roberta (who passed away in 2006 to the community of Divine Providence) and Sister Mariella, both joining the Religious Sisters of Mercy.

Third in line of the eight Bradley siblings, Bishop Bradley had just completed the eighth grade when he entered minor seminary (for high school age) at the Benedictine Archabbey of St. Meinrad in southern Indiana.

It was during these years that the Bradley siblings remember fondly the 10-hour car trips from Glassport to St. Meinrad, Ind. The youngest four girls were snuggled on the floor boards of the family car in makeshift beds their father made. Younger sisters, Sheila and Adele, attest to the vivid memory of watching their beloved brother bound across the St. Meinrad campus toward them. It was those trips, the sisters offer, that cemented the close ties all the siblings and the extended family retain today.

“I’ve never wanted to be up on a pedestal and they wouldn’t let me be on that pedestal; they’ve kept me grounded. It has kept me humble in the best possible way.”

“I want to say this in the most positive way,” adds Bishop Bradley, “my family has always treated me as one of the family. I’ve never wanted to be up on a pedestal and they wouldn’t let me be on that pedestal; they’ve kept me grounded. It has kept me humble in the best possible way.”

“We say often to one another how blessed we are that we all care about one another, that there are no divisions. All of our family members are a great support to me and continue to be. There’s not one whose wedding I didn’t celebrate or babies I didn’t baptize.”

“On this 50th Anniversary, I also realize how vitally important the love and faith of my family has been, especially that of my parents and siblings and their spouses, and my many nieces and nephews and their families; I continually learn from them, as I watch them raise children in these very challenging times. They show ‘24/7’ what Christ-like, generous, sacrificial love is.”

Father Paul

Asked what he remembers being most excited about as a newly ordained priest, Bishop Bradley answers quickly, “To celebrate Mass and hear confessions — those were the two main things I most looked forward to; bringing Christ to the people — that’s what being a priest means.”

His first pastoral assignment was to a large suburban, vibrant parish, St. Sebastian in Pittsburgh’s North Hills, where he was a parochial vicar for six and a half years.

“I was the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) priest; played my guitar at youth events and folk Masses and started a youth play that today still remains an annual tradition at the parish.”

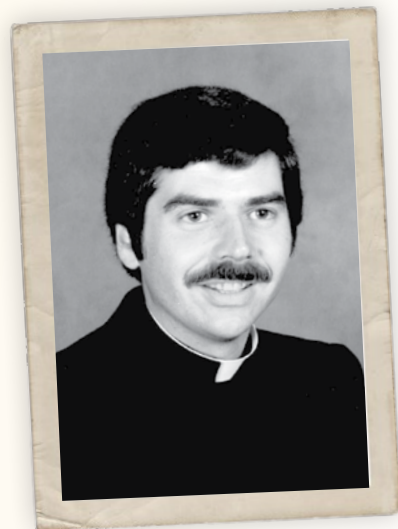
He then left St. Sebastian’s and was appointed to serve at several other parishes in the diocese.

It was during his time working at St. Paul Parish, Butler, Pa., that Bishop Bradley began to focus his pastoral ministry on family life and marriage. He developed programs for marriage enrichment and marriage preparation. The programs were very well received and “caught someone’s attention downtown,” notes Bishop Bradley. “Downtown” meaning the Diocesan Chancery Offices.

That attention led to Bishop Bradley being named director of the diocesan Family Life Office and then later being appointed Secretary for Human Services/Social Concerns, which included oversight of Catholic Charities.

He then eventually returned to his beloved first parish, St. Sebastian’s, but this time as its pastor.

Bishop Bradley had just been appointed to his second six-year term



“My advice to priests: don’t plan your own course; remain open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in whatever way that comes; and staying open to what God wants you to be doing.”

as pastor when the bishop asked him to be rector of St. Paul Cathedral.

“I was broken-hearted,” admits Bishop Bradley. “It was the most emotional and difficult change to make because I was so comfortable there and felt like I was accomplishing a lot and had a lot more to do.

“However, really, the whole thing about moving [changing assignments] is this: it was never what I wanted, but when I look back, I realize it was always the right thing.

“My advice to priests: don’t plan your own course; remain open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in whatever way that comes; and stay open to what God wants you to be doing.”



Photo by Victoria Cessna



Photography by John Grap

Life as a Bishop

In 2004, Bishop Bradley was appointed by Pope John Paul II as an auxiliary bishop for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. He also served for two years as the vicar general of the diocese and moderator of the curia. In 2006, the Bishop of Pittsburgh was transferred to Washington, D.C., leaving the diocese vacant for a period of 18 months. During that time, Bishop Bradley was appointed the diocesan administrator until Bishop David Zubick was appointed by the Holy Father to be the new bishop of Pittsburgh.

Did this prepare him to be a bishop of his own diocese?

“As an Auxiliary Bishop, I experienced the weight of the responsibilities of bishop up close and personal; I became very aware of what was involved. “

It was on St. Patrick’s Day, 2009, when Bishop Bradley received the call from the Apostolic Nuncio informing him of his appointment as bishop of the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

“It’s funny,” he remembers, “I first thought, ‘hmm ... Kalamazoo ... given its size and age ... that should be manageable,’ he laughs. “But even though we are relatively small, and as young as we are [as Diocese’s go] there are still a host of challenges here like everywhere else.”

However, despite the challenges, the same ones faced by dioceses across the country, such as waning vocations



Photography by John Grap

and declining Mass attendance, Bishop Bradley is quick to point out, “the joys truly do outweigh the burdens; but I must say that my hair is much grayer now than when I first arrived,” he jokes.

One of the new experiences coming to Kalamazoo was the experience of the rich diversity of the Catholic population, reflected in the large Hispanic/Latino communities.

“I was really concerned about not being able to communicate with them; how can I serve people if I can’t communicate,” he wondered. “That became my motivation to learn Spanish.”

To date, while Bishop Bradley would not characterize himself as fluent, he has 1,240+ consecutive days doing lessons on the Duo Lingo app.

One of the biggest differences between an auxiliary bishop and a diocesan bishop is the relationship between a bishop and the priests in the diocese. Throughout his



“... what makes the sacrament of confirmation so special is the opportunity to connect with (generally) a young person at a time when they’re excited about their faith.”



12 years as bishop of Kalamazoo, Bishop Bradley has ordained 17 men.

“It’s really a Father to sons relationship,” he says. “I try to build that awareness with all the priests much more than the notion that I’m their superior or their boss but that I’m their Spiritual Father.”

Recently while on retreat, one of the priests asked Bishop Bradley what he was happiest about as he reflected back on his 50-year priesthood legacy.

“Of course my tendency is to look at all the things I wish we could have done; there’s some disappointments there,” he admits. “But I think about some of the highlights, the Eucharistic Congress in 2019; the ecumenical gathering with Christian sisters and brothers through the Kalamazoo United event; the all schools Mass at Wings Stadium (2019); and I think those are great successes not because they were all large scale events but because they reflect a vibrancy of faith. We may have a long way to go; but we’re moving in the right direction.”

Confirmation

One of the great joys a bishop has, that only a bishop has the ability to confer, is the sacrament of confirmation. For Bishop Bradley, who has confirmed to date more than 15,000 people from his ministry both here and in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, this joy is ever present. And this year, marking the Jubilee Year of the Diocese, confirmations are taking place in the newly restored and renovated St. Augustine Cathedral, the Mother Church of the diocese.

And what makes the sacrament of confirmation so special, he notes, is the opportunity to connect with (generally) a young person at a time when they’re excited about their faith.

“The seeds are there; and hopefully at some point they’ll catch fire,” he says. “[As bishop] you get to be the instrument for bringing this person closer to the Holy Spirit and bringing the Holy Spirit closer to them.”



Bishop Bradley is shown with his six siblings after the special 50th Anniversary Mass held at St. Augustine Cathedral.

Looking ahead

When he first arrived in the diocese, Bishop Bradley became known for his work ethic and commitment to his ministry, quickly making pastoral visits to all 59 parishes in the diocese (which he’s embarked on a few times since) all the while maintaining a schedule complete with confirmations, pastoral events, diocesan meetings, etc. However, his schedule may soon free up a bit. When a bishop turns 75, which Bishop Bradley did last Oct. 18, they are required by Church law to turn in their letter of resignation to the Holy Father. Bishop Bradley did just that and currently awaits news of his successor, the timing of which is known only to the Vatican.

When asked about this impending retirement, Bishop Bradley admits, “Truthfully, I have to say, I’m not looking forward to it.”

He realizes that some people can’t wait until retirement, but Bishop Bradley intends to continue doing all that he can do. When the time comes, he’ll embrace it but not until then.

And what happens when he gets the call that his retirement’s been accepted?

“Pittsburgh was my home for 38 years as a priest, but

Kalamazoo’s my new home. I’m glad to be here and it’s going to remain my home.”

And when asked what he hopes for the diocese looking ahead to its 100th anniversary in 2071, he paints a vision that includes the following:

“I would hope the diocese would have had their 2nd Synod by then; that we would have an abundance of priests to the point where we’re wondering how we can share our priests with others; that we would have perhaps become home to 1, 2 or 3 religious women orders; that our Catholic schools are strong and thriving. And that most importantly the faithful are on fire with the sense of mission of living our Catholic faith and being good holy, joyful witnesses of Jesus Christ.” †

“I would hope ... the faithful are on fire with the sense of mission of living our Catholic faith and being good holy, joyful witnesses of Jesus Christ.”