

Alumni Spotlight

Msgr. James A. Moloney



Flying Father from the Golden Age

Al Sandner

He walks with a rolling, limping gait around the rectory, school and grounds of St. Anselm Parish in Dearborn Heights—due in part to thirty years of pounding as right wing on the Flying Fathers hockey team. On the wall of his pastor's office, cluttered with books, papers and other memorabilia of fifty years in the priesthood, hangs a framed certificate in Latin, signed by Pope Benedict XVI. It declares him *Protonotarium Apostolicum Supra Numerum*, meaning "Protonotaries Apostolic of the Highest Order." He is one of just three clerics in Detroit history to be elevated to this highest of three classes of monsignor, an honor the pope bestowed upon him in September 2005.

Msgr. James A. Moloney is a product of a generation he calls "children of the Great Depression" and "tweeners," because we were between World War II—too young to serve—and the Korean War—already in seminary." They were also tweeners, he says, "because we went in under Vatican I and came out on the eve of Vatican II." His generation came from the so-called Golden Age of Catholic Detroit, when perhaps sixty percent of the city and a controlling majority of its leaders and politicians were Catholic, "and we all identified ourselves by the parish we attended."

Monsignor Moloney is one of only two from his college ordination class of 1953 still in active ministry, the other being Bishop Thomas Gumbleton. Active is the operative word: he has been pastor of St. Anselm for nearly thirty years, while directing the Archdiocesan Society for the Propagation of the Faith, serving on the College of Consulters to Cardinal Adam Maida, heading the cathedral renovation project, serving on the board of the Stewards for Tomorrow Endowment Campaign and still anticipating further challenges.

"People ask me why I don't retire. I'm seventy-six. What else will I do?" he says of a calling he has wanted "since I was in the second grade."

The son of a World War I Canadian flying ace and Henry Ford test pilot, Monsignor was also the child of an obedient generation, honoring his father's wish to delay entry into Sacred Heart Seminary until after his 1948 graduation from St. Mary of Redford High School.

Ordained in 1956, he served five years at St. Joan of Arc Parish in St. Clair Shores before Cardinal John Dearden named him Archdiocesan Director for the Propagation of the Faith. This assignment resonated perfectly with interests sparked by stories he heard as a youth from Fr. Lawrence McAuliffe, a missionary to China from the Scarboro Missions of Toronto.

In his capacity as director, Monsignor Moloney has visited fifty-eight mission countries, raised \$100 million for mission activity and turned Detroit into the most generous mission-supporting archdiocese in the country. Since 1975, he has served as National Vice President of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In any given year, he coordinates Mission Sunday requests to the archdiocese from three hundred bishops and mission societies, signs some 20,000 mission-related letters and performs untold "mission animation" tasks—all while shepherding a flock of eight hundred families and 170 grade school students, and praying over the future of his beloved church.

So, what does he think about his new title? "That's something they give you when you're too old to be a bishop," he laughs.

Al Sandner (High School '52, College '56) is a retired journalist and was press secretary and speechwriter for former Michigan Gov. William Milliken.