

A Bit of Viatorian History

Viatorians Help the Ill Bear their Cross with Grace and Patience

Last year at the "Festival of Faith" of the Archdiocese of Chicago, **Deacon Donald Wehling** of St. Hilary Parish visited the Viatorian booth. He mentioned two connections he had with the Viatorians. The first connection is that his uncle was **Fr. Joseph Donahue**, who worked with the labor unions in Chicago for many years. Another connection he has with the community is that he organizes the Roman Catholic Mass at the Interfaith Chapel which is located on the grounds of the former Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium.



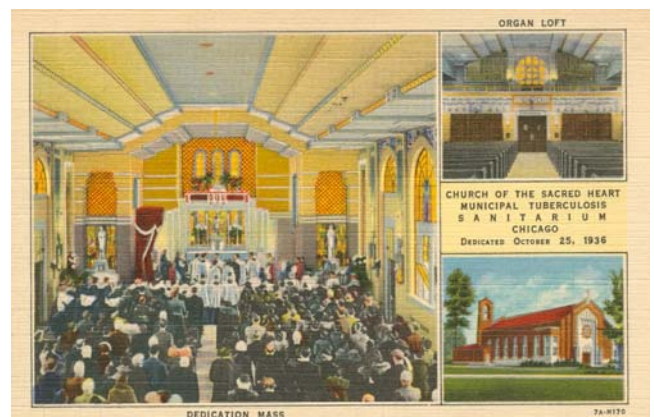
Deacon Wehling informed me that Viatorians served as chaplains at the sanitarium for sixty years -- since its opening in 1915 until its closing in 1974. He invited me to attend the 9:00 A.M. Sunday Mass at the chapel and see the memorial to the work of the Viatorians. We often hear of long-term Viatorian ministry commitments in schools and parishes, but it might be good to remember a long-term commitment our province made to the ministry of hospital chaplaincy.

Because the Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium was located at 5601 N. Pulaski, two miles north of the former Saint Viator Normal Institute, archdiocesan officials asked **Fr. Eugene Rivard** to supply the sanitarium with chaplains. Father Rivard appointed **Fr. Patrick Leary** to care for patients at Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium. Viatorians who served in the early days were **Frs. Charles Saint-Amant, Joseph LaPlante, Joseph Belair, John Farrell** and **William Stephenson**. But it was **Fr. Auguste Tardif** who really developed the ministry with impressive ceremonies, well-trained choirs and an active sodality. Fr. Tardif was the first Viatorian to live on the grounds of the hospital. By 1934 he even had an assistant – **Fr. William A. Harris**. Through the years 14 other Viatorians ministered at the chapel, among them **Frs. James Toolan, J. P. O'Mahoney, T.E. Fitzpatrick** and **Elder Senesac** – who served the MTS for twenty years, and was the last Viatorian to serve as chaplain at the sanitarium.

During Fr. Tardif's time at the sanitarium, **Mr. Frank J. Lewis**, a Catholic industrialist and noted philanthropist, provided the funds for the construction of the Chapel of the Sacred Heart. The chapel, with a seating capacity of 400 and living quarters for the Viatorian chaplains, was dedicated in 1936.

The days were busy ones for Viatorians who ministered at the Sanitarium. Fr. Fitzpatrick told the New World in 1951: "They begin their daily schedule with morning Masses at 5:45 and 7 AM...

The priest who has his turn for the first Mass, goes upon its conclusion throughout the three infirmary buildings, distributing Communion on each floor...The chaplains begin their daily rounds [of visits] after the patients' morning rest period is over. The nature and location of those visits will vary according to needs and circumstances...Special care is always given to the 'critically ill' and to those who are recuperating from surgery." Viatorians heard confessions, led devotions to the Sacred Heart and novenas to the Sorrowful Mother, and provided catechesis. An average of 150 a year embraced the Catholic faith. Viatorians also attended to the families of the sick.



Perhaps, Fr. Senesac, best summarized the contribution to the pastoral care of the patients at the MTS: "In our rounds of visits, we try to help the patient bear the cross of sickness as gracefully and patiently as possible so he will remain in the institution until his cure is effected and he is ready to go back to his family and society. We hope to make them realize this is where they must be in order to get well. We feel we bring them spiritual consolation and some material assistance, like writing letters for their relatives." (Chicago Sun-Times, June 24, 1957)

Today the 164 acre tract of land is known as North Park Village. Besides apartments and housing for the elderly, North Park provides youth programs, special events, environmental programs and health facilities. Sacred Heart Chapel is an interfaith chapel at which Roman Catholic Masses are organized by the nephew of a Viatorian.

Br. Daniel Lydon, CSV



Sacred Heart Chapel