

Church ACTIVITIES
EDITED BY MARY C. RITCHIE

Father William Bresnahan Sees Blessing in Malady

Polio Lengthened Life?

An increasingly familiar figure around the corridors in St. John Hospital these days is a dark-haired man of pleasant, scholarly countenance, who spends part of each day in visiting patients.

He walks down the halls and when I see a door open I go in and visit awhile. Sometimes the patients are strangers and sometimes they are out they recognize me or I remember them as former parishioners."

The visitor also is a patient and he is confined to a wheelchair—a victim of polio.

When a doctor in Weiser, Idaho, told the Rev. William Bresnahan, 63, one fateful day last August that "you have polio," Father William replied, "Oh, no, doctor, I'm too old."

He was then 66—he reached his 47th birthday last New Year's day—1959, to be exact, on Jan. 1, 1959.

There was no denying that the strength had gone from his legs and the muscles would no longer respond to command and the patient was left with the right, and oddly, the thumb of his right hand was more affected than any other finger.

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"That's the strange thing about polio," the Benedictine priest explained, "it can hit you in different places and neglect one part of the body more than another."

Father William did not have the hubar type that calls for an iron lung or special respirator—the high-grade, or brain-type, apparently used when the lungs are involved.

But the disease nevertheless felled a man who was a powerful figure—a man of 5 feet 10½ inches who weighed 180 pounds when he was pastor of St. Joseph's parish here.

Father William admits that there were times when he weighed more than that and that he even had a practice demonstration of a blessing.

Father William had days when he was not very successful—diabetes, and was dependent upon frequent use of insulin.

Success, a patient definition, was not a far-off factor. But the good priest never did love to eat and eating was something he neglected (eaten seriously).

Now, the priest's weight is 110 pounds—a loss that indeed was accomplished, the hard way and under the guidance of an unforeseen and unseen spiritual force. And his diabetic condition is under control.

No less an authority than Dr. Harold Neu, head of the polio rehabilitation center at St. Joseph's or Craig Hospital in Omaha, has pronounced that being stricken with polio "added 10 years" to Father William's life.

An ironic turn of events physiologically and of philosophical impact, certainly.

Now, there is a long road back to recovery. Life in the leg muscles and each day there are two one-and-a-half-hour sessions of physical therapy. Taking personal charge of the priest's disease daily works, it is true.

The medical agenda for the priest calls for a physical therapy of 40 hours. "You see, the less weight my legs have to carry the better off I'll be."

His right leg now flexes to directed motion and the priest is less responsive. He showed the difference by tugging at each. Father William also explained that there was no actual paralysis—he never completely lost control of his legs. Now his strength has returned to his arms, and he can use his hands to answer the telephone and to help himself in many ways. A special exercise and other writing equipment in his room give evidence that he spends time in correspondence.

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It still seems puzzling—and like a nightmare—how it happened that this stal-



—News and Leader Staff Photo
Patient visits patient . . . Father William comforts a former parishioner, Robert Fargheron, 265 East Olive, at St. John's Hospital.

wart man of the cloth crumpled. May 22, 1937, and in the same ordination class was the Rev. Francis Murphy, who in his be-cause Father William's successor at St. Joseph's Parish here. The Benedictine priests customarily are known by their first names in the Order.

After he was ordained, Father William taught for two years at the seminary in Conception and then was sent to Brawley, Calif., where he was in charge of the seminary mission from 1942. Once he returned to Conception Abbey, this time as procurator, or business manager.

After about a year he was appointed, in October, 1943, as assistant priest at St. Joseph's Parish and served as chaplain at old St. John's Hospital here until 1946 when he was pastor of Conception Parish in the community, which is near Maryville. He remained to Springfield as pastor at St. John's Hospital from October, 1954, until May, 1956.

That summer he assisted in the establishment of a minor seminary and monastery at Elkhorn, Neb., where he was a student of the monastery and in addition was spiritual director and teacher in the seminary. At that time he had 13 priests and four brothers in residence. The first year's enrollment of lay students was 170, and during the school year there were 200 enrolled.

The priest has now returned to have fulfilled his talent for teaching and his ability as an administrator—an ecclesiastical career that has been temporarily

But Father William is on the road back. Each day in the beautiful chapel at St. John's he is taught by the Benedictines to be patient and to bring his strength to his muscles. While he was not stricken with the worst type of polio the priest's whole body was weakened and his heartbeat was cut down more than half.

From then on there have been careful manipulations to keep him healthy in the physical areas, primarily the legs, a fight that will be pursued for some time. As the days passed he lost weight and his health improved and time and rest helped to his face. On October 14, accompanied by his brother, Father William traveled by plane to St. Louis for an experimental treatment at the Cerebral and Mental Rehabilitation Center—one of five patients there. Through that time his care and treatment had been primarily under the auspices of the Polio Foundation.

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Last month Father William came back to Springfield "at the church of the Sisters of Mercy" and the special invitation of Sister Chrysostom, administrator of St. John's Hospital.

Frequently she looks in to see all that is there, where he is getting along—she can find him in his room. The nurses have no trouble with him, at least as far as taking pills, for he gulps down a handful scarcely breaking off a sentence during an interview.

At one point he showed off a new pair of black walking shoes that fit him like gloves—another measure of progress.

Father William, who was born in Afton, Iowa, has spent many years in Missouri for he attended high school and two years of college at Conception Seminary, Conception, Mo. He entered the monasteries there and after three years went to Rome where he studied at the Pontifical Institute of St. Anselm, a college of the world-wide Benedictine monastic order.

He returned to Conception where he was ordained a priest on

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1st 40 Days
STER (APRIL 17)
the sepulchre at the sun."

Mark 16:3

lilies bloomed in pristine . . . Three women it dawning light . . . To sweet spices for the dead spie the fact that He had . . . That He would in three . . . Their hearts were . . . They did not seek . . . Easter morn but they while Apostles stayed away, devotions pay.

JULIEN C. BYER

Christian Science

Special treasures available to all who are there, the Lesson—Sermon entitled "Oppression" to be read at Christian Science services today.

The divine source of true substance is to be found in passages to be read from the Bible, including the following:

"Treasures of wickedness . . . delivered from death. The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to perish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked."

From "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy, it follows will be read (43:14): "Man walks in the direction towards which he looks, and where his treasure is, there he walks." It is written, "If love and affections are spiritual, they come from above, not from beneath, and they bear as of old the fruits of the Spirit."

Pastor at Lebanon
Is Lenten Speaker

The Rev. Arnold Prater, pastor of First Methodist Church, Lebanon, will be the guest speaker tonight at the 7 o'clock service at Grace Methodist Church, the second Sunday evening Lenten service.

The Lebanon pastor attended George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and Northeast Missouri State College at Kirksville. Following his graduation he served as teacher and football coach at Kirksville High School. He entered the ministry in 1949 and has served pastorates at Centralia, Corder and Bellair prior to coming to Lebanon.

During World War II the Rev. Prater served as a radio operator/gunner on B-17s with the 8th Air Force, stationed in England.

He has written several articles which appeared in "School and Community," the state Teacher Education journal, and in "The Nationalist," magazine of the National Board of Evangelism. The Rev. Prater also is the author of a book of sermons, "Model T King."