



It's about 35 miles as the dove flies from Sacred Heart Chapel in Darlington to "Padre's Pad" in Morris Plains. But it's been a 59-year trip for Rev. James Fallon from his ordination in that cathedral to this "retirement" house adjoining St. Virgil's – the parish family he chose to retire with.

Fr. Fallon was born and raised in Passaic County and served his priestly career in Morris County: 13 years as a young curate in St. Vincent's, Madison; 10 years building the parish of Christ the King in New Vernon; a year and a half at St. Michael's in Netcong; 25 years as St. Virgil's pastor, and now 10 years of "quiet" retirement.

James Leo Fallon was born on April 5, 1918, in Paterson and christened in Paterson's St. Agnes Church. He is the eldest of five Fallon children. His parents continued to live until their deaths in their quiet, family neighborhood of Clifton.

Jim Fallon was educated at St. George's Grammar School in Paterson. The young man then traveled to St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, where he conquered the formidable Latin curriculum and graduated in the top half of his class. But he was never really very far from St. George's as his pastor kept a close, paternal eye on his high school progress.

James Fallon entered Seton Hall University, and, after two years on the South Orange campus, continued his education at the Immaculate Conception Seminary in Darlington. He graduated from Darlington in 1943.

Fr. James Fallon was ordained on December 18, 1943, at the Christ the King Chapel of the Newark Cathedral and celebrated his first mass at his home parish of St. George's. Less than two weeks later he reported to St. Vincent's in Madison on New Year's

Eve. He said his first mass at St. Vincent's on Jan. 1, 1944.

He joined two other curates in Madison, including Christian Haag, another St. George's parishioner and long-time neighboring pastor of St. Margaret's in Morristown. Fr. Fallon served as curate for 13 years in this busy parish and began to exhibit some of the special characteristics that were to become lasting Fallon trademarks.

St. Vincent's parishioners describe him as "a very religious priest," "a very sincere person," and spoke of his commitment to the spiritual life of his parish.

"Always an intellectual," according to a colleague, he was adept at teaching the huge high school CCD classes and worked daily with the grammar school. This commitment to Catholic education and love of teaching would continue to shape his life.

It was here at St. Vincent's that James Fallon began to understand that God had made him a natural teacher. "The man is always teaching", a long-time Morris Plains friend says. At St. Vincent's, he found he was skilled in personal instruction, especially with converts. His ability to make the Catholic Church come alive has been so successful that other priests send potential converts to him.

During his tenure at St. Vincent's, Fr. Fallon carried this talent down the road to St. Elizabeth's College, where he taught theology for more than four years. Later, he taught at Bayley Ellard Regional High School – a relationship which was to continue to grow.

Fr. Fallon worked with the women's group at St. Vincent's and was active with youth program, including coaching basketball teams. A number of those boys he coached later had their sons playing for Fr. Fallon at St. Virgil's.



James L. Fallon

**Ordained
December 18, 1943**

Father worked very closely with St. Vincent's families, especially the young married. This concern with the family later made him instrumental in the Pre Cana program, an early director of the Family Life movement. This commitment to the family was later to make him a very active figure in Marriage Encounter.

One of his duties was chaplain to the Madison volunteer fire department — a relationship which grew uniquely warm one May morning. As Fr. Fallon attended the children's mass, he noticed a fire in the church. With the help of one of the sisters, he led the children to safety before the fire gutted the interior and the church tower collapsed. Except for his quick action, "There could have been a catastrophe," according to a witness. (St. Virgil's parishioners may recall a later encounter with firemen in church when the Easter Vigil was interrupted by firemen walking down the aisle to investigate a reported fire, when someone misinterpreted the burning of the palm at the beginning of the vigil service. The firemen were met with that characteristic Fallon smile and aplomb: despite the solemnity of the service, the celebrant couldn't help but enjoy the humor of the situation.)

As the curate responsible for St. Vincent's physical plant, Fr. Fallon supervised the refurbishing of the fire-ravaged church, providing him with invaluable experience for his next assignment.

In 1956, Fr. Fallon undertook a census of the New Vernon area of St. Vincent's, exploring the viability of creating a separate parish. He said his first mass in the New Vernon fire house that year, and every Saturday thereafter chairs and kneelers were brought up from Madison for these firehouse masses.

His first midnight mass was said in a large stable on Christmas, 1956. Hay was piled high, as animals from the real-life crèche added their comments to this unique Christmas liturgy. Fire engines were parked outside, just in case the tinder-dry hay provided Fr. Fallon with the opportunity to lead his second escape from a burning building.

Fr. Fallon was assigned to organize the New Vernon parish in 1957, and he literally built Christ the King from the ground up. On October 3, 1957, a parishioner donated 15 acres of Harding Township land for the construction of Fr. Fallon's church and "Operation Firehouse" was underway. The pastor kept his parishioners informed of building progress through a series of epistles.



Fr. Fallon presents a gift from St. Virgil's Parish to the Archbishop of Salzburg, Austria, during a pilgrimage to Europe in 1984. Our patron, St. Virgil, was bishop of Salzburg in the Eighth Century.

Fr. Fallon was pretty much of a one-man-band during these early Christ the King years: setting up for the firehouse masses, driving a donated school bus to pick up children for religious education, and carrying chairs to parishioners' homes for classes. This responsibility, energy and nose-to-the-grindstone style was a Fallon characteristic at St. Vincent's and continues today when he his retirement years are more active and vital than many in the prime of their professional lives.

Another hallmark of the man was his aversion to dunning parishioners for money. For the stable midnight mass, bushel baskets were set up at the door for donations. He also didn't believe in collections in the firehouse, despite the fact that Bishop McNulty told him the collections were his salary.

Eventually Christ the King Church and later a rectory were completed under Fr. Fallon's close supervision. Both buildings reflect the personality of the pastor: strong brick structures with

an engaging charm and grace. As one parishioner said: "The Rectory of Christ the King *is* Father Fallon — very masculine, very beautiful!"

Another thing which is very much Fr. Fallon is his strong social conscience. At St. Vincent's, he worked hard to bring minorities into the parish. At Christ the King he took a family of Cuban refugees into his rectory. Later, at St. Virgil's, he helped lead a drive to construct senior citizen housing and renowned for his personal care of the homeless.

And social concerns led this priest into the political arena, where he says Catholics must be to fulfill their Christian responsibilities. Politics became essential for the pastor as he fought to protect his newly-built parish from the jet age. The New Vernon area was slated to become the metropolitan area's major jetport, until residents convinced Congress to declare part of the township a national wildlife refuge. His moral conscience has led Fr. Fallon to be an outspoken advocate for the Right to Life.

Midnight masses continued to be a special feature of Christ the King after the stable gave way to the church. Visitors would travel from miles around to participate in the chamber music services which conveyed a very classical Christmas spirit.

Fr. Fallon celebrated his last Christ the King mass on June 26, 1966, and, after a short period as pastor of St. Michael's in Netcong, was named St. Virgil's pastor in January, 1968.

Fr. Fallon took over the St. Virgil's reins following the death of Monsignor John Tracy, a parish and community institution.

The new pastor quickly applied his administrative experience to parish finances. St. Virgil's ran in the black for most of his tenure as pastor, during which time he built an adult center dedicated to Msgr. Tracy, and later a school library which for his 50th ordination anniversary was dedicated to Msgr. Fallon.

Fr. Fallon's administrative acumen is also greatly respected by the St. Virgil's parish leaders he has worked with during his pastorate. This management skill and decades of management experience is now greatly prized by Bayley Ellard High School where he works with the development program in addition to his teaching and counseling.

Noted for progressivism at Christ the King where he heard face-to-face confessions in the police headquarters, Fr. Fallon followed his own quiet kind of change at St. Virgil's. "I've seen him make a complete turn around on any number of issues," says a former parish council leader. "But it was always done in such a quiet, non-assuming, deliberate and well-considered way..."

Fr. Fallon is a voracious reader, and stays current with all of the changes in the church. He is willing to implement these changes, and has accepted innovations in many areas of parish life, including the Whole World parish retreat, Jesus Week, and the full-day Family Encounter.

His reading has fueled an encyclopedic knowledge of the Church, Church history, spirituality and changes in the Church. "Monsignor Fallon is always up-to-date on the Church," says one long-time acquaintance. "If anything, his sermons and teaching are better after his retirement because they contain so much new information."

He is especially attuned to innovations offering spiritual development and has been a Cursillo team priest, and made Charismatic and Marriage Encounter weekends.

The intellectual side of James Fallon the life-long student was highlighted by two accomplishments of his St. Virgil's pastorate.

The first was the St. Virgil's Centennial year of 1981. The year-long celebration was allowed Fr. Fallon's love for history, especially church history, to flourish. He supported and encouraged the research and publication of the parish history and the monthly events celebrating that history. Also that year, he was elevated by the Holy Father to Prelate of Honor with the title Monsignor.

One of the outgrowths of the centennial inspired by the pastor was the renewed focus on St. Virgilius, including the donation of the St. Virgil's relic from Assumption parish. Fr. Fallon led a pilgrimage to Europe in September, 1984 which included a visit to Salzburg, Austria, where Virgil was Bishop.

The pastor continued his athletic lifestyle in Morris Plains, improving his golf and tennis games, skiing some of the better slopes in this country and the Alps, biking, jogging and weight lifting. He even managed to get in some fishing and hunting when he had the chance. His concern with physical fitness is characteristic of his thoroughly professional approach to all undertakings, and has resulted in a healthy, active, dynamic retirement.

Monsignor Fallon continues his active life through his retirement, although he is more likely seen on the golf links than the ski slopes.

James Fallon the teacher, who began to grow in his first days at St. Vincent's, has flourished since his retirement. He currently teaches religion at Bayley Ellard and counsels students. He teaches and counsels in the St. Virgil's RCIA program, runs a course in the New Testament for St. Virgil's, and works with the parish's scripture study programs. "The man never stops teaching", according to an active St. Virgil's parishioner.

Monsignor Fallon's love for St. Virgil School was a hallmark of his pastorate, as was his dedication to Catholic education at all levels. His tenure saw the development of the parish school endowment fund and the high school tuition assistance program.

The focus of this charity is to assist young people who could not otherwise afford a Catholic education. This was a consuming commitment throughout his St. Virgil's



CENTENNIAL MEMORIES: The mayors of Morris Township and Morris Plains presented awards to Fr. Fallon at the dinner dance honoring our Centennial year in 1981. Below, Fr. Fallon explains a painting of the original St. Virgil's church at an ecumenical service during the Centennial.



pastorate which he has expanded in his retirement. In addition to the Golf Tournament for St. Virgil's School, he is responsible for the "Monsignor James Fallon Educational Scholarship Fund" at Bay Ellard – also dedicated to helping young people receive Catholic education.

The Bayley-Ellard connection, which started when he was in New Vernon, blossomed in the last 10 years. Monsignor Fallon teaches religion and counsels students daily, serves as chaplain, sits on the board of trustees and development board, and is in charge of facilities and planning in addition to the scholarship fund.

When he was confronting retirement, Monsignor Fallon said that he planned to continue his ministry with the Marriage Encounter movement. But God had another plan. Bayley Ellard needed help, and James Fallon the teacher found a ministry perfectly matched to his talents, experience and passions — literally, a match made in heaven. The vision, inspiration, energy and leadership James Fallon brought to building a new parish in New Vernon and leading an active parish in Morris Plains, he brought to a revitalized regional Catholic high school in Madison. It is no coincidence that Bayley's re-birth coincides with Monsignor Fallon's retirement.

What better role model and inspiration for the students of Bayley than a priest who embodies the spiritual works of mercy?

Because, first, last and always, Monsignor Fallon is an intensely spiritual man. "A very priestly priest" as one parish leader put it. "He's never too busy to deal with the spiritual needs of his people. He's always there when you need him." If you have a problem, or need to speak to someone, you won't find a more concerned listener than James Fallon.

Deeply religious, Monsignor Fallon prays the "Liturgy of Hours" — the morning noon and night prayers of the church — every day. Others speak of his sincerity in all things, his generosity and his "humanity." He is a man of great character, taste and class.

His continued presence in the St. Virgil's parish family is a gift beyond price to the people who loved him as a pastor and love him even more deeply as pastor emeritus. Monsignor Fallon began planning his retirement in Morris Plains years before June



Fr. Fallon receives gifts to outfit his "Padre's Pad" home and celebrates with parishioners at his "house party" marking his retirement in 1993



1993 when he stepped down. He immediately saw potential of the bequest of the neighboring West Dover Avenue property, which was ready as "Padre's Pad" when he stepped down on June 15, 1993.

His "house shower" had a very homey touch, with presents of brooms, sewers and furniture to outfit his new home. Parishioners had painted and refurbished the house in time for him to move in.

Monsignor Fallon annotated the best of both worlds – he was close enough to be fully involved in his parish family, but was free to set his own agenda. This agenda included the opportunity to satisfy his appetite for reading and study, as well as his lifelong interest in travel. Before and after his retirement, Monsignor Fallon has thoroughly enjoyed trips to Alaska, Caracas Venezuela where he officiated at the wedding of the son of a former parishioner), Florida, Europe, The Holy Land as well as serving as chaplain on a cruise.

But retirement hasn't slowed down his down his

frenetic life style. In addition to his fulltime jobs with Bayley Ellard, Monsignor Fallon continues to serve St. Virgil's. Pastor, Fr. William Winston says "Monsignor Fallon is the embodiment of the ideal priest: deeply religious, compassionate, learned and always caring. He is a tremendous role model for all younger priests. His commitment to his parish family at St. Virgil's is boundless. I don't know how we could function without him."

Monsignor Fallon celebrates a minimum of seven Masses a week at St. Virgil's, makes sick calls, fills in for Baptisms, teaches a course each year in the New Testament, and works with the parish scripture study groups. In our one-priest parish. Monsignor Fallon is the emergency fill-in when Fr. Winston is unavailable. He never hesitates when an emergency sick calls interrupts a meal. When needed, Monsignor Fallon is always ready to serve – as he has for the 59 years of his priesthood.

As we pause briefly to mark this point in his dynamic priestly life, let us all say thank you James Fallon, for sharing yourself.

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