

'This Doesn't Mean

I'm Ready For

The Rocking Chair'

Msgr. Toner Retires

By **ART HOPPER**
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"This doesn't mean I'm ready for the rocking chair," Rt. Rev. Msgr. Michael J. Toner, pastor of St. Margaret's R. C. Church, Pearl River, for the past 28 years, said in announcing to his parishioners that he was retiring to pastor emeritus of that church.

He will continue in residence at St. Margaret's rectory because, as he puts it, the home for retired priests in New York City is "a place for old men."

Msgr. Toner, who likes the more simple and personal title of Father Toner, has served in the priesthood for more than 57 years, and in Pearl River since December of 1939. He has many friends among all faiths in the community, and is fondly described as "a Christian gentleman."

Because of his outstanding service to St. Margaret's Church and school, Father Toner was twice honored by the Vatican. In 1954 he was appointed a domestic prelate, with the title of Rt. Rev. Msgr. In 1963 he was elevated to the titular rank of Protonotary Apostolic by Pope Paul VI, and given the privilege of wearing the Episcopal (Bishop) insignia of Mitre, Ring and Dalmatic, and of Pontificating at ceremonies on various occasions during the year.

IN 1960, when Msgr. Toner completed a half century as an ordained priest, plus his 10 years of preparation, was honored at a golden jubilee banquet. Only one other priest in Rockland County, the late Rt. Rev. Msgr. James Crosby, pastor of St. Ann's Church,

Nyack, from 1890 to 1934, ever achieved the distinction of celebrating a Golden Jubilee while serving in the county.

Msgr. Toner is a native of Red Bank, N.J., but spent his boyhood at Dobbs Ferry. He was graduated from St. Joseph's Seminary, Dunwoodie, and was ordained in St. Patrick's Cathedral on May 21, 1910.

A man of scholarly bent, Msgr. Toner has been noted for the line of poetry and the classic quotation. At St. Charles College, Baltimore, Md., one of his professors was the noted poet-priest, John Bannister Tabb. During his student days, Msgr. Toner was an outstanding athlete and a most capable public speaker. During his pastorate at St. Margaret's the church and parish grew along with the community. A parochial school was completed in 1953, and later came an 8-classroom addition with a cafeteria and several new utility features, including a convent for the Sisters who run the school.

WHEN THE parish became too populated, Msgr. Toner worked for the creation of a new parish and a mission church, St. Aedan's, on Ehrhardt Rd., Pearl River.

Father Toner's first parish was St. Mary's in Kingston followed by several assignments in New York City. At one time he was attached to old St. James Church on the lower East Side, where the late Governor Al Smith, then entering his political career as sheriff of New York City, was his next door neighbor. His last city parish previous to being assigned to Pearl River was St. Martin of Tours in the Bronx.



MSGR. TONER

Now, after 28 years at St. Margaret's, he considers Pearl River his home and his parishioners his family. So strong is his feeling in this direction that he requested that he be continued in residence in the rectory after retirement as pastor.

He will be succeeded as pastor of St. Margaret's by Rev. Michael Vincent Bell, pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Port Jervis. Father Bell will arrive in Pearl River early this month.

Catholics, Protestants and people of the Hebrew faith in Pearl River have joined in wishing Father Toner "Long life, good health, and continued happiness among his multitude of friends in his retirement."