

“It was not you who chose me, but I  
chose you and appointed you to go and  
bear fruit that will remain...”

– JOHN 15:16

# Father Norm

J. Normand Tremblay grew up in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, South-bridge, was later a pastor there, and is comfortable being close to his roots.

“My rope only goes 10 or 15 miles,” Father Norm jokes, “then it pulls me back home.” Many of his priestly assignments have been in southern Worcester County.

His physical home today is a house on a lake in Brookfield. And his spiritual home is the close-to-home parish of St. Joseph’s in Charlton.

Father Norm bought his lake house 40 years ago and says you couldn’t even buy a car today for what he paid for it.

“It’s a great outlet, for physical, manual work; a great change of pace,” he said.

One of his favorite hobbies was a little sailboat, a Sunfish.

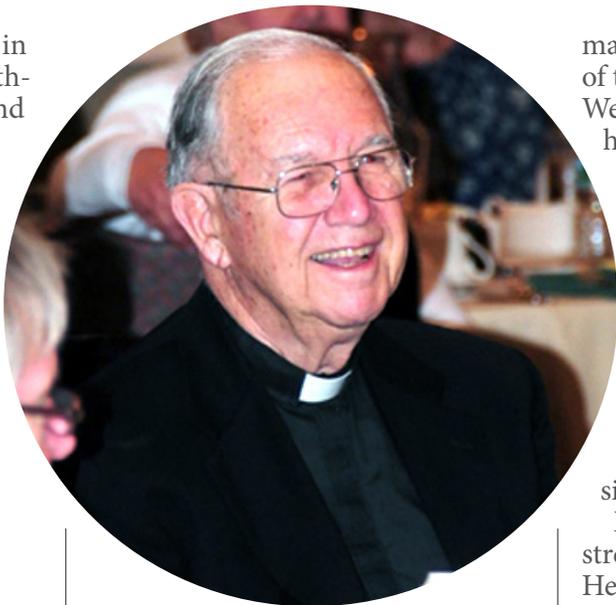
“I had that for about 25 years. I’d go out on the lake, then have to figure out how to get home using just the winds.

“I gave that up a few years ago,” he said.

“It is good to live on a lake,” he mused, “Every season has its charm and beauty. It is a nice, peaceful, quiet place to live.”

At St. Joseph’s he has had the pleasure of his company for 21 years. He came to us as a senior priest in 1992 and he has been here longer than any other assignment.

Our beloved Father Norm turns 86 on July 6 and on June 4 marked



60 years a priest.

Reflecting on his six decades as a priest, Father Norm said he often wonders, “Why me Lord?”

“The thing that keeps coming back to me is, I did not choose to be a priest, the Lord chose me.

“That is so overwhelming that the Lord would call me to be a priest. I did not think I was the type of material. I had a speech defect as a teen. Somehow, I overcame it. It is not that bad. I wondered though, how will I ever give homilies?”

“It is an overwhelming thought that he would take the poor material I brought and turn me into a priest,” he said.

The seeds of his vocation were planted by a priest and a nun during his grammar school years at Sacred Heart of Jesus School.

“A young priest in the parish did

many things with us. He spent a lot of time with us, was very nice to us. We all wanted to be altar servers for him,” he said.

Also, a nun who kept asking if he had thought of becoming a priest, kept the question in his heart.

“My parents were very religious, faithful, they prayed regularly. But they never pushed me or even asked the question. But they were very supportive when I made my decision to become a priest,” he said.

Being a priest is not a one-way street, he said, it is a two-way street. He cherishes being close to the people and being part of their lives. He is not only able to do things for them, such as administer the sacraments, but they do a lot for him.

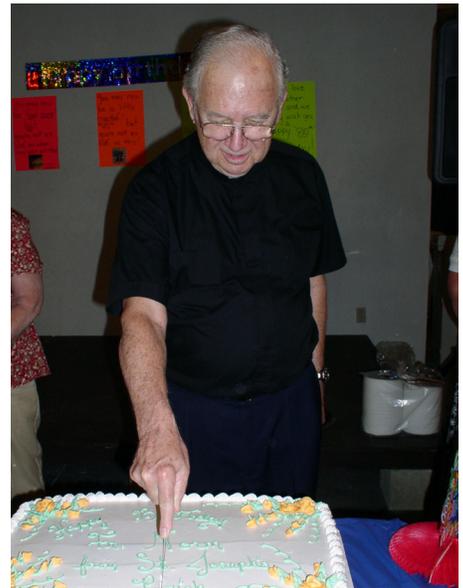
“To me that thinking was partly supported by what came out of Vatican II. Vatican II said, don’t wait for people to come to you, be part of their lives, be part of the real world, the real Church,” he said.

“It can be at times difficult, but most of the times very satisfying. When there are good things, you rejoice with them. And the families of the sick are a great consolation to me.”

It is clear that Vatican II shaped his priesthood.

“It was just being implemented and I caught the fever. It was a wonderful new way of doing things,” he said.

At the time, in the early ‘60s, he was working at Catholic Charities



and going to Boston College School of Social Work for his master's degree. He always lived at a parish and said that Msgr. Raymond Page, then pastor of Notre Dame Parish in Southbridge, was a great influence.

"Msgr. Page was a visionary, a great champion of Vatican II. He was a historic figure in that regard.

"We had one of the first parish councils. We were the first parish in the country to establish (an Anglican-Roman Catholic) covenant; with Trinity Episcopal church.

"We were invited to pray together and work together. We prayed for each other every weekend. It was very meaningful then."

Father Norm used that example of Vatican II parish life when, in 1974, he became pastor of his boyhood parish of Sacred Heart. He created a team ministry working collaboratively with a fellow priest and a religious sister.

"People were all excited about Vatican II. They asked to be eucha-

ristic ministers, lectors," he said.

He sees that excitement in lay people again in the call for the new evangelization.

"I am not so much involved now, but I see with great excitement the growth of spirit coming from prayer groups, Cursillo. I see an increasing desire for adult education" that is making a real difference in people.

"I see the new evangelization as a great plus in encouraging people in their faith," he said.

The greatest challenge of his priesthood hit close to home.

"Unfortunately, I had the responsibility of closing the parish school I went to. (Sacred Heart of Jesus Elementary School in Southbridge closed in 1976.)

"We had 70-some kids, many were not Catholic. It was real difficult. The people were very much attached to the school. But somehow people came to see the validity of it and tried to adapt. Then they became excited about what we as a

parish could do.

"With the school, we did not have any money. When we closed the school, the parish was really able to do what we needed to do."

Being a parish priest he had as a model St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars. His model is "to be available to and to be in the presence of people. He was with them, part of them, available to them, 18 hours a day. I see his work identical to mine," Father Norm said.

Those 60 years of 18-hour days went by fast, he said. And he would do it all over again.

He compares his life as a priest to that of proud grandparents talking about their grandchildren and all the joy that they give them.

He reflects on the number of people he has baptized, given first Communion and married.

"I look at myself as being a grandfather-figure to them.

"That's me, exactly," he said.

What advice would he give to young men considering the priesthood?

"Hope springs eternal.

"Be optimistic.

"Be of good cheer.

"Do not be afraid. The Spirit tells us we will not do it alone, the Spirit says, 'I will help you; be with you.'"

"Priesthood is two words," he said. "Mystery and gift.

"How did this happen? How did this come about?

"And, what a gift it is!"