



# Barquilla de la Santa Maria

BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society-  
Diocese of Columbus

Volume XXXI, No. 4

April 6: St. William of Eskiloe

April, A.D. 2006

## His Parish ... His People ... His Town Father William J. Spickerman

by J. Michael Finn

### Introduction

When Father William J. Spickerman died in 1971 *The Catholic Times* described him as one of the last “old-time pastors.” His service to the parishioners of St. Mary Parish in Marion, Ohio began before the Great Depression. When he retired in 1962 he had been pastor at St. Mary for nearly 34 years. Through the ups and downs of parish life, his commitment and dedication to his parish, his people, and to his town of Marion never wavered.

### The Early Years

William J. Spickerman was the son of William J. and Catherine (Woll) Spickerman. He was born in Cincinnati on October 14, 1883. The family resided in Sacred Heart Parish in an area of Cincinnati known as Camp Washington. His father was a bookkeeper with a downtown business address. The 1892 city directory lists only his mother, Mrs. Catherine Spickerman, as a dressmaker. In 1893 she is listed as a confectioner with business Welker and Spickerman. The business and residence were at 2812 Colerain Avenue, which was close to Sacred Heart Church. The 1901 directory lists young William residing at the same address. His occupation is “scholar.”

William’s elementary education was received at Sacred Heart School in Camp Washington.



Father Spickerman admiring the Papal Blessing he received in 1958.

He began his studies for the priesthood at St. Gregory Seminary in Cincinnati where he received both his high school and college education. In 1904 he entered Mount St. Mary’s of the West Seminary in Norwood, Ohio, where he received his theological training. Cincinnati Archbishop Henry Moeller ordained Father

William J. Spickerman on June 19, 1908 in ceremonies at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Father Spickerman's first assignment for the Archdiocese was as assistant pastor of Holy Angels Church in Sidney. In 1910 he was transferred to St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Dayton, where he served for a year as hospital chaplain. He returned to Cincinnati in 1911 and served as assistant pastor at his home parish of Sacred Heart in Camp Washington. It was in 1913 that he received his first pastorate, at St. Joseph Church, North Bend, Ohio. On September 4, 1919 he was named pastor of St. Aloysius Church in Bridgetown, Ohio, where he spent the next nine years.

On December 1, 1928 Archbishop John T. McNicholas, O.P. appointed Father Spickerman pastor of St. Mary Church in Marion, Ohio. At that time Marion St. Mary was part of the Cincinnati Archdiocese.

### **St. Mary Church**

The first recorded Mass held in Marion, Ohio was offered on January 13, 1844. Prior to that, Father William Schonat and Father J. M. Young had irregularly visited the area's Catholics. Regular services began in 1844 in private homes and then moved to the "Old Huber Rooms" in a Mill Street building owned by the Methodist Church.

Irish immigrant and Marion businessman Timothy Fahey purchased a plot of land on Prospect Street from Marion founder Eber Baker. On September 22, 1853 Fahey donated the land to St. Mary's for the construction of a church. Work was begun on the property in 1861. Bishop Sylvester H. Rosecrans (auxiliary bishop of Cincinnati) dedicated the new red brick church in 1862.

Foreseeing the need for more land for future expansion, Father John M. Mackey with Timothy Fahey, John O'Regan, and Thomas Joy purchased adjacent land fronting on Main Street, on September 26, 1868. In 1875 Father

Joseph Quattman built the first school on this Main Street property. In September 1875 three Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati came to Marion and began teaching at the new school. The first principal was Sister Sylvester with Sister Ann Alexis and Sister Bertha assisting her. The school also served as the sister's residence. After the demolition of the original church, a larger school was constructed and opened on September 24, 1905 on the Prospect St. property and a new convent was built next to the new school.

By the 1890s the original St. Mary red brick church was becoming too small to service the growing population of the parish. Father James A. Burns began construction of a new church on the Main Street property in October 1891. The cornerstone was laid on October 14, 1894. The new church was dedicated on October 23, 1898 during the pastorate of Father Michael Mulvihill.

The parish of St. Mary continued to grow and, as more Catholics came to Marion County, new mission churches were established at LaRue, Cardington, and Caledonia. By the time Father Spickerman arrived in Marion in 1928, the parish and outlying mission areas were thriving, although St. Mary's was carrying a sizable debt that would not be helped by the pending national economic crisis.

### **A Sympathetic Ear and Sound Advice**

Father Spickerman began his work as pastor just prior to the arrival of the 1929 economic collapse. It is reported that "Father guided his people through the troubled days of the Great Depression, always ready with a sympathetic ear and sound advice to all who came to him." Under Father Spickerman's leadership the parish was soon out of debt and the parish school was growing in attendance.

After the Depression Father Spickerman began to build the athletic program at St. Mary School. Father Spickerman had played baseball as a youth in Cincinnati and continued his interest in sports

through the students. Football and basketball teams were formed at St. Mary, coaches were found and games with other schools were scheduled. In 1940 the parish purchased an athletic field on the corner of Ballentine Avenue and Farming Street in Marion to provide a practice field for the outdoor athletic programs at the school.

By this time the 1898 St. Mary Church was beginning to show its age. Father Spickerman directed his attention to a major building renovation. The complete remodeling of the church interior was started and it was completed in 1945. The result of the remodeling was a more modern and a more brightly lit church interior.

On January 4, 1945 Marion County was transferred from the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to the Diocese of Columbus. On the same date, Archbishop John T. McNicholas, O.P. of Cincinnati installed Bishop Michael J. Ready as the fifth Bishop of Columbus. One of the Deacons of Honor at Bishop Ready's installation ceremony was Father Spickerman.

Soon after Bishop Ready's installation in 1945, the Diocese of Columbus was divided into five Deaneries and Father Spickerman was named Dean of the Western Deanery. A dean acts as a representative of the bishop in certain administrative matters and is the senior administrative head of a group of parishes. The Western Deanery included Hardin, Marion, Morrow, Union, Delaware and Madison Counties. The parishes of the Western Deanery were as follows:

Immaculate Conception, Kenton, Ohio  
Our Lady of Lourdes, Ada, Ohio  
St. Mary, Marion, Ohio  
St. Joseph, LaRue, Ohio\*  
St. Lawrence O'Toole, Caledonia, Ohio\*  
St. Joseph, Cardington, Ohio  
Sacred Heart, Milford Center, Ohio\*  
Our Lady of Lourdes, Marysville, Ohio  
St. Mary, Delaware, Ohio

St. Patrick's, London, Ohio  
St. Joseph, Plain City, Ohio

\* Parish no longer exists

In 1944 Father Spickerman established Moria Hall in unused space under the church. The hall was used as a meeting space for parish clubs and Catholic societies. Beginning November 17, 1952 the hall was also used as the school cafeteria when new food service equipment was purchased and installed. The cafeteria had a full time director and dietician. The mothers of St. Mary school students provided volunteer labor in the kitchen.

In 1947 Bishop Michael J. Ready made his first Episcopal visit to the Marion County parishes. The Bishop noted the progress made in breaking down the barrier of prejudice that had surrounded the Catholics in the county for a number of years. Marion had always been a hotbed of anti-Catholicism.

One of the reasons for the improved relations with the non-Catholic community was Father Spickerman's practice of working with the non-Catholic community. In a time when Catholic priests and non-Catholic ministers either ignored each other or regarded each other as enemies, Father Spickerman built a regular dialogue with the non-Catholic community of Marion. His peers often criticized him for this practice. He liked to talk about the things that all of the Christian churches had in common rather than the differences that divided the religious communities. He was often invited to speak at Protestant church functions. Father Spickerman's activities helped make the Catholic congregation in Marion more visible and active in the community, which in turn helped to dispel some of the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the time.

Father Spickerman was also a good friend to his community of Marion. He knew everyone in the city and was actively interested and involved in civic affairs. He gave of his time

and energies because he was interested in the welfare of his city. He often took walks through the downtown area of Marion and enjoyed the many greetings he received from its citizens. As a community activist, he founded the Marion Safety Council and was one of the founders of the Marion Community Chest (the predecessor of the United Way). Father Spickerman was also active with the Boy Scouts and founded the St. Vincent De Paul Society to further aid the poor of the community. On June 10, 1947 Bishop Ready named Father Spickerman Chaplain of the Ohio State Council Knights of Columbus, a position he would hold for two years.

#### **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

Father Spickerman's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a priest was a major celebration for the parish. On June 20, 1948 a celebration was held by the Western Deanery to recognize the anniversary and Father Spickerman's accomplishments at St. Mary Church.

The celebration began in St. Mary Church on Sunday morning when Father Spickerman celebrated a solemn high Mass. Father Jerome E. Bartel (a former classmate of Father Spickerman), pastor of the Cincinnati Church of the Nativity, was deacon and Father Everett G. Depenbrok, chaplain of Springfield Mercy Rest Hospital, was the sub-deacon. The sermon was delivered by Father Francis B. Lay, a former assistant pastor at St. Mary and then assistant pastor of Cincinnati Church of the Annunciation.

There was a public reception, followed by a solemn benediction and a banquet that evening. Preceding the banquet Father Spickerman was presented with a new automobile, a gift from the parishioners. He also received a spiritual bouquet from the pupils of St. Mary School. Representing the city of Marion was Mayor Harry L. Dowler. Toastmaster for the evening banquet was Father William O'Donnell, pastor of Cleveland Mt. Carmel and past state chaplain of the Knights of Columbus. Speaker at the banquet was Bishop Michael J. Ready. Bishop

Ready's remarks cited the current lack of reverence for good, the lack of justice, and the lack of good Christian virtues. He emphasized the contribution a worthy priest can make in a community in improving these virtues. "Certainly in these trying days we need priests to lead the way for recognition of justice and in the way of peace," said Bishop Ready.

Many priests were in attendance from both the Columbus and Cincinnati dioceses. Among them were several ordained from the Parish, namely Father John Kelly of St. Michael, Sharon; Father Robert Von Kaenel of St. Mary, Piqua; Father Benedict Rubeck, O.F.M.C. of Carey; Father Dean McFarland, S.T.D. of St. Paul in Cincinnati; and Father Hugh Simpson of Duns Scotus College, Detroit.

In his remarks, Father Spickerman referred to his associations of 20 years in Marion as an example of Americanism, where there is cooperation in educational, athletic and community fields. He expressed the hope that "as years go on the memory of this happy occasion will never fade."

#### **Parish Work Continues**

During the summer and fall of 1953 major roof repairs were made to the church. The 8-foot tall, 70 pound cross on the church's steeple needed to be re-plated. The cross was removed and sent for re-plating. It was returned to the steeple on October 30, 1953. C. A. Miller, the contractor assigned to the work, replaced the cross atop the 175-foot high steeple. Working without a safety belt and as the assembled students from St. Mary school sang *Holy God, We Praise Thy Name* Mr. Miller carefully replaced the cross. When it was finished a cheer for Mr. Miller went up from the assembled students.

Father Spickerman managed to take some time for himself, although the parish consumed most of his free time. Reportedly he played a very slow game of golf. One of his passions was the new medium of television. He had two favorite TV shows, *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* and the *Red*

*Skelton Show*. He often scheduled his parish duties so as not to miss them in the evening.

### **A New Catholic High School**

In May 1955 it was announced that the diocese had purchased a twenty-acre tract of land on Mt. Vernon Avenue. The land was purchased from Marlow Zachman. The intended use of the land seems to have been somewhat of a secret. It was not until October 1955 that it was announced that a new Catholic high school was to be built on the site.

Father Spickerman began a drive for funds for the new high school in November under the chairmanship of Dr. Daniel Murphy. The goal was to raise \$500,000 toward the construction costs. When the successful drive ended in December 1955 pledges totaling \$610,851 had been collected.

On November 4, 1956 the parish took the first step toward the construction of Marion Catholic High School when Father Spickerman dug the first spade of earth in a groundbreaking ceremony held at the site. The ground was broken with a chrome-plated shovel that was presented to Father Spickerman by A. E. Knowlton, President of the Knowlton Construction Co. of Bellefontaine, the chief contractor for the project.

Bishop Michael J. Ready laid the cornerstone for the high school on April 10, 1957. Assisting Bishop Ready at the cornerstone laying were Father Spickerman, Father James J. Carroll and Father Edward Hudacek.

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**

The year 1958 marked Father Spickerman's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a priest. His parishioners and his community prepared a celebration worthy of the event. In honor of the event Marion Mayor Wendell L. Strong proclaimed the week as "Father Spickerman Week." The *Marion Star* called the festivities "almost as much a community affair as a church event." The *Star* editorial on June 13, 1958 noted, "Father

Spickerman's tremendous record of service and achievement in Marion is by no means limited to his own church. On the contrary he is well known, admired and revered by citizens of all faiths. There is little doubt in anyone's mind that Father Spickerman has been a leader and a tower of strength..."

On June 14 and 15, 1958 the ceremonies to honor Father Spickerman were held. A public reception was held June 14 in the new Marion Catholic High School auditorium to give all of the residents of Marion an opportunity to extend best wishes to Father Spickerman.

The activities on June 15, 1958 (Father's Day) began with a Solemn High Mass at the high school. A testimonial dinner was held after the Mass followed by a reception for the clergy. Columbus Bishop Clarence J. Issenmann presided at the Mass. Father Spickerman was the celebrant, with Father Jerome Bartel of Cincinnati as deacon and Father William Huber, a former Marion resident and assistant pastor at Columbus St. Mary Magdalene, serving as sub-deacon. Masters of Ceremonies were Monsignor James J. Carroll, former assistant pastor at St. Mary and Chancellor of the diocese, and Father Robert Noon and Father Edward Hudacek, assistant pastors at St. Mary. Father William O'Donnell, Pastor of Our Lady of Cleveland Mt. Carmel delivered the sermon. Members of the Fourth Degree, Knights of Columbus, acted as an honor guard and ushers for the Mass.

Following the Mass a testimonial dinner was held in the CIO Union Hall on Leader Street in Marion. Bishop Issenmann was the main speaker at the dinner and Father William O'Brien, pastor at Delaware, was the toastmaster. Over 400 parishioners and guests attended the dinner. The parish gave Father Spickerman a gift of \$5,000 and a gold pen and pencil set in recognition of his anniversary.

"This is truly Father's Day," said Bishop Issenmann to open his remarks. Bishop



The clergy at Marion Catholic High School, after Father Spickerman's 50th anniversary Mass on June 15, 1958. Fathers Bartel, Spickerman, and Huber are vested. Monsignor Carroll is in surplice, behind them. Bishop Isseemann is in the rear.

Isseemann suggested that Father Spickerman's 30 years as "chief shepherd" of the St. Mary parish, make him "not only a father, but a grandfather as well." Addressing the assembled parishioners, Bishop Isseemann said, "It is truly a great honor for you to be recognizing a pastor celebrating a golden jubilee. It should give each of you great satisfaction to so honor one who has ascended to the altar of God's service."

Father Spickerman then spoke on his life as a priest, recounting both amusing and serious experiences he had experienced during his half-century of service to God. He noted that he was "nothing short of overwhelmed" by the many activities held in his honor over the past week.

A reception for 70 members of the clergy of the diocese was held in St. Mary's rectory following the dinner and also included Father Spickerman's relatives and state officers from many Catholic organizations.

### **His Retirement and Death**

Father Spickerman retired in June 1962 and was named Pastor Emeritus of St. Mary. He continued to live at the St. Mary's rectory until 1965. On January 1, 1971 Father Spickerman passed away at age 87. Since 1965 he had been living in a private home under the care of Mrs. Edward Quinn in West Jefferson, Ohio. Mrs. Quinn had met him when he was a patient in St. Anthony Hospital in Columbus.

On Monday, January 4, 1971 Father Spickerman's body was brought back to Marion where he was laid in state in St. Mary Church. On Tuesday, January 5, 1971 a solemn funeral Mass was held. The chief celebrant was Columbus Bishop Clarence E. Elwell.

Assisting, among others, were sons of St. Mary who had become priests: Father William Huber of New Lexington St. Rose; Father Carmen

Arcuri, assistant at Columbus St. Leo (both baptized by Father Spickerman); Father Dennis Ring, assistant at Columbus Christ the King; Father Bennett Rubeck, O.F.M. of Louisville, Kentucky; and Msgr. Robert Von Kaenel of Piqua St. Mary Parish. Following the funeral ceremony, Father Spickerman was buried at St. Mary Cemetery in Marion, Ohio where he rests today in the peace of Christ.

*The Marion Star* eulogized Father Spickerman with these words: "One of Marion's most beloved former citizens was paid final respects here today. Almost everyone he had come in contact with here had a special spot in his heart for Father Spickerman. Marionites long will revere his memory" An editorial in

*The Catholic Times* called Father Spickerman, "a good priest and a lovable gentleman."

### Conclusion

Marion St. Mary Parish grew and flourished under Father Spickerman's leadership. Notable during his long tenure as pastor was the maintenance and expansion of the parish and its educational heritage. Father Spickerman was ahead of his time in his early ecumenical work within the larger Christian community. This work helped to establish an identity and mission for his Catholic parishioners within the community of Marion. Father Spickerman will be remembered in Marion as truly the last of the "old-time pastors."

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## Abstracts from *The Catholic Telegraph*

(Continued from Vol. XXXI, No. 3)

April 15, 1854

### Dedication and Confirmation.

On Palm Sunday, the new and beautiful church erected in Steubenville, by the Rev. Em. Thienpont, was dedicated to Almighty God, in honor of the Holy Apostle St. Peter. The church is 94 feet long, and including the sacristy 110 feet, and 46 feet in width. From floor to ceiling it is 24 feet, and it is surmounted by two towers with their spires, each 94 feet from the foundation. These two spires are, of course, surmounted by Crosses, and there is a Cross on the apex of the pediment of the front wall, between the towers.

The new church is built on the site of the one erected in 1832 by Rev. Mr. McGrady, O.P. There is a splendid basement room under nearly the entire church, twelve feet in the clear, and well adapted for chapel and schools. A bell has also been procured, one of the best from the foundry of Mr. Coffin, of Cincinnati. It weighs 2,700 pounds [see correction below], and has a fine clear and mellow sound, which floats like music over the Ohio, and is heard for miles around.

Rev. Father Driscoll, S.J. (Van der Drisken,) of Cincinnati, labored for an entire week with apostolic zeal to prepare members of the congregation, the youth particularly, and the

faithful railroaders, for their Easter duties. The mission was well attended. About 350 persons received the Holy Communion and 102 were confirmed, of whom at least 60 were over sixteen years of age; and of these, some on this occasion made their first Communion.

The most Rev. Archbishop preached to the First Communicants at the 7 o'clock Mass, before the blessing of the church at 11 o'clock, and before the blessing of the bell and administering of Confirmation in the afternoon. The High Mass was sung by Rev. Mr. Brazil, of Wheeling, assisted by Rev. Messrs. Driscoll and Thienpont as Deacon and Subdeacon; and the two former clergymen preached in the afternoon and evening to a congregation untiring in its anxiety to hear the word of God.

Besides the credit due to the zealous Catholics of Steubenville and the poor workmen on the railroad, we must not forget our grateful acknowledgements to the non-Catholic citizens, who subscribed the handsome sum of \$800 towards the building. May all receive the reward of charity and liberality!

Subscriptions: John Myers, Wilksville; John Brady, James McGuinis, Michael Hart, and Val.

Owsney, Steubenville; James Sweeney, Hanging Rock.

April 22, 1854

TYPO PRANKS.--The typo added 1,000 lbs. to the weight of the church bell in Steubenville. We had written 1,700 lbs., which he changed to 2,700.

Donations to the Boys' Asylum: Ignatius McKenzie, Mt. Vernon, \$1.

An account of the dedication of St. Dominic's Church in Washington D.C., carried out by Rev. G. A. J. Wilson, O.S.D., assisted by Rev. S. A. Clarkson, O.S.D., and others, is reprinted from the Collegian.

Subscriptions: Rev. M. St. Herzog, Temperanceville; M. J. Braddock, Somerset.

April 29, 1854

An account is given of the consecration of Dr. Young as Bishop of Erie.

#### Conversion

Mrs. Emilie Bennett, 43 years old, an American lady, before belonging to the Baptist Church, was solemnly received into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church on Easter Sunday, by Rev. D. M. Winands, pastor at Canal Dover. This is the seventh convert during five months, by the same zealous clergyman.

Subscriptions: Martin Miller, Delaware; Rev. Mr. Ford, William Poland, and Michael Rigney, Chillicothe; James Barrett, Ironton.

May 6, 1854

Obituary of "the excellent Mrs. Brent"...Mt. Vernon, died suddenly on the 18th... Rev. Mr. Brunnemann was so good as to come up and perform the burial ceremony for her... Mrs. Brent was a respectable English convert, the mother of the Rev. Julius Brent of Mt. Vernon.

Subscriptions: James Henon, Circleville; Luke Davis, Carrollton; Mr. F. E. Clark, Somerset; Wm. Brophy, Mt. Vernon.

May 13, 1854

Rev. Mr. Herzog has been recently appointed to the pastoral care of St. Michael's and St. Peter and Paul, and other stations, Monroe Co.

Obituary.

With feelings of sincere and deep regret have we to announce the death of Mrs. MARGARET CECILIA TAGGART, wife of Arthur Taggart, Esq., Windsor, Morgan Co., Ohio, in her 38th year. This melancholy event took place on the 22d of April. By it six children are deprived of the care of a most affectionate, enlightened Christian mother; her husband, of a devoted and confiding friend; the poor, of a kind and generous benefactress; and society, especially Catholic society, of a distinguished ornament. To her aged and estimable mother, Mrs. Conger [Cronyn?], near Zanesville, and her numerous relatives and friends, we offer heartfelt condolence, and unite with them in wishing her the reward of her well-spent life.

*to be continued...*

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