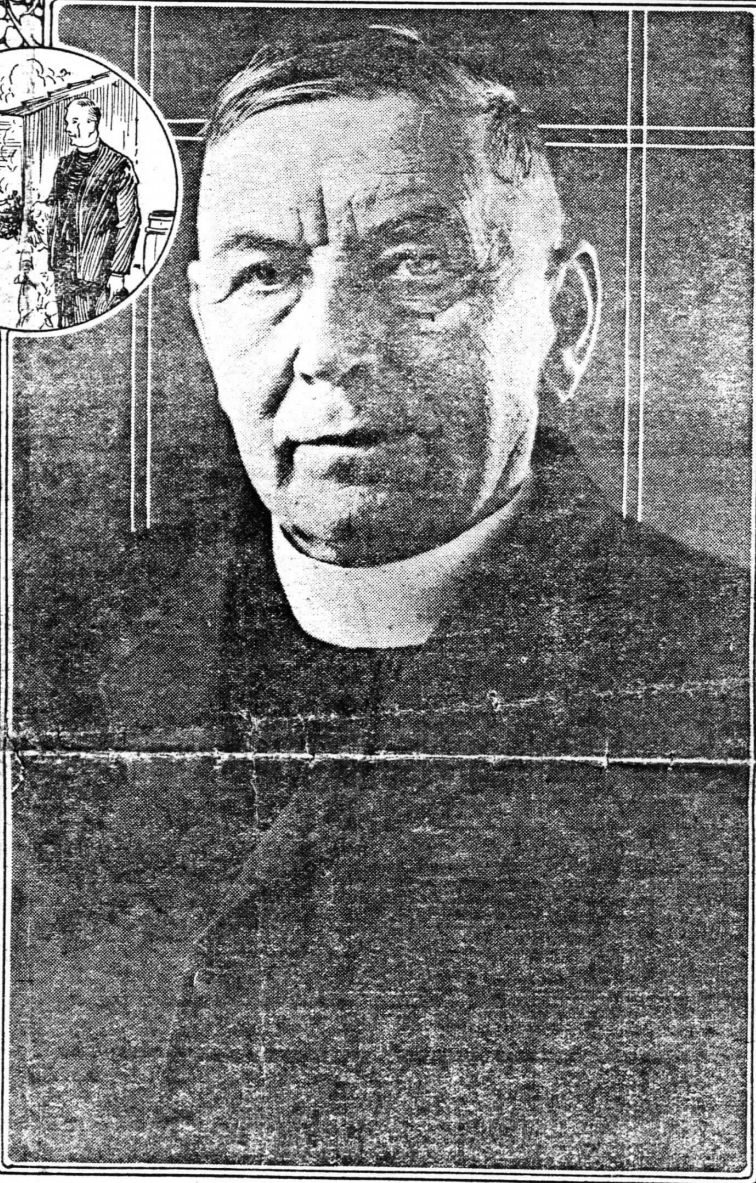


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This PRIEST Has Been Identified with DOWNTOWN PARISHES for 41 Years

Father James T. Coffey on New Year's Day observed his twenty-fifth anniversary as pastor of St. Leo's, in area the smallest parish in the St. Louis Archdiocese, but within its narrow boundary he has found the greatest pleasures of his ministry.



By JULIA C. UNDERWOOD,
Globe-Democrat Staff Writer.

SMALLEST in size geographically of all the Catholic parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, St. Leo's at Twenty-third and Mullanphy streets is one of those established institutions which has provided many contacts with the city's life. Its pastor for the last twenty-five years, Rev. Father James Thomas Coffey, prefers that busy "beat," three blocks wide from Cass avenue to Mullanphy, and less than ten blocks long from Glasgow to Hogan, to any other part of St. Louis.



Rev. Father James Thomas Coffey, pastor of St. Leo's, the smallest geographically, but one of the most active of all parishes of the St. Louis Archdiocese. Father Coffey was given months to live, 40 years ago, but regained his health and kept it through scientific exercise.

Globe-Democrat Staff Photographer



But Father Coffey is essentially a city man. He knows St. Louis from its embryo days, when, as a school boy, he walked from his home on Compton Hill to the Christian Brothers' College at Eighth and Cerre streets, always admiring Dr. McDowell's beautiful place right opposite; when Union Depot stood at Twelfth and Poplar streets and the heatless street cars had straw thickly spread on the floor to keep feet warm. Why, he even remembers those winters when influenza was a meaner thing than now, and attacked the horses in the form of epizootic—Father Coffey is a Greek scholar, and pronounces that word in five syllables; he says oxen were used, in place of the horses, winter after winter, to draw the cars. "It was very slow," he says. "The cars got off the tracks had enough with the horses, and we all would have to get outside and push, but with the oxen it was worse. Oxen are more balky than horses, too."

From one city he went to another, the city of Rome upon her seven hills. There he studied in the North American College, a rare privilege for a St. Louisian in those days; forty-one years ago on July 24, 1887, he was ordained a priest, to come back with all his training and serve in the congested districts of his home city for forty-one years, a period longer now than the Children of Israel were wandering through the wilderness. But when he was asked at this New Year anniversary, "Are you ever anxious to get out of the East End?" "No," was his answer.

Working Among the Poor His Greatest Joy

"Working among the poor has been the greatest joy and consolation of my ministry," said this priest; "I have learned lessons there I never would have learned elsewhere; learned to suffer the sorrows and trials of life with patience and resignation; learned to be content with what God wishes to give; learned that the gold of gratitude is found in the hearts of the humble."

In the days before he came to St. Leo's, Father Coffey was first assistant at the Church of the Annunciation, at Sixth and La Salle streets, to Very Rev. P. P. Brady, who was then Vicar-General to Archbishop Kenrick. He followed Father Brady to St.

John's Church at Sixteenth and Chestnut streets, two years later, succeeding him there in 1892, as pastor, later to be dignified as one of the few "Irremovable Rectors." About this time he was made Assistant Chancellor by Archbishop Kain. Father Coffey had the faculty of succeeding eminent prelates. At St. John's, Archbishop Ryan of Philadelphia and Bishop Hennessey of Wichita had been his predecessors, and when he stepped into St. Leo's twenty-five years ago it was to be immediate successor of an Archbishop in transit, the late Archbishop J. J. Hart, who went to Manila. Father Coffey's bonds of "irremovable rectorship" were dissolved by Archbishop Glennon, who made the appointment to St. Leo's one of his first official acts after he came to St. Louis as metropolitan in 1903. The Archbishop placed Father Coffey on his diocesan Board of Consultors.

Father Coffey, fresh from studies in Rome in 1887 was 26 years old, of fragile appearance, slender and pale, admitted to be in poor health. The foods of Rome had not agreed with him, nor the climate. His appetite was nil. His doctor didn't greatly encourage him. He would just have to "wear it out," the doctor said; "to get back to normal takes years." Perhaps his health was permanently shattered; perhaps he had not long to live. It is hard to credit these forebodings when one looks upon Father Coffey, now 67, robust and clear-

eyed, driving his own car, answering sick calls day or night, doing full duty in every way as a priest.

Damocles' sword dangling over his head made him think pretty steadily about what was most needed for him to do. He found men drinking too much, and women, too, so he set about getting people to sign the pledge. While he made no objection to wholesome recreation when families spent Sunday afternoons, as so many of them did at that time, listening to the music and partaking of moderate refreshment in the popular, airy beer gardens within easy distance, he did see harm in the excessive drinking of New Year's, Fourth of July and other holidays.

Incidents About Those Who Took the Pledge

"You would see drunkenness everywhere. You couldn't get on a street car on those summer picnic days when you wouldn't see men and women alike in their cups. Everybody kept open house on New Year's, and wherever the people went on that day, they drank. So we organized the Knights of Father Mathew, to save them from temptation. These grew to be 3000 strong. We gathered together, too, the first band of Catholic women in temperance work in St. Louis, under the able leadership of that brilliant and self-made woman, Mrs. O. R. Lake, mainly to in-

fluence the women not to serve intoxicating drinks on these holidays.

"The young people were more affected than anyone else, because it was they who did the visiting. Many of them came to me to take the pledge, and as a rule when a man takes the pledge in the confessional, he keeps it. They would take it with a proviso: 'This doesn't include New Year's Day.' Well, I was young and inexperienced, and I believed it was better to get them to take the pledge with an exception than it was not to take it at all. So they signed for a year, or two years, just as they felt they could do, and keep it. I had one lesson I never forgot, in a young man who said he wanted to take the pledge, except he must first have 'three drinks.' That was stipulated, but alas! It didn't occur to me that I ought to have limited the size of the 'drinks.' The three he took, I found out afterward, aggregated about two quarts of whisky, and his poor wife had to call in two doctors. But he recovered, and I think he kept his pledge thereafter, faithfully."

There were no autos then to keep people away from church, and roads were so bad there was not much driving out into the country, but Father Coffey didn't find church attendance much better then than now. One church custom of today he counts a great improvement, and that is the morning weddings. When he began, it

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