FR DENIS DIRSCHERL FAREWELL EVENT

SATURDAY, 28 JANUARY 2017

HOLIDAY INN FAIRBORN

AGENDA

1430 TEAM SETS-UP DECORATIONS, SOUND SYSTEM, FINAL DETAILS

1600 PARISHIONERS ARRIVE, CHECK-IN, GO TO TABLES

1645 RICK BEGINS ANNOUNCEMENTS TO GET PEOPLE TO SEATS FOR MASS

 SILENCE ELECTRONIC DEVICES

1700 MASS IN DINING ROOM

1800 MASS CONCLUDES – JIM ANNOUNCES CASH BAR AND FREE BAR

 NON-MASS ATTENDEES ARRIVE AND CONVENE IN FOYER

 ALTAR TAKEDOWN; PODIUM, VIDEO, SCREENS, SPEAKER, AND SOUND

 SYSTEM FINAL CHECK

 GIFT BOOK BEING ASSEMBLED IN OUTER HALLWAY

 DINNER REGISTRATION CONTINUES WITH RECONCILING OF GUEST LIST

 FOOD PLACEMENT IN OUTER HALLWAY

 SEMI PRIVATE PRESENTATIONS FROM DEACON BOB AND PAM; AND JIM

 & BETTY DESTOUT, DAVE &PEGGY JOHNSON, KATHLEEN & RICK LACH

1830 CASH BAR AND FREE BAR OPENS

1830 MASTER OF CEREMONIES BEGINS PROGRAM

 WELCOMES EVERYONE

 GIVES ROE FOR THE EVENING

 INTRODUCES FR TOM FOR INVOCATION

 MC ANNOUNCES HOLIDAY INN STAFF TO DIRECT GUESTS TO FOOD LINE

 DINNER IS SERVED

1930 MC ANNOUNCES 15 MINUTE BREAK TO CLEAR TABLES

1945 RECONVENE AND MC ANNOUNCES 15 MINUTE VIDEO WITH MUSIC

2000 SPEAKING PROGRAM BEGINS (MASTER OF CEREMONIES)

 DURING PRESENTATION, FR TOM INTRODUCED TO MAKE

 PRESENTATION & ESCORT FATHER DENIS THROUGH “FINISH LINE”

 DURING PRESENTATION, DEACON BOB & RICK PRESENT BOOK OF

 MEMORIES

 FR DENIS REMARKS

 FR THESING REMARKS

 CONCLUDING BENEDICTION BY DEACON BOB

2100 MC ANNOUNCES CONCLUSION OF EVENING’S EVENTS

MASTER OF CEREMONIES SCRIPT

AFTER MASS, SEMI-PRIVATE PRESENTATION TO FR DENIS BY PERRYS, DESTOUTS, JOHNSONS, AND LACHS

1830 DINNER SIT DOWN OCCURS:

WOULD EVERYONE PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE SILENCED YOUR ELECTRONIC DEVICES.

GOOD EVENING EVERYONE. MY NAME IS RICK LACH, AND I WILL BE YOUR MASTER OF CEREMONIES THIS EVENING. IT IS MY HONOR AND PRIVILEGE TO WELCOME ALL OF YOU ON BEHALF OF THE PARISH LEADERSHIP AND THE OUTREACH COMMITTEE TO THIS HISTORIC EVENT. YOU KNOW, IT IS NOT OFTEN THAT A MILITARY PARISH HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY GOODBYE TO A PRIEST WHO HAS BEEN WITH A PARISH FOR ALMOST 13 COMPLETE YEARS. USUALLY IT IS A 2 OR 3 YEAR ASSIGNMENT AND THEN PCS TO ANOTHER LOCATION. WE HOPE THAT THIS EVENING’S PROGRAM WILL LIVE UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS APPROPRIATE FOR SUCH AN EVENT: FIRST WITH HOLY MASS; SECOND WITH A GREAT MEAL; AND THIRD WITH A HEARTFELT RECOGNITION PROGRAM, ALL IN THIS TREMENDOUS SETTING.

WE DO HAVE SOME SPECIAL GUESTS THIS EVENING THAT I WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE: LT GEN JACK HUDSON, DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE; CHAP LT COL TED WILSON, OUR WING CHAPLAIN; CHAP LT COL STEVEN NICOLAI, OUR DEPUTY WING CHAPLAIN, FR BOB THESING, FR DENIS’ LOCAL JESUIT SUPERIOR IN CINCINNATI; CHAPLAINS AND THEIR SPOUSES FROM THE WING CHAPEL STAFF; AND COLONEL USAF RETIRED CASSIE BARLOW, OUR FORMER WING COMMANDER, AND HER HUSBAND TIM BARLOW, HER MOTHER WILMA AND THEIR DAUGHTER EMMA.

SOON I WILL ANNOUNCE THAT THE HOLIDAY INN STAFF WILL DIRECT US TO THE BUFFET SERVING TABLES. BUT FIRST, I WISH TO INTRODUCE OUR PASTOR, FR TOM GILLS, TO LEAD US IN PRAYER.

(FR TOM SPEAKS…..)

….. THANK YOU FR TOM. NOW IT IS TIME FOR DINNER. THE HOLIDAY INN STAFF WILL NOW COME TO YOUR TABLE TO TELL YOU WHEN TO PROCEED TO THE SERVING TABLES IN THE HALLWAY. FOR YOUR ENJOYMENT WE HAVE SALAD, FRUIT, CHICKEN AND ROAST BEEF, POTATOES, AND RICE. COFFEE, WATER, AND TEA AVAILABLE. AFTER THE MEAL FOR DESSERT, SPECIAL CAKES BAKED BY DEBORAH WILDER WILL BE AVAILABLE ON THE CREDENZA, AND WE WILL PASS OUT KLONDIKE BARS, FR DENIS’ FAVORITE DESSERT, FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS ONE.

(DINNER AND DESSERT ARE SERVED….)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I NOW WOULD LIKE TO ANNOUNCE A 15 MINUTE BREAK WHILE THE TABLES ARE CLEARED AND PREPARATIONS ARE MADE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE EVENING’S PROGRAM. PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR SEATS AT XXXXXXXXXX. DURING THIS TIME, YOU MAY WISH TO SIGN THE MEMORY BOOK FOR FR DENIS. THERE IS ALSO A BASKET IN THE BACK FOR ANY CONGRATULATIONS CARDS YOU MAY HAVE BROUGHT FOR FR DENIS.

(15 MINUTE BREAK…..)

MAY I HAVE EVERYONE’S ATTENTION. WE WILL NOW PLAY A 15 MINUTE VIDEO CONTAINING PICTURES OF SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN FATHER DENIS’S LIFE. PLEASE WATCH THE TV MONITORS. (TURN LIGHTS DOWN, TV’S ON, SOUND UP, AND RUN THE VIDEO.)

(RUN VIDEO….)

BEFORE SPEAKING, RICK ESCORTS FR DENIS TO CHAIR ON STAGE. (WITH BOSTON MARATHON HOODIE & DAYTON DRAGONS HAT)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, OTHER THAN MY OWN FATHER AND FATHER-IN-LAW, I CANNOT THINK OF ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL THAT I PERSONALLY KNOW, WHOM I ADMIRE MORE THAN FATHER DENIS DIRSCHERL. FR DENIS HAS LED A REMARKABLE LIFE. HE HAS REACHED THE TOP OF 4 DISTINCT CAREER PATHS, BUT SOME HOW HE HAS MOLDED THEIR CHARACTERISTICS TOGETHER TO PRODUCE THE ONE LIFE, CAREER, AND PERSONALITY THAT WE CELEBRATE TONIGHT.

I ONCE ASKED FR DENIS TO SHARE WITH ME HIS FAVORITE SCRIPTURAL PASSAGE. HE THOUGHT A WHILE, AND WITH A TWINKLE IN HIS EYE, HE SAID IT WOULD HAVE TO BE ST. PAUL’S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY. IN PARTICULAR “I FOR MY PART AM ALREADY BEING POURED OUT LIKE A LIBATION. THE TIME OF MY DISSOLUTION IS NEAR. I HAVE FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED THE RACE. I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH. FROM NOW ON A MERITED CROWN AWAITS ME; ON THAT DAY, THE LORD, JUST JUDGE THAT HE IS, WILL AWARD IT TO ME—AND NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT ALL WHO HAVE LOOKED FOR HIS APPEARING WITH EAGER LONGING.” THE METAPHOR OF FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT, THE PERSEVERENCE OF KEEPING THE FAITH, AND FINISHING THE RACE. THIS IS HOW I WOULD LIKE TO DESCRIBE AND HONOR FR DENIS’ LIFE. SO IMAGINE, IF YOU WILL, THIS DINING ROOM AS A HUGE STADIUM IN WHICH A RACE, A MARATHON, WILL BE CONDUCTED. AND THEN SUPERIMPOSE FR DENIS’ LIFE OVER THIS MARATHON, YOU GET THE PICTURE??? THAT’S WHY WE ASKED YOU TO WEAR TENNIS SHOES/OR RACING SHOES—THAT YOU WOULD EASILY GET INTO THE SWING OF THINGS…

SO, I HAVE SUGGESTED THAT FR DENIS ATTAINED THE TOP OF 4 SEPARATE CAREER PATHS: AN ORDAINED JESUIT PRIEST, A TEACHER WITH A PH D DEGREE IN RUSSIAN STUDIES, REACHING TENURE AND RETIRING FROM THE AIR FORCE AS A FULL COLONEL, AND A SUCCESSFUL, DOCUMENTED ATHLETIC CAREER THAT ENCOMPASSED TRYING OUT FOR THE CINCINNATI REDS, RUNNING IN OVER 800 RACES INCLUDING 83 MARATHONS (THE BOSTON MARATHON TWICE), PARTICIPATION IN EVERY SENIOR OLYMPICS SINCE HE BECAME ELIGIBLE IN 1991, AND BEING A PROFESSIONAL TENNIS UMPIRE SINCE 1972. FOR AN INDIVIDUAL TO REACH THE TOP IN ANY ONE FIELD WOULD BE DESCRIBED AS SUCCESSFUL, BUT HE DID IT IN FOUR!

IF WE LOOK AT STRATEGICALLY DIVIDING A 26 MILE MARATHON INTO 3 PARTS: PREPARATION & SETTING THE PACE FOR THE FIRST 10 MILES; CRUISING THE MIDDLE OF THE RACE FOR THE NEXT 10 MILES; AND THE FINISH FOR THE FINAL 6 MILES, WE MAY BE ABLE TO APPLY THESE SAME PARTS AS WELL TO FR DENIS’ LIFE. (RICK PUTS ON DRAGON’S SHIRT AND HAT; PUTS 2006 BOSTON MARATHON MEDAL AROUND FR DENIS’ NECK)

RUNNERS TAKE YOUR MARKS. SET. GO!!!

THE PREPARATION/PACE SETTING PHASE: THE FIRST TEN MILES OF THE RACE COULD CORRESPOND TO THE FIRST 25 YEARS OF HIS LIFE. FR DENIS WAS BORN ON 10 MAY, 1934 IN TROY OHIO. HE WAS A MEMBER OF ST PATRICK’S PARISH AND ATTENDED THE PARISH PAROCHIAL GRADE SCHOOL FROM GRADES 1-8. HE GOT AN EARLY EXPOSURE TO ACADEMICS AND DISCIPLINE BY THE 4 NUNS WHO TAUGHT THERE. HE THEN ATTENDED TROY HIGH SCHOOL WHERE HE EXCELLED IN ACADEMICS AND BASEBALL. THERE HE ENJOYED THE CONCEPTS OF DISCIPLINE, HARD WORK, THE TEAM, GRACE UNDER PRESSURE, AND WORKING TOWARD A GOAL. HE GRADUATED IN 1952.

SINCE OUR NATION WAS AGAIN PREPARING FOR WAR AND CALLING UP EVERYONE, SCHOLARSHIPS AND COLLEGE WERE NOT IN HIS PLANS AT THAT TIME. HE ENLISTED IN THE AIR FORCE IN THE SUMMER OF 1952. HE REMEMBERS BOOT CAMP OF 30K ENLISTEES AT A CLOSED DOWN NAVAL BASE IN UPSTATE NY, 4 YEARS OF BAD PAY, AND ASSIGNMENTS TO THE BERING SEA AND THE EAST COAST. HE SEPARATED FROM THE AF IN 1956. HE PLAYED BASEBALL IN THE SUMMER LEAGUES AND EVEN TRIED OUT FOR THE REDS AS A PITCHER AT CROSLEY FIELD THAT SUMMER. HE WAS PERSISTENT, BUT HE DID NOT MAKE THE REDS.

IN THE FALL 1956, HE ENTERED THE UNIV OF DAYTON FOR 1 YEAR FOR A PERIOD OF DISCERNMENT. BUT, BACK-UP TO WHILE HE WAS ON ACTIVE DUTY--HE HAD 2 FRIENDS WHO WERE SCHOOLED/TRAINED BY THE JESUITS WHO MADE A VERY POSITIVE IMPRESSION ON HIM. AS A RESULT OF THIS INFLUENCE, IN 1957 HE ENTERED THE JESUIT SEMINARY IN CINCINNATI AFTER A BRIEF STINT AT JOHN CARROLL UNIV IN CLEVELAND TO STUDY MORE LATIN. WHEN ASKED WHY THE JESUITS, FR DENIS SAID: I LIVED WITH 2 GREAT EXAMPLES, THEY WERE BRIGHT, REGIMENTED, DISCIPLINED, AND LED A HARSH LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY LIMITED PERSONAL POSSESSIONS. REGARDING THE SEMINARY, FATHER DENIS CAN DISTINCTLY REMEMBER SAYING TO HIMSELF: “I AM GOING TO GET THRU THIS ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.” HIS PERSEVERENCE DURING TOUGH SEMINARY LIFE PAID OFF. HE WAS ORDAINED IN THE MID-60’S AND CELEBRATED HIS FIRST MASS AT ST PATRICK’S IN TROY, ATTENDED BY HIS MOTHER AND FAMILY. AS AN YOUNG PRIEST, HIS PRIMARY MISSSION WAS TO TEACH LATIN AND SPEECH, AND HE DID THIS IN VARIOUS TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS IN THE EASTERN US. ONE YEAR HE TAUGHT IN CHICAGO, AND WAS ALSO THE BASEBALL COACH FOR PITCHERS AND CATCHERS FOR A TEAM WHICH HAD TO PRACTICE ON OTHER SCHOOLS’ FIELDS (THAT TEAM LOST THE CHAMPIONSHIP BY ONE RUN). HE ALSO COACHED THE FRESHMAN/SOPHOMORE DEBATE TEAM. LATER HE PARTICIPATED IN AN EXTRA 3 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES. IN THE MID-80’S HIS ACADEMICS CAME TO A HIGH POINT WHEN HE EARNED HIS PH D IN RUSSIAN STUDIES FROM GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON DC, WHILE LIVING AND WORKING IN A LARGE PARISH IN BETHESDA MD. HE NOW FONDLY REMEMBERS HIS PERSEVERENCE AND HARD WORK WHILE RESEARCHING HUNDREDS OF VOLUMES AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS TO COMPLETE HIS DOCTORAL DISSERTATION.

SO WITH THE PREPARATION/PACE SETTING PHASE OF HIS LIFE COMPLETED WITH A SOLID EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION, MILITARY SERVICE EXPERIENCE, THE SEMINARY AND ORDINATION, YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE, CULMINATING IN A PH D, HE IS READY FOR THE CRUISING PHASE OF HIS LIFE. THE JESUIT ORDER NOW PERMITS HIM TO ENTER THE AF RESERVES AS A CHAPLAIN. HE SERVES, FIRST IN THE RESERVES, THEN ON ACTIVE DUTY, ON AND OFF FOR A PERIOD OF 27 YEARS TOTAL COMBINED RESERVE AND ACTIVE DUTY. INTERMITTENTLY, HE CONTINUES TO TEACH, BUT IN THE AIR FORCE, HE WORKS MANY SPECIAL STAFF AND IG JOBS WHILE ON ACTIVE DUTY. HE RETIRES FROM THE AF IN THE EARLY 90’S IN THE GRADE OF FULL COLONEL. SOMEWHERE IN THERE, AFTER HE RETIRES FROM THE AIR FORCE, HE TEACHES LATIN A TOTAL OF 8 YEARS IN 4 DIFFERENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN MD, ALL AT THE SAME TIME. THE LAST YEAR WAS NEAR ANNAPOLIS, AND HE SAYS THOSE 8 YEARS WERE AS ROUGH AS ANY IN THE MILITARY.

AT THIS POINT, FR DENIS’ BIOGRAPHY LISTS THE FOLLOWING: BA DEGREE FROM LOYOLA UNIVERSITY IN CHICAGO, MA DEGREE IN RUSSIAN STUDIES FROM MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE IN VERMONT (OUR COUNTRY’S PREMIER RUSSIAN STUDIES INSTITUTION), AND A PH D IN RUSSIAN STUDIES FROM GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON, DC. HE TAUGHT AT 10 DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS. HE HAS EXTENSIVE TRAVEL AND BACKGROUND IN RUSSIAN STUDIES. HE IS A RENOWNED AUTHOR ON RUSSIAN STUDIES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: HE WROTE OR CONTRIBUTED TO 5 BOOKS AND 7 MAJOR JOURNALS. IN ALL, HE CONTRIBUTED OVER 300 ARTICLES IN VARIOUS REVIEWS, NEWSPAPERS, AND MAGAZINES. AND HE DID POST-DOCTORAL WORK IN MANY UNIVERSITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS. HE IS A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED ATHLETE: HE HAS PARTICIPATED IN AND WON MANY OF HIS AGE GROUP AWARDS IN THE NATIONAL SENIOR OLYMPICS IN EVERY OLYMPICS SINCE HE BECAME ELIGIBLE IN 1991 –THAT MAKES 13 COMPLETED. HE IS SCHEDULED TO COMPETE IN THE 2017 SENIOR OLYMPICS IN BIRMINGHAM, AL IN JUNE, 2017, IN TENNIS. HE HAS BEEN A PROFESSIONAL TENNIS UMPIRE SINCE 1972. HE HAS UMPED FOR ALL THE MAJOR NAMES IN TENNIS, AND HE CONTINUES TO PLAY TENNIS UNTIL THIS DAY. REGARDING RUNNING: HE STARTED RUNNING AT AGE 49 AFTER WITNESSING HIS BROTHER RUN IN THE BOSTON MARATHON. HE SUBSEQUENTLY BOUGHT A PAIR OF RUNNING SHOES AT KMART FOR $8 AND 6 MONTHS LATER HE RAN THE MARINE CORPS MARATHON (HIS FIRST MARATHON). IN THE LAST 33 YEARS, HE HAS RUN OVER 800 RACES INCLUDING 83 MARATHONS (TWO THE BOSTON MARATHON) AND HAS WON OVER 600 AWARDS IN RUNNING. GO BACK AND LOOK AT HIS MEMORABILIA TABLE; WE HAVE INCLUDED SOME OF HIS MEDALS, INCLUDING THE BOSTON MARATHON AND THE AIR FORCE MARATHON, AS WELL AS HIS HIGH SCHOOL LETTR IN BASEBALL. WE ARE SO THANKFUL THAT HE DIDN’T MAKE THE REDS IN 1956.

HIS AIR FORCE CAREER SPANNED 27 YEARS, 11 MONTHS, AND 22 DAYS; HE VISITED OVER 85 BASES IN VARIOUS STAFF AND IG JOBS, AND HE WAS AWARDED THE LEGION OF MERIT. HE RETIRED IN MAY, 1994.

AND HE HAS BEEN AN ORDAINED PRIEST FOR OVER 50 YEARS.

THESE ARE INCREDIBLE ACHIEVEMENTS, AND THEY DIRECTLY STEM FROM HIS SELF-DISCIPLINE, PERSEVERENCE, DESIRE TO FINISH WHAT HE STARTS, AND A LOVE OF ATHLETICS. (IT ALSO FITS GREAT INTO THE METAPHOR OF THE RACE FROM ST PAUL’S LETTER TO TIMOTHY.)

NOW, HAVING RETIRED FROM TEACHING AND RETIRED FROM THE AF, HE ENTERS THE FINAL PHASE OF THE RACE (THE FINAL 6 MILES), THE CLOSING/THE FINISHING. IT IS NOW 2004, HE IS 70 YEARS OLD, AND IS HEADING FOR A JESUIT RETIREMENT COMMUNITY IN CALIFORNIA. ON THE WAY, HE DECIDES TO STOP AT WPAFB, ONE OF HIS OLD ASSIGNMENT BASES, AND NEAR HOME. BUT HE NEVER LEAVES WPAFB. FR TOM ANGELO IS THE CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN, DEACON BOB IS THE PASTORIAL ASSOCIATE, AND I AM THE PARISH COORDINATOR. FR CY HAS JUST LEFT AS AUXILIARY PRIEST FOR HEALTH REASONS. THE CONVERSATION TURNS TOWARD EMPLOYMENT, AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, WE OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM HIS ORDER AND FROM THE BASE, ESTABLISH A CONTRACT AND A SCHEDULE, AND FR DENIS BECOMES OUR AUXILIARY PRIEST FROM SEPT 2004 UNTIL JAN 2017, ALMOST 13 YEARS. DURING THIS TIME, HE HAS WORKED WITH FR ANGELO, FR SRODE, FR ZIGADLO, FR MOSS, AND FR TOM.

IN MANY WAYS, THIS IS HIS FINEST HOUR. HE WOULD USE **ALL** HIS TALENTS TO MINISTER TO OUR PARISH AND COMMUNITY WITHOUT THE PAINS OF CLASSROOM PREPARATION AND EXHAUSTING TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE PAPERWORK. HE CELEBRATED HALF OUR MASS SCHEDULE AND WORKED OUR CATHOLIC HOSPITAL MINISTRY. HE ALSO WORKED MANY OF OUR EMERGENCIES. IN THE PROCESS OVER THE LAST 13 YEARS, HE HAS GOTTEN TO KNOW OUR PARISH AS A FAMILY, KNOWS ALMOST ALL OUR PARISHIONERS BY NAME, AND HAS LITERALLY TOUCHED EVERYONE’S LIFE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS BLESSED THIS PARISH WITH THE ARRIVAL, DEDICATION, INTEGRATION, AND HARD WORK OF FATHER DENIS, AND WE ARE REAPING THE BENEFIT OF HIS LIFETIME ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

HE KNOWS THE BASE HOSPITAL LIKE THE BACK OF HIS HAND. ON HIS ASSIGNED DAYS, HE ARRIVES AT THE HOSPITAL AT 5:30 AM, MAKES HIS ROUNDS, AND FINISHES BY CELEBRATING MASS IN THE HOSPITAL CHAPEL FOR HOSPITAL STAFF AND PATIENTS. HIS APPROACH TO PATIENTS IS INNOVATIVE: WHILE HIS VISITS ARE SPIRITUAL, HE LIFTS THE PATIENTS’ SPIRITS WITH HUMOR, FREQUENTLY BY TELLING JOKES, WHICH OFTEN GETS THEM TO OPEN UP TO COUNSELING. SOMETIMES HE SHARES THOSE JOKES BY TELLING THEM AT THE END OF WEEKEND MASSES. FR DENIS HAS EARNED THE CONFIDENCE OF OUR PARISH AS A SPIRITUAL LEADER, OFTEN VISITING AND BLESSING HOMES AND PETS. AS WE LOOK AROUND THIS ROOM, WE KNOW THAT HE HAS TOUCHED THE LIVES OF SO MANY OF US IN A DEEPLY SPIRITUAL AND PERSONAL WAY. HIS HOMILIES AT MASS ARE LEGENDARY, A DIRECT PRODUCT OF HIS JESUIT UPBRINGING OF BRIEF, BUT DIRECT TEACHING. BY THE WAY, WE HAVE A BOX OF HIS HOMILIES AND WILL TRY TO GET THEM EDITED AND PUBLISHED AS DAILY REFLECTIONS. HE WAS ALWAYS WILLING TO DROP WHAT HE WAS DOING TO TEND TO A RELIGIOUS EMERGENCY, TO RESPOND FOR AN ANNOINTING AT THE HOSPITAL OR AT A HOME. YOU HAD TO BE IMPRESSED BY HIS HUMILITY AND GENEROSITY; HE DID EVERYTHING WITHOUT FANFARE OR THE NEED TO BE RECOGNIZED. IN FACT, WE DID NOT GET HIS PERMISSION TO MAKE OUR COMMENTS TONIGHT, BUT WE HAVE CONVINCED HIM THAT TONIGHT IS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PARISH TO SHOW THEIR APPRECIATION TO HIM FOR A JOB WELL DONE. AND I WILL NEVER FORGET TWO YEARS AGO WHEN HIS PERSEVERENCE PAID OFF FOR OUR ENTIRE PARISH. TWO YEARS AGO WE WERE WITHOUT A FULL TIME ACTIVE DUTY CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN ASSIGNED. FR DENIS STEPPED UP AND, IN ADDITION TO HIS NORMAL HOSPITAL MINISTRY, HE CELEBRATED EVERY MASS (WEEKEND AND DAILY) AND TOOK EVERY APPOINTMENT FROM MID-JUNE TO MID-SEPTEMBER, UNTIL FR MOSS ARRIVED. HIS DEDICATION TO PUT OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS ABOVE HIS OWN NEEDS IS SO CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS LIFETIME ATTITUDES, THAT WE ALMOST TAKE IT FOR GRANTED. THIS WAS DONE WITHOUT COMPLAINT AND WITH OUR SPIRITUAL BENEFIT TOTALLY IN MIND. WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET THIS CARING ACTION AND SHOULD BE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL FOR HIS SELFLESS ACTIONS.

THIS WEEK I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH BISHOP RICHARD HIGGINS OF THE MILITARY ARCHDIOCESE ON THE PHONE. BISHOP HIGGINS TOLD ME TO PASS ON BEST WISHES TO YOU, FATHER, FROM BOTH BISHOP BROGLIO AND HIMSELF, BOTH OF WHOM INTERACTED WITH YOU OVER THE YEARS.

FATHER TOM, WOULD YOU PLEASE COME UP. (FATHER TOM MAKES PRESENTATION OF AN ALB AND A STOLE.) (FR TOM REMAINS ON STAGE NEXT TO FR DENIS)

FR DENIS WILL BE 83 IN MAY. HE **HAS** FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, AND HE **HAS** KEPT THE FAITH. HE **HAS BEEN** AN EXCELLENT PRIEST, TEACHER, OFFICER, LEADER, FRIEND, ROLE MODEL, AND ATHLETE. FR TOM, WOULD YOU ASSIST FR DENIS IN CROSSING OUR “FINISH LINE” SO WE CAN SAY THAT HE HAS FINALLY “FINISHED THE RACE” SYMBOLICALLY IN OUR PARISH. HOWEVER, WE KNOW THAT THIS IS NOT THE END. AS THE NEXT PHASE OF YOUR LIFE BEGINS, THERE WILL BE FUTURE RACES AND MORE LIVES TO TOUCH IN MICHIGAN. SO AS THIS RACE FINISHES HERE, NEXT WEEK YOU SIMPLY BEGIN A NEW RACE.

(FR TOM RETURNS TO HIS SEAT)

DEACON BOB, WOULD YOU PLEASE COME UP AND ASSIST IN PRESENTNG FR DENIS WITH A GIFT FROM OUR PARISH. SINCE HE CAN TAKE ONLY A LIMITED AMOUNT OF PERSONAL ITEMS WITH HIM, WE WOULD LIKE TO GIVE YOU A SINGLE MEMORY BOOK FROM OUR ENTIRE PARISH, FILLED WITH THE WORD “FAREWELL” IN MANY LANGUAGES, PICTURES OF THE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF ALL OUR CHAPELS, AND TOUCHING INSCRIPTIONS FROM OUR PARISHIONERS AND YOUR FRIENDS. OUR SIGNATURES AND MESSAGES IN THIS BOOK ALSO REPRESENT ALL THE STUDENTS YOU TAUGHT, ALL THE PLAYERS YOU COACHED, ALL THE BABIES YOU BAPTIZED, ALL THE COUPLES YOU MARRIED, ALL THE PEOPLE YOU COUNSELLED—EVERYONE YOU HAVE WORKED WITH. IN SHORT, THIS BOOK HONORS AND, IN A SENSE, VALIDATES THE LIFE YOU CHOSE AND THE MANNER IN WHICH YOU LIVED IT. THESE MESSAGES SIGNIFY HOW SPECIAL YOU ARE TO SO MANY PEOPLE. WE PRESENT IT TO YOU ON BEHALF OF OUR ENTIRE PARISH WITH ALL THE LOVE, ADMIRATION, AND THANKFULNESS THAT IS HUMANLY POSSIBLE.

(DEACON BOB RETURNS TO HIS SEAT)

(PICTURE OF FR DENIS IN VESTMENTS APPEARS ON SCREEN, WITH INSCRIPTION)

ALWAYS POSITIVE AND INSPIRATIONAL, FR DENIS FINISHES EVERY HOMILY WITH A TREMENDOUSLY UPLIFTING SENTENCE. SO, IN CLOSING, WOULD YOU ALL STAND AND PROCLAIM WITH ME, “KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK; MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF US; AND WE KNOW THAT HE MOST CERTAINLY WILL.” FR DENIS, FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS, OUR PRAYER FOR YOU IS FOR A HAPPY, HEALTHY STAY IN MICHIGAN. THANKS FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE FOR US, AND PLEASE KEEP US IN YOUR PRAYERS. PLEASE BE SEATED.

BEFORE FATHER COMES UP TO SPEAK, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE MEMBERS OF THE OUTREACH COMMITTEE FOR PUTTING ON THIS FAREWELL EVENT: FR TOM, FR MOSS, GINA FRANZ, CHERI CHAMPAGNE, JIM AND BETTY DESTOUT, DEACON BOB AND PAM PERRY, CORINA MITCHELL, OUR PARISH LAY MINISTERS AND CHOIR FOR ASSISTING WITH THE MASS, KATHLEEN LACH AND PEGGY JOHNSON FOR PREPARING OUR BOOK OF MEMORIES, DEBORAH WILDER FOR BAKING THE 4 DESSERT CAKES, THE MANY UNSUNG HEROES I DIDN’T MENTION WHO ASSISTED THE PLANNERS, AND THE WONDERFUL STAFF FROM THE HOLIDAY INN FOR ALL THEIR WORK. THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH.

TWO FINAL COMMENTS: ANYONE WHO WOULD STILL LIKE TO SIGN OUR BOOK OF MEMORIES CAN SEE KATHLEEN LACH IN THE BACK AFTER THE PROGRAM. AND, TO ALL: MANY OF YOU HAVE ASKED FOR FR DENIS’ FUTURE ADDRESS. FOR FR DENIS, IN FACT PROBABLY ONE OF THE BEST GIFTS WE AS A PARISH CAN GIVE YOU IS TO KNOW THAT YOU ARE CARED ABOUT, THOUGHT ABOUT, AND PRAYED FOR IN THE YEARS TO COME. SO TO HELP US DO THAT, IN THE BACK OF THE ROOM YOU WILL FIND CARDS WITH FR DENIS’ ADDRESS ON THEM. IN AN ATTEMPT TO SPREAD OUR LOVE FOR YEARS TO COME, THESE CARDS ALSO HAVE A SUGGESTED WEEK OF THE YEAR THAT YOU CAN CALL YOUR PERSONAL “FR DENIS WEEK.” IF YOU’D LIKE TO PRAY FOR FATHER AND/OR CORRESPOND WITH HIM DURING THAT WEEK EACH YEAR, HE WILL KNOW THAT HE IS ALWAYS CLOSE TO THE HEART OF OUR LADY QUEEN OF PEACE PARISH. SEE GINA FRANZ IN THE BACK.

AND NOW LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, OUR MAN OF THE HOUR, FR DENIS DIRSCHERL.

(FR DENIS COMMENTS….)

I WOULD NOW LIKE TO INTRODUCE FR BOB THESING FOR A FEW COMMENTS.

(FR THESING COMMENTS…..)

AND NOW DEACON BOB WILL GIVE THE BENEDICTION.

(DEACON BOB SPEAKS….)

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THIS CONCLUDES OUR PROGRAM. THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING AND PLEASE BE CAREFUL ON YOUR WAY HOME. I AM SURE FR DENIS WILL BE AVAILABLE UP FRONT TO GREET ANY OF OUR GUESTS.