

Monsignor Schmit Thoughts

By Reverend Ken Lill



On December 4, 1910 the fifth child of an Irish mother and German father was born in Toledo, Ohio. He grew up in a very devout family and always wanted to be a priest just like his uncle and two of his older brothers. After his first year in the seminary, the rector sent him home telling him that he would never make it. He was born with a cleft palate. In the early 20th century, a few corrective surgeries left him with a slight speech impediment. In those days even a minor health issue would exclude one from being ordained.

Undaunted, he worked his way through Catholic University in Washington and graduated with a degree in social work. This faithful dedication impressed the third Bishop of Toledo, Karl J. Alter, who eventually ordained Jerome E. Schmit as a priest on June 7, 1941. It was a privilege for me to live with Msgr. Schmit during the last three years of his life. He often repeated some of his favorite stories while we sat at the dinner table.

Although he ordained him, Bishop Alter would not assign the new priest to regular parish ministry. Monsignor would chuckle as he described the Bishop taking him to the old, run-down Westminster gym in downtown Toledo to see his first “assignment.” With cold air streaming through broken windows, the Bishop said, “Here it is. Now you owe me \$40,000.” This was the start of the rich legacy Msgr. Jerome Schmit left both the City and Diocese of Toledo.

The CYO program, all scouting programs and the Catholic Club in Toledo, all initiated by Msgr. Schmit, are a few of his accomplishments. Hundreds—maybe thousands—of young men and women met their future spouses at CYO sponsored dances. His influence was felt by powerful politicians and the poorest of the poor. He called together a group of leaders who brought the Mud Hens back to Toledo in the mid-1960’s and served on their board until to his death on April 10, 1997.

Msgr. Jerome Schmit has no immediate family. (Three of four sons were priests and their sister never married). Most of his peers have joined him in heaven as well. Those of us who were touched by his gracious love are honored to tell the story and celebrate the centenary of his birth. And if you are ever outside on a crisp, autumn Sunday afternoon watching a CYO football game—and you get a whiff of cigar smoke—consider yourself in the company of a saint.