

The Priest's Life



Thomas Kane has been a Catholic priest for 60 years but still maintains an active retirement life, including helping out a Maryland parish, sailing on his boat in Annapolis, and working in his carpentry shop. Those that know him say he is what you would call a priest's priest.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNA WEAVER LOPICCOLO



A PRIEST'S PRIEST
Monsignor Thomas Kane gives the homily at his 60th anniversary Mass on June 10.



STEP BY STEP

Above: Kane builds a simple stool similar to the one he made for his sister Elizabeth to use for sitting or standing at parades. He has built furniture, shelves, and religious paraphernalia like bishop's crosses and altars, among other things.



Queen Elizabeth II was in good company this June. As the British monarch celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in Great Britain, across the pond in Maryland, Monsignor Thomas Kane, a far less famous though equally beloved figure, celebrated his 60th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood on June 7. The 85-year-old has been retired for several years now but doesn't seem to be able to slow down.

He still says private daily Mass at his Annapolis, Md., home, as well as, at least one and sometimes two Sunday Masses at Sacred Heart Church in Bowie, Md. Kane also continues his longtime hobbies of woodworking and carpentry at his small carpentry studio in Rockville, Md., takes out his sailboat on the Chesapeake Bay, and

spends time with his large, extended family in the Baltimore and Washington D.C. area.

He says he considers his continued health and independence "a privileged thing," especially when he looks back at other priests ordained with him who have since passed away. "I'm still able to live by myself," Kane says. "It's a real blessing."

One can tell that keeping busy propels him through his retirement years, especially the woodworking and carpentry for which he has become known. Kane is mostly self-taught from reading books and magazines and says he learned things by trial and error over the last 60 years or so of pursuing his hobby.

He sees working with wood as a connection with the idea of Jesus Christ being the stepson of Joseph, a carpenter. "I figure Jesus must have been into [carpentry] as a young man," Kane said. "He must have learned his father's trade."

"You have to like wood to start with," Kane says of carpentry. "It's a nice medium." Get a good piece of white oak in his hands and he'll be the happiest woodworker around. Though he says he is "far from professional," Kane has made a number of altars in churches and chapels across the Archdiocese of Washington, crafted crosses, kneelers, benches, baptis-

mal fonts, and bishop's croziers. He's also made furniture, toys and shelves for friends and family, and he has a Milton chair he made himself in his living room, which he appropriately sits in to read his woodworking and sailing magazines.

Before retirement, Kane had slowly collected a number of large carpentry tools and equipment, which he kept in rectory basements over the years. After he retired, his brother gave him space in a corner of his Office Movers warehouse in Rockville, Md.

Now Kane comes to his workshop once a week to dabble at this or that project. He showed a visitor around recently, demonstrating how he built a simple parade stool for his sister from a piece of plywood, a few nails, and some steady carpentry skills. In less than a half hour, Kane wielded his machines and equipment to measure, cut, saw, sand, and assemble the stool like a pro.

One of his favorite transformations of a piece was an old phonograph stand that came off of President Roosevelt's yacht. He has since converted it into the base of a small altar that's tucked into a side room at his home. There he says Mass every day and remembers family members celebrating birthdays and anniversaries and priests who have died.

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WOODWORKER

Kane in his Rockville, Md., carpentry studio, wearing an four-leaf clover apron made by one of his sisters.

“I’ve never been outstanding at anything, just average. But I think that’s what most priests are, just average guys.”

- **Monsignor Thomas Kane**

Kane linked his love of woodwork-
ing and the water when he built a simple motorboat and kayak a few years ago.

“They didn’t sink anyway,” he says of the carpentry results. But for the most part, Kane sticks to the sailboat he purchased and named “Integrity,” which is docked at his Annapolis apartment complex on the water.

In recent years, he hasn’t gone out on the water as much, but he and fellow priests used to take the boat out on Chesapeake Bay during sailing season. “I’m not that professional at it but I know enough to get along,” Kane says.

He likes the challenge of sailing but doesn’t like competitive sailing because he says racers “don’t look like they’re having fun out there.”

Kane also loves Annapolis and its sailing ambience. It keeps him near his extended family in Baltimore and Annapolis, with whom he’s close. Kane so cherishes his family, in fact, that the chalice and communion plate he uses at daily Mass are etched with the names of his brothers, sisters, their spouses, and his nieces and nephews. Inside the base of the chalice are his mother’s engagement and wedding rings.

Thomas Kane was born in Washington D.C. on June 13, 1927. He was the second oldest of seven kids in an Irish Catholic family. Kane’s father worked for the U.S. Treasury Department, and his mother was a homemaker. Kane’s sister Elizabeth Rogers says, “He was always my mother’s favorite, but we

didn’t mind it because he was our favorite too.”

Thomas was the only one of the four boys and three girls in his family to express interest in the priesthood. He entered a high school minor seminary, St. Charles College, followed by St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore before being ordained for the Archdiocese of Washington in 1952.

He served at eight different Maryland and Washington D.C. parishes and in various

a celebration of Kane’s 60th anniversary, parishioners presented him with a check for \$10,000 that they raised for a scholarship fund that’s been established at St. Patrick School. Another \$3,000 or so came in after the check was printed.

Sacred Heart parishioner Joann Johnbrier was at the picnic with her husband Al. She says of Kane, “He’s just wonderful. He’s calm, his homilies are

fantastic and he speaks right to the people.” Parry has known Kane for close to 31 years and says, “He’s one of those priests that men like me look up to.

“He’s a mentor as to how to be a good pastor and a beautiful example of what it is to be a priest and give your whole life to the Lord and to the Church.”

But Kane says he’s just an average guy, like he’s an average sailor or carpenter. “I think that’s what most priests are, just average guys.”

He gives the example of six ladies at Sacred Hearts who took him out to breakfast on his ordination anniversary. “They know we aren’t perfect,” Kane says. “But they’re very loyal to their priests.”

The priest of 60 years adds, “In a way they build us up because that’s how they want to envision the priesthood. We have a special place in the Catholic Church, the priesthood, and I’d hope that would always be preserved.”



BOATING DREAM Kane always wanted a boat as a child and now loves sailing on his own boat, “Integrity,” today. It’s docked not far from his Annapolis apartment near the Chesapeake Bay.

Archdiocese of Washington roles. In Maryland, he was the founding pastor of St. Nicholas Parish in Laurel in 1968, coordinated the building of Mary of Nazareth School in Darnestown, and led the opening of St. Patrick School in Rockville in 2003. He received the honor of being named a “Monsignor” in 1984.

Kane has now made his new home base at Sacred Heart in Bowie, and the parishioners adore him, says the church’s pastor, Monsignor Charles Parry. “He just loves the priesthood ... and being with a parish that really loves him and is concerned for him.”

At a June 10 parish picnic that also served as

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QUICK LEARNER
Kane taught himself
how to do carpentry
and woodwork through
reading and practice.

