Winners of the 2005 Msgr. Francis Glenn Essay Awards

In this issue we present excerpts from the winning entries in the Catholic Historical Society’s annual Msgr. Francis A. Glenn Essay Contest. The winners, all local high-school students, received cash awards at the May 2, 2004 Lambing Lecture. Full citations for the students’ research have been omitted here, due to space considerations; but they are available with the original essays in the Historical Society’s archives. The winners are shown, with Historical Society members and friends, in the photo above. Left to right: Joshua Wasko (Serra Catholic), Allison Haag (Serra), CHS President Anthony P. Joseph, first-prize winner Christopher Manly (Central Catholic), second-prize winner Justin Mahood (North Catholic), Nathan Auvil (Central Catholic), third-prize winner Lori Ann Caldwell (Serra), CHS board member John Bates, and Msgr. Russell Duker, CHS board member and Vicar General of the Byzantine Archdiocese of Pittsburgh.

Each year, the Society invites high-school students to submit papers on Catholics who contributed to the development of the Church in western Pennsylvania. Essays must be 1,500-2,000 words. Submission deadline is March 1, 2005, and essays may be submitted by mail, fax, or e-mail. Awards are $250 for first prize; $100 for second prize; $75 for third prize. Full requirements appear on the Historical Society’s website: www.catholicichistorywpa.org.

Fr. Vincent Marinaro: A Man Who Made a Difference

By Justin Mahood
North Catholic High School

He fought the militant socialists in Rome, was knighted by King Victor Emmanuel of Italy and by the Belgian crown, and he received a special blessing from Pope Benedict XV. In the United States he was instrumental in putting socialist agitators in prison. It is a resume of accomplishments that would have made world leaders proud.

These accomplishments belong to a priest who served in Butler, Pennsylvania. His name was Father Vincent Marinaro.

Though his exact date and place of birth are not known, Vincent Marinaro was born in Italy in the year 1880. Much of his early life remains a mystery. It is known that he had four brothers who emigrated from Italy to the United States. Vincent remained in Italy and attended the Gregorian University in Rome, where he was eventually ordained.

While a young man, Fr. Marinaro played a large part in attempting to quench Italy’s political turmoil at the turn of the 20th century. Rome’s Socialist Party was gaining power and threatening to take the city by violent revolution. The Socialists opposed religion of any sort, but especially the Catholic Church.

Fr. Marinaro, while ministering at an orphanage, was instrumental in forming the Roman resistance to the revolution. Due to the dedication of the Italian priests and other advocates of freedom, revolution was avoided.

In 1909 Fr. Marinaro traveled to Pennsylvania to visit his four brothers who had settled there. Carmen, Nicholas, Joseph, and Anthony had all settled on the south side of the small factory town of Butler. This area, settled primarily by Italian, French, and Belgian immigrants, was predominantly Catholic, but had no

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Mother Mary Frances Xavier Warde, R.S.M.

By Lori Ann Caldwell
Serra Catholic High School

The Sisters of Mercy were founded in Dublin, Ireland, on December 12, 1831, by Catherine McAuley, the daughter of a wealthy businessman. Catherine’s father died when she was five years old. After his death, she experienced poverty and lived in foster homes. Little later in her life, she received an inheritance. With this money she built a place for abused and displaced women, and also the helpless and ailing poor. This place was known as “The House of Mercy.” Mother Catherine and her sisters became known as the “walking nuns and the moving nuns.” They had pledged to serve others in need.

It is this order that Frances Warde joined. Mary Frances also knew the hardships of being displaced. The woman who would become Mother Frances Warde was born in Ireland in 1810. Like the founder, Frances Warde was orphaned at an early age. As a young adult, Mary Frances was caught up in the activities of a fashionable life. One day her scruples caught up with her and she sought the advice of her director. Following his advice she met Mother McAuley and volunteered her services to the foundress. The majority of the work that Mary Frances did was with children living in the House for Homeless Children. She eventually became a professed Sister of Mercy. Mary Frances was often left in charge while the foundress, Mother McAuley, and others traveled to form new congregations. When Mother McAuley returned from one of her trips, Mary Frances had six other women working with her, and they became members of the Sister of Mercy.

In 1843 Bishop Michael O’Connor of Pittsburgh applied to the Sisters of Mercy for a foundation for his diocese, and Mother Warde left with a band of six for America. Pittsburgh was becoming an important industrial center. City life was tough, dirty, noisy, and dangerous. Most residents were workers and tradesmen who had come from across the ocean just as Frances Warde did. They came for the opportunity of jobs and a better life. Frances Warde was able to meet some of their needs with schools and a hospital as well as charitable institutions for the destitute. The sisters took charge of the cathedral Sunday school and the instruction of adults.

The sisters visited the sick and poor in their houses and people in the penitentiaries.

In 1846 Mother Warde opened a house in Chicago. In 1848 she opened a second branch in the Alleghenies. In 1850 she was invited by Bishop O’Reilly to come to Boston. One history recounts: “After the sisters’ installation a mob surrounded the convent, threatening them with death if they would not immediately vacate the premises.” Mother Warde and her sisters held their ground. The mob went into retreat.

Mother Warde, and later her sisters, went on to establish houses, schools, and other institutions across the United States and in countries as far away as Peru and Namibia.

The fourth vow of the Sisters of Mercy is the one that has allowed them to make the greatest and lasting impact. Along with vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, they vow to serve the poor, sick, and uneducated. Today, there are over 10,000 Sisters of Mercy ministering on six continents. Mother Warde’s commitment to the poor and disadvantaged lives on today through the organizations she founded.

I think Mother Warde would be proud of her followers. She is certainly a good role model for young women today. To go from rags to riches, material riches, to spiritual riches — what better guide could you ask for?
The Faith of ‘The Chief’: Arthur J. Rooney

By Christopher R. Manly
Central Catholic High School

A lay person whose good works exemplified a love of western Pennsylvania and an even greater love for God and Church was Arthur J. Rooney. Mr. Rooney is familiar to western Pennsylvanians primarily because he was the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team.

Western Pennsylvania may be less familiar with what I believe Mr. Rooney would see as his greatest accomplishments, the influence he had on the lives of others. He was a person who deeply cared for others, as a leader, friend, and family man. His son Art Jr. once recalled, “The Catholic Church was the real defining thing in his life. Sports was the conduit, the vehicle he used.”

Life was not easy for Arthur Joseph, the eldest of nine children, born January 27, 1901. He was born into what one biographer called “a rough, tough world ... but he never became a part of it. For tough guys, he and his brothers were really into their religion.” Mr. Rooney attended St. Peter’s Catholic Grade School and Duquesne University Prep School. He attended what is now known as Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Georgetown University, and Duquesne University. His brother Dan became Father Silas, a missionary in China.

When Mr. Rooney was 13, his mother was very ill. He went to St. Peter’s Church to pray for her from seven in the morning until eight in the evening. Her health improved by the next day. Art Jr. recounted: “He really believed in the power of prayer.” He continued to live his faith even as he traveled. He was a good role model for his traveling companions and co-workers. He would set the time that they would meet for Mass.

June 11, 1931, Mr. Rooney and Kathleen McNulty were married. They had five children, all boys.

His caring was evident in the little day-to-day encounters. When Mr. Rooney asked people how their family members were doing, “unlike most people, he was eager to hear the answer.” He followed up such conversations by sending Mass cards and personal notes. According to sportswriter Jim O’Brien: “He also led the National Football League in visiting hospitals, sending get-well cards and collecting...funeral cards. He used the latter for bookmarks.”

Former Pittsburgh Steeler John Baker, as the sheriff of Wake County in North Carolina, once was requesting funds to build a chapel in the women’s prison in Raleigh. Baker related how Mr. Rooney was financially generous. Then, several months after the donation, Mr. Rooney personally went to tour the prison and talk with the prison staff.

Among his many charitable contributions to Catholic institutions is at least one gift to the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. In the book Catholic Pittsburgh’s One Hundred Years, published in 1943, the Editorial Committee expresses gratitude to sustaining members who, “through their contribution of special membership in the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, have made possible the publication of this volume,” and among them was Mr. Rooney.

His humility was apparent even in death. Mr. Rooney died on August 25, 1988. His funeral was at St. Peter’s Church, the church he frequented. Curious individuals asked why not change the site to the cathedral, since it was larger. Someone who knew Mr. Rooney well responded, “If you do, he might not show up.”

Western Pennsylvanians need to remember Mr. Art Rooney, the man of character who lived his Catholic values daily. He attended Mass, funerals, and visited the sick. This quiet, generous, and humble spirit will live to inspire all who knew him. This is the mark of a gentle man whose greatness will continue to influence the Catholic Church in western Pennsylvania.
Father Marinaro
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Though there were several Catholic churches in the Butler area, all of them were a significant distance from the neighborhood. Also, many of the immigrants knew little English, and longed for a parish in which the priest would preach in their native tongue.

With these complaints, many locals came to Fr. Marinaro during his 1909 visit. He felt so compelled to help that he decided to make his visit permanent.

With the blessing of Bishop Canevin of Pittsburgh, Fr. Marinaro established the Parish of St. Michael the Archangel on August 3, 1909. He rented the second floor of an old fire hall to serve as the first church. He purchased and built pews from lumber, and bought a second-hand organ and wooden altar. He paid for all of these renovations primarily from his own pocket.

In 1910, Fr. Marinaro once again used his own funds to purchase a permanent home for St. Michael’s, purchasing and renovating an old Methodist church on the South Side. It is rumored that he spent more than $5,000 of his own money on this project.

In 1912, Fr. Marinaro began having Mass in three different languages every Sunday. There was a Mass in French, Belgian, and several in Italian every week. His kindness knew no ethnic boundaries. For his kindness toward Belgian immigrants, he received knighthood from the Belgian government.

During the early twenties, Pope Benedict XV gave Fr. Marinaro a special blessing. The pope recognized the outstanding work he had done for the immigrant population.

In 1921, Fr. Marinaro purchased an empty lot adjacent to St. Michael’s, and in 1922 a parish school was opened. By 1925, over 400 children attended the school, which was run by the Sisters of Mercy.

He insisted that the school devote significant focus to education in the arts, an odd idea for the time. He was instrumental in starting a school and parish band that would play at events and Church gatherings. He even constructed a bandstand on school grounds, for summer concerts. He also rented the Capitol Theatre in downtown Butler once a year so schoolchildren could perform operettas for the community.

In 1934, the Kingdom of Italy honored Fr. Marinaro by naming him with knighthood.

Also during this period, Fr. Marinaro again became active in resisting socialist movements, this time in the United States. He was instrumental in helping the U.S. government track down and imprison Carlo Tresca, an agitator attempting to incite revolution in western Pennsylvania.

In 1950, Fr. Marinaro broke ground for a new St. Michael’s. He helped import several tons of Italian marble to decorate the interior. The church opened in 1952, followed by a convent in 1960, and a new school in 1962. Along the way, he also established a mission church, St. Paschal in Argentine.

Fr. Marinaro retired in February 1968 at age 88. He had been pastor of St. Michael for nearly 60 years! In September 1969, Fr. Marinaro died.

His legacy lives on. St. Michael Parish still flourishes, with thousands attending Mass every Sunday. In 1978, the city of Butler dedicated a park in Fr. Marinaro’s honor. His kindness and love for the poor immigrants of Butler will never be forgotten.

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