



Jesuits have been serving as chaplains in Cook County Hospital for 100 years. In 1947, when this picture was taken, Francis Bimanski, SJ, Paul Kovalcik, SJ, and Robert Cronin, SJ, were serving as chaplains at the hospital.

# A Century of Service

by George Kearney

## JESUIT CHAPLAINS CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF SERVICE AT COOK COUNTY HOSPITAL

She is alone. The room is dim. Outside it is bright. And hot. It must still be hot. She drifts in and out of sleep. Two days ago when they brought her here, to the hospital, it was hot. She turns her head toward the window, straining to see what's outside. Is it still hot?

The shades are drawn. All she can see are lines of light at the edges of the window. She closes her eyes.

She is alone.

The door opens. Light floods into the room. Someone is in the room. Who is it? She turns her head, opens her eyes. She squints in the light from the hallway.

He comes to the side of the bed. "Soy un sacerdote." I am a priest. She remembers. She asked to see a priest, a chaplain. No longer is she alone. He wears a black shirt, with a white collar, and a white coat like a doctor.

"Padre Nuestro" he begins to say in Spanish. "Our Father, who art in heaven..." He recites the whole prayer.

"Dios te salve, Maria," he begins again. "Hail Mary full of grace..."

She moves her lips, joining him in the prayer. "Dios te salve, Maria," she says. Together they pray. Later he anoints her forehead with oil, praying over her in Spanish. When he is done he hands her a blue rosary. She takes

it in her weathered hand. Fingering the baby blue beads, she begins to cry. She presses the rosary to her face.

Minutes later Fr. Jim Chambers, SJ, leaves the hospital room. "I feel great satisfaction, that I was able to make her happy," he says. And with that, he's off.

There are many more patients to see.

Every morning at the John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County is a busy one. Doors swing open. New patients arrive constantly. Family and friends stream into the hospital to visit their loved ones. Ambulances come and go frequently. Doctors and nurses hurry through the hallways.

# A Moment of Grace

by Fr. Gene Nevins

One evening, before turning in for the night, I glanced down at a box on the bottom shelf of my bookcase. It had remained unopened

ever since my move to Chicago to begin my second tour of duty as a chaplain at Cook County Hospital. I picked up the box to refresh my memory as to its contents. The first item I came upon was a rolled up canvas scroll, which I'd purchased on my first visit to Rome. I carefully unrolled it and gazed once more at the picture of Michelangelo's famous "Pieta." "Yes," I said to myself, "some day I really need to get this framed." My action was so commonplace that I hardly gave it a second thought. Already it was late and that night I was the chaplain on call at the John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County, so I put the box aside and went to sleep.

Around 2:00 A.M. I was awakened by the sound of my beeper. It was a call from the Trauma Unit. There had been a terrible accident on the Dan Ryan Expressway. Two brothers, twins in their early twenties, had been in a car. Gabriel was killed outright and had been taken to the Coroner's Office. His twin brother, Toby, had been rushed to the hospital. They knew Toby had suffered a broken arm and possible internal injuries. Toby's mother Audrey and his step-father John were at Toby's bedside when I arrived at the unit. The nurse introduced me to the family. A few minutes later she took me aside and told me the bad news about Gabriel. Audrey wanted to see her son, but the Coroner's Office had advised against it. Gabriel had suffered such massive facial injuries, said the coroner, that it would've been impossible for her even to recognize her own son.

I could understand the concern of the nurse and the coroner. How devastating it would be for the mother to behold the mutilated face of her son, and how important it was for her to hold on to the mem-

ory of her son as she had known him. As I spoke with the mother, I couldn't help but remember the picture I had held in my hands just a few hours earlier.

Mary had held in her arms the brutalized body of Jesus when he was taken down from the cross. I thought to myself: "How terrible must be the pain of this poor mother who could not even see the body of her dear son, Gabriel."

Toby was stunned by what had happened, and there was need for the doctors to do further tests to rule out internal injuries. On leaving the trauma unit, I led Audrey and John down to the chapel. There we prayed together quietly. Audrey mentioned to me that she had been Catholic. Once again the thought of the "Pieta" in my room came back to me. I hadn't touched that box in months, and now here I stood before another "Pieta." Was it a mere coincidence that I'd opened that box before going to bed? Or was it a moment of "grace"? When Audrey told me that she had been Catholic, I thought of Our Lady, "Comforter of the Afflicted."

Might not this picture bring comfort to Audrey in a way I couldn't?

On leaving the chapel Audrey and John told me that they'd put in a call for another family member to join them. Since I live just a mile and a half from the hospital, I decided to drive back to the house and pick up the scroll. If Audrey couldn't see the body of her son, at least she might take comfort in the presence of this picture of Mary holding the body of her son. When I returned to the chapel I found Audrey praying beneath the cross behind the altar. I was in awe of the depth of her prayer as I heard her offer her son, Gabriel, to the Lord. Then she thanked God for sparing the life of Toby. Shortly after, I gave her the scroll. Driving home, I offered a prayer of thanks to God for that grace-filled moment when I opened that box on the bottom of my bookcase. ■



Gene Nevins, SJ, director of Catholic Chaplains at John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County

And each morning three Jesuit priests—Fr. Gene Nevins, SJ, Fr. Jim Chambers, SJ, and Fr. Bob Finn, SJ—gather in a small office adjacent to the new hospital’s chapel where they review a list of patients who have been admitted to the hospital in the last 24 hours. Then they go find the patients and minister to them. Sometimes it’s hearing a confession, sometimes distributing the Eucharist, sometimes performing last rites, and sometimes just sitting quietly so a lonely patient doesn’t spend the entire day alone.

Their ministry is not a new one. In fact, Jesuits from the Chicago Province have been serving at Cook County Hospital for over 100 years. On October 24, 2003, in a ceremony attended by Bishop John Manz and Chicago Provincial Edward W. Schmidt, SJ, the Chicago Province celebrated the 100th anniversary of this ministry to the patients and staff at Cook County, a ministry that began in 1903 when Fr. Michael McNulty, SJ, arrived at the hospital located just blocks from Holy Family Church and St. Ignatius College, the hub for Jesuit ministries in Chicago at that time.

Very sparse records of Fr. McNulty’s assignment remain. The clearest explanation of how he began ministering at the hospital comes from the Ignatian tradition. St. Ignatius Loyola wanted Jesuits to go where the need was greatest, and at the turn of the century the need at Cook County Hospital was incredible. In 1900, the average daily census numbered 792 patients, more patients than beds, and was rising rapidly. By 1910, the average daily census had jumped to 1,546.

The hospital was founded in 1835 as a “Poor House,” to provide medical care to indigents. By 1900, after a number of moves, it was located at its current site on the near west side of Chicago. Though it’s grown substantially, the hospital never strayed from its fundamental mission: to provide quality medical care for those who could not otherwise afford it. In the early 1900’s most of its patients were immigrants who had steamed into



Peter Hans Kolvenbach, SJ (second from right), Jesuit Superior General, visited the Jesuit chaplains at “County” in 1996. He’s pictured with Tony Kruetzjans, SJ, Dr. Terry Conway, SICP ‘66, John Pennington, SJ, Bill Madden, SJ, Frank Case, SJ, and George Wallenhorst, SJ.



John Pennington, SJ, who served as a “County” chaplain from 1995 to 2002, confers with clinical nurses Cristina Frederick, Cherie Cordero, and Mark Vild.

Chicago on ships and trains, looking for work in the many new industries of a city quickly becoming Carl Sandburg's stormy, husky, brawling "city of the big shoulders."

And most of them arrived in the United States with nothing. When they were injured on the job or became ill, they were dropped at the front doors of Cook County Hospital with nothing—vulnerable, hurt, often unable to speak the language, and quite surely scared.

A letter written by his superior in 1904 states that Fr. McNulty, during his first year at the hospital, offered last sacraments to patients on 592 occasions. He also baptized 44 adults and 14 infants, celebrated Mass at the hospital on Sundays, and made 520 additional visits to patients. And it wasn't even his principal job; he went there in his "spare time" as an assistant pastor at Holy Family because the need was great.

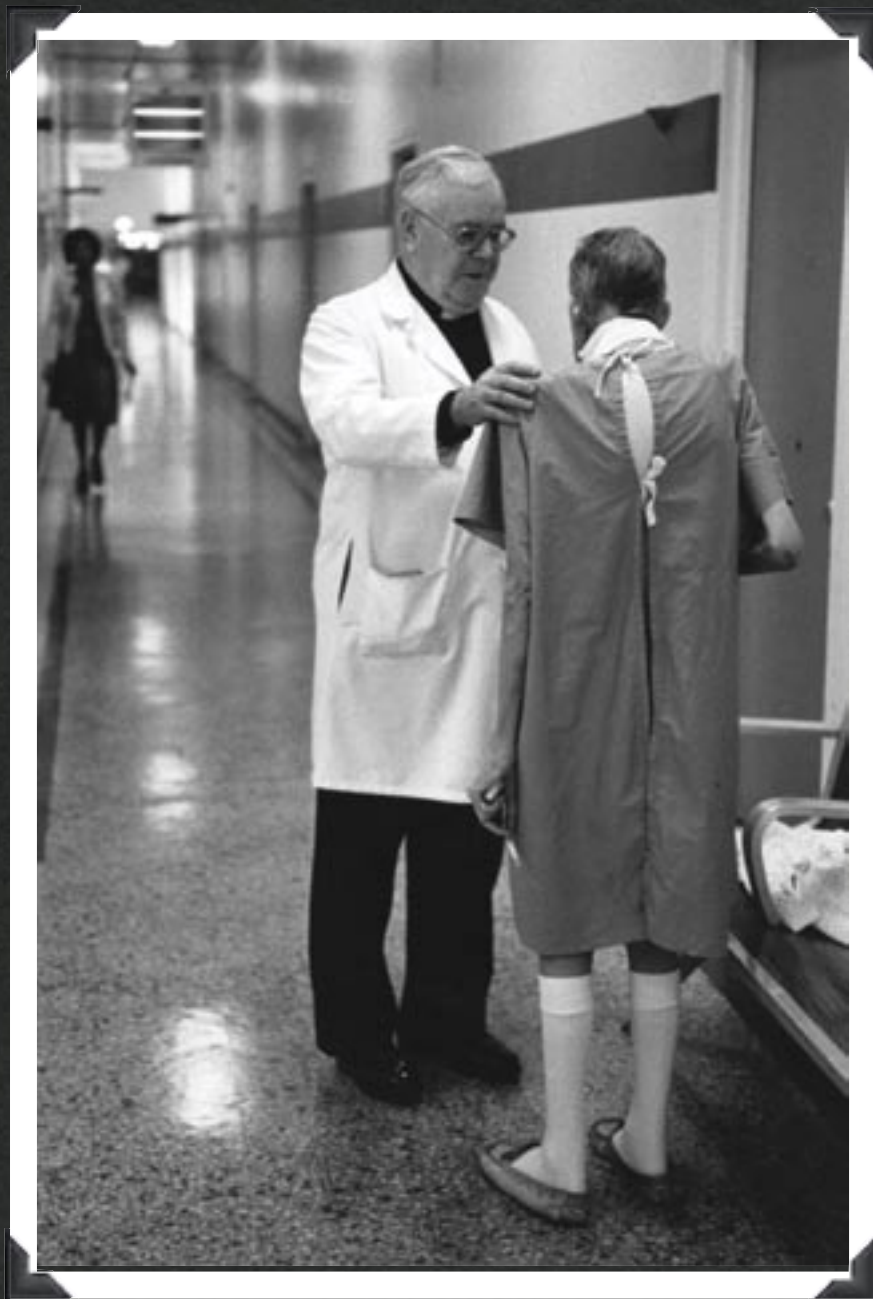
Superiors realized that need, too, and the next year Fr. McNulty was given an assistant, Fr. John M. Lyons, SJ. Together they offered last rites 1,028 times, baptized 26 infants and 107 adults, and made 830 additional visits.

As Chicago grew, County Hospital labored to keep pace. Through World War I, the roaring twenties, and the Great Depression the hospital continued its mission to heal and care for the poor. In 1927, according to John Raffensperger's *The Old Lady of Harrison Street: Cook County Hospital, 1833-1995* (International Healthcare Ethics, v. 3), the hospital admitted its one millionth patient. Records indicate that by the end of that year the Jesuits had provided sacramental ministry for some 55,000 Catholic patients. In 1930, Raffensperger notes, the annual admissions to the hospital had reached a previously unseen high of 45,953. By 1940 the number had leapt to 68,014.

The Jesuit ministry during this incredible period of growth was anchored by Fr. Francis X. Bimanski, SJ, who holds the distinction of the longest term of service as a chaplain at

Cook County Hospital. Born in Sion, Switzerland in 1871, he was ordained in Krakow in 1904, and then assigned to the United States to serve on the Polish Mission Band. In 1914 he was assigned to Cook County Hospital where he served for 38 years, rarely, if ever, missing a day of work, and visiting the tuberculosis ward at the hospital on his "days off."

A gifted linguist, Fr. Bimanski and his flowing black cassock were a welcome sight for the many immigrants in the hospital. He could speak to the Polish, the Italians, and the Slavs. He brought them Eucharist and helped them talk to their doctors. He arranged entertainment for patients in the hospital and was able to procure space in the old Cook County Hospi-



Bill Madden, SJ, shown here ministering to a patient, served as a chaplain at the hospital for 19 years.



Francis Bimanski, SJ, served as a chaplain at Cook County from 1914 to 1952.



Andrew Cook, SJ, served as a chaplain at Cook County from 1916 to 1946.



Paul Kovalcik, SJ, served as a chaplain at Cook County from 1937 to 1969.

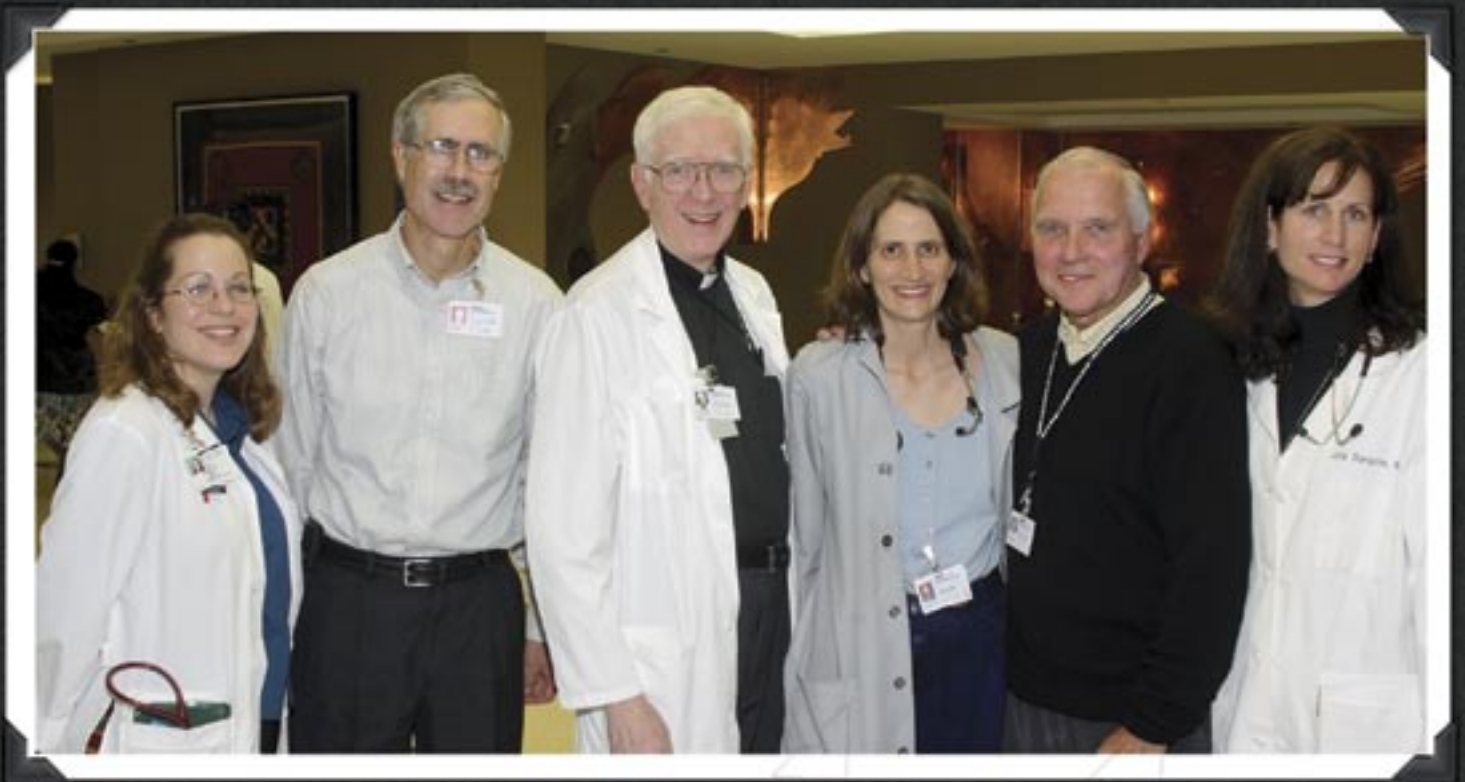
year of the flu epidemic that killed 550,000 people in the United States. It was a time when Chicago police were ordered to arrest anyone sneezing without covering their mouth; the chaplains, however, continued to work. Fr. Robert J. Cronin, SJ, served as a World War II naval chaplain and then returned to the States to become a chaplain at County from 1946 to 1973. Fr. George Wallenhorst, SJ, who served at the hospital from 1969 to 1997, also served as a chaplain during the Second World War. Fr. Paul P. Kovalcik, SJ, served as a County hospital chaplain for 32 years from 1937 to 1969. Fr. Bill Madden, SJ, served from 1982 to 2001.

tal building for a chapel. He penned pamphlets designed to help nurses in their work, and “phrase books” to help medical staff communicate with immigrant patients. Records indicate that Jesuit chaplains in the hospital had attended to the sacramental needs of more than a quarter million

Catholic patients by 1953, just one year after Fr. Bimanski’s death.

Fr. Bimanski was joined in this ministry for thirty years by Fr. Andrew J. Cook, SJ, who served as a chaplain from 1916 to 1946. Fr. John Grollig, SJ, worked with Frs. Bimanski and Cook at the hospital in 1918, the

Many Jesuits have dedicated the better part of their lives to the service of patients and staff at Cook County. Many have served for a year, or two, or three. Together they’ve combined for a century of uninterrupted service. But they haven’t done everything, says Todd Kenny, SJ, a Jesuit scholastic who served at the hospital while



Gene Nevins, SJ (third from left), celebrated the 100th anniversary of Jesuit service to the patients and staff at the hospital with members of the palliative care team: Kelly Cooke, D.O., Jonathan Platt, S.W., Catherine Deamant, M.D., director of palliative care, James Seeberg, volunteer, Loyola Academy class of '54, and Julia Sarazine, R.N.



These stamps from Monaco and Colombia depict St. Peter Claver's work, which serves as an inspiration for the Jesuits working in John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County today.

## *Jesuit Roots in Pastoral Care* St. Peter Claver, SJ

**I**n a letter dated May 30, 1627, St. Peter Claver, a Jesuit priest, wrote to his Jesuit superior detailing his work with African slaves in the port city of Cartagena, the chief slave mart in the South American Spanish Colonies.

"Yesterday, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, a great number of black people who had been seized from along the African rivers were put ashore from one very large ship.... There were a great number of them, lying on the damp earth, or rather in mud.... Two of the black slaves were more dead than alive; they were already cold, and we could hardly feel any pulse in their veins.... We got together some glowing embers on a tile, placed the dying men near them, and then threw aromatic spices on the fires. We had two bags of these spices and used them all. We got them to inhale the vapors, which seemed to restore their warmth and vitality. You should have seen the expression of gratitude in their eyes.... Then we sat or knelt beside them and washed their faces and bodies with wine; by such acts of kindness we tried to cheer them up."

Peter Claver, who was by all accounts a timid and shy man, declared himself on the day of his ordination in 1616 "the slave of the black slaves for all time." For 38 years, until his death in 1654, no slave ship entered Cartagena that did not find him hurrying to the seashore, his arms loaded with food and medicine. With boldness he fought his way into the cargo holds of ships where he fed the hungry, washed the wounds of those who'd contracted leprosy, and offered what comfort he could to the dying. For his efforts he received the scorn of slave traders and, sometimes, his religious brethren.

"Peter Claver is a role model and an inspiration," says Fr. Gene Nevins, SJ, director of Catholic chaplains at John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County in Chicago. "Stroger Hospital is about the same things he was about, caring for the sick, the poor, the oppressed." Peter Claver ministered to some 300,000 slaves during his lifetime. He was canonized on January 15, 1888, and is part of a long tradition of Jesuit pastoral care which stretches back to St. Ignatius himself and his early companions who ministered to the sick in hospitals. ■

studying at Loyola University Chicago last year: "We don't bring Jesus into this hospital. He's already here. We just help people discover Him."

Dr. Terry Conway, a 1966 graduate of St. Ignatius College Prep and long-time County medical staff member, explains how the hospital's chaplains serve the patients: "This hospital is a very unique place. It can be an isolating and confusing place, too. Sometimes we have patients arrive with advanced conditions. They might not have families. They might be totally alone. They might not ever have been in a hospital before. The whole experience can be difficult and scary, and sometimes the patients won't ask questions because they don't feel they're entitled. Then the chaplains come into their lives. They come in and talk, and listen, and they talk about what the experience means to the patient. Those are very powerful encounters."

Dr. Philomina Thuruthumaly, an anesthesiologist at County, echoes the same sentiments. "The Jesuits have a great effect here," she says. "There are studies which suggest people who are close to God are more likely to heal; I can see how my patients are more at peace after they (the Jesuits) have been by to visit."

For the last 36,500 days the Jesuits have done their part to help patients in the hospital heal. They've served immigrants from all parts of Europe, and Africa, and Russia, and India, and Mexico and many other places. They've served during outbreaks of disease, flu epidemics, brutally hot summers, and dangerously cold winters. They've served through World Wars and civil unrest. They've very often pulled themselves out of bed to respond to the needs of a patient at the hospital in the middle of the night. They've served quietly. They've served constantly. They've served in the Jesuit tradition, where the need is greatest.



George A. Wallenhorst, SJ, served as a chaplain at Cook County Hospital from 1969 to 1997.



John G. Henry, SJ, served as a chaplain at Cook County from 1972 to 1993.



Catherine and George Starmann visit with Provincial Edward Schmidt, SJ, during a reception at John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County to celebrate the 100th anniversary of service by Jesuit chaplains. Ms. Starmann is a former chair of the Cook County Hospital Women's Auxiliary Board.

In December, 2002, Cook County unveiled a new hospital building, the John H. Stroger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County. This spectacular new facility has improved the quality of care for all patients. It's also provided the hospital's chaplains with a beautiful new chapel. Each day at noon one of the Jesuit chaplains at Stroger says Mass in the chapel. "On many days," Fr. Chambers says, "all the seats are full." Family members of patients, and sometimes the patients themselves attend. So do doctors, nurses, and other hospital employees.

On this day Fr. Finn celebrates the Mass. At the conclusion he says "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord."

"Thanks be to God," the congregation replies, and the chapel slowly begins to empty. One of the nurses remains, sitting quietly in her chair. Fr. Finn clears the altar.

The nurse makes the sign of the cross and stands. As she heads for the door she calls over her shoulder, "See you tomorrow, Father."

"You bet," Fr. Finn says.

The Jesuits have been there for 100 years.

They'll be there tomorrow, too. ■

## 100 Years: The Jesuits Who Made it Happen

**T**hirty four Jesuits have been assigned full-time to Cook County Hospital for at least a year over the last 100 years. (The names in blue are currently serving at the hospital.)



Fr. Finn has been a chaplain at County since 1993.



Fr. Chambers began his chaplaincy there three years ago.

- John Assman, SJ (1915–1917): 2 years
- Francis X. Bimanski, SJ (1914–1952): 38 years
- James Brockman, SJ (1973–1974): 1 year
- James E. Chambers, SJ** (2000–current): 3 years
- Andrew J. Cook, SJ (1916–1946): 30 years
- Robert J. Cronin, SJ (1946–1973): 27 years
- Lawrence J. Eckmann, SJ (1956–1957): 1 year
- Robert E. Finn, SJ** (1993–current): 10 years
- Ray Garcia, SJ (1988–1992): 4 years
- Albert Gilbert, SJ (1924–1931): 7 years
- Robert C. Goodenow, SJ (1954–1956): 2 years
- John H. Grollig, SJ (1917–1920): 3 years
- Theodore T. Hegemann, SJ (1913–1915): 2 years
- John G. Henry, SJ (1972–1993): 21 years
- Edward A. Jones, SJ (1932–1947): 15 years
- Joseph G. Kennedy, SJ (1911–1913): 2 years
- Eugene C. Kieffer, SJ (1907–1909; 1913; 1916): 5 years
- John B. Kokenge, SJ (1909–1916): 7 years
- Paul P. Kovalcik, SJ (1937–1969): 32 years
- John M. Lyons, SJ (1907–1911): 4 years
- Charles D. McAleese, SJ (1951–1970): 19 years
- Michael F. McNulty, SJ (1903–1907): 4 years
- William O. Madden, SJ (1982–2001): 19 years
- John E. Mahoney, SJ (1970–1979): 9 years
- Eugene J. Nevins, SJ** (1981 to 1986; 2002–current) 6 years
- Francis P. O'Donnell, SJ (1978–1981): 3 years
- John F. Pennington, SJ (1995–2002): 7 years
- Joseph Reichel, SJ (1920–1924): 4 years
- Aloysius J. Schuler, SJ (1915–1916): 1 year
- John B. Van Acken, SJ (1912–1913): 1 year
- George A. Wallenhorst, SJ (1969–1997): 28 years