



UP FRONT AND PERSONAL
**Retired Pastor - It
Wasn't About Me**

BY MSGR. JOHN POWIS

I really appreciated the kind words of The Tablet (Editorial, Feb. 21) on the occasion of my retirement after 45 years of priesthood.

Over the years, especially at St. James Cathedral, Our Lady of the Presentation and at St. Barbara's parishes, I have had much help from individuals and the people of these congregations.

Even before ordination, I and my life-long friend, Neil Sullivan, worked during two summers at St. James parish. Actually, Msgr. James Coffey, our seminary professor, made contact with the Missionary Servants of the Blessed Trinity at Dr. White Settlement House which covered the areas of Farragut and Fort Greene Housing Projects near St. James. The Trinitarians didn't pay us a salary (that we got by working night games and weekends at Ebbets Field and Yankee Stadium).

But our experiences working with the families and young people in those two developments taught us more about those beautiful people than any seminary course could ever do. Right after ordination, we were both assigned to St. James parish. There we continued our ministry in those projects plus we worked with the middle-class families on the side streets and at Concord Village, a new moderate income development built in front of St. James Church. Our greatest accomplishment in those early years was made possible by an Irish family - John and Doris Meyer - who worked tirelessly to unite the parish into one solid community.

Most of my priesthood (25 years) was spent at Our Lady of the Presentation parish in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. Those were the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council. Msgr. Ed Burke was our pastor and he had six assistants (including myself). He urged us to go out into the community of Brownsville and become involved in the religious and social needs of the poor.

During my own later years as pastor of Our Lady of the Presentation, I had the invaluable assistance of Deacon Jaime Landron and Deacon Joseph Francois and an outstanding congregation of people whom I will always cherish. Our main objective was always the formation of one united parish in a congregation that was half Afro-American and half Hispanic.

In my last 15 years as pastor of St. Barbara's parish in Bushwick, I built on the outstanding efforts of lay leadership training begun by the previous pastoral team. Our magnificent church has been completely renovated. Our weekend Mass attendance hovers close to 2,000 people. The area of Bushwick, a symbol of destruction after the 1977 blackout, is once again a vibrant community and the people of St. Barbara's parish are one of the reasons for its rebirth.

I also want to thank Michael Gecan and the Industrial Areas Foundation who have taught us here in East Brooklyn how to move the establishment of the City so that we could build 3,000 (so far) owner-occupied Nehemiah Homes where the owner pays a monthly mortgage of less than \$600, so that we could open three small quality high schools with the New York City Dept. of Education, and so that we could fight the previous mayor to keep fire alarm boxes in all the poor areas of the city where many families do not have telephones.

I also want to thank Msgr. Bryan Karvelis who, many years ago, introduced me to a fraternity of priests who meet together monthly. Without my monthly review of life and my hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament at the beginning of each day, none of my social ministry would have had any meaning.

Finally, while thanking The Tablet for your kind words about my ministry, I want to say that I fully recognize that there have been and are at present bishops, priests (active and inactive), women and men religious (active and inactive), deacons, and thousands of lay leaders who have performed or are performing ministries in the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens of equal or greater valor than mine.