

*A Tribute from the late Bishop John A. Duffy
to Father Gonter on the Occasion of the
25th Anniversary of His Ordination*



**The Chancery
Diocese of Buffalo**

*Fifty Franklin Street
Buffalo, New York*

October 23, 1942

The Rev. Walter Gonter
157 Cleveland Drive
Buffalo, New York

Dear Father Gonter:

The information that you are about to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of your Ordination came to me as a great surprise. I had not thought of you as one old enough to have reached the age of a jubilarian. The fact, however, that twenty-five years of priesthood have gone over your head proves that you have acquired the habit of living, and another twenty-five years should not be difficult of attaining.

My sincerest congratulations on the event and my best wishes for many more years of health and happiness. Your work in the priesthood has won general commendation and your achievements at St. Aloysius are obvious even to the casual observer. Your priestly work is indicative of your character and spirit. A host of friends and parishoners will give testimony to both by their hearty congratulations on the occasion of your Jubilee.

With a prayer that you may be enriched with new graces and blessings, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

John A. Duffy
Bishop of Buffalo

*A Tribute to Father Walter M. Gonter
By Most Rev. Joseph A. Burke, D.D.
Bishop of Buffalo*

THE CHANCERY, DIOCESE OF BUFFALO

35 LINCOLN PARKWAY, BUFFALO, N. Y.

Like the many thousands who numbered themselves among his acquaintances, friends, parishoners and relatives, I was profoundly shocked to learn that Father Walter Gonter had succumbed to an unexpected cardial attack. His death means a severe loss both to his diocese and to his Bishop. I had the rich experience of serving with him as assistant pastor both at the Old Cathedral and the New Cathedral and as a member of the Budget Committee of the Catholic Charities. He consistently proved himself an extremely capable, conscientious, prudent and indefatigable member of the diocesan priesthood.

Undoubtedly, a fitting memorial stone will mark the place where rest his mortal remains; but a more eloquent and far more impressive monument was sculptured by his own capable artistry. The parishes where he served, either as an assistant or as a talented administrator of parochial affairs, now combine to form a more convincing tribute to his memory than any shaft of purest marble or of imperishable granite. Had he accomplished no more than the thoughtfully planned and strikingly beautiful buildings that comprise the several facilities of St. Aloysius Parish, his abilities, his zeal and his remarkable leadership are amply mirrored in this very impressive group of parochial structures.

His spiritual leadership is reflected in the enthusiastic parochial life that especially characterizes those who cooperated with him in his last field of labor. To him, in a marked degree, the parishoners of St. Aloysius Parish owe their vibrant faith and their inspiring spirit of generous cooperation.

May his blessed memory comfort us in our sorrow and prove a powerful incentive to our endeavors in behalf of God's Kingdom on earth. May our merciful and generous Savior grant him rest, peace and happiness — the lavish reward that awaits a capable, selfless and fruitful priestly life.

Joseph A. Burke

CATHOLIC CHARITIES HEADQUARTERS

545 WASHINGTON ST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

Father Gonter was a friend for many years. The friendship grew with his ardent interest in Catholic Charities. I recall the first days of his appointment at St. Aloysius. He had no church, no funds, property only. God blessed his leadership. St. Aloysius will always be the monument to his sterling priesthood. His real memory will be enshrined in our hearts. He had priesthood, manhood, integrity. He served God and his people indefatigably. There can only be the highest reward for such a life.

Rt. Rev. Msgr. Eugene A. Loftus, LL.D.
*Director of Catholic Charities Appeal
and Pastor of St. Mark's Church*

ROSARY HILL COLLEGE

4380 MAIN STREET, SNYDER, NEW YORK

It is the duty of a priest to be a mediator between God and man. To be an effective mediator, one must understand, have the respect of, and be interested in the welfare of the two parties for whom he is the mediator. Judged in the light of these essential requisites, Father Gonter was, in very truth, a great priest.

His service to God was long, intense and loyal. In public and in private, he was God's "man", working selflessly throughout a life time in the interests of God. The beautiful buildings he left behind are the crowning achievement of, and eloquent testimonial to, a successful priestly life richly spent in spreading the knowledge of the one true God and procuring for His honor and glory a regular and dignified worship.

Father Gonter's service to his fellow man needs less demonstration. We were, all of us, witness to his energetic, stupendous efforts in our behalf. In time of sorrow as well as in time of joy, in our sickness, in our difficulties of every sort, yes, even in our guilt and shame, he came to us. Never could we doubt that he came to us as a friend, profoundly interested in our wellbeing, a brother. He had an ability to understand human hearts, and understanding them, to touch them. Humility coupled with warmth, a disarming smile and an almost boyish sincerity, an aura of cleanliness and an evident desire to spend himself lavishly in our service, he gave us proof beyond question that Father Gonter, in addition to being God's "man" was also our "man".

His knowledge of many useful things, his truly remarkable organizational ability, and his boundless energy in doing good matched the greatness of his heart. It is no extravagance of words to say that his great heart, which had born the cares and anxieties of so many for so long a time, was finally crushed beneath the weight of its heavy burden.

FR. JOHN B. O'MALLEY *Chaplain*

ST. ALOYSIUS RECTORY

157 CLEVELAND DRIVE

Although my personal acquaintance with Father Gonter began only a few months ago, I have actually known of him for many years through his many priest friends. Truly "another Christ", his life was a mirror of self-sacrifice for his parish, his family and his friends. If I were to pick from the innumerable virtues that crowned his character, of all of them I think the outstanding would be Father's unselfishness. Always thinking of someone else, he forgot himself in his service to all who needed him, sick or sinner, child or adult. His life was a holocaust, an offering to God of himself on the altar of self-sacrifice. The tributes offered to Father here and by all who knew him are not mere phrases or hollow words, but sincere though inept attempts to repay the debt of gratitude which countless numbers owe to this holy man of God. Father had many friends, young and old, all felt at ease with him. Father Gonter had no enemies, for it would be impossible for him to hurt anyone, and equally impossible for anyone not to respond to his warm heart.

Like Father Baker, he had a great love for children, surpassed only by his affection and anxiety for the aged and infirm. No matter what time of day or night a call would come, he would always insist "I will go." That was his trademark — Service. To me during the last few months, Father Gonter gave the precious gift of Good Example; now that he's gone, there is one thing of his that I hope to have someday, his reputation as a gentleman and a priest.

Father Gonter is not really dead, for he lives on in heaven, in the lives of all whom he helped and influenced, in St. Aloysius Parish a monument to his life, and in the hearts and minds of all who loved and respected him. A brother to all, a member of every family, and truly a Spiritual Father, may the soul of Father Walter Gonter rest in peace, forever.

Sincerely in Christ

FATHER JOHN NUGENT

ST. ALOYSIUS RECTORY

157 CLEVELAND DRIVE

As you all realize, there is very little that I can say to you about Father Gonter that you don't already know, many of you perhaps even better than I. You have been with him through those first difficult times as well as the later, easier (?) ones. If I were telling a stranger about him though, I'd tell him how Father was really loved by all, clergy and laity alike, children, men and women. How I've never heard one word against him. It would be hard to pick one characteristic that made this true. The list could go on and on; he was so thoughtful of everyone else; cheerful; self-sacrificing; generous (overly so) with his time and money; always ready to listen; always ready with just the right story at the right time; and on and on. You can make up your own list.

As you know, he was my first pastor too, as an assistant. They say these first impressions are the lasting ones. I pray God that they will be, because in my two year's association with him in this parish, I found him to be a real priest in every way. I feel that I have lost not just a "good boss" but a real friend who has taught me what I should strive to be in future years. Many times he said to me, "Jim, always remember we're not ordained for ourselves, but to be of service to the people." And his life certainly showed that he practiced what he preached. They say we should "wear out" rather than "rust out" in the service of the Lord. I hope that I will remember his words and all the other advice he gave me. If I can even be half the priest he was, I'll feel that God will have been good to me. We'll all have to keep our chins up no matter what happens. I know he would want things to go on as he always planned them.

He won't forget us or anyone who comes after us, but will be here guiding us from that high place we all feel sure he has earned in heaven. God bless you all and give you the strength to see His Holy Will in this our loss as in all things He does.

FATHER JAMES COTTER

MOUNT SAINT JOSEPH ACADEMY

2064 MAIN STREET, BUFFALO, N. Y.

"Thou art a priest forever . . ."

No words save those of Christ Himself can be used to pay tribute to Father Gonter. No comparison save with that of Christ Himself can draw our picture of this "Other Christ" whom we love so well.

Only in the Heart of Christ can be found the love and peace which made the heart of Father Gonter. Only the Hands of Christ can be the Treasure House from which Father Gonter's hands poured out their blessings. Only from the Feet of Christ did Father Gonter learn the pathway to the doors of the poor, the sick and the troubled souls to whom he ministered.

Twelve years ago this "Other Christ" stood here in the midst of nothing and the course of St. Aloysius Parish unfolded before his very eyes. Twelve years ago he breathed into his newest child the breath of life and the breath of God. His Christ-heart brought peace, understanding and love. His Christ-hands blessed in marriage, baptized the newly-born, and anointed the dying. His Christ-feet beat a never-ending path to the sick, the poor and the distressed. His Christ-smile brought joy, sunshine and the blessing of happiness.

He taught as Christ taught, by living. He loved as Christ loved, by giving. He understood as Christ understood, fully and mercifully.

To the children of St. Aloysius School, Father Gonter was father and guide. To the teachers he was inspiration. To the Sisters of Saint Joseph he was loyalty, generosity, and kindness. In one word, rich, warm and all-encompassing, he was, Friend.

With the Sisters he shared his joys, his pride in good things accomplished, and his heart of unbounded generosity. Through all his priestly years the Sisters of St. Joseph have been blessed by Father Gonter's help and companionship. Through all these years they have watched his life for Christ unfold: giving the gift of himself, "in good measure, pressed down . . . and running over."

We ponder these thoughts of Father Gonter and reflect on them with deep, deep sorrow and ever mounting joy. For in the light and love of his beautiful life we will try to follow as Father Gonter did the urgent cry of St. Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are never at rest until they rest in Thee."

SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH