

# It's official – Fr. William Sprigler is Holy Trinity's parish priest

He's a traveling man who has made a lot of stops all over the world

By Linda Scherer  
Staff Writer

Fr. William Sprigler, known by his parishioners as Fr. Bill, was officially installed as Holy Trinity's pastor by Archbishop John C. Nienstedt at Holy Trinity's all-school Mass the first day of school, Sept 4. He has been in residence at Holy Trinity since the end of June.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1975, Sprigler lives his vocation. He is a priest first, before all else; and a traveling man second. From the time Sprigler was a child going for country drives on Sunday afternoons, he has loved traveling.

When he talks about his most recent trip to Peru last November, he sounds like a poet as he describes climbing a mountain ridge above the Urubamba Valley to tour Machu Picchu, the most familiar symbol of the Inca Empire.

Excitement about his next journey is just as apparent as he talks about going to Nepal, India later this fall with his brother and his brother's wife.

He has been to every state in the union except Alaska. He said he might consider going to Alaska when he is a little old man who can be placed on a steamship.

"I have seen the Himalayans and the sand dunes of the desert in North Africa, I have been to Denmark, Germany, Australia, Spain, Morocco, Italy, Portugal, and Israel," Sprigler said.

“I never take pictures,” Sprigler added. “While you are taking pictures, you are missing everything else.”

Part of his travel has been through his vocation. As a newly ordained priest, Sprigler was first a member of a religious order called the Paraclete Fathers, located in Fredricksburg, Texas.

In 1983, he was incardinated into the Diocese of New Ulm, and he moved to Minnesota.

Most recently, he has moved from the Hutchinson parish of St. Anastasia, which isn't such a great distance for anyone who has traveled the miles that Sprigler has, but it is a hard transition to make anyway.

“I felt bad every place I have ever had to leave,” Sprigler said. “We are ordained for a diocese, not a parish. We have to have a much broader view of the Church. It is not just parish. Now, it is our Area Faith Community of the Diocese of New Ulm. Even though we are on the edge of the diocese, we are still an integral part of the Diocese of New Ulm.”

### **He has known wealth and what it is like to be poor**

Sprigler is originally from South Dakota, where he grew up on the family dairy farm. His early life was not an easy one.

His family lost their home to fire before he was old enough to enter elementary school.

The fact that his family was well-to-do did not seem to phase a very young Sprigler, born into a wealthy lifestyle. Having hired men and women to care for his home and family did not seem unusual to him.

“My earliest memory was standing on a leather-back chair in the second floor billiard room watching my brothers shoot pool. Downstairs, there was a room just for music,” Sprigler said.

“I remember the hallway between my parents' bedroom and the nursery because that was my play area.”

He was used to having someone other than his mother take care of him.

In the winter of 1949-50, what Sprigler had known as home burned to the ground.

“It all went up in smoke and from there, we had to move into a chicken coop,” Sprigler said.

His parents were never able to recover from the loss.

Besides dealing with the loss of his home, Sprigler struggled for many years with disabilities which caused physical pain that was so great that he made a vow that he would try to become a priest if he would just be able to learn to walk without pain. That was when he was in the seventh grade.

During his college years, while attending the Black Hills State University, he seemed to miraculously outgrow his physical handicap. By the time he graduated from college, with a degree in secondary education, he was walking without pain.

“Later on, I remembered my promise and I went to the seminary to give it a six-week trial, and I am still trying,” Sprigler said.

Sprigler added, “It was with the grace of God that I became a priest.”

The first assignment he was given when he was transferred to the Diocese of New Ulm was associate pastor at Holy Rosary in North Mankato.

“A year later, Bishop Lucker named me director of the office of personnel for the Diocese of New Ulm,” Sprigler said. “I was in charge of every aspect of religious personnel. The office represented nuns, priests, school, and clerical staff.”

He remained the director of the office of personnel until 1989 while also serving as pastor of other parishes.

He has been pastor at St. Mary’s in Cottonwood, the Church of the Japanese Martyrs in Leavenworth, Holy Redeemer in Marshall, St. Anthony’s in Watkins, St. Andrews in Granite Falls, and St. Anastasia in Hutchinson.

Of all of his past parish homes, he was the most drawn to Leavenworth, located south of Sleepy Eye. He was there for four years.

The Catholic church in Leavenworth is one of the oldest Catholic churches still active in the Diocese of New Ulm. It was founded in 1860.

While he was there, it was necessary to close the Catholic school because there were not enough students attending.

The place has remained in Sprigler's heart.

"The people treated me like I was one of their own. They were very good to me. It reminded me of home," he said.

It is where Sprigler has chosen his final resting place. His grave site already has a marker placed on it with his name and birth date etched in stone. He smiles as he shares a picture of the plot and tells how he even had a chance to dance on his own grave.

Retiring is not part of his future plans.

"Being a priest is my vocation," Sprigler said. "I think I am a good priest and I don't know what I would do otherwise. I have no intention of retiring. I don't understand that concept at all. It's like retiring from being married."

Being a priest and being able to celebrate the Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation are the most rewarding parts of his vocation, Sprigler said.

"Reconciliation is a wonderful, wonderful healing sacrament. I have had more than one person tell me how much they hate going to confession, but how much they love to go to confession afterwards when it is over."

When asked if there is a particular accomplishment Sprigler is truly proud of, his response was that pride is one of the seven deadly sins.

"What I have been able to do as a priest is not me, it is Christ who has done things through me," he explained.

**His work at Holy Trinity is prioritized**

The two months spent at Holy Trinity, so far, have been a positive experience for Sprigler.

He likes the area and its people. He thinks Winstock and Higher Ground are “a real hoot.”

There is a lot of work that Sprigler would like to see happen at Holy Trinity and he has a list of jobs he is ready to tackle. His first priority is the school’s gymnasium roof.

Once that is complete, he would like to raise funds to make the church handicap-accessible.

The church ramp can be used to get into the church upstairs, but there are no bathrooms on the upper level. Also, the handicapped cannot use the lower level social hall because its only access requires the use of steps.

As far as important events coming up, the Diocese of New Ulm will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2008. Plans are being made to begin after the first of the year. It will be conducted by the Redemptorist Mission Team, based in Chicago. Missions will be held in all of the area faith communities and parishes in the diocese January through April 2008.

Area mission committees started planning the first week of September to prepare for the Redemptorist missions. It will involve over 25 different missionaries, who are to preach in English and Spanish.

“The whole parish and anybody else in town who wants to come is invited,” Sprigler said.

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