

Irish Priest Likes Hendersonville

By CONNIE CLARIS

HENDERSONVILLE—Hendersonville has a new Catholic priest who could have stepped right out of an old Bing Crosby movie. Youthful and handsome, with a bit of a brogue, the Rev. Hugh Clarke came straight from Kildare, Ireland, to his assignment as assistant pastor at Immaculate Conception Church.

Like Ireland

The Rev. Mr. Clarke flew into Asheville Airport Dec. 22, having left his native Ireland just the day before. "I find this area just like my home in County Donegal, where I was born. The same mountainous countryside. And the climate is just like Ireland, too. Ireland in July, that is!" He smiled his appreciation of the (at that time) unseasonably warm winter weather.

However Western North Carolina is the only part of the United States he has seen as yet. "New York City was fogged in when I arrived and I didn't even glimpse a skyscraper."

Clarke was born in Lifford, a town of 2,000 which is the capital of County Donegal. He is one of 10 children, the only member of his family to choose religion as a vocation.

Carmelite

A member of the Carmelite order, he was educated in a seminary and took his degree in philosophy at the University of Dublin. "I expect to remain in America for one year as assistant to Father Lane (the Rev. Howard V. Lane). Then I hope to get my doctorate when I return home."

"This is the first time I have been stationed in a parish," he continued enthusiastically. "It is wonderful. The

people are so friendly. In England people are more reserved. They hardly speak, even when they know you. Here nobody knows me but everybody speaks to me!" Clarke's engaging personality invites friendship from all who meet him.

London Monastery

For 10 years following his ordination, the 37-year-old priest was stationed near London at a 12th century monastery called The Friars. It is a combination resort and retreat, with as many as 300 guests in residence. Listed with the board of British Antiquities, The Friars is a pilgrimage center visited annually by 20,000 Americans and countless Europeans.

Ancient handicrafts are being revived at The Friars, where the brothers make wrought iron, ceramics, and woodcarvings for sale to tourists. They also weave silk material for vestments.

Travels About

Besides his work at The Friars, Clarke frequently traveled about Britain lecturing on religion and the history of the reformation. He also spent several years counseling refugees from behind the Iron Curtain, particularly from Poland.

In recognition of his service to refugees, he was awarded the Gold Cross of Merit by the Republic of Poland. The government-in-exile presented him with its highest decoration at an impressive ceremony in the London embassy.

A vigorous, athletic man, Clarke was a varsity rugby player both in high school and at the university. He is also quite interested in dramatics. "I have always served

on drama committees and have even written two one-act plays. I don't know how many skits I have put on." He was frequently in the audience of the Abbey Players during his years in Dublin.

Though he drives a car back home, he now plans to take some driver-training lessons before venturing out on the North Carolina highways. It takes considerable courage when you have always driven on the left side of the road.

During his first visit to the United States, Clarke expects to acquire "a broadening of vision. A meeting of the new world. It is like a breath of fresh air after living in the

old world," he added. "I expect a fusion of both in my own mind."

He went on to compare two men from the old and the new worlds, both of whom he admired greatly: Pope John and John F. Kennedy.

"Both Pope John and President Kennedy touched the hearts of Europe. When President Kennedy died, many little children who were not Catholics brought their pennies and asked me to say Mass for him.

"With only a few short years and without any great pronouncements, I cannot understand how each of these men influenced the people so much."



THE REV. HUGH CLARKE
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