



2023 Walks of Life Honoree

Fr. Thomas D. Mahoney

Fr. Thomas D. Mahoney has served as chaplain to the Our Lady of the Rosary Division of the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians for the last 15 years.

The Hibernians, an Irish American Catholic Fraternal organization founded in New York City in 1836, had roots in a parent organization of the same name, which has existed in Ireland for more than 300 years. The American Order was created to protect Catholic clergy and parishioners from hate groups and their bigotry-filled followers. The subsequent Famine Years in Ireland in the mid-1840s and early 1850s prompted an unparalleled growth of social societies in the US - the largest of which was, and continues to be, the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

The primary purpose of the Ladies group was to protect young immigrant Irish girls coming to the United States and to assist them in securing employment. Today, the Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians still focuses on protecting the Faith, but also supports social justice, peace and reconciliation and social welfare programs, and perpetuates the religion, history, culture and traditions of Irish heritage. The Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians has had an active presence in Cleveland since the turn of the 20th century. Chaplains have always been an integral part of the LAOH mission and work.

Fr. Tom Mahoney, one of four sons of Leo and Margaret O'Connor Mahoney, was born on Cleveland's West Side. He recalls that two of his great-grandparents were married by Bishop Louis Amadeus Rappe, the first bishop in the Diocese of Cleveland, who also gave First Holy Communion to one of his great-grandmothers. His family lived in St. Augustine Parish for fifty years. He was baptized at St. Colman's and grew up in St. Clement's and St. James in Lakewood.

A graduate of St. Ignatius High School, and Borromeo and St. Mary's Seminaries, Fr. Mahoney was ordained in 1965 and said his first Mass at St. James Church. His first parish assignment was at Immaculate Conception Church in Willoughby. He served in nine parishes, including as pastor of the former St. Cecilia's on Cleveland's East Side, St. Ann's in Cleveland Heights, and St. Pius X in Bedford. He also served as administrator at St. Malachi Church.

Now retired and living in Lakewood, Fr. Mahoney said, "Cleveland is an absolutely fascinating place to be able to carry out the ministry of a Catholic parish priest.

"Historically, faith and culture have always been intimately joined together, but now in a secularized and materialistic world, not so much. It seems a challenge for the Church and for the minister to try to draw people back together without politicizing religious conviction."