

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **A MAN of GOD**

On August 1916 in the midst of World War I, Rev. Herbert J. Farischon was appointed as the first resident pastor by Bishop Maurice F. Burke, bishop of the St. Joseph Diocese. Thus began a relationship with Palmyra lasting over 50 years during which time Father Farischon became a legend. He has been called a “priestly priest,” a “Renaissance man,” “a man for all seasons, and “a man of God” by his parishioners. His is a story of a life well-lived, serving people not only of a particular faith, but a whole community, generation after generation. His is a story of a memorable, unforgettable character etched in the fabric of a place—St. Joseph Parish and the Palmyra community. His is a story of a large part of this parish’s history as well.

Father Farischon was born May 22, 1888, in Columbus, Ohio, where he attended Holy Cross Grade School. As an exceptionally bright student, he was advanced from the second to the fourth grade within a year. He attended Holy Cross High School, and immediately after graduation, he entered the Pontifical College Josephinum at Worthington, Ohio, where he completed his preparatory studies for the priesthood.

After twelve years of study, he was ordained to the priesthood for the diocese of St. Joseph by Bishop James J. Hartley of Columbus on June 8, 1915. He was perhaps the only priest in history to have a brass band honor him on such an occasion. His father was a member of a Columbus band, and the musicians came to the Farischon home to play a concert in his honor (Church). An unusual chain of events brought him to Missouri. The summer before his ordination, he had been visiting relatives in St. Joseph, and they suggested he should ask to be sent to Missouri. He was not too enthusiastic as he had no more reason to want to be in Missouri than elsewhere, but he put in his request, thinking it would probably be denied. He was mistaken. Father later said “I lived in only two counties in my entire life, Franklin County in Ohio and Marion County in Missouri (Stability).”

He was immediately named chaplain at St. Elizabeth Hospital, Hannibal, where he served until his appointment as pastor of the St. Joseph Church in July 1916. Soon after his ordination, Father Farischon’s father died. This was his first funeral Mass as a priest. When the young priest went to Palmyra as pastor, St. Joseph’s parish was a mission of the Quincy, IL Franciscan priests who built the church with only 40 families. When he retired, the parish had almost four times that many.

The young Father Farischon was also in charge of the mission church in LaGrange from 1916-1921. He made the 34 mile round trip journey by train or by Model-T often accompanied by Albert Juetten or some other man from the parish.



**Young Father Herbert J. Farischon  
First Resident Pastor**



**Father with Mildred Kroeger**



**Fr. Farischon and Mildred Kroeger**

A parishioner, Mrs. John Kroeger (nee: Clara Wellman) died shortly after giving birth to a baby girl, Mildred, in March 1922. The father with five other small children could not care for the new baby. Mrs. McGonigal, housekeeper at the rectory, and a widow whose policeman husband was killed in the line of duty, volunteered to raise the infant. Father Farischon took a major responsibility in helping raise the child. Martha Scheveling Hudson recalled her Aunt Fieldine Slocum, a school mate of Mildred's saying, "That was the happiest home." Father

wanted Mildred to have a normal life and regularly arranged visits with playmates. Mildred was raised in the rectory until her death Christmas Eve at the age of 14 years of age. In 1925 Father Farischon was hospitalized for three weeks gravely ill with typhoid fever.

On December 6, 1932, Father H. J. Farischon was critically burned about eight o'clock p.m. when the natural gas which was used to heat the church exploded as he attempted to light the burner. A meeting was being held in the church and Father Farischon noticed that the room was getting chilly. Upon checking the furnace in the basement, he found the pilot light had gone out, but he failed to notice that the gas supply to the burner was not shut off. When he struck a match to light the pilot, the accumulated gas exploded and Father Farischon's clothing was instantly in a blaze. He was wearing a very flammable celluloid collar and suffered severe burns about the face, neck, and chest. The explosion extinguished the electric lights, but he was able to get to the door where the meeting was taking place. He was treated at St. Elizabeth's hospital for severe shock and burns. Four months of recuperation were required to heal critical burns suffered about the face, neck, and arms. He carried scars from this accident for the rest of his life. Mary Kroeger Hirner remembers taking supper to Father "the night he blew the basement up."

On Christmas Eve, 1936, Mildred Kroeger, age 14, died. Father went ahead with confessions and later announced at Mass that his foster daughter had died. Marie Nill marveled that "he was a tough old bird." Marie, who was the same age as Mildred, served as one of the pall bearers at her funeral. Mildred was buried at St. Mary's Cemetery, Hannibal, where Mrs. McGonigal, had a cemetery plot.

On May 22, 1940, a Silver Jubilee and birthday celebration was held in his honor. The solemn High Mass at 10:30 A.M. was attended by priests from the diocese as well as many priests and friends from Quincy, Il. A banquet was held in the Palmyra High School Auditorium at 12:30 P.M., and a program by the school children and other members of the parish was held in his honor at the auditorium at 8:00 P.M.



**Father Farischon's Silver Jubilee and Birthday Celebration on May 22, 1940, Edna Barber Tuley, Bride**

On October 3, 1959, Father Farischon was appointed Domestic Prelate by his Holiness, Pope John XXIII, with the title of *Right Reverend Monsignor*. His investiture was on December 12 by the Most Rev. Joseph M. Marling, Bishop of the Jefferson City Diocese.



**Msgr. Connally, Msgr. Farischon, Bishop Marling**



**Msgr. Farischon**



**Bill Bryan**

**Maurice Buckman**

**Msgr.**

**Frank X. Reller**

**Gerald Maas**

A fire damaged the beloved observatory and equipment belonging to Msgr. Farischon beyond repair in 1964. In 1965 Msgr. Farischon celebrated his Golden Jubilee in the priesthood and the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Joseph's Parish with the parishioners and townspeople. Bishop Marling celebrated with a special Anniversary Mass at 4:00 p.m. followed by a banquet at 6:00 p.m. The Knights of Columbus held a public reception for Msgr. at the high school gymnasium from 8:00-10:00 p.m. In 1966 Msgr. Farischon was honored at a carry-in supper on the fiftieth anniversary of his arrival at St. Joseph's Church. On July 2, 1968, Msgr. Herbert J. Farischon retired as pastor, after 52 years of service. The Palmyra Knights of Columbus, Council 1937 invited all his friends to a "Smoker." He moved to an upstairs apartment on the corner of Home

and Church Streets, close to the church. He later moved to a retirement home in St. Louis where he died.

Few Catholic pastors have had the distinction of serving continuously in the same parish for one-half century. In Palmyra it is believed that no one of any denomination has approached this record (Church). As many as five generations in some families were under the spiritual guidance of Monsignor Farischon. Church records record an accession of baptisms, marriages, and funerals. He baptized Mary Kroeger Hirner and celebrated the Mass at her wedding. In addition, he celebrated the sacraments for most of her ten children.

His first baptism was Carl Milton Johnson, Sept. 3, 1916, the son of Ursula Shear Johnson and the late Joseph Johnson. His last baptism was Gregory Joseph Schwartz, son of Frank W. and Bonnie Chase Schwartz, performed April 7, 1968. His first marriage ceremony united Miss Elizabeth Meyers and James Albert Lake. The last wedding before he retired was that of Mary Reller, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Reller II, of Palmyra and Erik Hernes of Lillestrom, Norway, son of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Hernes of Norway, on Saturday, June 8, 1968. The very last wedding he performed was after his retirement when he officiated at the wedding of Terry Rothweiler and Joseph Barnes on May 24, 1969, when the pastor, Fr. Jelenic was hospitalized. Joe Barnes is the grandson of Albert and Elizabeth Lake, the first couple married by Rev. H.J. Farischon in Palmyra. Monsignor instructed many in the faith explaining theological teachings (St. Joseph). But much of his influence cannot be shown by statistics, but lives within the hearts and souls of those he taught.

He shared the joys and hardships of his parishioners and friends through two World Wars, the Korean conflict, and Viet Nam. The devastating Depression, bad crop years, and other hardships he bore with his people. Often Father's salary was depleted by needs of the parish; sometimes he collected no salary. He knew major problems, disappointments, and sadness as well. Still he continued his work with humility and prayer making him a significant spiritual leader. Father Farischon was noted for his administrative qualities; his efficient conduct of church affairs, keeping a stable financial situation in the operation of the church, school, rectory and Sisters' home. "Even in the spare years of the thirties, he managed skillfully." (Church).

Prayer life was important to Father. In addition to daily mass and the "office" required of him, he said the rosary and talked to God about the general and specific needs of his parishioners. This ministry continued as long as his memory and strength would permit. In speaking of prayer, Father emphasized that many who become discouraged in their efforts do not realize how much prayer is needed to change a situation. He cited St. Monica who prayed for twenty years that her wayward son Augustine would become a Christian. Monsignor Farischon recited the Legion of Mary prayer each day and he lived its precepts.

Lord...

Grant us a lively faith, animated by charity, which will enable us to perform all our actions from the motive of pure love of Thee, and ever to see Thee and serve Thee in our neighbor; grant us a faith, firm and immovable as a rock, through which we shall rest tranquil and steadfast amid the crosses, toils and

disappointments of life; a courageous faith which will inspire us to undertake without hesitation great things for God and for the salvation of souls... (Kroeger).

Father was very well respected. Sr. Longina told Martha Scheveling Hudson's class how fortunate they were to have Father as he was such a priestly priest. As further explanation she told the children the shocking news. "You know there are some priests that even play golf!" Many believed that Msgr. could have reached high ecclesiastical levels, but he chose to remain a parish priest among his people (Church).

Father was known for his wit. L.A. (Unk) Wellman recalled a story relating to that aspect of Father Farischon. Shortly after Father came to Palmyra, four men: Father, Tony Heembrock, George Schaffer, and Lawrence (Pop) Wellman Sr. were playing pinochle in the Wellman home. They played in the kitchen, directly underneath Unk's bedroom. Tony and Pop were partners against Father and George. Pop was leading off the play and Father trumped his Ace. Pop called for all the cards, put them into a neat stack, and threw the whole deck against the wall accompanying his action with strong language, all in German. No one knew Father was fluent in German until he answered Pop in the same language. On another card-playing night, Father showed his sense of humor. While Tony was outside, the other three stacked the deck so Tony got the bid, but couldn't take a trick.

Father was known to his many friends as the "Priest Astronomer," the title coming from his reputation as a well-known amateur astronomer. He worked with a telescope in his own observatory built in 1929 and was a long-time member of the Lions Club of Quincy, Il. Father was noted for his love of astronomy. On Friday mornings, Monsignor would go to the parish school to give all the students additional religious instruction. The students learned in the first four grades that questions about the stars and planets were rewarded by some of the most joyful and interesting discussions that ever occurred in the school. The high school students met with Monsignor on Wednesday evenings for instruction of morals and related issues, but frequently these students would use the same tactics to get Monsignor into more interesting discussions about astronomy. Monsignor often used all the allotted time for this and never got to the lesson on morals.

Unfortunately, Father had to abandon his astronomy hobby in 1964 when a fire gutted the observatory and destroyed all his mechanical equipment.

During one of the Friday morning sessions, Monsignor was making a point in his lecture and flung his arms out wide. His wrist watch flew off and smashed into the door frame. When he picked it up, Monsignor made the comment that it was supposed to be shock-proof. He took it to the jewelry store to be repaired or replaced under the warranty. The jeweler said that it was shock-proof, not smash-proof, and he did not replace it.

Another tactic students used to make the Friday morning sessions more interesting was to question some of the language of the Bible. Monsignor could speak several languages fluently and could understand several others. Once a student got him started, he could go for most of the hour on the differences in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew etc. Monsignor loved language and its



nuances. In 1961, Monsignor took Jon Wellman down to St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary for Vocation Day. At the door, Monsignor introduced Jon to Father Wenting and that was the last English word for several minutes. Each priest would speak a sentence in one language and answer in another, without repeating languages. Father thoroughly enjoyed language. He would take a class period analyzing each student's name and explaining its origin. He enjoyed talking about the range of meanings brought on by translating from one language to another and frequently gave examples of how this worked. One of his favorites was from a letter he received from a missionary in Africa who was just learning English and had to rely heavily on a dictionary. He ended one of his letters to Monsignor, "May God pickle you." Monsignor looked up "pickle" in his dictionary. The primary definition is "preserve." Monsignor loved that.

Among many other interests, Father loved to travel. In 1966 he took a 4,000 mile vacation with his sister to the Western states. Marie Nill was the driver. In the rectory he displayed conversation pieces from colleagues, friends, and from his own travels. He loved to pamper gold fish in his front yard fountain, tell a story about a flower growing in his yard or a tree nursed through tornado damage (Church). A stamp collector since his childhood, Father later branched out into coin collecting. He recalled that his stamp hobby was interrupted somewhat when he was in the seminary. He took it up again when he decided his charge Mildred was old enough to learn about stamps. The two of them renewed his old hobby, and he added coin collecting. He later willed his coin collection to Josephinum Pontifical College, his alma mater. He kept many of his interesting objects in a room he called his "museum." He had a lively interest in the outside world. Books and magazines filled his rooms (Stability). His interests ranged from the "tiniest insect exploring the grass on the lawn", to the most distant star viewable from his home-built observatory on the parochial school grounds. Above all, was his concern for the temporal and spiritual welfare of all persons, parishioners or not (Kroeger).

Everyone knew that cigars were very important to Father Farischon so he received many boxes of them as gifts. Mary Jane Rothweiler recalled an amusing incident. Father always put his cigars up in the closet to "ripen" and unwrap as needed. One time after about six or eight months of "ripening," he brought a new box out of storage only to discover the box of cigars was a box of homemade cookies (quite stale). Some parishioners while on vacation were attending Sunday Mass at Camdenton, MO. To their surprise Father Scobee was filling in and told in his homily that his good friend, Father Herbert Farischon, had smoked enough cigars that if laid from end to end would reach around the world. Father's visits to parishioners are legend. He loved to talk and he loved to smoke. Often these visits would stretch late into the night. Hosts knew if Father lit up yet another cigar, he would not go home until it was finished. It has become part of the Farischon lore how he loved to visit—and how lengthy his visits were! Leo Rothweiler remembers Father visiting his folks until 2 a.m. The next morning when Leo's dad got to church, Father was already preaching. Father waited until the senior Rothweiler was seated and then he said, "I guess I ought to do penance." He then resumed his sermon not missing a beat. Many parishioners knew they were in for a long session when Father would light up another cigar as he never went home until the cigar was finished.

Monsignor never ceased to amaze others. Around 1960, Unk Wellman was building a small covered porch on the side of his house. Monsignor came by to visit and seeing the ladder

leaning against the roof, told Unk how he ran up ladders as a boy with “no hands.” Although he was past 70 years of age, Monsignor decided to demonstrate. He climbed to the top of the ladder with no hesitation, and then came back down—with “no hands.”

Msgr. Farischon said that events following his coming to Palmyra scarcely would have led him to expect such a long career. He had no more than put down his luggage when a ferocious storm struck, damaging the church and other properties in town. He remembered that as the worst storm in his half century here, with the exception of the tornado of 1945. Adding to that adversity, the first three parishioners to whom he was introduced, including the church organist, informed him they were leaving the parish. And remarks following his first Sunday Mass at Palmyra were not entirely favorable. His physical appearance at that time apparently prompted one member of the congregation to conclude, “He won’t last long; he’s got T.B. (Testimonial).”

From these beginnings, Palmyra and Father Farischon were good companions. Someone once observed he was an advance scout for the Ecumenical spirit long before the efforts of Vatican Council. He was in Palmyra only a short time before it was noted that when he walked downtown, he knew exactly what to say to almost everyone he met to produce a smile.

One of the few criticisms he received came from his scholarly sermons delivered with enthusiasm and at great length. He was always reluctant to pass up an opportunity to discuss the scriptures in depth. Once when a churchgoer complained that a sermon over an hour was too long to endure in the uncomfortable pews, Father retorted that the complainer was much younger than he himself and if he, the priest, could stand that long, he, the parishioner, should be able to endure sitting that long as well. He consistently stood solid on God’s teachings and the teachings of the church. No one could convince him to deviate on his convictions and obligations (Kroeger).

On the occasion of his Golden Jubilee he received a congratulatory message from the parishioners of St. Joseph Church which echoed the sentiments of his grateful parishioners.

To express our love and appreciation to you for all that you have done for us, and our beloved Church is something that cannot be put into words. You have been with every family through ups and downs; you have baptized, confirmed, and married many of us; you have been there to comfort us in time of sorrow. For all these things, we give thanks, and say, ‘Father, we love you (Father).

Monsignor died October 3, 1979, in Alexian Brothers Hospital, St. Louis, at the age of 91. He had been residing since 1975 at the Little Sisters of the Poor Retirement Home in St. Louis. He came home for the final time to his beloved Palmyra. Bishop Michael F. McAuliffe concelebrated the Mass with priests from around the diocese assisting. And his pallbearers and honorary pallbearers—members of his parish family with names like Juette, Luger, White, Kroeger, Wellman and Buckman, Fleming, West, Kroeger, Carroll, Hirner, Kroeger, and Shear. And his resting place, St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Palmyra (Msgr. 1).



Ruth Hastings in a Palmyra Spectator editorial (Wednesday, October 10, 1979) expressed the devotion to Msgr. Farischon many of the parishioners felt.

Msgr. H. J. Farischon was buried in St. Joseph Cemetery Monday morning—our Father Farischon has come home to stay. His death on Wednesday, October 3, brought back poignant memories to me and many others who were under his reverent guidance as children and adults during his fifty-two years as our spiritual leader.

I remember with fondness his Friday visits to the classrooms at St. Joseph School. He didn't lecture. He talked. About everything! Father Farischon especially loved children. Oh, how he enjoyed giving the annual Christmas treat, a sack of candy to each school child; colored eggs on Easter Sunday; and planning the picnic at the end of school.

My own family possessed a unique kinship concerning Father. He performed my parents' wedding ceremony (his first); baptized all their children, all their grandchildren and even a few of their great-grandchildren. Most of the third generation has arrived since Monsignor took residence in St. Louis at the Little Sisters of the Poor, a home for retired Priests.

Although a native of Ohio, Msgr. Herbert J. Farischon's body rests in the town that he loved. His soul rests in the Hands that he served.

And that is the story of a man who made a difference in the temporal and spiritual lives of many in a particular time and place—Father Farischon, Monsignor Farischon—man of God.



**Monsignor Farischon 1958**