

Leeds Terrace, Lawrence

This was to be our new home for a good number of years. It had seemed strange to me to come to Tyngsboro with the direct request that we should dispose of the whole plant and property and to find new quarters for our elderly and retired Marist Brothers.

Our Brothers had been working in Lawrence, Massachusetts, from the very first years of our work in the U.S.A. We had started in Canada and then opened workplaces all over New England. So moving from Tyngsboro to Lawrence was no problem at all. We had a regular high school in full operation in Lawrence and would be able to maintain good contacts with those who first started there so many years ago. We settled in Leeds Terrace because it offered the unique opportunity of being right at home with Marist Brothers who had been working there for years. Marists were well-known in Lawrence and much appreciated. Alumni of our schools surrounded the new residence, and they were delighted as they opened their doors and hearts to this special group of aged, retired Marist Brothers. It was one of the poorest areas of Massachusetts, and this would surely ring a bell with our Blessed Founder. He loved the poor, the large families, and dedicated his life to serving the poor.

Leeds Terrace in South Lawrence was a residential area of private homes, assuring our Brothers of a lot of peace and quiet. Our property was fenced in and quite private, as were all the other yards in the area. There was enough land for our old timers to walk around the property and work in the garden. The swimming pool was just the right size for a small restricted group and had a whirlpool that the elderly would appreciate. The Brothers from our local school would come to enjoy the pool with us occasionally and were very solicitous of the welfare of our "Old Timers," as our community was soon labeled.

The community was well cared for as our Brother Cook was a consummate expert; we also had outside help for cleaning the house, including the private rooms of those who wanted this service. Our community doctor came every two weeks and was also always on call when needed. Brothers would, at times, come from our other local communities for a swim in the pool, a chat with the conferees, or an occasional game of cards in the evening. We were blessed to have kept our same chaplain and confessor, who came from Lowell. Besides that there was a community of Marist Fathers not far from our house who were always available as well if needed.

There were many occasions of card games in the evenings or visitors just passing through who were curious to see our new house and how pleased the elderly Brothers were. Having the Blessed Sacrament immediately as one entered the house made the chapel the most often-used room of all.

We were surely providing an all-around service for a small community of very respected and much appreciated retired religious. We had Brothers in Lowell and for a good while also in Haverhill, which is to say that there was plenty for the Brothers to visit, places to go and friends to meet.

It was rather convenient for me also to go to visit my aging mother and to be able finally to attend some of the family functions that I had missed during my years in Rome. Then again, as this place was new, many of the Brothers who came to New England would make it a point to come to visit our facility. I still remember the places where we used to go for long walks in the cool evenings, and the whole area was very familiar having a school where some of our Brothers had worked as teachers or which they had attended in their youth. There were also a number of times when visitors were anxious to see this place, and would look ahead to a time when they would like to be able to come take part in this community.

I recall that on one occasion my family came from Worcester for a visit and had Mother along, as she had known most of the Brothers I knew. She thoroughly enjoyed the place and actually told me that she wouldn't mind coming to rejoice here and retire also if that were possible. I assured her that she would eventually get bored with all these males in this community, even if we could allow it in the first place. I was not about to get into a long explanation of canon law concerning male religious. It was neither the place nor the time to do so.

The work that I had been doing here was far different from what I had to do at the General House and I appreciated the opportunity of having had experienced both types of assignments. Surely, our old Scout motto,

“Be prepared!” “to always be ready for anything that might come our way” was a wise piece of advice, whether we liked it or not. It always seemed to prove useful and it came in handy whether dealing with youngsters or old-timers. For example, the special ministry that I had practiced at Sacred Heart Parish of the Marist Fathers was a great boost for me later on when working alone in the missions of Liberia and living alone with the Bishop.