

TOGETHER

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BLESSED JOURNEYS: RETIRED PRIEST LEADS CATHEDRAL TOURS

By Cassie Bird

Meet Msgr. Dan Knepper

Fr. Dan says choosing to live in Dubuque in his retirement feels like “being home,” especially because he grew up less than 30 miles away in Cascade. After attending Catholic school in Worthington and Cascade, he graduated from Loras College in 1966 before beginning his theological studies at Mount St. Bernard Seminary and Aquinas Institute of Theology in Dubuque. Afterward, he completed his studies at St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland.

From 1970-1980, Fr. Dan served outside of the Archdiocese of Dubuque as a temporary member of the Society of St. Suplice - a community of diocesan priests who educate and form men for the diocesan priesthood. During these years, he served in Maryland, California, and even Hawaii.

In 1980, Fr. Dan returned to the Archdiocese of Dubuque to serve as a parish priest. His assignments included Holy Ghost in Dubuque, team ministry of St. John Parish in Waterloo and St. Nicholas Parish in Evansdale, St. Thomas Aquinas Church and Catholic Student Center in Ames, St. Joseph Parish in Bellevue, St.

Anthony Parish in Dubuque, and lastly St. Raphael Cathedral and St. Patrick Parishes in Dubuque, where he served up until his retirement in 2014.

However, retirement hasn't meant slowing down for Fr. Dan. He stays plenty busy these days, and one of the many ways in which he volunteers locally is by leading guided tours of his last assignment - the Cathedral of St. Raphael.

What are some of the things that you've done in your retirement?

In 2014, I retired to the Villa Raphael in Dubuque. I was in parish ministry for the past 40 years, and now I do some supply and help (with parishes) mostly around Dubuque since then.

When I was in parish ministry, I focused pretty much on the parish and the place I was, and not so much on the external things. However since I retired, besides doing some help with filling in at times in parishes, I work at two assisted living facilities where I have Mass every other week. During the last few years I've been going to the Anamosa Penitentiary for Mass once or twice a month so that they can have the Eucharist on Sundays. But I'm also involved in some civic activities. I wanted to reach out to the poor and needy in real regard, plus I became involved in the NAACP because I think we need to reach out more to people of color.

I also did some work with Bridges Out of Poverty - that organization's mission is to help the people living in poverty, for us to come to know them better. I historically worked in middle class parishes where people were not poor or in great need, but the Cathedral is in an area of the town where there are a lot of single people that just eke by, maybe on social security or other assistance. And St. Patrick has more Hispanics, but I don't speak Spanish so I always had to have other people help with that. I'm concerned about how we can help those people, and immigrants.

The other thing I would say I've really enjoyed doing for the last 25 years is that I've sung with the Dubuque Chorale. Music is one of my passions and things I love, so I sing with the Dubuque Chorale and I'm also supportive of the arts, not that I'm an actor or a musician other than singing, but I go to a lot of those events, and those that are offered in the area.

How and when did you get involved leading tours of the Cathedral?

Since I was a pastor here (at the Cathedral) from 2010 to 2014, I grew to appreciate the Cathedral much more. I've always been a person who loved history, and always been connected to ecclesiastical and church history. When they started to have tours several years ago, I started making myself available to lead tours for people who wanted them. When the groups come into town, and if they ask for them, Mary Rae, the secretary, lets us know that these people have requested a tour. There are several of us that do tours, and I've been doing them for the past few years. During Covid, naturally, there weren't tours, but I started before that.

(During the tour) I like to bring in not only the idea of the architecture, but the history of our diocese, the faith, what's happened over the years, and how things continue to change.

How do you remember all of the dates and facts while you're leading tours?

Well, I'm sort of a linear person, so if I have them in a line and I can see how things are connected, it's easier than just remembering a singular particular date, rather it's remembering how it's connected to the next event.

How often do you lead guided tours?

I typically lead them a few times a year, based on the number of requests, and there are others who lead them too. Sometimes

it's groups from parishes that want a tour, other times it's people who might be visiting Dubuque who want a tour of the Cathedral because it's very historic. It's a very beautiful facility, but recently while it's being restored it's not in the best of condition right now. We hope that in 2-3 years it will be all finished, and then it will really be magnificent to give tours.

Because the Cathedral is not open during the day besides for Mass, if you want to go through it for a self-guided tour, you can stop at the rectory and the secretary will let you in.

Are there any parts of the tour that many people are surprised by, or maybe didn't know?

Well, one of the things that I think most people are aware of, but maybe not, is that when Archbishop Hennessy died in 1900 he wanted to have a place where the bishops would be buried, and he wanted a place where he himself would be buried in the mortuary chapel of the Cathedral. So they developed a mortuary chapel dedicated to his memory. The schoolchildren in particular are excited to go down to the chapel to see where these bishops are buried.

Other than that, I think most people would be surprised to find out that the chapel (now the Cathedral Center) was built as an addition to the Cathedral by Archbishop Hennessy in 1882. The other thing people are surprised by is the tower on the front of the Cathedral. They often look at it and think the entire tower is limestone. Now as it is being refurbished, it's obvious that it's not all limestone because it's gray and they're using an undercoating, but it will be painted to match the limestone.

(See the photo above with the Cathedral tower in the background, where you can see the exposed sheet metal being worked on!)

How else do you currently spend your time during retirement?

Besides being in the Chorale, and NAACP, and doing some other things of continuing education, I've liked to travel, but I haven't traveled too extensively outside the tri-state area since Covid. I love this area because it's the Driftless Area, where the glacier missed this part of the country, so this area has lots of hills and bluffs and ravines. During Covid I started to spend a lot of time discovering the back roads of

this area, and getting to know its history.

What might you say to someone who has donated to priest retirement or the Cathedral of St. Raphael through the ArchdioceseOne special appeal?

I would say I'm particularly grateful for their contributions, and that one of the things that I've liked about our diocese is that all of us try to pitch in - everybody can give something. We realize that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, and we want to leave this place better because we've been here, and we want to pass that on to the people who come after us. It's continuing that, and because we are such a historic diocese, the Cathedral is very important.

In other dioceses, they build a brand new Cathedral, a bigger Cathedral maybe than the original. But this one was started in 1858, and though things keep changing, like the sisters aren't living here anymore and there's no longer a school here, we have that whole continuity of the faith of this area of the country. We're really grateful that we can do this. The other thing would be, people ask - why don't people of the Cathedral just take care of the repairs like they did back in 1987? But back then they had more people living down here, more families, and now we don't have enough people to do that.

The other thing is, it's a historic building, and historic restoration is quite costly. But it's wonderful that not only the church, but also the city, is trying to maintain our history because when we don't understand that we have a history, we sort of lose our roots. But we have to look toward our future generations. I'm very concerned about passing on the faith and people living the way of Christ, and the Catholic way of life into the future.

And for the fact of the retirement fund for priests - we're really grateful that our healthcare and retirement is covered so we don't have to worry about that. That's a real blessing.

Information about scheduling a tour of the Cathedral of St. Raphael can be found www.Cathedralstpats.org/schedule-a-tour. Tour groups are welcome to schedule a date as well to visit. Please plan to schedule your tour at least a month in advance, so that staff and volunteers can prepare for your visit.



Fr. Dan Knepper stands between the Cathedral Rectory and the Cathedral, with the tower visible in the background. The gray portions are what Fr. Dan explains further on in the article - the tower of the Cathedral is actually sheet metal, which is being repaired and then repainted to once again match the limestone that makes up the rest of the Cathedral tower.

ArchdioceseOne Update

Thanks to your sacrificial gift, over \$16.5 million has been raised for the ArchdioceseOne special appeal.

Over \$7.8 million of this amount has been left unrestricted, and over \$2.3 million has been restricted to Priest Retirement.

If you are interested in making an additional gift to support priest retirement, or interested in making a gift to the Cathedral, you can do so at www.archdioceseone.org/support.



EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS BUS TRIP

Are you interested in joining a bus trip to the National Eucharistic Congress next year? The Catholic Parishes in Waterloo are considering sponsoring a bus to the Congress which will be held July 17-21, 2024 in Indianapolis. The 7-day, 6-night trip arranged by Faith Journeys, would leave Waterloo July 16 and return July 22. The parishes need to know if a sufficient number of people are interested.

- Learn more about the trip at: waterloocatholics.org/Eucharistic-Congress-Bus-Trip
- Let us know if you're interested at: <https://bit.ly/bus-trip-survey>