

Msgr. Slowey Reminisces With Pride On Cuban Role

By VIRGINIA REDFERN
Staff Writer

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. John Slowey, first director of Catholic Social Service, Inc., founded in Lansing a quarter of a century ago, now serves as pastor of St. Mary's Church in the quiet little town of Niles. He tells friends he knows what it's all about to "grow old gracefully."

"Years ago," he told a group gathered to honor him at a Silver Anniversary banquet at St. Gerard's. "Gov. G. Mennen Williams, at the suggestion of Jerry Coomes, director of Michigan Catholic Conference, appointed me to the Commission on Aetna."

"NOW, I understand why," he said, with the inimitable twinkle in his eyes, "but then, it seemed sort of a flaky deal."

He reminisced about the dynamic pace he once lived as director of Catholic Social Service, director of St. Vincent Home, director of the Cuban Refugee program (one of the larger in the country) and founder of Big Brothers Inc.

For vacations, he sometimes led tours to shrines in Europe, including Lourdes in France, and the Vatican in Rome.

MSGR. SLOWEY was elevated to his present dignity by Pope John XXIII in 1959, celebrated here at a huge, city-wide reception drawing over 1,000 guests to St. John Student Center in December, 1959.

"As I look back," he said, "probably the most rewarding experience was the Cuban

Refugee program. I personally went down to Miami, Fla. in 1959 and 1960, to collect the children as they arrived (children were sent out ahead of their parents under Fidel Castro's evacuation plan)."

"They arrived on our shores with only one change of clothing and baptismal photograph clutched in their little hands. They were frightened, naturally, unable to speak English and not knowing when — or if — they would ever see their parents again."

MSGR. SLOWEY brought them to Lansing, where they were resettled at St. Vincent Home and attended Lansing Public Schools. Lansing area Catholic families all came to the rescue on weekends and invited them over to share the family life they missed.

"Francie" and Duffy Daugherty were especially helpful," he recalled, "and so were Dale and Mary Sheets and many, many others. Gradually, the children were reunited with their parents as the Cuban government let adults leave, "stripped of their land and possessions."

His "right hand aide" at Catholic Social Service at this time was Elia Collar, (now Mrs. Arthur Stanley) who acted as interpreter for the Cuban families. The wife of a physician who died a year after arriving here, she had two young children to bring up:

"EVERYONE OF our Cuban families is a credit to the community," Msgr. Slowey said with pride, "and ever-


yone of the children has done exceptionally well in school."

Catholic Social Service was founded in 1949 with funds furnished by St. Vincent de Paul Society. Bishop Joseph Albers appointed (then) Father Slowey as its first director and he opened shop in a tiny room in the Tussing Building.

That same year the agency was welcomed into the United Community Chest.

MSGR. SLOWEY was ordained at St. Mary Cathedral in May, 1940. During World War II years, from 1944 to 1946, he served as Military Chaplain at Percy Jones Hospital in Battle Creek.

He is a graduate of St. Louis University and Catholic University, where he received his M.A. degree.



Rt. Rev. Msgr. John Slowey