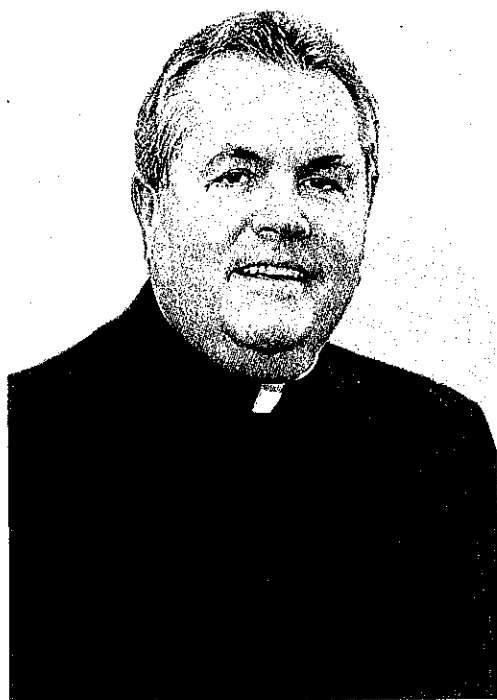


## REVEREND JOHN J. CONAHAN

Pastor 1988 - Present



Robert S. Halvey

Father Conahan was born on October 25, 1935, in Chester, Pennsylvania. He was the only child of Joseph H. and Mary Kelly Conahan. His mother died the day he was born. His maternal grandmother took him in, but when his grandfather died he went to live with and was raised by his aunt and uncle. They had three boys, all of whom are now married with children of their own. Father Conahan first attended public school near his home, then St. Robert's Parochial School, and he graduated from St. James High School in Chester in 1953. In September of the same year, at the age of seventeen, he entered St. Charles Seminary even though his father had forbidden him to become a priest. He received a degree in philosophy five years later, and he was ordained on May 19, 1962, in the Cathedral by Archbishop Krol.

Father Conahan's first assignment was assistant pastor at St. Timothy's Church in northeast Philadelphia. From 1964 to 1976, he was a professor at Cardinal O'Hara High School in Springfield, Delaware County, where he taught religion and French. He lived at St. Gabriel's rectory in Norwood for four years then at St. Cyril's in East Lansdowne. At various times, he headed the Language Department, was Athletic Director for eight years, music director for the school shows, and during his last year was Director of Activities.

Father Conahan spent the summer of 1966 in Europe, studying French at the University of Grenoble in France. For two years he took education credits at St. Joseph's College (now St. Joseph's University) in Philadelphia, then he earned a Master's degree in French at Villanova University in Villanova, Pennsylvania.

For a year and a half, Father Conahan worked on preparations and activities for the 41st International Eucharistic Congress held in Philadelphia the first week in August 1976.

After that he was appointed the second principal of Archbishop Ryan High School for Girls. He served in that capacity for the next twelve years.

During his twenty-four years of involvement in educational work, Father Conahan served on the Archdiocesan High School Language Committee, was chairman of the board for the Boys' and Girls' Catholic Athletic Leagues (having re-formed and enlarged the Girls' League). He gave retreats for Sisters, and directed the choir in the two parishes where he lived.

He gave retreats at St. Charles Seminary as well, and for six years served on the first Advisory Board for the Seminary when Bishop Thomas J. Welsh was rector.

Cardinal Krol chose Father Conahan to succeed Monsignor Flatley as pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, just at the time the archdiocese was to have a change of command. Cardinal Krol had suffered severe illnesses and retired as Archbishop of Philadelphia at the age of seventy-seven, and turned his crozier over to Archbishop Anthony J. Bevilacqua on February 11, 1988, during the installation Mass in the Cathedral-Basilica.

For the previous four years, Father Conahan had served on the archdiocesan committees responsible for planning celebrations for events such as the Cardinal's anniversary jubilee and farewells to bishops transferred to other dioceses. He was in charge of planning and coordinating the many details of the installation dinner welcoming Archbishop Bevilacqua to Philadelphia.

A year after he arrived in Philadelphia, the new archbishop reorganized the administration of the archdiocese, introducing regional vicars for the five counties of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia as liaison between individual parishes and himself. The new structure included advisory bodies, and secretaries for each element of archdiocesan life, including temporal affairs, education, Catholic life and evangelism, human services, and the clergy. The plan proposed the establishment of Pastoral Councils to aid pastors in their work.

Father Conahan met with parishioners to plan such a council, and it began functioning at Immaculate Conception in September of 1990. Activities such as the Home and School Association and the Parish Guild (formerly the Women's Guild) were subsumed within the Pastoral Council.

Before the council had gotten under way, Father Conahan had already set up a volunteer committee to plan activities to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the founding of Immaculate Conception Church. The year-long festivities began with a concelebrated Mass on November 4, 1990, with Reverend Monsignor Thomas J. Leonard, Vicar for Montgomery County, principal celebrant. The Mass was followed by a reception in the Church Hall. Various liturgical and social functions were held during the year. Most Reverend Edward T. Hughes, a former assistant at Immaculate Conception, was the principal celebrant at the closing liturgy. A parish banquet was held at Williamson's Restaurant in Horsham.

Father Conahan, who once fleetingly thought of pursuing art or music as a profession, brings a special flair to the liturgical functions at Immaculate Conception. His flower arrangements for Holy Days as well as Sundays are exceptionally beautiful.

Monsignor Flatley had the church interior newly painted in 1987 and Father Conahan carried the renovations further by extending the main altar platform level out to unify it with the side altars. He recarpeted the floors but left the Mercer tiles near the altar rail exposed and had them lacquered. Also to offer more space for weddings, he removed the middle sections of the altar rail, which he had made into candlesticks. At the exterior of the church, he installed a ramp leading to the vestibule door on the east next to the rectory to make entrance to the church accessible to all.

Father Conahan commissioned Eucharistic Ministers to take Holy Communion to



*Immaculate Conception Church Exterior with Ramp installed in 1990.*

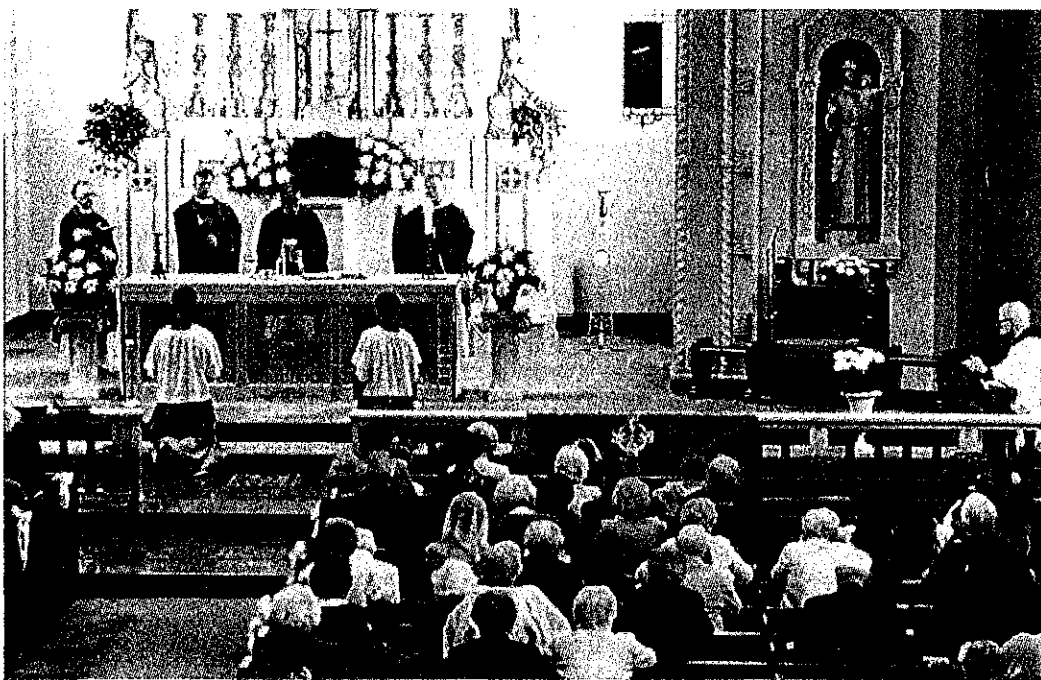
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homebound parishioners after Sunday Mass. These ministers help in the distribution of the Eucharist at Sunday Masses.

By 1990, Father Conahan had to repair the school and rectory roofs. Parish volunteers applied fresh paint to the school rooms in the summer of 1991.

On May 26, 1991, Archbishop Bevilacqua learned that Pope John Paul II had designated him to be a Cardinal. Father Conahan was a member of the Archdiocesan Committee that made preparations for accommodations and festivities accompanying the Cardinal's elevation in Rome on June 28th. He also co-chaired Philadelphia-South Vicariate's celebration of Mass offered in the Cathedral-Basilica on July 14th in the new Cardinal's honor.

Father Conahan shared his experiences on his trip to Rome with his parishioners in a Parish Bulletin (July 14, 1991) after his return to Jenkintown. He wrote of the delayed flight, the fatigue of getting through customs and settling into hotels of the 750 pilgrims from Philadelphia. He was the "Shepherd" at the Majestic Hotel. He found the Evening Prayer and Reception at the North American College very interesting and "Roman." The highlight of the trip was the Consistory in the Audience hall when the Holy Father conferred the cardinalate. Only 250 tickets were allotted for the Philadelphia pilgrims, with no priests attending. The rest of the pilgrims, including Father Conahan, were invited to view the ceremony on television in Saint Peter's. "Pleasantly," Father writes, "it was a wonderful experience because the screen was as large as any movie screen, the seats were comfortable, the Basilica was cool, the conversation excellent, and the Pope came to visit us beforehand. All in all, I believe those who witnessed the ceremony by tv saw more than those who were able to see the Pope close to the altar." On another day, the group had an audience with the Holy Father. Father Conahan notes his excitement as the Pope came up to each in his group, and could touch the Holy Father. "Our Holy Father is rather small, but his skin seems almost translucent-the goodness and holiness of the God Who lives in him shining through. The one thing I asked for in Rome was this experience and I received it and I thank God!"



*Liturgy opening Immaculate Conception 125th Anniversary Celebration*  
*Priest l. to r.: Reverend Thomas Kennedy, C. M., Reverend James F. Endres, Reverend Msgr. Thomas J. Leonard, Vicar for Montgomery County, Reverend John J. Conahan; far right. Reverend Msgr. William H. Flatley*