

CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

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BISHOP SHAUGHNESSY AND THE AMAZING MOTOR MISSION

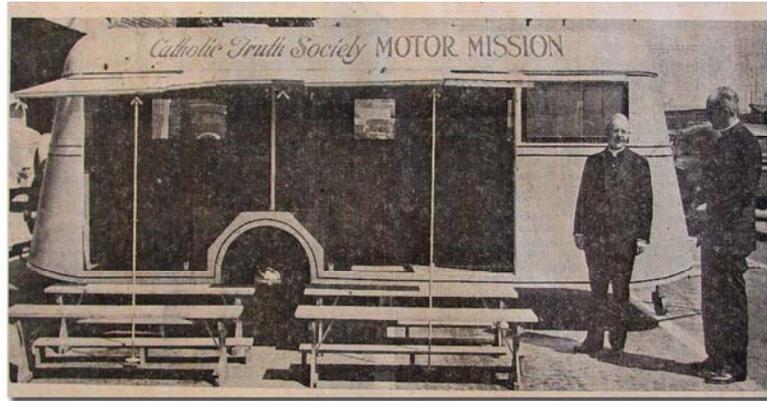
Almost exactly seventy years ago, on Sunday, July 11, 1937, a gleaming silver trailer rolled down 9th Avenue, stopping directly in front of St. James Cathedral. The

trailer was fashioned by the firm of Pierce Arrow, purveyors of luxury automobiles to those who still had money (it was the Great Depression, after all).

This was no ordinary trailer. When its spotless aluminum side was raised, one saw not bunks and a tidy kitchenette, but rather an altar, with crucifix and candles, movable benches complete with kneelers, even a tiny confessional! The trailer was not a camper at all, but a "Motor Mission," sponsored by the Catholic Truth Society: a church on wheels which would, through the summer months, carry the sacraments to the remotest corners of the diocese.

The Motor Mission was the brainchild of Bishop Gerald Shaughnessy, Seattle's fourth bishop, who proudly blessed it and sent it on its way on that brilliant July day in Seattle. Shaughnessy was an East Coast man, born in Massachusetts in 1887. A brilliant student, he had earned a scholarship to Boston College, and had then entered the Society of Mary, a religious order of priests, in 1916. He was assigned to a post at the office of the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, and while working there he earned a doctorate in sacred theology at Catholic University, and also wrote a noted scholarly work on Catholic immigration, entitled, *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?* Among other responsibilities in Washington, Shaughnessy handled all correspondence for the "Seattle desk," and so over the years he got to know the diocese—its strengths as well as its struggles. So it was not a complete surprise when he was appointed Bishop of Seattle in 1933. Shaughnessy was consecrated in the crypt of the National Shrine in Washington, and then traveled by train to Seattle for his installation, which took place at St. James Cathedral on October 10, 1933.

Bishop Shaughnessy was in a tight spot. For one thing, he was following in the footsteps of Bishop O'Dea, a most beloved bishop who had died a saintly death. And for another thing, the Great Depression was now in full swing. Building new churches and institutions had been the hallmark of Bishop O'Dea's episcopacy, but Bishop Shaughnessy's tenure was to be marked by the less exciting processes of retrenching and reducing debt. If



Bishop Shaughnessy poses with his "Motor Mission" in July, 1937.

Bishop O'Dea had built the diocese, Bishop Shaughnessy may well have saved it—but fund drives and debt clocks were hardly as interesting as cornerstone layings.

And yet, Bishop Shaughnessy's years in Seattle left their mark. He liked innovative projects, using the latest in media and technology.

His installation ceremony was broadcast on the radio, and then there was the motor mission, which he had personally supervised—"His Excellency suggested the use of automobile trailer chapels and has taken a very personal interest in planning the Motor Mission in all its details," reported the Progress. He also invited luminaries from all over to come to Seattle, including a noted street preacher, a layman named Theodore Dorsey, who preached in Volunteer Park and Pioneer Square.

Bishop Shaughnessy was an able administrator, and so it seems fitting that one of the few building projects he undertook was the construction of a new Chancery (still standing at the corner of Marion and Terry). But Shaughnessy also took on a prophetic role, speaking out for peace both before and after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and advocating against the internment of Japanese Americans. As the war ended, he publicly urged that God be given a place at the "peace table."

In November, 1945, as he was traveling back from a national meeting of bishops, Shaughnessy suffered a stroke. After several weeks he recovered, or seemed to. He resolutely returned to work. But the stroke had taken its toll, and more severe strokes followed. By the end of 1947, he was confined to his bed, but still struggled to fulfill his duties, though even opening mail was too much for him. In 1948, Pope Pius XII appointed Thomas Arthur Connolly of San Francisco coadjutor bishop. Young, dynamic, and very popular, Connolly (or "Tac" as he was called by his friends) was everything Shaughnessy was not. And, coming in during the years of the post-war economic boom, he had opportunities Shaughnessy had never had.

Bishop Shaughnessy died on May 18, 1950, Ascension Thursday. His funeral took place at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, because the Cathedral was filled with scaffolding—Bishop Connolly was redecorating it in honor of the centennial of the diocese. Times of change lay ahead.

—Corinna Laughlin