

## The Rt. Rev. Msgr. William J. Slocum 1851 - 1908

*"Waterbury's foremost citizen and foremost Catholic"* Rev. John L. McGuinness

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. William J. Slocum was born in Winsted, Connecticut on February 6, 1851 and attended public and parochial schools there. He learned his trade at a local cutlery shop and worked several years at the bench.

Msgr. Slocum received his classical and theological education at St. Bonaventure's College and Seminary in Allegheny, New York and was ordained there on June 22, 1876.

After assignments at St. Peter Church in Hartford, St. Patrick in New Haven, and the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Hartford, he was appointed pastor and then permanent rector of St. Mary Church in Norwalk.

On September 1, 1895, Msgr. Slocum came to Waterbury "to take permanent rectorship of what is in many respects," according to the *Waterbury American*, Oct. 23, 1908 "the most important parish in Connecticut." His service at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, then located at 103 East Main St., was highlighted by numerous notable accomplishments, beginning with reclaiming a large part of St. Joseph Cemetery and purchasing, grading and opening the new St. Joseph Cemetery.

In 1898, according to the same *Waterbury American* article, "Msgr. Slocum performed an act that stands alone in the history of the church in the United States. He purchased the site and building of St. Thomas Church and turned over the completed church to the parish with \$13,000, half of its entire debt, paid."

In 1900, Msgr. Slocum entirely renovated the interior of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. In 1902 he erected Mulcahy Memorial Building on Cole St, which contained a library and a gymnasium. Two years later, he built an addition to St. Mary's School and a big boiler house to furnish heat and ventilation. In 1904 he purchase and opened St. Mary's Nursery.

In 1906 he purchased the site for St. Mary's Hospital, noting the need for a hospital located closer to the various industrial plants. He turned his entire fortune over to its building fund.

On January 3, 1907, Msgr. Slocum was formally invested as a monsignor by the Rt. Rev. Michael Tierney, D. D., Bishop of Hartford, at the Church of the Immaculate Conception. He was, at that time, the only parish priest in Connecticut to be so honored.

Msgr. Slocum's accomplishments in Waterbury, according to the *Waterbury American*, "will stand as monuments to his memory, as indication for his zeal for



all classes of his parishioners and his keen insight into their wants. The improved accommodation for the exercise of religion and the first class condition of the parish treasury speak volumes for executive ability of the man, an ability which has far surpassed the most sanguine expectations of his people and his ecclesiastical superiors . . . Mere piety, whilst the chief essential, will not suffice of itself. To it must be joined learning and tact and urbanity of manner . . . And the crowning of his life was his own good example."

Msgr. Slocum died on Oct 23, 1908. An ardent admirer of the military, and chaplain of the famous Fighting Ninth Regiment of Connecticut, he was awarded a military funeral. Public schools were closed for the day.

Eight months later, a five-division parade (complete with marching bands and a reviewing stand in front of City Hall, then located opposite the Green on West Main St.) marched from St. John's Episcopal Church to the new St. Joseph's Cemetery for the unveiling of Msgr. Slocum's monument. On that occasion, the Rev. John L. McGuinness referred to Msgr. Slocum as "Waterbury's foremost citizen and foremost Catholic".

An elementary school (currently a day care center) was named for Msgr. Slocum, along with the Waterbury division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.