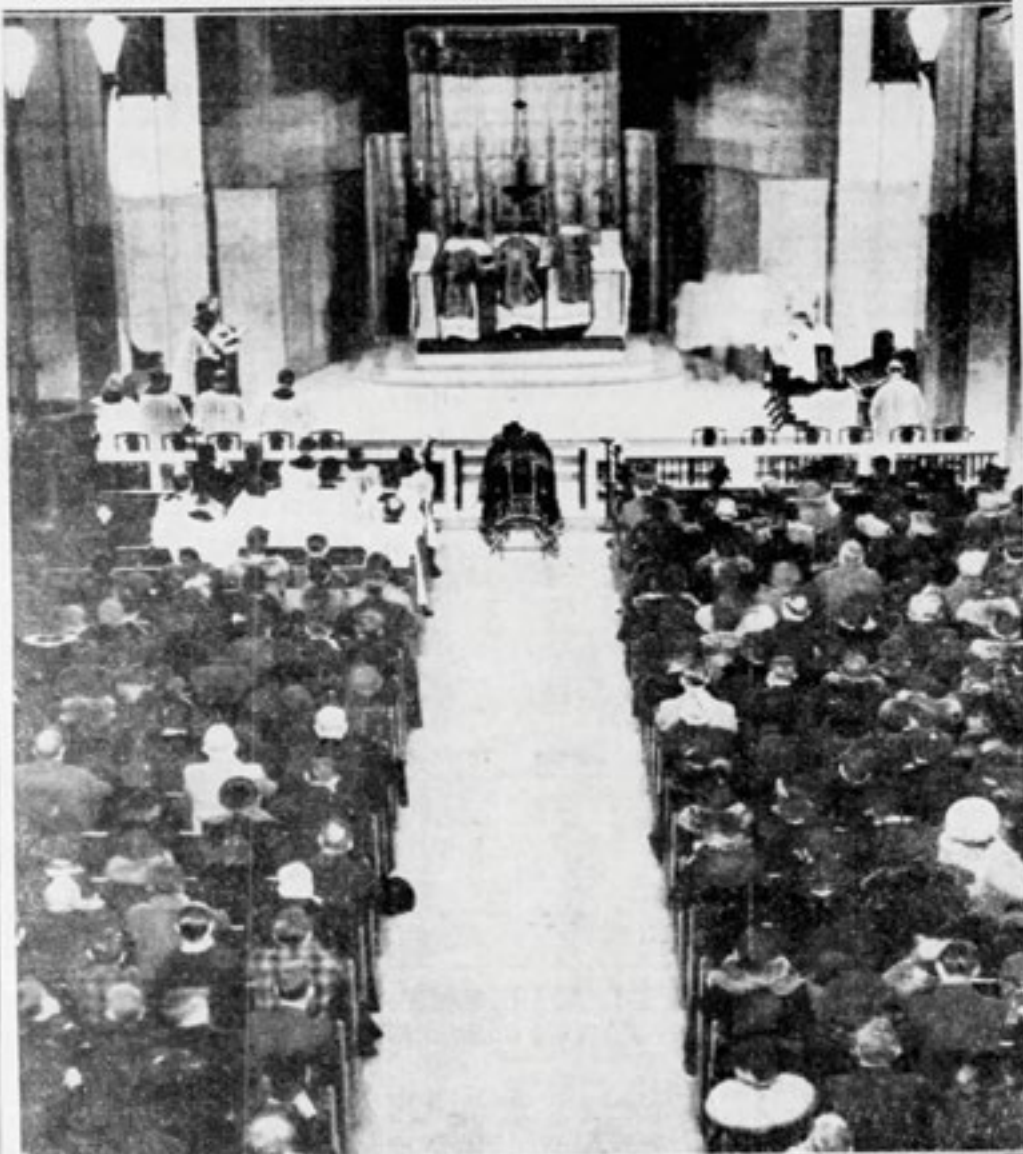


HUNDREDS ATTEND REQUIEM MASS IN MEMORY OF FATHER DONOVAN



More than 1300 persons crowded St. Stephen's Church in Hazelwood today for requiem mass in memory of Father Gerard A. Donovan, victim of Chinese bandits. The photograph shows Father Donovan's brother, Rev. Joseph Donovan, of Mary-

knoll, N. Y., celebrating the mass. In the front of the altar railing is shown the catafalque. School children and relatives and friends of Father Donovan filled every pew in the church, while others stood in the rear and lined the aisles.

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA'S FIRST MARTYR: FATHER GERARD A. DONOVAN, M.M.

*Go forth, farewell for life, O dearest brothers; Proclaim afar the sweetest name of God.
We meet again one day in heaven's land of blessings. Farewell, brothers, farewell."*

– Charles-François Gounod's missionary hymn, refrain sung at the annual Maryknoll Departure Ceremony¹

John C. Bates

Western Pennsylvania was true missionary territory well into the 19th century. A small number of colonial Catholics who migrated to the area after the British secured control from the French was later joined by German and Irish immigrants seeking freedom, land, and employment. Used to privation in the “old country,” the new arrivals survived and thrived. Their children, typically raised in modest circumstances, were no less able to cope with the challenges occasioned by an industrializing society. Imbued with the faith of their parents, this next generation of young men and women responded to appeals by the Catholic Church to become missionaries and evangelize the parts of the world where the Gospel had not yet been preached.

Maryknoll

The first American missionary order was the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America – popularly known as Maryknoll. Established in 1911 by Fathers Thomas F. Price and James A. Walsh, the fledgling society purchased property in Ossining,² Westchester County, New York in 1912. Dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the land was named “Mary’s knoll.”

Fathers Walsh and Price both agreed that China was the land where their missionaries “should be most needed.”³ By that time, however, most of China had already been divided into prefectures and vicariates apostolic entrusted to other missionary organizations. Under *Propaganda Fide’s* principle of *jus commissionis* (right of entrustment), an express invitation from the existing missionary organization would be necessary for a second group to help or take over a part of that territory. In late 1917, Bishop Jean-Baptiste-Marie de Guébriant, M.E.P.,⁴ of the Canton vicariate in Kwangtung province in southeastern China agreed to grant Maryknoll a mission field in his vicariate.⁵

In less than a year the first group of Maryknoll missionaries – Father Price as superior, along with Fathers James A. Walsh, Francis X. Ford, and Bernard F. Meyer – departed for China on September 8, 1918.

In the fall of 1925, Maryknoll also agreed with Bishop Jean-Marie-Michel Blois, M.E.P., of the Vicariate of Mukden in Manchuria (northeastern China) to assume responsibility for territory in that vicariate. While this new mission was thousands of miles distant from their territory in southeastern China, Maryknoll accepted this territory because it bordered an established Maryknoll mission in northern Korea. The city of Fushun,

30 miles east of the city of Mukden (today, Shenyang),⁶ would serve as headquarters for this new mission.

Maryknoll would become, to many, the best-known Catholic missionary order in the United States. Its monthly, *The Field Afar* (later renamed *Maryknoll* magazine), enjoyed a broad national readership. That magazine, missionary appeals at parishes, teaching sisters’ encouragement of mission-mindedness among students in parochial schools, and newspaper and radio coverage of missionary activities abroad served to encourage vocations among young Americans who sought to become missionaries.⁷ Numbered among those in Western Pennsylvania who responded was the Donovan family in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Three brothers – Joseph,⁸ Thomas,⁹ and Gerard – entered the order and were ordained priests. Gerard, the youngest of the three, was to become the first Maryknoll priest to die a martyr’s death in China.

Gerard A. Donovan

Gerard was born on October 14, 1904, in McKeesport, about ten miles southeast of the city of Pittsburgh. His father, Michael Donovan, was an immigrant from County Clare, Ireland.¹⁰ His mother, Mary McCahill, had been born in Scotland of Irish immigrants from County Donegal.¹¹ The two young adults married at St. Peter Church in McKeesport in 1880. Gerard – known to his pals simply as “Jerry” – was the youngest of their thirteen children; the span between the oldest and youngest was twenty-four years. The midwife held out little hope that the baby would survive. An older sister immediately administered private baptism, and then announced to the other siblings: “You have a little brother and he is as good as dead.” But the baby survived and was formally baptized “Gerard” in honor of St. Gerard Majella (patron saint of expectant mothers) by Father Charles J. Fallon, then curate at St. Peter’s Church. The name was suggested by the baby’s oldest sister, “Nonie”, who was Sister Mary Regina of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Erie, Pennsylvania.¹² She had made special devotions to the saint on behalf of her new brother.¹³

Jerry is described as “a puny, flaxen-haired kid, with a mischievous grin whose hair kept falling into his eyes making him look pretty much like Mickey Rooney.”¹⁴ He attended St. Peter elementary school, where he was taught by the Sisters of Mercy. McKeesport’s many Catholic parishes at that time represented virtually every possible nationality. The Sisters of Mercy “inculcate[d] in their pupils the importance of the conversion of all people on earth by the Church’s world-wide missions. Jerry’s class “ransomed”



Map of China's Provinces

Source: Chinahighlights.com

a Chinese baby and saved pennies and tin foil to give it food and shelter.”¹⁵

Near the end of Jerry’s first year at St. Peter’s, the Mercy Sisters brought a young Chinese boy to school one day and assigned him to sit next to Jerry, upon whom this made a lasting impression. Young Donovan’s ability to learn quickly enabled him to skip two grades during his first six years at St. Peter’s School. In the fifth grade, another student brought a loaded gun to school and, on the way home, fired it in a spirit of bravado. The ricocheting bullet hit Jerry in the leg, but he never “squealed” on the culprit.

Young Jerry liked things religious but showed no signs of “ostentatious piety.” When another parish curate, Father John P. Shields, informed him that he could not be an altar boy since there were already enough Donovans “on the altar,” Jerry responded that he already knew the Latin responses. The youth promptly became an altar boy.¹⁶ During his final year at St. Peter’s School, Jerry disclosed to his mother that he wanted to become a priest and follow his older brother Joe to Maryknoll. Joe was sixteen years older than Jerry. While studying for the diocesan priesthood at St. Vincent’s Seminary in Latrobe, Joe responded to a missionary appeal made by Maryknoll co-founder Father James Walsh, and transferred to Maryknoll.

The Venard

In May 1917, Jerry wrote a letter of application to Maryknoll and received a brief note of acceptance for The Venard,¹⁷ its preparatory school at Clarks Summit near Scranton, Pennsylvania. He was only 12 years old. A train ride in August 1917 brought Jerry, in the company of his brother Joe, to the crest of Chestnut Hill above Ossining, New York – Maryknoll. The two youths were met by the two co-founders, Father Walsh and Father Price. Three days later, the youngest Donovan was on his way to The Venard.

Clarks Summit was about eight miles outside Scranton. There were thirty-five students at The Venard, which had been purchased by Maryknoll only a year earlier. This served as the preparatory school while the Ossining site served as the major seminary. Jerry became part of the first-year high school class, reflective of his demonstrated intellectual abilities rather than his age. He was an outstanding student, with an agile mind, intense concentration, and a retentive memory. Manual labor on the school’s farm filled a considerable part of his time outside the classroom.

At the time of Jerry’s entrance, four priests had been ordained at Maryknoll but none had yet been sent overseas. The Venard’s rector, Father Walsh, became part of the first Maryknoll mission band to China in 1918. Jerry’s brother Joe was ordained in 1920 and left in the third mission band. In the same year, their brother Tom Donovan entered The Venard. Tom was almost seven years older than Jerry, but was placed behind his younger brother due to the fact that Tom had worked in lieu of continuing his education.

Ossining

Jerry completed his studies at The Venard in 1922 and entered Maryknoll’s philosophy program at Ossining. Here he also served as community infirmarian, house electrician, and arborist.

Gerard’s spiritual director would remark:

Behind that smile is a very serious, interior, spiritual and intellectual life. An outstanding characteristic is his determination to become saintly by living the spirit of the martyrs. I have watched how Theophane Venard is a reality to him and how he tries to imitate him.¹⁸

Jerry could be tough. On a 1927 camping trip, he became very sick but shrugged it off to his companions with the reply, “It’s just a part of the day’s work, buddy.” In fact, he had a ruptured appendix.



**Ordination Portrait
of Fr. Gerard Donovan –
June 17, 1928**

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

Ordination

For his final year of studies, Jerry was selected to attend the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he received the degrees of Bachelor of Sacred Theology and Bachelor of Canon Law. On June 17, 1928, Jerry became Rev. Gerard A. Donovan, M.M, with his ordination to the priesthood by New York Auxiliary Bishop John J. Dunn in the chapel at Maryknoll.¹⁹ That afternoon, the new priest received his mission assignment – Wuchow in the

Province of Kwangsi, in southern China. One week later, the newly ordained priest sang his first Solemn Mass at St. Stephen’s Church in Hazelwood, to which Pittsburgh neighborhood his aged parents had moved.

During the interval between ordination and departure, Father Donovan followed the custom of delivering addresses at churches and church-related organizations to make an appeal for financial and spiritual support of his work and that of the Maryknoll order overseas. Thus, it was no surprise to see the following notice appear in *The Pittsburgh Catholic’s* weekly column of the Catholic Daughters of America:

COURT PITTSBURGH

On Wednesday, July 11, (the only July meeting), the Court will have the pleasure of having the newly ordained Rev. Gerard Donovan give an address. Father Donovan is a brother of the Rev. Joseph Donovan, Maryknoll Missioner, who is an old friend of Court Pittsburgh.²⁰

That was one of the last of Father Donovan’s public events before a medical emergency changed his departure plans.

Less than one month before departure (July 29), Father Donovan developed acute peritonitis (inflammation of the abdominal wall) during a weekend missionary appeal at a parish in Brooklyn, New York. He came close to death. The extended recovery period precluded his departure for China. Instead, he was assigned to teach at The Venard. In 1929, he became procurator – responsible

for the material needs of the college, which included supervision of construction of an addition to the college building. Finally, in spring 1931, Father Donovan was assigned to the mission of Fushun in Manchuria. His assignment was for ten years.

Departure to China

Accordingly, on the last Sunday of July 1931, several thousand visitors occupied the quadrangle and the cloister walks at Maryknoll to bid farewell to the mission band of which Father Donovan was a member. An altar had been erected in the Asian kiosk and behind it hung the hunch-backed bell that announced the moment of departure. Once used in a Buddhist temple at Sendai, Japan, it had been gifted to Maryknoll by the bishop of that city. Father Donovan received his mission crucifix and took his place in the centuries-long line of apostles authorized to bear Christ's witness in fields afar. Gounod's departure hymn filled the air. A blessing followed – and the departing missionaries hastened to waiting cars that swept them off and down the drive.

For Father Donovan, a last visit home was included, where he celebrated his mother's birthday. The following day, August 3, he left Pittsburgh for the trip west. He sailed from Seattle on the *Empress of Japan*. On August 29, the ship docked at the harbor of Yokohama. After a train ride to Shimonoseki, the group boarded a boat to Fusan, the Korean port nearest to Japan. A day's train ride brought the group to Heijo [today, Pyongyang], principal city in the Maryknoll territory in northern Korea. On September 2, Fathers Donovan and Comber, the only two Maryknolls assigned to Manchuria, crossed the bridge over the Yalu River and entered Manchuria. Additional hours of train riding brought them to the city of Fushun, thus ending a month of travel. On the rain-soaked day of arrival, he joked "I can't find any roses strewn in my path, but someone has been wonderfully generous with mud."²¹ Here Fr. Donovan began his very creditable mastery of the Mandarin Chinese language. He was now some 10,500 miles from Pittsburgh! But despite the distance from home, he never lost his smile and outgoing Irish sense of humor. Little wonder that, in time, Father Donovan's parishioners would dub him the "Laughing Father."

Manchuria

Manchuria comprised northeastern China with its three provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning. It bordered Mongolia on the west, Russia on the north, and Korea on the south. Its territory was greater than all the Atlantic states as far as Florida, combined.



Fushun City Gate 1930s

Source: Postcard, 1930s

Its diverse geography of plains and mountains experienced temperature extremes – humid tropical summers and frigid arctic winters.

Manchuria was China's "wild west" – a huge area where gangs of bandits roamed, preying on villages, looting and killing at random. The Han, Manchus, and Mongolians had fought over this area for centuries. It was the site of the major battles of Port Arthur

and Mukden during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. Warlords operated freely in this area from the 1920s into the 1940s. Communist influence from neighboring Russia was a constant.

The city of Fushun was located in the province of Liaoning – the southernmost part of Manchuria – with the Yellow Sea to the south, Korea to the southeast (separated by the Yalu River), and Inner Mongolia to the northwest. It was a prefectural level city.²²



Japan occupies Chinese Manchuria 1932

Source: Military Historica

As a result of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan took over Russia's privileges in Manchuria. Japan, which had annexed neighboring Korea in 1910, desired to directly control the vast wealth of Manchuria. The fertile Manchurian plains, covered in sorghum – tall grass plants used as grain and fodder – made it the "granary of the

East." The mountains were mineral-rich. Japan would exploit these resources. Two weeks after the arrival of Father Donovan, the famed "Mukden Incident" occurred on September 18, 1931, in which Japan accused China of railroad sabotage as a pretext for invading and occupying Manchuria. Five months later in February 1932, Japan set up the puppet state of Manchukuo.

Thirty-four million people inhabited Manchukuo. One hundred sixty thousand were Catholics. The original Catholic missionaries in this area were French, and many of them died as martyrs during the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901. After the rebellion was quelled, Catholic missionary efforts in China intensified and Manchuria was divided into districts with Maryknoll later assuming responsi-

bility for the southeastern district in Liaoning Province adjacent to Korea – 40,000 square miles with 2.5 million people. Fushun was the administrative center of Maryknoll work in northeastern China. One of the three largest cities in the Maryknoll territory, it was located about 30 miles east of the city of Mukden. The city had been occupied by Russia until 1905, and then by the Japanese who would remain for 40 years. Of greater importance to this story is the fact that Fushun’s suburb – the city of Hopei – lay directly across the Hun (“muddy”) River. Hopei would figure prominently in Father Donovan’s life some six years later in 1937.

First Assignment: Hsing Ching

In November 1931, Father Donovan was assigned to the mission of Hsing Ching (also referred to as Hsin Pin and Sinpin; today, Xinbin)²³ – 90 miles east of Fushun and 120 miles east of Mukden, in Liaoning province. Here he would serve as curate to Father Francis A. Bridge, the pastor, who was coincidentally a native of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.²⁴ The mission had a simple chapel that held a little over a hundred, a one-story brick rectory for the two priests, a convent for two Chinese sisters, a school, and an old folks’ home – along with adjacent farmland.

Danger, especially from bandits, was ever present and was compounded by increasing Japanese military efforts to suppress the Chinese bandits who were engaging in guerrilla warfare against the occupiers of Manchuria. Foreign missionaries and their stations were frequently caught between the two groups. An offensive by Japanese troops in the fall of 1932 brought the battle to the very doorstep of Donovan’s mission and introduced Father Donovan’s name into international news reports.

On October 14, Japanese headquarters in Mukden announced that its airplanes had dropped English language leaflets over the area where an offensive against “Chinese insurgents” was underway. The leaflets warned all foreigners



Manchukuo 1935

Source: *Fortune* (February 1935)

to withdraw or concentrate in one city. The area contained 20 foreigners including eight Maryknoll missionaries. The Japanese had captured half of the 20,000 square mile Tungpian bandit zone. In the process, they took Hsing Ching without a struggle. “In that town are two American Catholic missionaries, Rev. Gerard Donovan...”²⁵ The brutality of the conflict was noted in the reports of bodies too numerous to count, and prisoners being executed where they were taken. Japanese army pigeons, flying hundreds of miles across the snow-capped mountains, delivered reports to Mukden.²⁶ This was typical bandit activity and typical October weather in Manchukuo, aptly describing both the challenge and the weather that Father Donovan would encounter exactly five years later in October 1937.

The bandit-military conflict led to a spate of stories in the fall of 1932 that involved Father Donovan. Less than a year after Donovan’s arrival, international news services transmitted reports to the States that he and the pastor had been killed at their mission “during an attack on a party of Japanese soldiers by Chinese bandits.”²⁷

The Pittsburgh Press of October 17, 1932 carried a sensational page-one headline: “Bandits Slay Cleric in China: Pittsburgh Priest Menaced as Japanese, Guerrillas Clash in Manchuria.” The *Press* reported that the American victim was either Maryknoll Father John Comer or Presbyterian minister Rev. Floyd Henderson, both of whom were *en route* to Hsing Ching for safety. As to Fathers Donovan and Bridge, the paper stated that “fear was expressed here today for their safety.”²⁸ The *Press* reported at length:



Fr. Donovan celebrates Mass in Hsin Pin, early 1930s

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

On Saturday [two days earlier], Japanese airplanes dropped leaflets printed in English over the Hsinping area, warning all priests and other foreigners to evacuate the area.

“You must do everything you can to prevent exposing yourself to danger,” the leaflets read.

Rev. Donovan of Pittsburgh was reported to have been in the town of Sinpin, Saturday, when it was taken by Japanese troops after a fierce clash with Manchurian bandits.

The attack occurred today as the missionary, accompanied by several Koreans and an escort of five Japanese soldiers, was on his way to Hsinping.

The bandits, numbering 50, suddenly appeared from the tall corn [sorghum] which covers the Manchurian plains and opened fire on the little party. The American was fatally wounded by a stray bullet before the soldiers could repulse the bandits. One Japanese soldier was slightly wounded.

The party carried several American flags, but the bandits paid no attention to these.

Japanese authorities were unable to identify immediately the slain missionary. They said that both Rev. Comer and Rev. Henderson were known to be on their way to Hsinping at the time of attack.

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Two Pittsburgh priests are today in the heart of the turbulent area where an American missionary was killed today.

They are Father Gerard A. Donovan and Father Frank Bridge.<sup>29</sup>

Later reports conveyed the information that neither of the Pittsburgh priests had been injured. Instead, the Presbyterian missionary had been killed. The Donovan parents received a telegram on October 18, 1932 from the Maryknoll Superior General assuring them that their son had not been injured.

Despite the seriousness of their challenges, the two Western Pennsylvania natives had a sense of humor. They sent a report to American friends of their difficulties with the Chinese postal system. A change in political administrators in Hsing Ching led to departure of postal staff, but with no replacements. The local postmaster had informed the priests that he would soon close up shop to move to a better position in southern China and that they should hurry to get their letters out. Hurry the two priests did, but service had already stopped. Thereafter, outgoing mail had to be carried by casual travelers while Maryknoll officials attempted to arrange for incoming mail. The story concluded with “It is two

days journey on muleback from the railroad to [Hsing Ching].”<sup>30</sup>

A December 1933 letter from Father Donovan described his busy Christmas week that entailed, over December 22-23, a 60-mile sub-zero round-trip trek by cart and foot over the mountains to anoint a dying man. Donovan acknowledged the dangerous conditions in Manchukuo in noting that the 200 Catholics who came to the compound for Christmas Midnight Mass had to arrive before dark and stay until morning. But the joyous satisfaction in his work was aptly captured in these words:

I only wish I could find words to describe the scene to you. Our little chapel is a gem by candlelight, even if the strong light of day does show it rather crude. The hushed expectant Christians, the straw-thatched crib, the snowy white linens of the altar and their red cassocks – all these were a perfect setting for the Midnight Mass of the missionary’s boyhood dreams, and he would not change it all for the most gorgeous cathedral in Christendom.<sup>31</sup>

Father Donovan wrote of his work in Hsing Ching in a letter to the Missionary Aid Society in the Diocese of Pittsburgh that was published in the February 28, 1935 issue of *The Pittsburgh Catholic*:

Although we are only a few hundred yards from the main street, the only road leading to the [mission] property was along the bed of a small stream and very roundabout at that. In the summer that small stream becomes a raging torrent. In the spring and fall it is a sea of mud or slush, and in the winter a sheet of ice. One had to be a very devout Catholic, preferably a Holy Name man in good standing, to make the trip at all.

For some time I had my eye on a strip of dry land running directly to the main street. It would be a long story, and an old story to you, to tell you how we cajoled and feasted the previous owners into signing on the dotted line. At any rate that road is now rented to us for twenty dollars a year. Now we are within five minutes’ walk of the heart of the town instead of the former fifteen minutes’ swim. It is beginning to produce results already, for I saw new faces in the chapel last Sunday.

With that new road I have hopes for greater progress here in Hsingking. I do not mind saying that I envision a St. Francis Xavier’s Church at the top of the road.... Overlooking the whole town, and easy of access, it ought to draw many to the Faith. For obvious reasons I cannot rush into this pell-mell but I will keep it as my aim....

Now as to conditions here, the authorities are doing their utmost to stamp out banditry. With fair roads in every direction they can rush soldiers to any troubled area. But it is one thing to chase bandits and another thing to catch them in a mountainous country like this. When you do catch them they are carrying hoes instead of guns, and how can you tell the tares [weeds] from the wheat? Thank goodness my job is simply to dodge them, not to catch them. Every one says they would not harm the priest; still I am not giving them too much of a chance. The simple



**Fr. Donovan celebrates his birthday on October 14, 1932**

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

fact is, I haven't met them yet so I don't know how they will act. They certainly don't show much mercy to their own people.

I long for peaceful times once more, so that we can travel at will to the homes of our scattered flock. They need the Sacraments, the instruction and the added incentive that only the priest can bring.<sup>32</sup>

### **Bandits!**

From his arrival, Father Donovan worked in an environment heavily impacted by bandits. Manchuria had always been classic bandit country, but the 1930s were a period of particularly violent activity. In June, before Father Donovan's arrival, the first Maryknoller had been stopped by bandits who relieved the priest of everything of value, while holding a revolver to his head. In October, while Father Donovan was studying at Fushun, bandits attacked the Antung chapel and made off with the tabernacle after throwing the Blessed Sacrament in a field and trampling it underfoot. Compounding the ever-present bandit problem was the struggle for political control between Nationalists and Communists and between China and Japan. This did not impede the Maryknollers' regular visitation schedule of their missions. Yet, in a three-month period, Father Bridge was held up by bandits twice, challenged by hostile members of the Big Knife Society (a peasant vigilante group), and experienced two bad confrontations with soldiers.

The Chinese sisters made Father Donovan a bulging coat and trousers in anticipation of the typical winter with temperatures 35 to 40 degrees below zero. The following July saw the departure of Father Bridge for medical reasons. The Hsing Ching mission was now the responsibility of the young Shen Fu ("Good Father" as the Chinese called their priests) – just ten months after his arrival in what was now Japanese-controlled Manchukuo.

Despite the deteriorating political conditions in northeastern China, the ecclesiastical picture looked promising. On February 4, 1932, just five months after Father Donovan's arrival, the existing Vicariate Apostolic of Mukden was split to form the separate Prefecture Apostolic of Fushun to formalize the Maryknoll assignment in that area.<sup>33</sup> The Maryknoll procurator in Hong Kong, Father Raymond A. Lane, was named Prefect Apostolic of this provisional missionary jurisdiction not yet sufficiently developed to become a diocese.

Bandit attacks increased in number. Farmers and townspeople gathered at the mission for safety. A September 1933 attack placed the mission in the direct line of fire, with bullets landing in the sanctuary. The unsettled conditions prevented Father Donovan from undertaking a visitation of the outstations for a year. But he did not escape the dreaded encounter with bandits. Once, he and a Chinese companion were captured by bandits who demanded ransom for his freedom.

Answering their demand for money, Father Donovan said: "No. I'm working for God. This is all God pays me." and turned out his empty pockets.<sup>34</sup>

As his mother later recalled the incident, "They didn't mistreat him then. He simply opened his pockets and convinced them he had no money."<sup>35</sup> The kidnappers let the two go.

### **Second Assignment: Lin Kiang**

In March 1935, Father Donovan was transferred to head the mission at Lin Kiang (today, Linjiang), the most remote of the Maryknoll missions in the mountainous southeastern part of Manchukuo – 260 miles east of Fushun and 180 miles east of Hsing Ching – in Jilin province. Those were "straight line" distances. The actual journey by railroad and mule from Hsing Ching to Lin Kiang covered more than 600 miles.

In June, Msgr. Lane telegraphed a bandit warning to each station: "Strongly avoid all unnecessary travel until conditions safer."<sup>36</sup> Father Donovan jokingly wrote to his superior, "You should have seen how happy my mule was when I showed him your telegram."<sup>37</sup> The warning proved prophetic: in February 1936, Maryknoller Father Clarence Burns was kidnapped near the Tung Hua mission. Burns would not escape until November of that year.

The Pittsburgh diocesan newspaper carried a weekly Missionary Aid Society column that served to keep local Catholics abreast of the work of Western Pennsylvania missionaries serving overseas. Father Donovan was clearly a favorite. The paper carried an account in June 1937 about him that had been received from one of the Maryknoll sisters who served with him. The published story began "The devil never takes a holiday in his playground in ... China, where Rev. Gerard Donovan, M.M., of Pittsburgh, recently came into close contact with him." Donovan had received word that a baptized Catholic woman who had apostatized was dying in a nearby village. He journeyed over the mountains to her hut. Far from desiring reconciliation with the Church, the woman became upset at the very mention of God. Donovan wanted to make a second attempt, but only after having two Maryknoll sisters visit the woman. After their visit, the sisters reported that the woman remained unmoved and was afraid of going to confession. One of the sisters told the woman that "we all had to confess our sins, and of how Our Lord died for the sins of all mankind, but only groans and moans of one suffering terribly from an interior cause responded to my pleading." The sister then candidly concluded: "Don't instances like this make you realize what you at home can do? It was my first conception of what 'prayers for the conversion of sinners' actually means."<sup>38</sup>

### **Final Assignment: Hopei**

In July 1937, the vicar apostolic transferred Father Donovan to assist in administrative work in Fushun and to pastor St. Patrick's parish in Hopei, directly across the Hun River, working among the Koreans. The parish consisted of a church, rectory, convent for Maryknoll sisters and Chinese postulants, old folks' home, orphanage, catechumenate, and seminary.

### **Kidnapped!**

On the evening October 5, 1937, Father Donovan went to the church for Rosary and Benediction that was to be conducted by newly arrived Maryknoller Father James J. Rottner. A stranger

entered the church, went to the sacristy where he encountered 17-year old seminarian Francis Liu, who was preparing the censor, and then went out into the sanctuary when he spoke to Father Donovan who was kneeling while reciting the Rosary. Donovan quietly accompanied the man into the sacristy, whereupon the stranger pulled a revolver and ordered both priest and seminarian outside at gunpoint. The congregation was unaware of the kidnapping and continued to pray. In the courtyard, the bandit passed a ransom note for 50,000 yuan (\$14,500 U.S. dollars) to the church handyman with an instruction to pass it to “the foreign devils.” Several other bandits appeared and the entire group of five bandits, Father Donovan, and the seminarian headed up the mountain pass behind the church.

### The Search

Police were notified of the kidnapping and 300 Manchukuan soldiers went in pursuit.<sup>39</sup> Police in Mukden reported the troop involvement to the American consulate. The American consul at Mukden went to the military governor. A telegram was dispatched to the American ambassador in Peking. Maryknoll headquarters was notified with the following cablegram sent by Msgr. Lane: “Bandits entered Fushun Hopei parish chapel yesterday at six P.M. took Donovan. Good prospects early release. Lane.”<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile the bandit party, with Donovan and Liu, continued its march – covering some 25 miles on foot by dawn. The priest was bareheaded, in rope bonds, wearing only his light cassock inadequate for the cold of the early fall, and forced to trek on foot. His surplice was later found on the mountainside, badly torn. The censor, which the seminarian was holding when taken by the outlaws, was also found.<sup>41</sup> By October 16, the group under the leadership of bandit Wang Sheng reached a shelter – a walled house without a roof. Here, Francis Liu was released with instructions to deliver two notes: a note repeating the original demand for 50,000 yuan in ransom, and an accompanying note signed by Fr. Donovan testifying that the boy was acting as messenger for the bandits.

Donovan knew the position of the Church that no ransom would be paid for a missionary since experience showed that this would lead only to jeopardizing the safety of thousands of other missionaries who would thereby prove too great a temptation to kidnapers. However, friends of missionaries did give rewards to government agents or private individuals who helped effect the release of missionary captives. This fact was widely known among bandits.



**Newspaper Headline of Fr. Donovan's Kidnapping**

Source: Archives of *The Observer*, Diocese of Joliet

Two bandits led Francis Liu for two days through the mountains and sorghum fields to a village near the town of Ching Yuan – almost 70 miles from Hsing Ching. The ransom note was delivered to the prefectural governor. Liu provided authorities with the details of the first two weeks of Father Donovan's captivity. The bandits had taken the priest's shoes and had forced him to walk barefoot in the snow some 170 miles through temperatures as low as 30 degrees below zero. The sorghum they were feeding him was aggravating a stomach ailment. The bandits marched at night and slept in daytime.<sup>42</sup>

The government sent a party of four to the bandit leader with two written appeals from

Msgr. Lane – one in English and one in Chinese – explaining that Maryknoll did not have such funds and their money was used to serve the poor. The four also took along provisions for Father Donovan. Only one of the four was permitted to return – a complete failure of the plan. On October 27, soldiers encountered a part of the bandit party and found Msgr. Lane's English-language letter. There was a rumor that Donovan was now in the hands of a larger bandit party – likely uniformed resistance fighters with Communist backing.

The refusal to pay the demanded ransom must be understood in light of the uniform Catholic Church response to such situations involving its missionaries. As one Catholic publication explained:

The Maryknoll Fathers have offered no reward for the release of Father Gerard A. Donovan, captured by bandits, the Congregation of Propaganda some time ago advising against the paying of ransom when any missionary is captured for the paying of ransom only whets the appetites of the bandits and encourages other kidnappings.<sup>43</sup>

### Family Notification

Ten thousand miles away from Manchukuo, the normalcy of life in Pittsburgh continued until local newspapers received word of Father Donovan's kidnapping via international news services. Father Michael Conroy and Father Joseph S. Meenan – two of the curates at St. Stephen's Church in Hazelwood – accompanied one reporter to the Donovan home to notify and interview the priest's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Donovan, with whom were living their adult children Catherine and Daniel. Then a newsboy's call sounded on the street: “Pittsburgh priest captured by bandits!”<sup>44</sup>



Father Donovan's parents were stunned by news of the kidnapping. The October 6 issue of *The Pittsburgh Press* trumpeted a front page headline: "Hazelwood Priest Serving in Manchukuo Kidnaped by Bandits Who Ask \$50,000." Mrs. Donovan was quoted on the front page as sobbing "I only hope they don't torture my son."<sup>45</sup>

But a reassuring telegram soon arrived from Bishop Walsh of Maryknoll:

Cable received Father Gerard captured by bandits from Fushun chapel but good hopes early release STOP Little fear of any other than successful outcome for such an able and seasoned missionary STOP Be assured of our sympathy prayers efforts.<sup>46</sup>

The news, via Reuters, Associated Press, and other wire services, had spread world-wide.

The *New York Times* carried the story on October 7: "Ask \$50,000 for Priest: Bandits in Manchukuo Hold Rev. Gerard Donovan of Maryknoll."<sup>47</sup> Representative of international newspaper coverage was the article that appeared on October 7 in the British Crown Colony of Singapore's newspaper, *The Straits Times*, as a boxed and bolded headline along with the brief 42-word text of the Reuters press release.<sup>48</sup>

#### **BANDITS ABDUCT MISSIONARY**

Mukden, Oct. 7.

Father Gerard Donovan an American from Pittsburgh, and a member of the Maryknoll Mission has been abducted from the sacristy of a church in Northern Fushanby bandits. They are demanding a ransom of \$50,000.— Reuter.

Thus began a four-month-long period punctuated with alternative reports and rumors that the priest had been sighted, that he had been freed, that he was dead, that he had been rescued, and that he was still a captive of the bandits.

While the prominence given to Father Donovan's story would shift periodically in the print media as news was reported, neither the secular nor Catholic press could ignore the public's interest in his case. Over the four months between the priest's kidnapping and recovery of his body, hundreds of newspaper articles appeared in American and foreign papers. American interest was not limited to large cities with Catholic populations. Coverage from coast to coast and north to south was the norm and was noticeably evident in overwhelming Protestant areas in the southern and western United States where residents were interested in the fate of American Christian missionaries in pagan China regardless of denomination. Maryknoll, even in the brief period since its establishment, had developed a positive image in American society as the first American Catholic missionary group. Secular newspapers – with more frequent publication schedules than weekly diocesan Catholic newspapers, and access to multiple news reporting services – produced more articles, while the Catholic press provided greater depth reflecting their reliance on announcements from Maryknoll or Fides news agency and their knowledge of the level

of interest on the part of the Catholic faithful.

#### **Two Weeks Out**

There was still no word on Father Donovan by October 18, but *The Pittsburgh Press* posted a brief United Press release that day: "Bandits Still Hold Pittsburgh Priest." The article read in part:

The fate of Father Gerard A. Donovan, Pittsburgh priest captured by Chinese bandits a fortnight ago, remained a mystery today as Catholic mission authorities and Japanese officials searched for him in the wilds of Manchukuo.

No word has been heard from Father Donovan since his captors notified his mission they were holding him for \$50,000 ransom.<sup>49</sup>

This unexpected UP release was likely triggered by its simultaneous press release that three Catholic missionaries (a French brother, a Spanish brother, and a German brother) were released that day by bandits in Manchukuo. These three attributed the delay in their release to protracted fighting between the bandits and Japanese forces.<sup>50</sup>

On October 20, *The Pittsburgh Press* reported "Jap Army Rescues Pittsburgh Priest: Father Donovan Unharmed; No Ransom Paid." The brief article of six paragraphs reported that:

Rev. Gerard A. Donovan, Pittsburgh missionary captured a fortnight ago by Chinese bandits, was reported rescued unharmed today by Japanese soldiers.

A terse telegram to Rev. Hugh Lavery of the Los Angeles Maryknoll Mission announced the rescue but gave no details except that the Pittsburgh priest was "safe."<sup>51</sup>

The fact that the story was brief and carried only on page 19 suggested that the press was becoming somewhat inured to the violence in China and the frequency of Catholic missionaries, including Americans, being kidnapped. Such incidents had become "routine" in a world where political instability in Asia (and Europe) dominated the news and wearied reporters, if not also their readers. Indeed the front page of this edition was filled with other stories of the rapidly expanding war between Japan and China in northeastern China. Perhaps the sense of ennui was best expressed in the article's next-to-last sentence: "Father Donovan ... once before was released unharmed by bandit captors."<sup>52</sup> "Released" lacked the sensationalism that sells newspapers. The magnitude of the issue of the kidnapping of Catholic missionaries in China would be the focus of an article in the *British Catholic Herald* on November 12, 1937, entitled "Banditry in China: A Bishop and Many Priests Kidnaped."<sup>53</sup>

Other newspapers picked up on the wire service release, including *The Scranton Times*, due to the fact that Donovan had both attended and taught at The Venard, which was close to the city of Scranton. On October 20, *The Scranton Times* ran a story by the Associated Press that Father Hugh Lavery of the Maryknoll house in Los Angeles had received a cablegram from China stating that Father Donovan had been rescued and was unharmed. In fact, it was seminarian Frank Liu who had been freed, but the initial Reuters

and other news service reports failed to make that distinction.<sup>54</sup>

### Five Weeks Out

The Diocese of Rockford's *Observer* provided perhaps the most detailed account of the kidnapping. The October 11, 1937 issue carried the banner headline: "Kidnapped from Church: Bandit Ruse Described by Eyewitnesses." Maryknoll Sister Veronica Marie Carney, who was present in the chapel at the time of the kidnapping, provided the information that was released by Maryknoll headquarters:

Returning to our convent at Hopei on the evening of Oct. 5, I went immediately to the church, which is close by, hurrying a bit for I knew I was late for the October devotions. It was about 5:45, and the rosary had already begun. Father Rottner (Rev. James J. Rottner, of Cincinnati, O.), was officiating and Father Donovan was kneeling on the right side of the sanctuary. At the second decade of the rosary, we noticed a man enter the sanctuary from the sacristy, holding a paper in his hand ... Father Donovan, I suppose, like ourselves, thought that the man was not familiar with the place, had entered by the wrong door and was looking for someone. Father got up and led him into the sacristy where the altar boy was preparing the censer for Benediction. After a few seconds, we heard a scuffling sound that was quickly drowned by the loud voices of the people reciting their prayers.

At this point, one of the men got up to investigate, and standing at the door of the church looked toward the sacristy. He was followed a few minutes later by two or three others from the congregation. I thought that whatever it was it could not be very serious, or they would be taking some action.

Finally, the catechist came to me and said: "Father has been taken by bandits. The men say that they went through the valley, up the hills in back of the mission – four or five in the group." ...

The men returned soon and said they could see nothing of the bandits....

Meanwhile, Father Rottner was still in church, unaware that anything unusual had happened. Within 15 minutes after they were notified, some 20 soldiers came up from town, separated into two groups, and began an intensive search.

We sent the people and the children to supper after which they gathered in church to pray for Father's safety and quick release....

We have heard that everything possible is being done, but it is difficult to track down the bandits – they have so many secret hiding places in these hills. The nights are very cold, and Father Donovan's only outer clothing was a cassock, although the priests say he wore a sweater underneath it. His hat was left behind in the sacristy.

The boy, about 16 years old, who was taken, will be a help and a comfort, I am sure, for he is a fine lad.

(The boy has since been released and sent back with a ransom note from the kidnapers demanding \$50,000 in

Manchurian money. The demand will not be met since it is contrary to practice among Catholic missions in China and Manchukuo to make any payments. The boy stated that Father Donovan was well treated, but that he lacked proper food.)<sup>55</sup>

After the erroneous report of Donovan's release, the case went silent for another three weeks until November 12, 1937, when *The Pittsburgh Press* reported that Japanese authorities had enlisted 2,000 volunteer police to assist troops in the search.<sup>56</sup> At this time, Japan had committed every available soldier to its further incursions into China (which were going badly) while balancing negotiations with the United States over such military actions in an effort to avoid economic sanctions. Military troops could not be spared, but local Manchukuan police could be and were brought in. Finding the American priest was essential to preserve the image of proper administration of Manchukuo by Japan's puppet government and to present Japan in a favorable light with the American government as to the safety of an American national in Japanese-controlled territory.

Winter descended on Manchukuo as did silence on the fate of the kidnapped missionary. The American consul at Mukden faithfully cabled every week to Washington his report on the "Father Donovan case." The messages were the essence of brevity: "No further information." "No new developments."<sup>57</sup> The prayers of Manchukuan Catholics were joined by those of Lutheran missionaries and Japanese Anglicans in Manchukuo.

### Final News

In late January 1938, rumors surfaced that Father Donovan had been seen and that a military plan had been devised to secure his release. The many false rumors ended and the family's hopes were dashed on February 11, when American Consul John Davies in Mukden phoned Msgr. Lane to inform him that Japanese military authorities had found the body of a foreigner in the snow on a path at the foot of a mountain near the village of Huai-Jen in the northern section of Antung province, some 60 miles from Donovan's mission. The body's description matched that of Father Donovan. Japanese police had apprehended alleged Communist bandit Wang Fu Sheng on February 10; he confessed to the kidnapping and later abandonment of the body, and his information led to the finding of Donovan's remains.<sup>58</sup>

A Reuters dispatch from Mukden reported that a body believed to be Father Gerard Donovan had been found in northern Antung province.<sup>59</sup> The report was immediately picked up by American newspapers, including those in Pittsburgh. *The Pittsburgh Press's* top headline for October 11 trumpeted: "Body of Pittsburgh Missionary Found in China" – accompanied by a front-page article "Priest, Kidnap Victim, Killed by Abductors."<sup>60</sup> Information had been released by Bishop James E. Walsh at Maryknoll headquarters, based on a cable sent by Maryknoll Fathers in China to Father Joseph Donovan, older brother of the murdered priest, at Maryknoll headquarters. Father Joseph in turn telephoned Father Denis Murphy, pastor of St. Stephen's in Hazelwood, the Donovan family's parish.

When two newspaper reporters appeared at the residence of Father Donovan's parents with the news that their son's body had been found, Mrs. Donovan poignantly reacted with the heart-felt comment: "It is God's will. . . I gave him to God. . . I am sure He has made good use of him."<sup>61</sup> To another reporter, she commented: "If he is gone, it is the will of God and I accept it."<sup>62</sup> The deceased priest's sister Catherine was reported to be "grief-stricken" and "wept bitterly" upon receipt of the message from Bishop Walsh; it fell to her dry-eyed mother to console her crying daughter.<sup>63</sup>

The following morning, February 12, Maryknoll Father Thomas Quirk and Raymond P. Ludden of the U.S. consulate flew to Huai-Jen, where they found Father Donovan's frozen body with rope marks of strangulation; the rope was reportedly still around his neck. A bruise over the right temple suggested that one of the bandits had mercifully struck the captive a blow with a blunt instrument before the traditional Chinese form of strangling took place.<sup>64</sup> The priest's feet, without shoes, were in such bad condition that it was obvious that he could no longer walk. The many tooth marks indicated that wolves had gnawed at the lifeless corpse.<sup>65</sup> Death had likely come in late January, about two weeks before discovery of the body. On receipt of verification from the consul, the death was confirmed by the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C.<sup>66</sup> The consul's cable did not reveal how Donovan had been slain.

A Japanese military escort accompanied the body's transport from Hua-Jen to Fushun.<sup>67</sup> American consul Lane, in his account of Donovan's death, emphasized the part played by Japanese soldiers who found the body and "did everything possible to honor and respect the remains." He did not express his real feelings that the Japanese had purposely failed in their efforts to intercept the bandits and save the missionary.<sup>68</sup> This stemmed from the attitude of occupying Japanese officials that foreigners were spies supportive of the Chinese.

But there was an element to this killing deeper than mere kidnapping for ransom money or military disinclination to fully engage. The official report from the Japanese military identified the influence behind the killing:

At six o'clock on the morning of February 10 the Nagashima unit of the Manchuria Pacification Force arrested a Communist bandit named Fu-sheng, who belonged to what was called the First Anti-Japanese Communist Army of the Northeast. Fu-sheng revealed to them that the dead body of Father Donovan had been abandoned in the neighborhood of Niu-Wei-Tou-Shan. In close cooperation with the Kurosaki unit of the Japanese garrison here at Huai-Jen, the Nagashima unit began an immediate search. By ten o'clock, at a point some two hundred yards from the base of the mountain, they discovered the remains of the murdered missionary.<sup>69</sup>

So the Communist influence in the bandit affair was known. Communists did not want Catholic priests free to proselytize in the country. There was no other reason for his murder. Friends in Manchukuo and America had offered to pay the ransom as the Church would not – a fact known to the bandits.<sup>70</sup> Father Don-

ovan was not merely the victim of kidnapers. He had been the victim of his priesthood – and this made him a martyr.



**Initial interment of Fr. Donovan in Fushun, Manchukuo 1938**

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives



**Children gather around the casket of Fr. Donovan in Fushun, Manchukuo 1938**

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

Death focused the attention of media. *The New York Times* reported "Kidnapped Priest Dies in Manchukuo."<sup>71</sup> *The Pittsburgh Press* now printed an extended excerpt of the testimony of Maryknoll Sister Veronica Marie Carney, who was an eyewitness to the abduction and whose account had been released by Maryknoll headquarters shortly after the October 1937 abduction. Few papers printed any portion of her interview at that time, but now her account was of interest to Pittsburghers. The portion that appeared in the *Press* included information that had not appeared in the *Observer's* selective printing in November 1937:

He was only an ordinary looking individual to us, who were not thinking of bandits or even the possibility of them.

~~~~~

I left the church immediately, and urged the men to go after Father Donovan and help him, but as the congregation consisted mostly of school children and elderly men, there were few who could be of assistance.⁷²

It was established Catholic practice that a missionary who died overseas would typically be buried at his post, reflecting the priest's commitment to his chosen people. The cost and logistical challenges of transporting a body half way around the world to a missionary's home country, political instability in mission lands, and the expectations of local Catholic converts help explain this practice. Maryknoll followed this practice as deaths occurred among its missionaries in China.⁷³ Accordingly, preparations were made for Father Donovan's burial in Fushun. But in the midst of these preparations, Maryknoll headquarters cabled instructions that the body was to be sent home for burial at its New York seminary. The body was temporarily interred in a cemetery in Hopei, pending a local funeral and initiation of the transport of Donovan's body to the United States.

The confirmed news of Father Donovan's brutal death made international headlines – competing with news of the escalating war in China, the Nazis' continuing orchestration of propaganda to support German territorial expansion, and the ongoing civil war in Spain.⁷⁴ American papers tended to the one-two reporting approach: initial coverage of the reported finding of the body, following by more detailed articles subsequent to confirmation of the finding of Donovan's body.⁷⁵

Dorothy Day's *The Catholic Worker* carried a piece, which was reprinted in *The Pittsburgh Catholic*.⁷⁶

MARTYR

Mourn with us the death of Father Gerard Donovan, first Maryknoll martyr. Mourn his death, who died so young, but rejoice that a new martyr is added to the roster of those who, in the past, have given true witness. Father Donovan fought the Christian fight, used the Christian weapons and won the Christian victory.

A native of Pittsburgh, Father Donovan met his end on a bleak, scrawny Manchukuo hillside. Alone, without the solace of priest or dear ones he died the Christian way.

Would to God his fellow Christians in other parts of the world would learn the lesson. He died praying and loving. The Christian way. How many die cursing and hating? Do we sound sentimental? Perhaps we do. But we do know that his IS THE CHRISTIAN WAY, and no amount of rationalization or sophistry can lessen the virtue of it. We pray for him and we pray for those who die in battle. We mourn them both, but we rejoice for him.

—*The Catholic Worker*

This statement reflected the perspective of American Catholics generally, and missionaries in particular, that “While martyrdom was technically defined as going to one's death rather than renouncing of the faith, the [missionaries] interpreted death at the hand of bandits as ‘martyrdom in the eyes of God.’”⁷⁷ The writings of Maryknoll co-founder Father (later Bishop) James A. Walsh and Maryknoll literature had already placed the image of the martyr before the eyes of Maryknollers. The mission cross

entrusted to Maryknollers at the departure ceremony suggested a martyr motif. Father Gerard Donovan was the first Maryknoller to make such a sacrifice.

Ecclesiastical Response

On February 11, the first Pontifical Requiem Mass was celebrated at Maryknoll, with the eulogy given by Maryknoll Bishop James E. Walsh. The bishop spoke these words:

We recognize the presence of Father Donovan and of all Maryknoll missionaries, in foreign fields, is a voluntary act on their part. We accept the risk of unpleasant and even fatal consequences as part of the day's work.⁷⁸

Subsequently, a second Solemn Pontifical Requiem Mass was held at the Fushun mission chapel with two bishops – Bishop Auguste Gaspais, M.E.P., of Kirin representing the Holy See, and Bishop Blois of Mukden. Msgr. Lane delivered the eulogy in Chinese and Japanese.

On March 4, Maryknoll announced that Father Donovan's body would be transported to Japan, where it would leave Kobe on March 30, aboard the *SS President Cleveland*, arriving in San Francisco on April 14.⁷⁹ The shipping arrangement changed, occasioned by a ship fire and resultant delay. On April 18, the announced plans called for arrival of the body aboard the Japanese liner *Titibu Maru* on April 25.⁸⁰

Father Thomas Donovan, Father Gerard's brother, was unable to reach Manchukuo from his mission station in southern China for his younger brother's funeral, but journeyed to Japan to salute the remains when they were placed aboard the *Titibu Maru* at the port of Yokahama for the voyage to the United States. Father Joseph W. Connors, a Maryknoller assigned to northern Korea, accompanied the body.⁸¹

The Pittsburgh Catholic carried a front-page article on Father Donovan's death – by then already known via the secular daily newspapers – on February 17, 1938, which was the first issue after announcement of the finding of the priest's body.⁸² *The Catholic's* May 12 issue devoted almost a full page to pictures in connection with the arrival, American funeral, and interment of Father Donovan.⁸³

Public interest in the “Donovan case” did not cease upon discovery of his body, but rather continued and indeed intensified for some time. United Press wire service reported:

SAN FRANCISCO, April 15.—UP—A piece of the rope with which he was strangled arrived here today among the effects and clothing of a missionary priest, kidnaped and murdered in China. The body of Father Gerard Donovan, Maryknoll priest, was delayed in China, however, by fire aboard an Oriental vessel. Other priests of the order arrived today on the *President Cleveland*.⁸⁴

When the liner arrived in San Francisco on April 25, the casket was transported to St. Mary's Cathedral where it lay in state for

three days before the Office of the Dead was chanted and Archbishop John J. Mitty celebrated the third Pontifical Requiem Mass on April 27.⁸⁵ While the body was *en route* from San Francisco to Maryknoll headquarters, Father Donovan's aged parents left Pittsburgh on April 30 to attend the funeral at Maryknoll. Twenty Hazelwood residents accompanied them by train, including the pastor and one curate.⁸⁶ A journey by train across the continent brought the young priest's body to Maryknoll. On arrival, Father Joseph Donovan celebrated a Requiem Mass for his deceased younger brother. The final Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated on May 2 in the Maryknoll chapel with a procession of 500 before the remains were lowered into a grave in the Maryknoll cemetery.⁸⁷

Details of the abduction and violent death of Father Donovan were read into the *Congressional Record* by U.S. Rep. Peter J. DeMuth of Pennsylvania.⁸⁸ That included correspondence from Secretary of State Cordell Hull that told of the circumstances of the abduction and of the State Department's efforts to effect release. The congressman commented that, "it is with deep sorrow that the people of Western Pennsylvania received the news concerning the death of Father Gerard Donovan."⁸⁹

Few newspapers took note of Maryknoll's announcement that within 48 hours of discovery of Fr. Donovan's body, the departure ceremony of Father Edward A McGurkin, 32, was held at Maryknoll headquarters. He was to take the place of the slain missionary at the mission in Hopei.⁹⁰

A Pittsburgh Farewell

The religious response in Pittsburgh was immediate. Pittsburgh's two principal newspapers, *The Pittsburgh Press* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, announced on February 11 and February 12 that a Solemn Requiem Mass would be sung the following Monday (February 14, Valentine's Day) at St. Stephen's Church in Hazelwood for the repose of the deceased missionary's soul.⁹¹ On that day, more than 1,300 people jammed St. Stephen's for the funeral Mass. The church had a seating capacity for 1,200, so people stood in the rear and lined the aisles next to those who filled every pew.



Interment of Fr. Donovan at Maryknoll – May 2, 1938. Bishop James E. Walsh, M.M., officiated. At far left is Msgr. Michael J. Lavelle, rector of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and vicar general of Archdiocese of New York.

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

Father Donovan's aged and infirm parents – the father, 82, and the mother, 78, both of whom had been unable to attend church for some time – were helped to the front pews. Some 600 students from adjacent St. Stephen School were in attendance at the church where Father Donovan had celebrated his First Mass only ten years earlier.

Father Joseph Donovan from Maryknoll headquarters celebrated the Mass for his younger brother.⁹² Fr. Benedict, O.F.M., served as deacon, and Father John C. Fallon (who had baptized the baby Gerard 35 years earlier) was subdeacon. Father John McKenna was master of ceremonies. The sanctuary was filled with Franciscan, Carmelite, Benedictine, and Passionist priests. The diocesan priests present included Matthew Coghlan, Paul E. Campbell, John Greaney, John P. Shields (whom Gerard had served as an altar boy), Joseph F. Battung, Regis Phelan, Thomas R. Murphy, and William G. Connare. At the conclusion of Mass, Father Denis N. Murphy (pastor of St. Stephen) gave absolution over the *catalfaque* that had been placed at the head of the aisle and draped with black vestments, a purple stole, and a priest's biretta.⁹³ When someone expressed sympathy to Mrs. Donovan at so tragic a loss, she remarked quietly: "It's a small price to have to pay for having three priestly sons."⁹⁴

The following day, February 15, another Requiem Mass was offered at 10 A.M. in St. Peter's Church in McKeesport, the city in which Father Donovan was born. This was the church where he was baptized, adjacent to the parish school that he had attended until age 12 when he entered Maryknoll.⁹⁵

A Solemn Requiem Mass was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on May 8, 1938, reflecting the fact that Maryknoll headquarters was located within the New York archdiocese. Father Donovan was praised during the eulogy delivered by Father Charles O'Connor Sloane, who declared that the missionary's willingness to die for his faith was the most recent addition to "the evidence of the centuries that the religion of Christ cannot be overthrown because it is of God."⁹⁶

Afterwards

Two years later, Maryknoll's Father John J. Considine produced a biography of the martyr entitled *When the Sorghum Was High: A Narrative Biography of Father Gerard A. Donovan of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a Maryknoll Missionary Slain by Bandits in Manchukuo*.⁹⁷ Archbishop (later Cardinal) Francis J. Spellman of New York wrote in his preface to the book that "in many a missionary heart there throbs a holy envy of Father Gerard Donovan of Maryknoll."⁹⁸ Prominent Catholic novelist Katherine Burton promptly reviewed the book in Maryknoll's *The Field Afar*.⁹⁹ Her review was in turn reprinted in *The Pittsburgh Catholic*.¹⁰⁰ The book would go through eight printings, and was issued in hardcover and paperback.¹⁰¹

Maryknoll would include Father Donovan's story in its subsequent publication, *Men of Maryknoll* (1943).¹⁰² Journalist Glenn Kittler devoted a chapter of his book, *The Maryknoll Fathers* (1961), to the story of Donovan.¹⁰³



Funeral Mass in Maryknoll chapel – May 2, 1938

Source: Maryknoll Mission Archives

Thirty-eight years after Father Donovan's death, the last of his siblings died – his older sister Margery who had married John F. Kelly before her brother's death. One of her sons was ordained a priest of the diocese of Pittsburgh – Father Gerard D. Kelly (1925-2004), who served as a priest for 54 years and as pastor of St. Thomas á Becket parish in Jefferson Hills for 32 years.¹⁰⁴ Father Kelly bore the same baptismal name as his uncle – Gerard.

His Sacrifice Remembered

Over the three-quarters of a century that have passed since Father Gerard Donovan's death, his sacrifice has been recalled in various ways and at various times. The following are illustrative:

- Britain's premier Catholic newspaper, *The Tablet*, included Father Donovan in its listing of missionary casualties stemming from the wide-ranging impact of the ongoing Sino-Japanese conflict in China – labeling him an “indirect victim.”¹⁰⁵
- On the occasion of the golden jubilee of Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption in San Francisco, Archbishop Mitty recalled that the cathedral had witnessed two historic Solemn Masses of Requiem: Father Damien of Molokai and Father Gerard Donovan of Maryknoll.¹⁰⁶
- During World War II, Archbishop Francis J. Spellman of New York included Father Donovan in the pantheon of “Catholic heroes.”¹⁰⁷
- Father Donovan's sacrifice of his life has inspired religious vocations. In 1941 – a mere three years after Father Donovan's death – Maria Rieckelman of Cincinnati heard her teacher read aloud to the class from *When the Sorghum Was High* and was so impressed that the seventh grader decided to spend her life as a Maryknoll missionary in China.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in 1943 – just five years after the priest's death – 11-year-old Mary Ellen Manz listened to her teacher, a Sister of St. Joseph, tell her class about the story of Father Gerard Donovan. When finished, the sister asked the students, “Who will take Father Gerry's place?” The young girl said to herself, “I will.” And she did – later joining the Maryknoll Sisters, where she has served since 1950, including 20 years in Chile and 25 years in Sudan.¹⁰⁹ In the ensuing decades, other women and men would cite their exposure to literature or stories about Fr. Gerard Donovan as the beginning of their journey to Maryknoll and missionary work.¹¹⁰
- Thirty-one years after Father Donovan's abduction, *The Pittsburgh Press* included a special “Martyr from McKeesport” article in its *Pittsburgh's Family Magazine* on December 8, 1968. The story recalled his Pittsburgh area roots and his death three decades earlier.¹¹¹
- Father Donovan is memorialized in stained glass in “The Men of Maryknoll” window in The Chapel of Our Lady at Canterbury School in New Milford, Connecticut. The school's alumni magazine, *Pallium*, beautifully describes the story behind that window:

In September of 1961, two other Canterbury families, the Duffys and the Murrays, committed to donating windows. The Murray window would be in memory of Joseph Murray who had died in September of that year. Immediately, John Kernan wrote to [Walter] Sheehan with suggestions regarding possible subjects for these windows. In response, Sheehan wrote that the Duffys might be interested in a window dedicated to the

Maryknoll Order despite the fact that there would be no saints connected with the window, “inasmuch as the School has always been tied in closely with Maryknoll” and “the Duffys have a boy in the Maryknoll Order.” The Duffy brothers, Edward ’49, Michael ’51, John ’59, and Daniel ’63, did donate a window with the theme “Men of Maryknoll.” The window is in memory of their grandparents Edward J. and Lillian (Poole) Duffy. It depicts scenes from the history of the order such as Pope Pius X blessing the order’s founders Fr. James Walsh and Fr. Thomas Price, and Fr. Gerard Donovan, the first Maryknoll martyr who was killed at age 33 in 1937 while a missionary in China. This window is fitting for the Duffy family since Michael Duffy served as a Maryknoll priest for 35 years.¹¹²

- Father Gerard Donovan’s name and story receive mention on blogs, such as Father Len Stoviak’s “The Company of Witness.”¹¹³ Likewise, as to print publications such as the October 2011 issue of *The Priest* magazine.¹¹⁴ Such mentions, while brief, continue to perpetuate the story of this missionary martyr. Likewise, the 13th General Chapter of the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers held in September 2014 closed each day with special evening prayer services that recognized Father Donovan as a Maryknoll martyr, among the others who followed him.¹¹⁵
- Brian O’Neel’s 2014 book, *150 North American Martyrs You Should Know*, included Father Gerard Donovan. The author ended each chapter with a prayer for God’s help in applying the lesson and example of each particular martyr to readers’ own lives. Based on Donovan’s life, O’Neel concluded:

Fr. Donovan put service to others above his personal safety and happiness. If he hadn’t, we wouldn’t remember him. Because he served so nobly, however, we laud and reverence his memory. . . . Fr. Donovan teaches us to find something to do that is of service and then to do it. . . . *Lord, Fr. Donovan said he was happy “because I have tried to do what I was told and go where I was told.” By sacrificing his will to yours, he did not lose his freedom. Rather, he gained it.*¹¹⁶

- Internet stories¹¹⁷ and blog entries¹¹⁸ about Father Donovan reach people just as newspaper articles and the 1940 print biography reached Catholics in earlier decades. The availability of information about the priest via the online Maryknoll Mission Archives¹¹⁹ has the potential to reach an even larger audience.

Father Gerard Donovan was to be followed by other Maryknoll “martyrs”:

- Father Robert J. Cairns (d. 1941 when drowned at sea by Japanese soldiers)
- Bishop Patrick Byrne (d. 1950 in Korean Communist captivity)
- Bishop Francis X. Ford (d. 1952 in a Chinese Communist prison)
- Father Vincent Capodanno (d. 1967 in Vietnam)

- Bishop Adolph Paschang (d. 1968 in Hong Kong after imprisonment in China)
- Bishop James E. Walsh (d. 1981 in U.S. after 12 years of Chinese Communist imprisonment)
- Sister Ita Ford (d. 1980 in El Salvador)
- Sister Maura Clarke (d. 1980 in El Salvador).¹²⁰

More than three-quarters of a century after the martyrdom of Father Gerard Donovan, M.M., the story of his missionary work and martyr’s death in China resonates over time and distance back to his roots in Western Pennsylvania. *Requiescat in pace.*



Notice from a Convent Superior to other Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, ca. Feb. 20-April 15, 1938.

Source: Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Erie, PA. Courtesy of Sr. Marie Timmons, S.S.J., Archivist.

Suggested Reading:

Kathleen Kelly, "Maryknoll in Manchuria, 1927-1947: A Study of Accommodation and Adaptation" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Southern California, 1982), accessed October 13, 2017, <http://digitalibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll3/id/501465>.

Endnotes:

- ¹ "The Departure," *The Field Afar* Vol. XII, No. 10 (October 1918), 160-162. Gounod (1818-1893) was musical director for the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris where he composed the hymn. See Charles Gounod, *Chant pour le Départ des Missionnaires (de Semaine des Missions Étrangères)* (Paris).
- ² Ossining is a town about 30 miles north of New York City, on the east bank of the Hudson River, better known for its prison, Sing Sing.
- ³ James A. Walsh, *Observations in the Orient* (Ossining, NY: Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, 1919), 184.
- ⁴ The Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (French: *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris*, or M.E.P.) was not a religious institute but an organization of secular priests dedicated to missionary work in foreign lands. Bishop de Guébriant later became Superior General of the society and an archbishop.
- ⁵ Jean-Paul Wiest, *Maryknoll in China: A History, 1918-1955* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1988), 48, 51-52, 59.
- ⁶ Current names of cities and towns central to this story are given as a point of reference.
- ⁷ Also to be noted is the role of the Maria Mission Circles that was formed in 1913 by five Pittsburgh women to assist missionaries in the care of the poor and needy overseas. By 1963, more than 60 circles existed with over 1,000 members.
- ⁸ Joseph S. Donovan (1889-1966) worked for a number of years before beginning studies for the diocesan priesthood at St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe. At the conclusion of his philosophy program, he entered Maryknoll in September 1916 at age 27. He was ordained on May 29, 1920 and assigned to the Kongmoon mission in southern China. He returned to the United States in 1922 for health reasons and was assigned to promotional work on the West Coast. In December 1931, Father Joseph returned to China where he was assistant procurator in Hong Kong. Two years later he returned to Maryknoll, where he died and was buried. See "Father Joseph S. Donovan, MM," accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-joseph-s-donovan-mm>.
- ⁹ Thomas R. Donovan (1897-1948) entered Maryknoll in 1921, after having worked for Crucible Steel Company for several years. Ordained on January 26, 1930, he spent a year at Catholic University of America before being sent to China as a missionary. It was during his time in China that his brother Gerard was killed. After nine years of service overseas, Father Thomas returned to the U.S. where he spent a year at St. Stephen Church in Hazelwood. He was appointed procurator at Maryknoll Seminary in Clarks Summit, and in 1948 was appointed to a similar post at Maryknoll House in St. Louis, Missouri. *En route* to his new assignment on July 26, 1948, his auto skidded on wet pavement on U.S. Route 40 near Cambridge, Ohio while rounding a curve and smashed head on into a bus headed for Pittsburgh. He was killed at age 51, and was buried at Maryknoll. "Priest Killed in Auto-Bus Crash in Ohio: Carrick Woman Hurt; Clergyman Left Hazelwood Monday," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (July 27, 1948), 2; "See Third Son Say First Mass: Aged Hazelwood Couple Attend Ceremonies in St. Stephen's," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (February 6, 1930), 1-2. See also "Father Thomas R. Donovan, MM," accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-thomas-r-donovan-mm>.
- ¹⁰ The obituary of Michael Donovan (1848-1943) provides his biography: "Michael Donovan Dead; Father of Slain Priest, Two Other Mary-knollers," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (July 15, 1943), 11. He is buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, McKeesport. Six children survived:

Rev. Joseph, Rev. Thomas, James, Daniel, Catherine, and Mrs. John F. Kelly.

- ¹¹ The obituary of Mary McCahill Donovan (1860-1939) provides her biography: "Priest-Martyr's Mother, Mrs. Donovan, Dies," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (December 7, 1939), 1; "Slain Priest's Mother Dies in Hazelwood," *The Pittsburgh Press* (December 6, 1939), 40. At the time of her death, she and her husband of 60 years were living at 219 Joyce Terrace in the Hazelwood section of Pittsburgh. She is buried with her husband.
- ¹² Nora ("Nonie") was born in 1881 and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania on March 19, 1898. Professed on August 22, 1905, she died on November 19, 1915. Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania, Erie, Pennsylvania. Information compiled by Archivist Sister Marie Timmons, S.S.J.
- ¹³ George Swetnam, "Martyr from McKeesport: Three Decades Ago, Father Gerard Was Kidnapped and Slain by Chinese Bandits," *The Pittsburgh Press* (December 8, 1968), 258.
- ¹⁴ See "Father Gerard A. Donovan, MM," accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-gerard-a-donovan-mm>.
- ¹⁵ John Joseph Considine, M.M., *When the Sorghum Was High: A Narrative Biography of Father Gerard A. Donovan of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a Maryknoll Missioner Slain by Bandits in Manchukuo* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1940), 6.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ¹⁷ Father Walsh had selected the school's name to honor Blessed Theophane Venard, M.E.P. (1829-1861), a French-born missionary to Indochina who was martyred in 1861. Walsh wrote a biography of Venard, entitled *A Modern Martyr*. Venard had been beatified in 1909, and was later canonized a saint in 1988.
- ¹⁸ Father Leopold H. Tibesar, M.M., as quoted in Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 27.
- ¹⁹ "Pittsburghers to be Ordained for Foreign Missions," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 7, 1928), 1.
- ²⁰ "C. D. of A. News," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (July 11, 1928), 4.
- ²¹ Brian O'Neel, *150 North American Martyrs You Should Know* (Cincinnati: Servant Books, 2014), 120.
- ²² A prefecture is an ancient administrative unit in the second level of the administrative hierarchy, below a province. A detailed description of Fushun and other Manchurian cities cited in this article, along with commentary on transportation and topography of the area, is provided in Madrolle's Guide Book, *Northern China: The Valley of the Blue River, Korea* (Paris: Ste d'Éditions Géographiques, 1912). While dated from our time perspective, it accurately depicts the country as Father Donovan and other early Maryknoll missionaries would have encountered it.
- ²³ The variant spellings of Chinese words reflect the Romanization of Chinese, i.e., the use of the Latin alphabet to write Chinese, including the Wade-Giles system. The different spellings of the names of Chinese cities and towns appearing in this article reflect the spellings as used in the sources consulted.
- ²⁴ Father Francis A. Bridge (1895-1934) was a native of West Alexandria, Pennsylvania. Initially a coal miner, he enlisted in the Army and served overseas during World War I. Inspired by the late vocation of Father Joseph Donovan, he entered Maryknoll in 1920. Father Gerard Donovan was his ordination classmate on June 17, 1928. Bridge had already served three years in China when Fr. Gerard Donovan arrived in 1931. Ill health forced Bridge to return to the United States in 1933, where he died the following year. Bridge's family included his well-known brother, Father Gerard Bridge, O.S.B. (1872-1959), of St. Vincent College in Latrobe. Gerard Hall on the college campus is named in the latter's honor. See "Father Francis A. Bridge,

- MM," accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-francis-a-bridge-mm>.
- ²⁵ "U.S. Missionaries Warned by Japanese," *The Reading Eagle* (October 14, 1932), 10.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ James M. Costin, "Passing Remarks," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (October 20, 1932), 2.
- ²⁸ "Bandits Slay Cleric in China: Pittsburgh Priest Menaced as Japanese, Guerrillas Clash in Manchuria," *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 17, 1932), 1, 5.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Rev. Gerard A. Donovan to unidentified American (December 29, 1933), Sin Pin, Manchuria, appearing as "Manchurian Christmas" in *Stories of Mission* (November 1, 2012), accessed October 13, 2017, <https://maryknollsociety.org/mission-stories/manchurian-christmas/>.
- ³² Gerard A. Donovan to Rev. P. C. Danner, director of the Missionary Aid Society, as quoted in "Missionary Aid Society," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (February 28, 1935), 14.
- ³³ Fushun was elevated to the status of a vicariate apostolic in February 1940, and became a diocese in April 1946. Lane (1894-1974) enjoyed the title of "Monsignor" while serving as prefect apostolic; upon being named vicar apostolic in 1940, he was ordained a bishop. After the Pearl Harbor attack, Lane was interned by the Japanese in Fushun. After World War II, he became the first bishop of the new Diocese of Fushun in April 1946. Four months later, in August 1946, he became Superior General of Maryknoll – a position he would hold for 10 years.
- ³⁴ "Hazelwood Priest Serving in Manchukuo Kidnaped by Bandits Who Ask \$50,000," *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 6, 1937), 1. Father Donovan had written of his initial bandit experience in a letter to his parents.
- ³⁵ "Mass to be Celebrated Here Monday For Priest Slain by Chinese Bandits," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (February 12, 1938), 2.
- ³⁶ Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 108.
- ³⁷ O'Neel, *150 North American Martyrs You Should Know*, op. cit., 121.
- ³⁸ P. C. Danner, "Missionary Aid Society," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (June 3, 1937), 6.
- ³⁹ "300 Soldiers Hunt Kidnaped Priest," *Reading Eagle* (October 7, 1937), 29. This was a report from the Chinese capital, Peiping. See also "Soldiers Hunt Kidnapers of a Missionary," *The Milwaukee Journal* (October 7, 1937), 1.
- ⁴⁰ Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 132.
- ⁴¹ Some of the details were released through the Fides Agency. See, e.g., untitled newspaper clipping from the *Catholic Herald* (November 12, 1937), accessed October 13, 2017, <https://leiden-ink.org/2014/05/14/when-the-sorghum-was-high-john-joseph-considine-m-m/catholic-herald-12111937/>. Fides news agency (*Agenzia Fides*) was established by Maryknoll Father John Considine in June 1927 as the first missionary news agency of the Catholic Church, part of the Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*. It became a center for the collection and production of missionary news, photographs, studies, and statistics. See the agency's official website at www.fides.org.
- ⁴² Information from Maryknoll Father Thomas Quirk (who had accompanied the American consul to Huai-Jen and made the final identification of Father Donovan's body), as reported in "Father Donovan Strangled to Death, Superiors Learn," *Bradford Evening Star* and *The Bradford Daily Record* (February 14, 1938), 1.
- ⁴³ "The Maryknoll Fathers," in "News Review of the Catholic World," *The Bulletin* [of the Catholic Laymen's Association of Georgia, Diocese of Savannah] (November 27, 1937), 3.
- ⁴⁴ Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 153.
- ⁴⁵ "Hazelwood Priest Serving in Manchukuo Kidnaped by Bandits Who Ask \$50,000," loc. cit.
- ⁴⁶ Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 154.
- ⁴⁷ "Ask \$50,000 for Priest: Bandits in Manchukuo Hold Rev. Gerard Donovan of Maryknoll," *The New York Times* (October 7, 1937), 14. Donovan's kidnapping was again mentioned the following day in a larger article about the deteriorating situation in China. See "Shanghai Shaken by Artillery Duel," *The New York Times* (October 8, 1937), 3.
- ⁴⁸ "Bandits Abduct Missionary," *The Straits Times* (October 7, 1937), 11. Father Donovan's kidnapping made the front pages of newspapers across the U.S.: "Missionary Captured," *The Anniston Star* [Alabama] (October 6, 1937), 1; "Soldiers Hunt Priest," *Lincoln Evening Journal* [Nebraska] (October 7, 1937), 1; "Kidnaped," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (October 9, 1937), 1; "U.S. Missionary Kidnaped by Chinese Bandits," *The Nashville Tennessean* (October 8, 1937), 1; "Priest Kidnaped," *The Gallup Independent* [New Mexico] (October 11, 1937), 1; "Bandits Kidnaped Rev. Gerard A. Donovan," *Albany Democrat-Herald* [Oregon] (October 12, 1937), 1; "Bandits Kidnap American Priest," *The Observer* (October 14, 1937), 1; "Missionary Held for Heavy Ransom," *The Evening Standard* [Uniontown, PA] (October 22, 1937), 1; "Ransom Asked on Missionary: Chinese Bandits Want \$14,500 for Release," *The Los Angeles Times* (October 23, 1937), 1; "Kidnaped From Church," *The Observer* (November 11, 1937), 1.
- ⁴⁹ "Bandits Still Hold Pittsburgh Priest," *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 18, 1937), 14.
- ⁵⁰ United Press, Peiping, October 18, appearing in *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 18, 1937), 14.
- ⁵¹ "Jap Army Rescues Pittsburgh Priest: Father Donovan Unharmful; No Ransom Paid," *The Pittsburgh Press* (October 20, 1937), 19. Similar stories appeared in other papers; see, e.g., "Missionary Priest Has Been Recovered," *New Castle News* (October 20, 1937), 1.
- ⁵² "Jap Army Rescues Pittsburgh Priest: Father Donovan Unharmful; No Ransom Paid," loc. cit.
- ⁵³ "Banditry in China: A Bishop and many Priests Kidnaped," *Catholic Herald* (November 12, 1937), 15. A Vincentian bishop and eight of his priests had been kidnapped in Hebei Province. The article noted Father Donovan's abduction and then mentioned two missionaries abducted in Sechwan province that still had not been released after two years, two missionaries held in Shensi province, and a priest taken in Kweichow province a year and a half earlier who was now believed dead. The numbers were staggering.
- ⁵⁴ Newspapers across the country continued to report the latest news on the Donovan kidnapping, often in the back pages of their issues: "\$14,500 Demanded for Missionary," *The Spartanburg Herald* [S.C.] (October 23, 1937), 11; "Chinese altar boy reaches Mukden," *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (October 23, 1937), 4. International coverage continued, integrated into the larger story of the Sino-Japanese conflict; see, e.g., "Fighting in Shanghai," *The Irish Press* [Dublin] (October 23, 1937), 1.
- ⁵⁵ "Kidnaped from Church," *The Observer* [Rockford] (November 11, 1937) 1, 4. See the archive of *The Observer*, accessed October 13, 2017, <http://obs.stparchive.com/Archive/OBS/OBS11111937p01.php>. It should be noted that the front page of the same issue carried the bolded story "8 Priests and Bishop Kidnaped" – a Vatican announcement regarding Bishop Hubert Schraven, who was vicar apostolic of Chengting in Hebei province. In fact, Schraven had refused to turn over 200 women who had sought refuge in his compound during the Japanese invasion; he and his priests were handcuffed by the Japanese, doused with petrol, and burned alive; their remains were found the following month, while Donovan's body would not be found for four months.

- ⁵⁶ “Japanese Police Hunt Missionary,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (November 12, 1937), 24.
- ⁵⁷ Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 148.
- ⁵⁸ United Press report of Japanese Foreign Office spokesman quoting official reports from Manchukuo, appearing in “Priest’s Death Related,” *The Herald Statesman* [Yonkers, NY] (February 18, 1938), 3.
- ⁵⁹ See “Late News Flashes by the Associated Press: London—Reuters (British news agency)” as reported in *Nashua Telegraph* (February 11, 1938), 1.
- ⁶⁰ “Priest, Kidnap Victim, Killed by Abductors,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (February 11, 1938), 1.
- ⁶¹ Mrs. Donovan as quoted in Considine, *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., 159.
- ⁶² Mrs. Donovan as quoted in “Priest, Kidnap Victim, Killed by Abductors,” loc. cit. See also “Requiem Mass to be Sung for Martyr Priest: Parish Will Pay Tribute to Missionary Killed by Chinese Bandits,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (February 12, 1938), 6; “Mass to be Celebrated Here Monday For Priest Slain by Chinese Bandits,” loc. cit.
- ⁶³ “Priest, Kidnap Victim, Killed by Abductors,” loc. cit.; “Body of Father Donovan Found: Emaciated remains of brother of local man, kidnapped by bandits Oct. 5, found in Manchukuo,” *Bradford Evening Star and Bradford Daily Record* (February 11, 1938), 1.
- ⁶⁴ At an early stage, the Japanese concluded that Father Donovan had been hanged rather than strangled: “In Tokyo a foreign office spokesman said ... Father Donovan had been hanged.” “Father Donovan Hanged by Bandits Report Reveals,” *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* (February 14, 1938), 2.
- ⁶⁵ “Fr. Gerry Donovan, M.M.,” accessed October 13, 2017, <http://www.maryknollvocations.org/main>.
- ⁶⁶ “Requiem Mass to be Sung for Martyr Priest: Parish Will Pay Tribute to Missionary Killed by Chinese Bandits,” loc. cit. See also “Noted Missioner’s Sister at Novitiate,” *The Edgecliff* [Cincinnati] (October 28, 1940), 1.
- ⁶⁷ “Late News Flashes: Peiping,” *Nashua Telegraph* (February 14, 1938), 1. Associated Press reported that the U.S. Embassy in Peiping was informed that day that the body of Father Donovan had been taken by Japanese military truck back to the Fushun mission. The Japanese were to perform an autopsy on the body. “Study Priest’s Death: Japanese to Perform Autopsy on Father Donovan’s Body,” *The New York Times* (February 15, 1938), 12.
- ⁶⁸ Weist, *Maryknoll in China: A History, 1918-1955*, op. cit., 374.
- ⁶⁹ Japanese military report, as quoted in Glenn D. Kittler, *The Maryknoll Fathers* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1961), 216.
- ⁷⁰ Kittler, *The Maryknoll Fathers*, op. cit., 217.
- ⁷¹ “Kidnapped Priest Dies in Manchukuo: Body of Father Donovan Found, But Details Are Lacking in report to Maryknoll,” *The New York Times* (February 12, 1938), 32.
- ⁷² Sister Veronica Marie Carney as quoted in “Slain Priest Kidnaped from Church Service: Sister at Maryknoll Compound in China Tells of Father Donovan’s Abduction by Bandit—Brother Will be Celebrant of Requiem Mass Tomorrow,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (February 13, 1938), 7.
- ⁷³ The first Maryknollers to die in China were Father Thomas Price (1919), Father Anthony Hodgins (1922), Sister Mary Gertrude Moore (1923) and Father Daniel McShane (1927). Jean-Paul Wiest, *Maryknoll in China: A History, 1918-1955* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1988), 37. All were buried in China, but the body of Father Price (a co-founder of Maryknoll) was exhumed in 1936 and transported to Maryknoll.
- ⁷⁴ As to international print coverage, see, e.g., “Finding of Body,” *Southern Star* [Cork, Ireland] (May 7, 1938), 10; “Kidnapped Priest Dead,” *China* [Magazine of St. Francis Xavier China Mission Seminary in Ontario, Canada] (March 1938), 37 (“the brigands had killed Father Donovan in ‘sheer brutality’.”).
- ⁷⁵ The following are illustrative of American print coverage: “Think Priest’s Body is Found,” *The Independent* [St. Petersburg, FL] (February 11, 1938), 9; “Father Donovan Strangled to Death, Superiors Learn,” *Bradford Evening Star and The Bradford Daily Record* [Bradford, PA] (February 14, 1938), 1; “Discover Body of Slain Mission Priest,” *The Observer* (February 17, 1938), 1; “Maryknoll Priest Killed by Bandits: Father Donovan of Pittsburgh One of Three Brothers Missionaries in Orient,” *The Bulletin* [Catholic Laymen’s Association of Georgia] (February 26, 1938), 1.
- ⁷⁶ “Martyr,” *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (March 17, 1938), 14.
- ⁷⁷ Angelyn Dries, *The Missionary Movement in American Catholic History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 130.
- ⁷⁸ Bishop James E. Walsh, as quoted in “Priest, Kidnap Victim, Killed by Abductors,” loc. cit.
- ⁷⁹ “Father Donovan’s Body Due Apr. 14: Pittsburgh Priest Slain by Chinese Bandits, to be Buried at Maryknoll,” *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (March 10, 1938), 1, 16.
- ⁸⁰ “Body of Father Donovan Due in U.S. Apr. 25,” *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (April 21, 1938), 1. The Japanese passenger ship was renamed *Kamakura Maru* in 1939, converted to a troop transport ship during World War II, and sunk in April 1943 killing 2,035 soldiers and civilians on board.
- ⁸¹ “Father Joseph W. Connors, MM” accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-joseph-w-connors-mm>.
- ⁸² “Pittsburgh Priest, Killed by Bandits, Hailed as Martyr,” *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (February 17, 1938), 1, 16.
- ⁸³ “Maryknoll’s First Martyr Comes Home,” *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (May 12, 1938), 2.
- ⁸⁴ “Wire Briefs” *Evening Courier* [Prescott, AZ] (April 15, 1938), 4.
- ⁸⁵ “Body of American Martyr Lies in State,” *Catholic Herald* (May 13, 1938), accessed October 13, 2017, <https://leiden-ink.org/2014/05/14/when-the-sorghum-was-high-john-joseph-considine-m-m/>. See also “S.F. Rites Set for Slain Priest,” *Oakland Tribune* (April 7, 1938), 17.
- ⁸⁶ “Parents to Attend Priest’s Funeral,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (April 29, 1938), 12.
- ⁸⁷ Cheryl A. Kashuba, “Local History: Missionary Priest from NEPA Died a Martyr,” *The Times Tribune* (October 28, 2012), accessed October 13, 2017, <http://thetimes-tribune.com/news/local-history-missionary-priest-from-nepa-died-a-martyr-1.1394959>.
- ⁸⁸ DeMuth (1892-1993) was a Catholic and native of Pittsburgh who was elected as a Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1936. He served until January 3, 1939.
- ⁸⁹ “Father Donovan’s Death in ‘Congressional Record,’” *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (March 3, 1938), 1.
- ⁹⁰ “To Fill Place of Martyr-Priest,” *The Observer* (February 24, 1938), 1. McGurkin (1905-1983) had been serving in several important positions in Rome. He became a bishop in 1956.
- ⁹¹ “Priest, Kidnap Victim, Killed by Abductors,” loc. cit.; “Requiem Mass to be Sung for Martyr Priest,” loc. cit.; “Mass to be Celebrated Here Monday For Priest Slain by Chinese Bandits,” loc. cit.
- ⁹² National interest in Father Donovan’s death continued. A number of papers covered the funeral obsequies. An Alabama newspaper carried a picture of Father Joseph Donovan officiating at the McKeesport funeral Mass. See “For His Brother,” *The Tuscaloosa News* (March 2, 1938), 8.
- ⁹³ “Hazelwood Pays Homage to Priest, Slain in China,” *The Pittsburgh Press* (February 14, 1938), 24. See also “Hundreds Attend Requiem

- Mass in Memory of Father Donovan," *The Pittsburgh Press* (February 14, 1938), 24; "Memorial Mass Held Here for Priest Slain in China; Hazelwood Church Thronged for Services for Father Donovan," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (February 15, 1938), 3.
- ⁹⁴ "Mother of Three Missionaries Dies," *The Observer* (December 21, 1939), 1.
- ⁹⁵ "Mass Celebrated for Slain Priest: Brother of Father Donovan Officiates at McKeesport Church," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (February 16, 1938), 15.
- ⁹⁶ "Father Donovan Praised: His Death in China Held as in 'Tradition of Centuries,'" *The New York Times* (May 9, 1938), 1. Sloane noted that Maryknoll's 500 missionaries were counted among the larger number of 120,000 Catholic missionaries worldwide. Sloane was then a curate at the cathedral and would later become professor of Sacred Scripture at St. Joseph Seminary at Dunwoodie (Archdiocese of New York) and rector of the seminary.
- ⁹⁷ John Joseph Considine, M.M., *When the Sorghum Was High: A Narrative Biography of Father Gerard A. Donovan of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a Maryknoll Missionary Slain by Bandits in Manchukuo* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1941). Considine (1897-1982) was a journalist at heart. He was the founder and first director of Fides News Service (1927-1934), and later served as Maryknoll director of promotion, vicar general, and editor of Maryknoll Publications.
- ⁹⁸ Francis J. Spellman, "Preface," *When the Sorghum Was High*, op. cit., n.p.
- ⁹⁹ Katherine Burton (1887-1969) was a convert to Catholicism (1930) who became a prodigious religious biographer.
- ¹⁰⁰ "They Will Let You Go Home": New Book Tells Story of Pittsburgh's Maryknoll Priest Martyr," *The Pittsburgh Catholic* (September 5, 1940), 7.
- ¹⁰¹ Decades later, Considine's book is still noted for its exceptional quality. See, e.g., "The Best Books I Read in 2013," *The Catholic World Report* – CWR Archive: Books (January 1, 2014), accessed October 13, 2017, <http://www.catholicworldreport.com/2014/01/01/the-best-books-i-read-in-2013/>.
- ¹⁰² See "Death on a Mountain" in James Keller and Meyer Berger, *Men of Maryknoll* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 110-124.
- ¹⁰³ Glenn D. Kittler, *The Maryknoll Fathers* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1961).
- ¹⁰⁴ See "Mrs. Margery Donovan Kelly," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (July 7, 1976), 8. At age 94, she was the last of the 13 siblings to die.
- ¹⁰⁵ "The Church Abroad," *The Tablet* (January 14, 1939), 11.
- ¹⁰⁶ "Cathedral Anniversary Recalls Notable Events," *The Catholic Advance* [Wichita] (February 28, 1941), 7.
- ¹⁰⁷ Francis J. Spellman, quoted in "Catholic Heroes," *Time*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 13 (March 30, 1942).
- ¹⁰⁸ Maria Rieckelman, M.M., "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (October 2001), 169-173, accessed October 14, 2017, <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2001-04/2001-04-169-rieckelman.pdf>.
- ¹⁰⁹ Sr. Mary Ellen Manz, "Who will take his place?," *Maryknoll Magazine*, Vol. 105, Issue 3 (May/June 2011).
- ¹¹⁰ See, e.g., Sister Geraldine O'Leary-Macias, *Lighting My Fire: Memories – Between Two Worlds: The Passionate Journey of a Young American Woman* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 1, and the obituary of Rev. Stephen L. Schroeppel, M.M. (1931-2008), accessed October 14, 2017, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/> 110
- ¹¹¹ George Swetnam, "Martyr from McKeesport: Three Decades Ago
- Father Gerard Was Kidnapped and Slain by Chinese Bandits," *The Pittsburgh Press* (December 8, 1968), 258-259.
- ¹¹² Brian Kiefer and Lou Mandler, "The Chapel," *Pallium*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2016), 34-43, at 40-41. Canterbury School is a college preparatory boarding and day school established in 1915 by lay Catholics. A picture of the window, in which Father Donovan appears in the lower right quadrant, graces the front cover of this issue of *Gathered Fragments*.
- ¹¹³ Fr. Len Stoviak, "The Company of Witness" (September 28, 2011), accessed October 13, 2017, <http://myjourneythoughts.blogspot.com/2011/09/>. See also Professor Paul R. Sebastian, "Maryknollers – A Century Spreading the Gospel and the Part of Each One of Us" (October 23, 2011), accessed October 13, 2017, <http://paulrsebastianphd.blogspot.com/2011/10/maryknollers-century-spreading-gospel.html>.
- ¹¹⁴ "Maryknoll's First Martyr Kidnap Victim," Last Things for October 2011 in *The Priest* (October 2011), accessed October 13, 2017, <https://www.osv.com/Magazines/ThePriest/ByIssue/Article/TabId/818/ArtMid/13723/ArticleID/5345/Last-Things-for-October-2011.aspx>.
- ¹¹⁵ John A. Meyer (Maryknoll Affiliate Board Member, Phoenix Chapter), "Daring to Dream Anew" (January 9, 2015), accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollaffiliates.org/news/not-so-far-afield/item/1185-daring-to-dream-anew.html>.
- ¹¹⁶ See Chapter Nineteen, "Fr. Gerard A. Donovan, M.M.: It's Just Part of the Day's Work, Buddy," in O'Neel, *150 North American Martyrs You Should Know*, op. cit., 119-122, at 122.
- ¹¹⁷ See, e.g., "American Saints" (February 3, 2013), accessed October 13, 2017, <https://americansaints.wordpress.com/2013/02/03/3-to-9-february-2013/>.
- ¹¹⁸ See, e.g., "Missionary priest with local ties kidnapped by bandits," accessed October 13, 2017, <http://timetribuneblogs.com/pages-from-the-past/>.
- ¹¹⁹ "Father Gerard A. Donovan, MM" accessed October 13, 2017, <http://maryknollmissionarchives.org/?deceased-fathers-bro=father-gerard-a-donovan-mm>. See also Maryknoll's Spanish-language story of Father Donovan, "¿Quién tomará su lugar?," accessed October 13, 2017, <http://revistamaryknoll.org/index.php/revistas/237-iquien-tomara-su-lugar>.
- ¹²⁰ Maryknoll has not initiated the process of canonization for its first martyr, nor for any of its successive martyrs. Yet, the cause for canonization of two deceased Maryknollers has been opened: Father Vincent Capodanno's cause by the Military Archdiocese in 2002, and Bishop Ford's cause by the Diocese of Brooklyn in 2011. Commentator George Weigel has questioned why Ford has not yet been beatified. He opined that the process had been put on hold because of Vatican concerns about offending the Chinese Communist government. George Weigel, "Why Hasn't Francis Ford Been Beatified?," *First Things* (July 27, 2011), accessed October 13, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2011/07/why-hasnt-francis-ford-been-beatified>.