

of seven a week. He will say once again this morning, at St. Joseph Church in Grand Isle, one of three churches in his parish. The service will be followed by a celebration of his priesthood.

Alice Toth, a South Hero teacher, plans to attend. She has been a parishioner at St. Rose in South Hero, Branon's home church, for 33 years. Toth appreciates his "special gift" for reaching the elderly and ill.

"He's a very caring pastor," she said. "And he's a true Vermonter in the sense that he's really close to nature in his sermon and his message."

Branon's first church was St. Paul in Barton. Then Mass was in Latin and his sermons were delivered in French and English.

He had no choice: He was informed by the Bishop that he would not be ordained if he didn't learn French.

He picked up sufficient French in conversation with other students at St. John's Seminary in Boston. "I got along well in Barton," he said. "Even though I didn't always know what I was saying."

Branon became the pastor at the University of Vermont's Newman Center in 1957, and served there for 14 years. He called it "the best place a priest could be" when the changes of Vatican II were introduced.

At UVM, bringing together his two loves—family and the Church—he asked a woodworker from the Fairfield hills, Frank Moran, to carve a crucifix from a piece of black cherry that belonged to Branon's father. It remains at the chapel today.

GOOD VERMONT STOCK

Thirty years ago, Branon moved to the Champlain Islands, where he lives in South Hero and serves three island churches. He has chosen to stay because he loves where he lives, has firm roots in the community, and is not far from family and his childhood home.

"His contributions to the islands cannot be overestimated," said Max Reader, the retired pastor of the Congregational Church in South Hero.

"He's down to earth," Reader said, "He's quite honest and he's very understanding. He's of good old Vermont stock and he's just got all these good qualities that make him a very, very fine priest."

Branon feels that perhaps his most important contributions are made at funerals. He estimates that he has presided over 15 to 20 during each of the last 30 years.

"I'd rather do funerals than weddings anytime," he said Thursday morning after Mass. "At a funeral, it's all honest. It's really and truly a teachable moment, the best chance for a priest to talk to a number of people who don't go to church."

He considers the most important part of his job bringing Communion and comfort to the elderly and ill who can't get to church. Thursday after Mass, Branon—a slow walker and deliberate talker—placed a bible and some bread in his Chevy Corsica and prepared for a dozen Communion house calls.

"It comes down to the purpose of our ministry," he said. "The purpose of the priesthood is to help people go to heaven. When you're dealing with sick people and old people, you're pretty apt to be dealing with people who are close to it."

"Over the years, you find out that sick people know they're sick. You try to help people understand it, help them face death."

The deaths are not only a time for comfort and compassion, but a chance to learn about the families who live on the islands. "If I had written down two or three lines about every person I buried," Branon said, "I'd have a wonderful history of the islands."

FARMING FAMILY

The history of the Church and his family are of great importance to Branon. His family has been farming in Fairfield for about 130 years, working a farm that was started by his great-grandmother, Mary O'Neill Branon.

She was widowed in the 1860s when her blacksmith husband, Irish immigrant Anthony Branon, was killed by the kick of a horse. Mary Branon took her two children and walked 17 miles from Swanton to Fairfield, driving cattle as she went.

Branon and his nine siblings—seven brothers and two sisters—grew up on the nearby farm settled by Mary O'Neill Branon's son, Edward. He fondly recalls the Sunday mornings of his childhood, a satisfying mix of chores, Mass and fox hunting.

His mother was devout, but it is his father's definition of sin that has stayed with the priest: "He said, 'I was brought up to figure you can't commit a sin unless you want to,'" Branon recalled.

And it was his father, brother of a priest and a nun, who took the time to fall to his knees and pray before going to the barn to care for a sick horse.

These stories of family and faith nourish Branon as he approaches 75, as he makes his rounds to comfort the elderly and ill.

He has no plans to retire, no plans to leave South Hero. "I owe it to God and the people to keep going as long as I'm worth anything," he said.

In his parish home, alone at night, Branon thinks of his own mortality and finds comfort in these words: "May the all powerful Lord grant me a happy life and a peaceful death."

Maybe not the exact words of the night prayers, concedes the priest with 50 years' experience. But close enough.

BRANON FILE

Who: The Rev. Phillip J. Branon
Occupation: Catholic priest ordained 50 years ago, April 11, 1951.

Age: 74.
Family: Branon is the sixth of 10 children of E. Frank and Mary Branon. He grew up on a farm in Fairfield.

Education: St. Mary's High School in St. Albans, graduated 1943; St. John's Seminary in Boston, ordained in 1951.

Career: St. Paul's Parish, Barton, 1951-1953; Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Burlington, 1953-1955; Vermont Catholic Charities, Burlington, 1955-1957; Newman Center, the University of Vermont, 1957-1971. Since 1971 he has been serving at St. Rose de Lima, South Hero; St. Benedict Labre, North Hero; and St. Joseph, Grand Isle.

Open House: An open house in his honor will be held today at St. Joseph Church from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., after Branon celebrates Mass.

VERMONT PRIEST FACTS

Full-time priests in Vermont: 101.
Active priests with 50 years of service or more: two.

Vermont priests ordained 50 years ago or more: 24. Of those, two are active and 22 are retired. Eight of the retirees fill in as substitutes.

50th anniversary: Wednesday is the 50th anniversary of the ordination of the Rev. Phillip J. Branon, a priest at three parishes in Grand Isle County. Two other Vermont priests celebrate half a century or ordination on Wednesday, though they have retired: Monsignor Raymond Adams of Essex Junction and the Rev. Robert Whalen of Poultney and Steamboat Springs, Colo.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:56 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Hays, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2216. An act making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 2052. An act to facilitate famine relief efforts and a comprehensive solution to the war in Sudan; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bills were read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 2216. An act making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes.

S. 1077. An original bill making appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2001, and for other purposes.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, which were referred as indicated:

EC-2553. A communication from the Chief of the Regulations Unit, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Modification of Rev. Proc. 97-13" (Rev. Proc. 2001-19) received on June 19, 2001; to the Committee on Finance.

EC-2554. A communication from the Chief of the Regulations Unit, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Applicable Federal Rates—July 2001" (Rev. Rul. 2001-34) received on June 18, 2001; to the Committee on Finance.

EC-2555. A communication from the Assistant Secretary of Legislative Affairs, Department of State, transmitting, pursuant to