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Scrappy priest still fighting [newspaper article]. [1972]

St. Paul, Minnesota: Saint Paul Pioneer Press, [1972]

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'Scrappy' priest still fighting

By DON SPAVIN
Staff Writer

CHIPPEWA FALLS, Wis. — A tough Oblate missionary priest who never lost faith in his religious convictions was honored earlier this month on his 70th anniversary as a priest.

Now 96 years old, Father Peter Minwegen is the oldest living Missionary Oblate of Mary Immacu-

late in the United States, and while time may have slowed his footsteps, it has not dampened the fires of his religious fervor.

HE KEEPS ABREAST of current events by reading voraciously, and he offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass daily in a chapel in his home here.

In his lifetime, he has preached the word of God from the wilds of

Canada to the wind-swept Dakota plains. He has fought prejudice and ignorance, offering no compromise despite threats of bodily harm or worse. He never backed down from a fight.

Even when it meant taking on a powerful Ku Klux Klan bent on not only destroying his church but the priest as well.

THAT HAPPENED in Cornell, Wis., according to Father

Minwegen's memoirs, in the early 1920's. The Catholic priest had gone there in answer to a summons from Bishop Schwebach of La Crosse who explained that there were about 30 Catholic families in the area that had been without a priest for several years. He felt Father Minwegen could renew their faith.

"I went to Cornell to serve a few weeks," the priest recalled, "and ended up serving ten years there."

It was ten years of strife and often hardship. When he arrived there was no church and a small congregation in a booming lumber center. Before he got a church built, Father Minwegen offered mass in cabins, farms, theaters and in lofts over stores.

HE RECALLED that his flock was a minority in the area and were "mistrusted by the majority of Protestants." Minor persecutions were the order of the day, he recalled, but open warfare almost broke out when the Klan moved into Cornell.

The Klan became a powerful force in Cornell, Father Minwegen remembered, and their main goal appeared to be aimed at driving Catholics from the area.

The priest fought back. Most Cornell residents were dependent

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ACTION LINE



Action Line solves problems, gets answers, cuts red tape, stands up for your rights. Call 222-1871 between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. or write Action Line, Dispatch and Pioneer Press, St. Paul, Minn. 55101. Action Line cannot give individual replies.

My mother, brother and 2-year-old girl got very sick one night after eating Pepperidge Farm pretzels. The next day I heard they had a call-back on the pretzels because they contained lye crystals. I still have the box the pretzels were in and a few of the pretzels. Can you tell me where I can have them tested and how much it will cost? I can't get

any satisfaction from Pepperidge Farm. They won't even admit they made the pretzels.

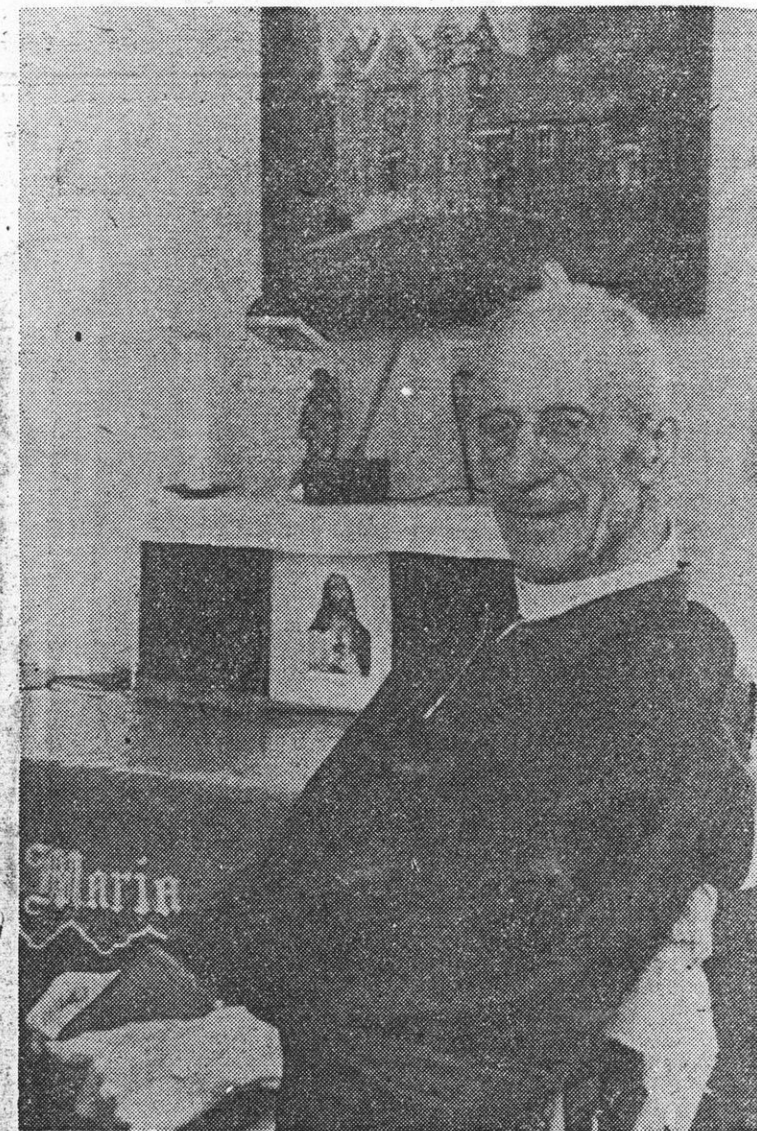
—L. H., South St. Paul

A federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) spokesman said there was a class 2 recall on Pepperidge Farm pretzels in the middle of February because of a chemical contamination case in the Philadelphia area. A class 2 recall, he said, is made when a substance that might cause injury is found in a food product. He said the FDA does not make laboratory tests on an individual basis. Action Line talked to a representative of the Pepperidge Farm distributor in this area. He said all

Pepperidge Farm pretzels were removed from the market after the recall. Two cases of throat irritation from pretzels were reported locally to the Minnesota Poison Information Network. Action Line also talked to the Minnesota Agriculture Department's food inspection director. He said they'll analyze the pretzels you have left. You can arrange this, he said, by calling 296-2627.

I purchased a Medicare supplemental policy through an agent for United American Insurance Co., Dallas, Tex. I have been hospitalized twice in 1977 and I have

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Wearing his years lightly, Father Minwegen, Chippewa Falls, sits before the altar in his home. On the wall is painting of Sacred Heart Church, Jim Falls, Wis., one of two churches he established in that area. —Staff Photo

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Priest: Fighter at 96

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on the lumber mills directly or indirectly. When the heat against him and his church became so bad that teachers in the public school were teaching the evils of Catholicism; that the priest was a "black-robed Devil who got drunk every morning" Father Minwegen had enough. He went to Chicago and directly to the president of the lumber mill. There he found, if not a spiritual kindred soul, a man who believed in equality for all men regardless of race or creed.

THE WORD WENT out to the mill that any members belonging to the Klan would have their employment terminated. Cornell took the hint and the Klan was through.

But not before clansmen burned a cross on the lot across from the home Father Minwegen occupied. He still got the last blow in against the Klan. He purchased the lot where the cross had been burned and erected Holy Cross Catholic church.

Born at Kemnich, Germany, June 27, 1881, Father Minwegen was the first of ten children born to a shopkeeper and his wife. He studied for the priesthood in Holland and Huenfeld, near Fulda, Germany, and was ordained in 1907. His first assignment after ordination was in Alberta, Canada, where he carried the word of God to the thousands of immigrants pouring into Canada from Europe.

During World War I when German-born residents of Canada were being persecuted for their German backgrounds, Father Minwegen moved on to the United States, to the La Crosse Diocese and then to Cornell.

After service in Wisconsin where he built congregations and churches at Cornell and Jim Falls, Father Minwegen moved to Illinois where he built and directed St. Henry's Seminary at Belleville, and then to other charges until the last one before active retirement at St. Joseph's church in Orient, S.D.