



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS
OF CATHOLIC CHAPLAINCY AT YALE

Father Edwin B. O'Brien '31

Chaplain 1943-1960

Fr. O'Brien '31 was born in New Haven, CT, in 1909. He graduated from Hillhouse High School in 1927 with high honors. He was the editor of the school paper and a member of the fraternity, Alpha Iota Epsilon. Upon graduating from Hillhouse High School, he received a four-year scholarship to Yale University.

While at Yale, Fr. O'Brien '31 was involved with Yale's Catholic Club under Fr. Riggs '10. He was the secretary of said club as well as a member of the Yale Literary Society. After graduating Yale in 1931, he began his studies for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. He also received a Master of Arts from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He was ordained to the priesthood May 21, 1936 in St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hartford by Bishop Maurice F.

McAuliffe. Father T. Lawrason Riggs '10 served as deacon at Fr. O'Brien's '31 first Mass he celebrated after being ordained.

Before his appointment as Yale's second Catholic Chaplain, he served as assistant priest in Litchfield for two years before moving to the Church of the Sacred Heart in Bridgeport. He also kept deep ties to Yale and its Catholic Club, serving as Fr. Riggs's assistant at all Masses at STM—including the Solemn Blessing of the Chapel on October 9, 1938. Fr. O'Brien '31 also served as deacon at Fr. Riggs's '10 funeral.

Bishop Maurice F. McAuliffe of the Archdiocese of Hartford appointed him as Yale's second Catholic Chaplain on May 27, 1943.

Fr. O'Brien's tenure at Yale was from 1943-1960. Early in his appointment, he led the Catholic chaplaincy through World War II, when the population of Yale students decreased drastically due to enlistment. He ministered to numerous young servicemen stationed in New Haven every Sunday at Mass. He also threw dances and parties for both the servicemen and service women who were completing their training in New Haven. The Military Ordinate of New York named him an Auxiliary Chaplain to better carry out these duties.

After the war, he continued the work on the Chapel that Fr. Riggs '10 had not be able to complete, due to his unexpected death. This work focused in particular on the Chapel's etched windows. Fr. O'Brien '31 worked with both artisans and donors—some who were dedicating the windows to sons they lost in the war—to complete this final Chapel project

He also furthered the STM's ties with Yale University by expanding many of the programs that Fr. Riggs '10 started. During this time, members of the Yale Catholic club participated in Tuesday Philosophy discussions, marriage inquiry classes, annual retreats and mixers with other nearby Catholic Clubs (especially Vassar and Smith). Fr. O'Brien '31 was the first Catholic Chaplain to teach non-Catholic Yale undergraduates about Catholicism. He was the guest instructor for two weeks in a 1950 religion course. He also initiated a second building campaign to build the Chaplain's Residence.

Fr. O'Brien '31 served as Catholic Chaplain for fifteen years before accepting the pastorate at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Yalesville, CT. During his time there, he oversaw the church's

construction of a parish hall, rectory, and a new wing in the church. He served at Our Lady of Fatima until his death in 1974.

Links

Yale Daily News. "Rev. E. B. O'Brien Yale '31, Named Catholic Chaplain."

["https://ydnhistorical.library.yale.edu/?a=d&d=YDN19430703-01.2.7&srpos=3&e=-----en-20-1--txt-txIN-Edwin+O%27Brien-----"](https://ydnhistorical.library.yale.edu/?a=d&d=YDN19430703-01.2.7&srpos=3&e=-----en-20-1--txt-txIN-Edwin+O%27Brien-----)