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On this day: Edwin Vincent O'Hara

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NCR Today

On this day in 1881, Edwin Vincent O'Hara was born to Owen and Margaret O'Hara on their farm near Lanesboro, Minnesota, the last of their eight children.

"All the O'Hara children shared the difficult work involved in operating a rural homestead. This, no doubt, helped to forge Edwin's work ethic, which enabled him to accomplish many great things for the nation and the church."

--*Cultivating Soil and Soul: Twentieth-Century Catholic Agrarians Embrace the Liturgical Movement*, by Michael J. Woods, SJ, Liturgical Press, 2010, page 2.

Edwin and his brothers and sisters attended the one-room school on an acre of land their father had donated, and later, they all graduated from Lanesboro High School. Edwin began studying for the priesthood, and "two people in particular greatly colored his outlook on church and world; these were Archbishop John Ireland and Father John A. Ryan. . . . Archbishop Ireland was both hailed and scorned as one of the great progressives among the American hierarchy. He promoted a broad liberal education that did not back down from the modern age. Faithful to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novaum* (1891), he led the way in advancing the church's socioeconomic agenda, making it integral to the seminary's formation program. He lectured on such 'delicate' topics as labor unions, race, urban affairs, education science, and other topics usually the domain of secular experts. Archbishop Ireland ordained Edwin in December 1905 for the diocese of Oregon City, Oregon, in response to the great pastoral needs in the Western United States." Pages 3-4.

Father Edwin Vincent O'Hara's activities in the earliest years of his priesthood included lecturing on Scripture and apologetics to high school girls and boys and to their teachers, organizing educational

associations for adults, lecturing on the classics and history in the Portland Public Library, promoting temperance, making the first of many trips to Europe, spending a semester at The Catholic University of America, writing his first book, and beginning "a campaign that would secure a minimum-wage law for Oregon's working women". Pages 4-5. As a result of this last effort, he became involved in *Settler v. O'Hara*, which went to the U.S. Supreme Court and brought him to national prominence.

O'Hara went to France in 1918 as a Knights of Columbus chaplain. "This experience permitted him to see the vast destruction of farms and livelihoods, and it renewed in him the desire to return to his rural roots."

He was appointed to rural ministry in Eugene, Oregon, in 1920. He "began at once an ambitious social program" that included a Clinic on Wheels, help with sound farming techniques, "parish credit unions and cooperatives--endeavors that would hold a central place in the philosophies of both the NCRLC and the liturgical movement. He also recruited women religious and laywomen to serve as catechists." Page 7.

O'Hara became the first director of the Rural Life Bureau in 1921, and in 1923, at St. Louis University, the first meeting of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference was held.

For recent news of the NCRLC, see the March 14, 2011, Fostoria, Ohio, Review Times. From that:

"Sister Ellen Lamberjack, Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin, is the recipient of the Edwin Vincent O'Hara Advocacy Award given by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference.

"The award honors a leader who is an advocate for rural communities and social justice in the spirit and tradition of Archbishop O'Hara, who founded NCRLC in 1923."

Edwin Vincent O'Hara became Bishop of Great Falls, Montana, in 1930, and Bishop of Kansas City, Missouri, in 1939.

See Woods's book for details of Edwin Vincent O'Hara's contributions to the liturgical movement, and for an extended examination, see Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan's *Some Seed Fell on Good Ground: The Life of Edwin V. O'Hara*, Catholic University of America Press, 1992. This book may be found in these libraries.

In Kansas City, in the early 1940s, under Bishop O'Hara, the Missa Recitata became customary. In 1947, he integrated the Catholic schools. See "First black student at Loretto Academy remembers angry parents, best friend," by Marty Denzer, *The Catholic Key*, 2001, for the story of Carmen Forte. (Click here for a picture of Loretto.)

"Edwin O'Hara," by Barbara Magerl, contains more information about Archbishop O'Hara's leadership of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

On this day in 1956, his seventy-fifth birthday, Archbishop O'Hara left for Rome. Five days later, in Milan, he died of a heart attack. "Archbishop Montini of Milan (later Pope Paul VI), with whom he had planned to have lunch that day, celebrated the Requiem Mass. . . . The farm boy had spent his life planting seeds for his church with ideas well ahead of their time. The diocese experienced many building projects under his leadership, yet the frugal builder left his diocese debt-free." Page 2.

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