

**ARCHBISHOP, C.E.O.:** A savvy, workaholic globe-trotting pastor with one eye on his flock and other on the bottom line, Theodore McCarrick may be the perfect churchman for his time. But that's not always enough.

*New Jersey Monthly*, March 1998

## **ARCHBISHOP, C.E.O.**

By David Gibson

*New Jersey Monthly*, March 1998

*A savvy, workaholic globe-trotting pastor with one eye on his flock and other on the bottom line, Theodore McCarrick may be the perfect churchman for his time. But that's not always enough.*

**T**he Archbishop bursts into the quiet antechamber from a side-door, surprising his visitor both with the unexpectedness of his entrance and his congenial intensity. "Sorry to keep you waiting but I just want to make sure where we are with today's schedule," he says with a rapid-fire apology and a reassuring squeeze of the arm. In shirtsleeves, wearing basic black and Roman collar, Theodore McCarrick could be any parish priest, except for the heavy pectoral cross tucked casually into the breast pocket and a hewn-gold signet on his ring finger. And the surroundings.

Decorated in soothing mauve hues and patterned carpeting, with recessed lighting and classical music piped through hidden speakers, the third floor of the \$13 million archdiocesan center looks like the headquarters of a self-assured corporate giant. Given that the Archdiocese of Newark has a \$600 million annual budget—more than the City of Newark—and a sprawling network of parishes, schools, social service programs and hospitals, the comparison is not off target. In contemporary America, many Catholic dioceses operate, apart from their spiritual mission, as all-encompassing institutions—and vital adjuncts to local and state governments. But among the nation's 185 dioceses none is run more smoothly than Newark's, and no bishop matches McCarrick in drive and energy.

On this Wednesday in late September the archbishop rises at his usual time—5 am—exercising and catching the radio news while shaving. No moment is wasted. "We work while the light lasts," is a favorite Gospel verse. Prayers and Mass begin another day of perpetual activity, and by 9:30 am the archbishop, a confessed workaholic, is moving at full throttle. Sweeping his visitor up in his wake, McCarrick pauses for an instant to check in with one of his secretaries and then heads downstairs to introduce Bishop Joseph Sullivan of Brooklyn to a group of local Catholic health care workers. Sullivan, an old friend, has been invited to talk about the spiritual dimension of their mission. The formalities deftly completed, Sister Thomas Mary Salerno, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Newark buttonholes the Archbishop for a quick word before he returns to the third floor.

A slight man with gray hair cropped close in a military style, McCarrick sits behind a utilitarian, L-shaped desk with a computer, bulging Monthly Minder, a blinking phone

bank, and framed snapshots of cousins and nieces and nephews fanned out before him. On the walls hang a gold crucifix, the obligatory pictures with the current Pope, and a decree in Latin from Paul VI making him a bishop. A high circular window frames the soaring, immutable stone cathedral across the street.

Inside the archbishop's office, the scene is all business as McCarrick faces the three priests who are his top lieutenants. Monsignor Ron Rozniak, pastor at Mount Carmel parish in Ridgewood and the outgoing vicar general of the archdiocese, tells McCarrick that the special collection for Poland has yielded \$20,000. "Small," the archbishop says quietly. "We can't send less than \$25,000. Let's throw something else in." Next up is a letter to his fellow bishops about efforts to promote religious freedom, and then a draft response to critics of the church's stand allowing only male priests. There are personnel problems, priests salaries, and the politics of renaming Essex Catholic High School after the recently-deceased Bishop Joseph Francis, a beloved assistant to McCarrick and one of the nation's few black bishops. McCarrick opts for a compromise—Bishop Francis Essex Catholic High School—that will keep alumni donors happy. Funding for a joint missionary effort with other dioceses will not fare as well. The project clearly benefits a neighboring diocese more than Newark. "And I should pay for this?" McCarrick asks incredulously. The question needs no answer.

And so it goes for the archbishop, dealing swiftly with a dizzying array of topics, homing in to the heart of an issue, mediating disagreements, or simply cutting them off. After a huddling with his auxiliary bishops in a small room adjoining his office, McCarrick moves on to a huge board room with a massive polished wood table and a view of Manhattan to present a new plan for the deaneries, the regional groupings of parishes. He greets each of the 30 or so priests and quickly breaks the tension with his easy wit. "This is not about money, so everybody relax," he says to appreciative laughs.

"How many CEO's know every one of their managers by their first name?" says Michael Hurley, McCarrick's longtime spokesman. "The archbishop knows every priest...and where they are stationed. And there are more than 1,000 of them."

Before lunch McCarrick will drop in on a meeting of Latino priests, kibbitzing in fluent Spanish, one of several languages that he speaks with ease. That fluency, and McCarrick's remarkable diplomatic skills, have made him one of the pope's favorite global trouble-shooters. He has been dispatched to war-ravaged Rwanda and Bosnia, wearing a flack-jacket over his vestments, and has conducted delicate behind-the-scenes talks in Moscow and Hanoi. He helped smooth the way for the pope's January visit to Cuba. In February he traveled to Communist China, the first Catholic bishop to visit the mainland in 50 years in what Vatican officials describe as an extraordinarily high-stakes mission. "Whenever there is a tight spot, McCarrick is the one they send in," says an aide. "He has done a lot of behind-the-scenes negotiations that he has never gotten credit for."

McCarrick's many trips keep him away from Newark for weeks at a time—a source of irritation to priests and congregants who would like an archbishop who tends more to

his flock. Regardless, McCarrick's fellow bishops respect his expertise so much that last year they elected him as their foreign-policy spokesman, a role that frequently brings him into conflict with the Clinton administration.

When McCarrick is abroad he keeps in touch with the chancery by phone and fax, and when he's in New Jersey, he tries to compensate for the long absences by visiting five or six parishes on a Sunday, sometimes dropping in unannounced (often to the dismay of the pastors). "I have to make sure the archdiocese doesn't suffer, so when I'm here, I have to be everywhere, or I'll lose track of things at home," he says. "And I can't do that."

**I**f this is the complicated, all-consuming life of a bishop in modern-day America—CEO, politician, diplomat, and pastor—no one has mastered it as deftly as the fourth archbishop of Newark. In the twelve years since his appointment as spiritual leader of nearly 1.4 million Catholics in Bergen, Essex, Union and Hudson counties, McCarrick has become arguably the most effective leader in the Catholic Church in America.

Certainly no one has done so much with so little. Although it is the seventh-largest diocese in the nation, Newark has always suffered the fate as New Jersey itself: being overshadowed by Philadelphia and New York, historically two of the most powerful sees in the Catholic universe. And with a largely working-class constituency, Newark has never had the financial clout to make up for its location. As McCarrick is quick to note, 40 percent of his parishes operate in the red, 30 percent barely make ends meet, and the rest range from comfortable to well-to-do. Yet during his tenure McCarrick has raised more money and—in the key indicator of a bishop's stock in the vocations-starved church—ordained more priests than any other U.S. bishop. More impressively, in 1995 McCarrick convinced an aging pontiff, beset by debilitating health and the clamor of a billion Catholics staking claim to his time, to visit New Jersey for the emotional high point of what may well have been John Paul II's swan song to America. It was a tribute to sheer persistence. "That is really swimming with the sharks," says an admiring priest. "The very fact that he got the pope to visit New Jersey says it all. You have to twist arms."

Such has been McCarrick's success that he is widely touted for promotion to a major see and a cardinal's hat. Most of the speculation centers on John Cardinal O'Connor's spot in New York, the brass ring of the church hierarchy in America and a job that the pontiff likes to call "the Archbishop of the Capital of the World."

Any strong leader invites strong critics, and McCarrick is no exception (although few will speak on the record for fear of winding up in the parish version of Siberia). His detractors say that his hyperefficiency makes him remote to the faithful, that his peripatetic efforts drape him in all the studied sincerity of a Dale Carnegie graduate. "He's not somebody you really warm up to," says one priest. "He's more like a business executive." Some say the archbishop's self-deprecating style masks a driving ambition for a cardinal's crimson—"scarlet fever," in church lingo—and they see in his political savvy the machinations of a careerist. Theologically, liberals accuse him of kowtowing to Rome, while conservatives question his penchant for compromise. Perhaps most telling are

the complaints that he is too cozy with the rich and famous—and infamous. His longtime friendship with the penny-stock swindler and church patron Bob Brennan is a particularly sensitive issue. “That’s going to come back to haunt him,” says a fellow bishop. Indeed, McCarrick seems to embody Christ’s commission to his disciples to be “cunning as serpents and yet as harmless as doves.”

**T**heodore Edgar McCarrick was born 67 years ago in the parish of the Church of the Incarnation in the Washington Heights of New York City—an ethnically-mixed neighborhood of Eastern European Jews and Irish Catholics. McCarrick himself is something of a melting pot. His family tree includes Scotch-Irish Protestants, a part-Jewish grandmother, and American Indian blood. His father and namesake was a sea captain who was confined to a veteran’s hospital upon returning from a voyage stricken with tuberculosis.

“My book of memories opens with my father’s face,” the archbishop recalls softly, the cadence of the city still in his voice. “I remember we played ball. We tossed it back and forth.” He makes a small throwing motion with his hand as the recollection spools through his mind’s eye. “After that, I remember nothing.”

Teddy McCarrick was three years old when his father died. The Great Depression had descended on America but his extended family pitched in, providing a secure home life and a childhood sustained by the comforting rituals of the liturgical calendar. “He always talked about being a priest, always,” says Robert McLaughlin of Ridgewood, a cousin of McCarrick’s with whom the archbishop remains close. “Every altar boy back then probably thought of being a priest. But he was one of the few who did it.” When he was twenty and studying foreign languages in Europe, McCarrick made his final decision during a retreat at a Carthusian monastery in Switzerland. He enrolled in Fordham University in the Bronx, and in his sophomore year, he entered St. Joseph’s Seminary in Yonkers.

“People definitely had a sense that he’d go places in the church,” recalls one of his teachers, the Rev. Avery Dulles, the august, incisive Jesuit theologian. “He’d go places in any career he chose.”

It helped that the fifties were the golden age of American Catholicism, and that New York was the church’s epicenter. Those were the days when the diminutive but fiercely political Francis Cardinal Spellman—“Spelly,” to McCarrick’s generation—called the shots for the American church from his Madison Avenue chancery, dubbed the Powerhouse.” Moving in these circles, a young priest with promise could go places. All it took was a word from the right person, and Spelly saw potential in Father Ted. In 1963 the Cardinal sent McCarrick to Puerto Rico so that he could add Spanish to his stable of languages, and within two years, at 35, he was president of the University of Ponce. McCarrick’s industriousness transformed the school into a major Catholic institution, and in 1969 the new

cardinal archbishop of New York, Terence Cooke, called McCarrick back to serve as his personal secretary—a post that opened every possible door for the young monsignor.

“Spellman was Spellman, but Cardinal Cooke was a friend,” McCarrick says, still full of admiration for his mentor. Given McCarrick’s résumé and Cooke’s tutelage, it was hardly surprising in 1981 when John Paul named McCarrick to head his own diocese in Metuchen. But the post was no sinecure. The Metuchen See had just been set up by breaking off four counties and 400,000 Catholics from the Trenton diocese. McCarrick, running the show for the first time, had to build the see from a standing start.

**T**he contrast between McCarrick and his predecessor, Archbishop Peter Gerety, is sharp. Gerety was a Vatican II-style priest—collegial and pastoral. He is now perceived as a liberal by some, but mainly he was a hands-off administrator who delegated authority and did not come down hard on his troops. Priests like that.

McCarrick, on the other hand, tends to micro-manage, and his early pronouncements clearly put him to the right of Gerety. Shortly after his appointment to the Archdiocese of Newark in 1986, the new archbishop let it be known that fighting abortion would be his top priority. Then he cracked down on the popular practice of general absolution—McCarrick favors one-on-one confession—and he told his priests to wear clerical garb rather than civilian clothes.

McCarrick’s notion of management reflects church structure: a chain of command where the boss knows what his people are up to. “I’ve always been that way, and I think I always will,” McCarrick says. He is no doctrinal blunderbuss, preferring careful, almost legalistic pronouncements rather than weighing in with broadsides like some bishops. But if he is not about to root out progressives, his archdiocese is also not going to be a testing ground for freethinkers. His theology is traditional, and his priests must understand that to survive.

“We are in a quieter age,” a priest at a large parish says with a sigh of resignation. “This is what Rome wants.”

**W**hatever the qualms about McCarrick’s style, his effectiveness is unquestioned. The Archdiocese of Newark is a gargantuan operation: 241 parishes in four counties; 1,000 priests and 1,700 nuns and brothers; four colleges, two seminaries and nearly 200 elementary and secondary schools with more than 60,000 students; and eight hospitals treating nearly 900,000 patients a year, making the archdiocese one of the largest health care providers in New Jersey. It runs nursing homes, homeless shelters, monasteries and an orphanage, and it is the leading social services agency after the government.

More multinational than ever, the archdiocese offers weekly Masses in more than a dozen languages, from Creole to Korean.

Managing this non-profit enterprise requires money—rivers of money—and McCarrick knows where the currents run deepest. He tripled proceeds from the annual appeal to \$12 million last year, and during his tenure as archbishop has brought in more than \$80 million—not counting a one-time capital campaign that netted \$56 million, a figure that still astounds church observers.

The money has bolstered parochial schools and helped needy parishes. Additional state funding has helped boost the diocese's social services budget to \$46 million a year, with a proportionate increase in staff, programs and assistance to the homeless, immigrants, and AIDS patients. In Newark itself, McCarrick stuck by the beleaguered city long before the glitterati jumped aboard the new Performing Arts Center bandwagon. Besides building the archdiocesan headquarters smack in the city's tough northside, McCarrick oversaw Seton Hall's renaissance and ensured that financially troubled St. Michael's Hospital would remain open—critical aid to a city on life-support. "He does all the work and I get all the credit," jokes Mayor Sharpe James.

That this fundraising is all in the service of the church is unquestioned. McCarrick's own tastes run more to Amish than ermine. He wears off-the-rack clerical suits and a black plastic digital watch, and his car is a standard-issue Ford Taurus. The only nod to his station is a vanity plate that reads "TEM-1." But so adept is McCarrick at raising money—"a necessary evil", he says—that in 1996 he was named president of the Papal Foundation, an influential endowment that quietly disperses more than \$100 million in assets to assist the Vatican.

"Most bishops aren't good fundraisers," says a priest who observes church politics. "They don't like to do it. It's not easy. Most bishops would rather go to a baptism. McCarrick is good at it. He knows a lot of rich people—and all the right ones."

McCarrick's A-list of donors is extraordinary: comedian Bob Hope, novelist Mary Higgins Clark of Saddle River, former Treasury secretary William Simon of Harding, and billionaire media mogul John Warner Kluge. McCarrick is known to stand by his friends, even when such allegiance puts him in a bad light. When Brennan was on trial for defrauding investors of millions (he was eventually slapped with a \$75 million fine), McCarrick was set to testify on his behalf as a character witness. Leona Helmsley, the New York hotel owner, tax evader, and celebrated "Queen of Mean," called on McCarrick last year to preside at the funeral of her husband, Harry, the real estate baron. Helmsley is Jewish and her husband was a Quaker, but Harry Helmsley had known McCarrick since his days with Cardinal Cooke. "They were kindred souls, he and Harry," Leona Helmsley says fondly.

The Chambers family were also friends from way back, and after Robert Chambers made tabloid headlines as the “Preppie Killer” who strangled Jennifer Levin during sex in Central Park, McCarrick wrote the judge in an effort to get the young man out on bail. Even Cardinal O’Connor questioned the action. But McCarrick said he was simply a priest helping out a family he has known for years. His sense of loyalty also briefly caught him up in the pedophile priest scandals when it was revealed that while in Metuchen he quietly accepted for assignment a Boston priest, the Rev. Eugene O’Sullivan, who had been found guilty a year before of raping and sexually abusing a Massachusetts altar boy. Although O’Sullivan never abused anyone during his seven years in New Jersey, McCarrick says he would not approve such a transfer again.

Whatever the issue, McCarrick seems willing to take the criticism—he is often the first to point up his own shortcomings—but he also understands that the world of the Catholic bishop has changed enormously since he was ordained.

Far fewer Catholics attend Mass today, but there still aren’t enough priests to provide for them. Running a diocese now is about doing more with less, closing schools rather than building new ones. It also means scrounging for funds to provide for struggling new immigrants while placating the old-line Irish, Italian and Polish Catholics who are taking their wallets to the suburbs. Not only is the burden heavier, but the public scrutiny is closer, and the flock far less likely to likely to pay blind heed to church pronouncements.

“You do your best and at the end of the day, that’s all you can do,” the archbishop says equably. “Sure, I often think I could have worked harder, or I could have worked smarter or I say I should have foreseen that situation. But you do your best.”

“Go right on 48th,” McCarrick says as his car heads through the Lincoln Tunnel, bound for New York. The priest behind the wheel is one concession to the archbishop’s increasing workload. As always, McCarrick’s mind seems to be working on two tracks, maybe more. A fat black leather satchel sits at his feet in the back seat. He has already determined the most efficient parking garage for this afternoon’s appointments. First, the archbishop is headed for the Brazilian consulate for a visa—he’s going to Brazil next week. The pope will be there, and McCarrick is scheduled to brief his Latin American colleagues on the upcoming Vatican synod. In the early evening, a cocktail reception is scheduled at the Austrian consulate on the Upper East Side to honor a rabbi and Holocaust survivor with whom McCarrick has worked to promote religious freedom abroad. Two other meetings clog the day’s schedule, but McCarrick deflects all questions about both of them.

Walking briskly toward Rockefeller Center, McCarrick rounds the corner onto Fifth Avenue, and St. Patrick’s Cathedral suddenly looms in bristling stone splendor. The archbishop is good-natured about the speculation that he could

replace the 78-year-old O'Connor, who is expected to retire within the next year or two. "I'm too old!" he says with a wave of his hand. He walks past the big bronze statue of Atlas shouldering his eternal burden. "The Cardinal is in wonderful shape! The Cardinal will be around to bury me in Newark. Sometimes I think the speculation is coming from people who wouldn't mind if I left Newark."

Whether McCarrick goes to New York may depend on more than actuarial tables. Church sources say the two men are not close, and O'Connor is likely to have a large say in choosing his successor. Right now, McCarrick only sees the speculation hurting his work in New Jersey. "He doesn't like it largely because it interferes with the smooth running of the diocese," confides an aide. "If people think he's not going to be around next year they may not get involved. It's like a corporation that thinks the CEO may be leaving. They're going to start hedging their bets."

After the visit to the consulate, McCarrick slips away for his first closed-door meeting. At 6 pm he arrives at the Austrian consulate for white wine and diplomatic small talk. Later that night, he returns to Newark, where lights glow from the rectory. The archbishop has yet another parley too private to discuss. It is almost 10 pm.

**A** few days later, the pews are filled for Sunday's noon Mass at Corpus Christi Church in Hasbrouck Heights. The archbishop is here to mark the parish centennial. By McCarrick's yardstick, it is a slow day. There was just one other parish visit, a morning Mass at St. Lawrence's Church in Weehawken, and later this afternoon he will head to the Shore to lead an overnight retreat for the Board of Regents of Seton Hall University. The next day, he will board a plane for Brazil, and ensuing months will take him to Washington, Rome, and Beijing.

But today McCarrick is focused on being a pastor. At St. Lawrence, a struggling parish in a no-man's land known as the Shades, between the Lincoln Tunnel and the empty Hoboken factories, he is funny, serious, challenging, and contagiously enthusiastic. The church isn't full; there are maybe 75 people. He walks among the pews to deliver his homily in that folksy way lots of priests try to pull off but very few can. He is preaching off the cuff about the role of a prophet, and in one of those dreaded Q&A moments, he even manages to cajole a few responses from the children. He has the crowd smiling and thinking and involved. And then he hits home.

"A real prophet is not someone who foretells the future, but who speaks for, who speaks on behalf of God!" he tells them with riveting intensity. "If we do not speak out for what is good and right and holy, nobody's going to do that. It's not just my job. It's everybody's job." The archbishop is on a roll. It is a bravura performance. And efficient. It comes in under 15 minutes.

Corpus Christi is a different kind of parish—established, well-populated, and self-assured. A color guard of plumed Knights of Columbus leads the procession past a church packed with hundreds of worshipers. “I won’t make this a one o’clock mass,” McCarrick says to laughs. He jokes about a kindly former pastor, 93-year-old Monsignor Jarvais—hunched over and stone deaf—who has come to concelebrate the centennial. “Monsignor Jarvais was here 100 years ago,” McCarrick says. Then comes a pause Jack Benny would admire. “He was a priest of 30 or 40 then.” More laughs all around.

Remaining at the lectern, he delivers another extemporaneous homily, a studious reflection on the journey to Emmaus. “Jesus doesn’t let us go away in despair,” he reassures the congregants. “If we listen, he comes to join us on the journey.” The celebration runs long, and it is 2 pm before Mass is over.

Within minutes, the parishioners gather noisily in the church basement for some post-Mass noshing, digging into deli platters and chatting at a roaring hum about the deaths and births and joys and disappointments and small-town gossip that are a community’s connective tissue. Kids barrel past seniors trying to get a steady grip on plastic soda jugs. Construction-paper cutouts cover the corkboards on the wall, and the relentless fluorescent lights reveal every line in every face. For parishioners, this is the best part of the day. “The archbishop looks good,” a matron in a pillbox hat announces to her tablemate. “The archbishop looks good, doesn’t he?” her friend asks by way of an answer.

But while the parishioners mingle, McCarrick is not around. Outside the church, the white Taurus has already pulled away.

**New Jersey Monthly, March 1998**