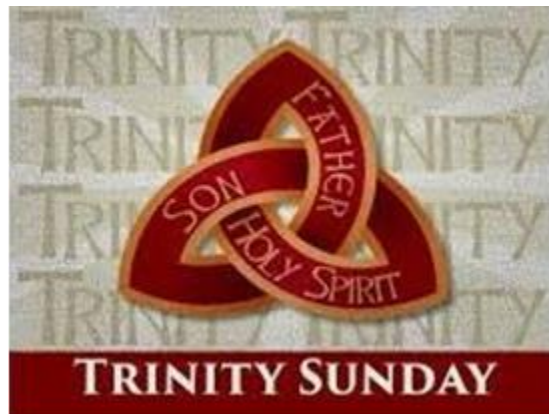


## Jefferson Quick, Timely Reads

### Trinity Sunday: *Don't Go Near the Water*

By David Frew  
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*Dr. David Frew, a prolific writer, author, and speaker, grew up on Erie's lower west side as a proud "Bay Rat," joining neighborhood kids playing and marauding along the west bayfront. He has written for years about his beloved Presque Isle and his adventures on the Great Lakes. In a new series of articles for the Jefferson, the retired professor takes note of life in and around the water.*



The Bayfront neighborhood near West Fourth and Cascade streets was decidedly Portuguese. In addition to three specialty Portuguese grocers, there was a Portuguese Social Club on Fifth Street between Cascade and Raspberry. Neighborhood people were Azoreans as opposed to mainland Portuguese, a distinction that was important to them. Home parish for the decidedly Roman Catholic Portuguese community was St. Andrew at Seventh and Raspberry. Not that St. Andrew was a dedicated Portuguese church. On the contrary, it was the Catholic Diocese' high-end, westernmost church-school combination, originally built in 1873 within a block of the Erie's early western border. It was intended to attract upscale suburbanites who were moving to the growing west side. Before the later appearance of St. Jude Church and its companion,

Our Lady's Christian School, just two miles west in Millcreek Township, St. Andrew was an important flagship diocese.

For St. Andrew's altar boys, one of the best possible gigs was to be selected for the annual Trinity Sunday event, at which the Portuguese community was celebrated during 9 a.m. Mass. Four lucky eighth-grade servers were instructed to arrive at the church by 7:30 a.m., when Father Wiley, who usually presided, organized them into a crucifix bearer, two candle holders, and an incense pot assistant. By 7:45, the servers had departed with Fr. Wiley for the "Holy Trinity Portuguese Society," which was two blocks from church.

The legends surrounding this event did not come close to describing the actual sight that greeted us when we arrived. Chaos! Fr. Wiley was rushing around, attempting to begin a procession from the club to the church (and possibly to shield impressionable altar boys from what was happening inside). Meanwhile, the club band was outside in the alleyway between Fifth and Sixth streets "tuning up." The most amazing vision was unfolding in the main hall. Club members were crowded up to the bar, loudly ordering and consuming shots and beers while singing songs in Portuguese. The incredible din from the yelling and singing was almost as overwhelming as the smell of alcohol. Fr. Wiley had done all he could do to move the men through the doors and begin the procession. Or was it a parade? It was fairly obvious that not all of them were going to be able to leave the building. Meanwhile, the procession was beginning. Led by the official band and holy fivesome of priest and altar boys in liturgical outfits, we began to move. Ever so slowly.

About the band. The most important instrument was a giant base drum on wheels that lived in a corner of the social club at all times. The drummer did not seem to have much of a sense of the music that was being played. He just pounded away. For that matter, the other six band members did not seem to be completely in sync, either. There were two accordions, one saxophone, two mandolins, and a trumpet. As the "music" continued, the odd parade moved north, away from St. Andrew with 30 or 40 men singing Portuguese songs that had absolutely no relationship to the music playing in front of them.

As Fr. Wiley led the procession, he seemed to be grumbling and trying (with little success) to keep things moving. The procession wound its way through the neighborhood in a serpentine manner and, as it did, wives and children appeared from neighborhood homes and fell into formation at the rear. Priest, altar boys, big drum, band, Portuguese men, wives, and children.

For as relentless as Fr. Wiley had been at trying to stay on time, it was obvious that we were going to be very late for 9 o'clock Mass. And we were. The procession entered St. Andrew through the main doors on West Seventh Street and passed down the center aisle to the front of the church, where ribbons had been used to reserve the first several

rows. Ushers held the doors and snickered as we all entered, at least 15 minutes late. The moaning and grumbling from already-seated parishioners was palpable.

During those 1950s days, St. Andrew filled for each of its Sunday Masses and the 9a.m. service was the most popular. On ordinary Sundays, with no Portuguese parade, 9a.m. Mass would be a standing-room-only event, with people hanging around the rear of the church ready to bolt for the parking lot as soon as communion was over. Long before the final blessing.

Communion time came and congregants filed up to the altar, beginning from the front rows. Interestingly, none of the Portuguese men rose to take communion. The wives and children did, followed by the rest of the congregation. As the non-Portuguese parishioners came forward, they could be overheard muttering about how they would never come to 9 o'clock Mass on Trinity Sunday again. Most had gone to church that day without realizing that it was an important ethnic feast day or the implications of the liturgical event.

In European tradition, Trinity Sunday was the day when bishops from around the Mediterranean would officially bless their local fishing fleets. No one was supposed to go out, on, or near the water prior to that day. There have been dozens of historical, theological, political, and biological explanations for the tradition, some as practical as insuring the stability of fishing. At St. Andrew School, the "stay away from the water ethic" was reinforced from early grade school on with a series of really scary stories. Teachers regaled us with warnings as well as the potentially dire consequences of any contact with water, especially early-season swimming. Those stern Trinity Sunday warnings had been exemplified in 1944. Raymond Gallagher, a seventh-grader at St. Andrew's and the grandson of local boat builder and ferry operator Jim Nolan, had pestered his grandfather into allowing him to work on the Downtown to Presque Isle Ferry. On June 6, Trinity Sunday, he was aboard the Eileen, working as a deck hand. It was a balmy 73 degrees as the Nolan ferry departed the Public Dock for Presque Isle at 1 p.m. on its second trip of the day. The ferry was almost half-way across the bay and Raymond Gallagher was walking back along the side of the boat after coiling bow lines, when a huge wake from a speedboat washed into the Eileen. The ferry boat lurched, young Raymond lost his balance, and the boy dropped over the side, hitting his head on the gunnels as he slipped into the water. The water temperature was a chilly 59 degrees when Raymond Gallagher fell in, fully clothed and wearing thick leather shoes. Passengers and crew assumed that he would quickly come back to the surface, but he did not.

The ferry captain, George Simmons, immediately turned the Eileen around and returned to the site where the boy had disappeared. He removed his jacket and shoes and began diving for him. Within hours, all of the Nolan boats were there and dozens of men in the cold water, trying to find the youngster. The body came to the surface several day later, in time for a terribly sad St. Andrew funeral, and Jim Nolan spent the rest of his life regretting the decision to let the youngster work on his ferry boat.



*St. Andrew Church was originally built at West Sixth and Raspberry streets in 1873. In 1915, this beautiful stone structure opened at Seventh and Raspberry and the original church was converted to a school.*

While St. Andrew School was decidedly multi-ethnic and represented the general composition of the rest of the community with smatterings of Irish, Italian, German, Hungarian, Scottish, and English, Trinity Sunday warnings were a regular part of the curriculum. Stories, including the terrible tragedy of Raymond Gallagher, began each year as soon as the weather began to warm up and continued until after Trinity Sunday. The primary theme of the Raymond Gallagher story was that there was “no excuse for going near the water. Not even a job.”

Years later, after the Sisters of St. Joseph who composed the 1950s teaching faculty, shifted from their old and mysterious nun names to actual family names, we should not have been surprised to learn that many of our teachers had been Portuguese girls from the neighborhood.



*The smell of frying Linguica defined my neighborhood during the 1950s.*

The altar boys were invited to the Portuguese Club after mass for one of the greatest breakfasts of all-time. The smell of frying Linguica (Portuguese sausage) could be detected blocks away from the club. The after-mass meal was a feast. Sausage, eggs, fried potatoes, and pastries. But no shots or beers for the altar boys! The Portuguese Club is gone now, as is St. Andrew School. Both institutions quietly disappeared. But a

visit to Bello's market and their Linguica counter is all that it takes to bring back the memories of those old days.

Photos:

Holy Trinity: <https://www.stmaryandstmartha.org/sermon-topic/trinity/>

St. Andrew's Church: <https://www.saintandrewerie.com/>

Linguica: <https://www.silvasausage.com/>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is an emeritus professor at Gannon University, where he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.*

