

# The Soul of Seton

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## Brigadier General James McPartlin



### *Editor's Note:*

*What does the call to service mean? For each it is different. But the means to figure it out is always the same. Each person is invited to seek God's will for his or her life. That usually requires some quiet time, listening for the voice of God within. It usually requires listening to others as they affirm one's gifts and skills. It always requires action. The opportunities to serve are endless. No one is called to do it all, each is called to respond to their particular situation and circumstance in a way that is significant to the other. The Good Steward takes the gifts and skills that God has bestowed and develops them which allows for an increased return to the God who gives all. Jim's journey is one of service, how lucky for all of us who are the recipients of Jim's lifetime of returning with an increase, to the Lord..*

History teachers like to ask their students: "Do the times make the man or does the man make the times?" Consider the case of this Soul of Seton, Brigadier General James McPartlin.

World War II—part of what Tom Brokaw calls "The Greatest Generation"

James McPartlin was born, raised and educated in the state of Michigan. As a youth he was always fascinated with flying and aircraft. Charles Lindberg was his special hero. After attending the University of Detroit and the University of Houston, Jim joined the military service. His initial

experience in the military was as a member of the Michigan National Guard from 1935-1938. In July 1941 he enlisted as an aviation cadet taking his training at Parks Air College in East Saint Louis, Illinois and Air Corps flying school at Randolph Field and Foster Field in Victoria, Texas. Upon receiving his commission and wings in February 1942 he was assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Group and later joined the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group as a pilot. With movement of the 91<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group to England in September 1942 Jim McPartlin was named Operation Officer for his squadron. In September of the following year, while still stationed at Bassinbourn, England, he was named Commander of the 401<sup>st</sup> Squadron a position he retained until returning to the USA in September 1944. His unit flew B17 bombing raids out of England deep into enemy territory. The missions were dangerous and the unit suffered many casualties—more than any other part of the service. Jim later was Squadron Commander of the 439<sup>th</sup> Fighter-Bomber Wing at Selfridge Air Force Base. In 1956 he was named Wing Commander of the 403<sup>rd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing. Later he was assigned Wing Commander of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Troop Carrier Wing at Richards Gebaur Air Force Base. He has more than 4000 hours of flying time, including 300 hours in jet fighters. He was promoted to his current grade of Brigadier General in February 1963. Jim's career is distinguished; his apartment includes what Jim likes to call his "ego room". The display of medals and awards is truly impressive. His awards and decorations include: the Distinguished Flying Cross and Cluster Air Medal, Four Clusters, the Distinguished Unit Citation and Cluster and the RAF Battle for Britain Medal. The room also contains a summary of modern

American history (pictures of Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Reagan and Kennedy as well as pictures of wartime ceremonies). The room also reflects Jim's continuing interest in aviation with pictures and models of early and more recent aircraft. As outstanding as his efforts during the war continue to be, Jim says he is proudest of the work that he did on behalf of unit safety. The preparation and safety of the men under his command was truly a priority. For his personal life the war meant long times away from his wife, Virginia, and their children. Jim recalls that when he first saw his oldest son the child was two years old. After the war Jim settled into family life. He and Virginia raised five children. The family came to Dallas so that Jim could be part of the Pearle Vision headquarters located here. Educating his family became the priority.

#### The Catholic Church—part of the Vatican II generation

James McPartlin was raised Catholic and educated by the Jesuits. He was deeply committed to the Catholic Church. The woman he loved and married was Baptist. The wedding was not "in the Church" so Jim's relationship with the Church was changed. The family searched for a church home and settled here in Dallas at the Transfiguration Episcopal Community on Hillcrest. The theology and the liturgy were familiar to and comfortable for Jim. He recognized the words of the creed; he was inspired by the beautiful music. Jim was happy. After caring for his wife during her final illness, Jim felt the urge to investigate reconnecting with his Catholic roots. The journey has been absorbing and along winding paths. While Jim was away from the Catholic Church, Vatican II happened. Jim received various answers to his questions about what exactly he had to do to reestablish ties with the Catholic Church. He read. He found the writings of John Henry Luce especially helpful. He visited with

different priests and authorities. He met several priests who were currently serving the Catholic community and were at one time part of the Episcopal community. Jim has talked with the clergy and staff at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and has found a degree of comfort with the thinking and the liturgy that is part of today's Catholic Church. Jim feels he has found a home at Seton. Jim's call to service continued into retirement. During Jim's daily visits to nursing homes over the course of his wife Virginia's illness, he became acutely aware of the plight of nursing home patients. As a result he went through the 50 hours of State training and joined the Federal Volunteer Ombudsman Program. Through the program he became an advocate for patients in Nursing Homes. This included doing inspections of facilities and listening to the needs of residents and patients. Many benefited from his dedication and service both in his career and in his retirement.

#### James McPartlin today

Jim has lived in Plano for seven years. He is now part of an independent living retirement community. He is limited in his ability to move around so he no longer pursues his deep interest in the game of tennis. (The ego room also has a picture of Jim receiving a Detroit area tennis trophy.) He does enjoy reading and discussing books. He enjoys books about the military and aviation. He is currently reading a book titled *Masters of the Air*, but he also enjoys reading books by Robert Fulghum. Jim has numerous books sitting by his special chair. Jim works hard to be active and deal with loneliness. He considers connection with family, friends and church an essential part of life. Jim McPartlin is a newcomer to the Seton community, but he is part of the life and soul of Seton.