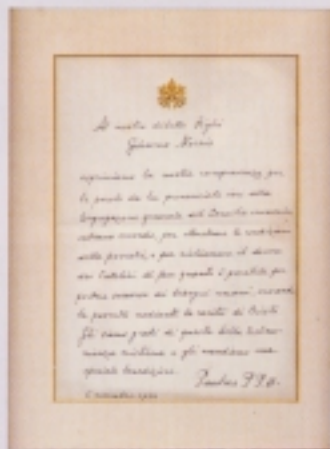


From the Archives

James J. Norris (1907-1976) was a Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserves and served in the European, Atlantic and Pacific theatres of World War II. In 1943 the *Catholic Bishops' War Relief Services* (precursor to *Catholic Relief Services*) began resettling refugees in Europe. In 1946, Norris was placed in charge of the operation. By 1949 thousands more were forced to flee their homes in Eastern Europe. It was clear that the needs of forced migrants required a more systematic response.



In April 1951, having considered a draft constitution, Pope Pius XII instructed Secretary of State, Archbishop Montini (Paul VI), to communicate to Norris, his "complete and urgent approval" to begin the operations of the *International Catholic Migration Commission*. The inaugural meeting of the ICMC occurred on June 5, 1951 in Rome with Norris as the first president, a position he held until 1974. During his tenure Norris administered a

program of relief, welfare and rehabilitation among the displaced in seventy-four countries of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America and organized programs for the resettlement of 300,000 refugees.

Norris's contribution and efforts were honored in many ways, among them, his appointment as the only American lay auditor at the Second Vatican Council (he is depicted in a mosaic of the Council in the Upper Church's Apse); the first member of the laity to address a council of bishops on world poverty and the Christian conscience, proposing a papal commission on social justice and peace; and the first layman named as an official escort of the Pope, accompanying Paul VI to the meetings of the International Labor Organization and the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. His close friendship with Pope Paul VI remained throughout his lifetime.

Mary's Shrine, 2002, No. 1

by Geraldine M. Rohling, M.A.Ed., Ph.D., Archivist

Here at home, Norris's vision was responsible for the Bishops' Pastoral: *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*, which resulted in the Marian catechesis program; he served as the official papal representative at the funeral services of Dr. Martin Luther King; and was a member of the Shrine's Board of Trustees from 1968 until his death.

The bronze bust by Jimilu Mason of Alexandria, Va., located on the bridge in Memorial Hall not far from the tiara of Pope Paul VI (which Norris was instrumental in helping to bring to the Shrine) is a gift of the Trustees. The quote on the pedestal is from Norris's acceptance speech for the prestigious *Nansen Medal* for 1975. This honor is named for the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, the first League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and is given in recognition of "outstanding services rendered to the cause of refugees and displaced persons." The medal was awarded posthumously to his wife Amanda on Dec. 10, 1976 in Geneva; the draft of Norris's acceptance speech was read by one of his sons. James J. Norris is the only member of the laity to be honored with a statue in the National Shrine.

Before burial, Norris's body was brought to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel for a prayer service. As he requested, he is buried within view of the National Shrine at St. Mary's Cemetery. He was a member of Catholic University's class of 1933.

L to R: Bishop Edward E. Swannstrom, former director of Catholic Relief Services; William Cardinal Baum, Archbishop of Washington, and Norris's wife Amanda.

