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News

June 25, 2012

Father Haney Remembered as Prolific Writer, Homilist, Educator

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By Jen Reed

The Catholic Witness

Father T. Ronald Haney, a priest of the Diocese of Harrisburg for 54 years and Editor of *The Catholic Witness* from 1975-2006, died June 16 in Danville. He was 80 years old.

The funeral Mass was to be celebrated June 22 at noon at St. Theresa Church in New Cumberland, with burial in the Priests' Circle at Holy Cross Cemetery in Harrisburg.

Father Haney was known as a prolific writer, gifted homilist and insightful conversationalist who could challenge people in their thoughts and actions.

"He kind of marched to a different drummer," said Father William Sullivan, a retired priest of the diocese who was close friends with Father Haney since their seminary years.

"He loved to question people and make them think through his writing and preaching," Father Sullivan said. "But there was always a kindness in him. Once you got know him, you could see he was a great man."

Msgr. James Lyons, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Hanover, developed a friendship with Father Haney when the two were assigned at St. Theresa Parish in New Cumberland.

"We were very different in so many ways, but we enjoyed reading, good writing, good movies. He was always ready to laugh, and sometimes clearly at himself," Msgr. Lyons said. "The people who knew him well and loved him knew that his exterior was sort of like a bark, but his interior was very gentle and compassionate."

Father Haney was born in Ashland on Feb. 22, 1932, to Martin and Lillian Haney. He attended Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Mount Carmel, St. Charles College in Catonsville, Md., and St. Charles Seminary, Overbrook.

Bishop George L. Leech ordained Father Haney to the priesthood on May 15, 1958, at St. Patrick Cathedral in Harrisburg. In the early years of his ministry, Father Haney served at St. Anne, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Sacred Heart of Jesus parishes in Lancaster, St. Peter Parish in Columbia, and St. James and St. Ann parishes in Steelton. He also served as principal's assistant at Lancaster Catholic High School and Bishop McDevitt High School in Harrisburg.

In 1967, Father Haney was assigned as principal of Our Lady of Lourdes Regional High School in Coal Township. He also served at St. Edward and St. Michael parishes in Shamokin, and St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Ranshaw.

In 1975, he was appointed executive editor of *The Catholic Witness*. During his time as editor of the diocesan newspaper, Father Haney also served as pastor of Holy Spirit Parish in Palmyra (1976-1981) and St. Ann Parish in Steelton (1981-1985), and also ministered at St. Catherine Labouré Parish in Harrisburg. He moved to St.



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Father T. Ronald Haney

Theresa Parish in New Cumberland in 1992, and assisted there for a number of years, including after his retirement from active ministry in 2006.

In his years of service as a diocesan priest, Father Haney employed his God-given talents as an educator, lyricist and homilist. He penned a number of spiritual books and novels, and his words – both written and preached – often focused on social justice and peace.

“He loved stories. He taught me to preach with narratives,” Father Sullivan said. “That’s how Christ taught, with stories and parables.”

“I was impressed with his knowledge and his incisiveness,” he continued. “Whenever he sat down to read, he always had a pencil in his hand. He was constantly writing down phrases or sentences that struck him, and he would take that and incorporate it into his writings.”

Father Haney enjoyed debate, and was adept at prodding people into discussion.

“He was very astute, very theological, a real thinker. He liked to sometimes take on the opposite opinion for the sake of debate,” said Msgr. William Richardson, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Lewisburg.

He first came to know Father Haney at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional High School, where Father Haney was serving as principal when the young Richardson was a diocesan seminarian.

They met again when both serving at the Diocesan Center in Harrisburg – Father Haney in the Communications Department and Msgr. Richardson as Vicar General – and at St. Theresa Parish in New Cumberland, where Father Haney resided while Msgr. Richardson was pastor there.

When a newly-ordained priest moved into St. Theresa Parish, Father Haney prodded him in discussion, Msgr. Richardson recalled.

“Dinner conversation was always interesting there,” he said.

Father J. Michael McFadden, current pastor of St. Theresa Parish, noted that Father Haney “had a soft spot in his heart and ministry for children. He would spend time in the school reading to children, most especially the youngest ones who most likely were just learning to read. He was always ready for and wanted to celebrate the Christmas Vigil Mass that was geared to children and families.”

“Father Haney had a great following of people for Mass who enjoyed his homiletic style: introductory story, the message, the joke of the day,” he said.

Msgr. Robert Lawrence, pastor of St. Columba Parish in Bloomsburg, said Father Haney enjoyed interaction with teenagers as well.

“He always had a good rapport with the high school students. He was always at the games and the different activities that the kids were involved in,” said Msgr. Richardson, who was chaplain at Lourdes when Father Haney was principal there.

Msgr. Richardson, who formerly served as pastor of St. Theresa Parish while Father Haney resided there during his tenure at the Diocesan Office, spoke of the late priest’s diverse talents and highlighted his well-rounded abilities.

“He was an extremely good educator, an innovative person when he was principal at Lourdes. He was a very good teacher, able to handle a large crowd. He was also a great writer. And he was always good for discussion. He wanted to pick other people’s brains, as he wanted us to pick his brain. He had a good sense of humor, and was certainly well prepared in his homilies with a good spiritual message,” he remarked.

Father Sullivan said that Father Haney stood out from the crowd because of his quick wit and intellectual ability. He also told of his late friend’s devotion for the Church and the Eucharist from the time he was a student at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School.

“At school, he was spoiled by the nuns. In eighth grade, we were very jealous of Ronnie,” he quipped. “He started going to Mass every day, and afterwards, one of the nuns would take him over to the convent and give him breakfast. But that particular nun thought the world of him. I think she saw that he was very capable and articulate, and a great student.”

“Over the years, our friendship developed. People would say, ‘You and Father Haney don’t seem to be of like mind,’ but we balanced each other,” Father Sullivan said. “I was a tempering element in his life, and he got me out of my shell. He was just kind to me, and I treasured his friendship.”

“I’ve always felt that he was a man for all seasons,” he said.

Father Haney was preceded in death by his sister, Jeanne Marie Carpenter, and brother, Gerard Haney. He is survived by three nieces and two nephews. Letters of condolence may be sent to his niece, Pam Moser, at 204 Pine Street, Steelton, Pa., 17113.

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