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The Rev. Marian Lesniak, who served as pastor of Jackson's St. Joseph Catholic Church for 39 years, dies of complications from pneumonia

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Even when sick, in bed and in need of prayers himself, the Rev. Marian Lesniak offered constant prayers for others.

“He just resonated the love of the faith and the love of God, and he always shared it,” said David Zemer, a friend and past member of St. Joseph Catholic Church on Waterloo Street in Jackson.

“Here is a man who in his lifetime has been to every corner of the world and always carried Jesus with him.”

Lesniak, pastor at St. Joseph for 39 years, died Sunday of complications from pneumonia. He was 85.

A proud Polish immigrant born to strict Catholic parents, he was ordained in 1950. He began his career in Jackson in 1955 at St. Stanislaus Kostak. In 1963, he was appointed pastor at St. Joseph and served there until his retirement in 2002.

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He then returned to his family home in Flushing, Michigan, where he continued to help at local parishes and kept a personal chapel in his home.

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“You can look into the future, but as long as God gives you time, you use the time for God,” he told the Citizen Patriot in 2000, when he celebrated his 50th year as a reverend. “I want to be remembered as a good priest.”

By many accounts, he is.

“That was his life. That was his calling. He took those vows seriously,” said his niece, Valerie Martin of White Lake.

He was described as positive, decisive and brilliant.

Dedicated and forever “priestly,” he never went out in public without his clerical clothing, those who knew him said.

“My whole life, I have been a Catholic and I have never in my life met a priest that was so reverent,” Zemer said.

“His creases were so creased that they cut you if you bumped into him. There was not a hair out of place. He was just that way.”

He was strong-willed and determined but still caring and kind, Martin said.

Yearly, he would bless the homes of all the parishioners. It was an opportunity to meet with them individually, said Stephen Job, parish plant manager and life-long member of St. Joseph.

In 1968, he made parishioners’ “dream a reality” by building a new octagon-shaped church, dedicated in 1968, Job said. The building was a symbol of the unity of the church and of Lesniak’s devotion to God, Job said.



In 2000, Job credited Lesniak with keeping the school, in a decades-old building, modern. The school, beloved by Lesniak, closed in 2005.

A sports fan, Lesniak would take the altar boys to see a Detroit Tigers game every year, Job said, and sometimes allowed school boys an extra 20 minutes of softball after lunch.

Burial mass is planned at 11 a.m. Friday at St. Joseph, 707 N. Waterloo St. Visitation is from 1 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday at the church.

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