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Rev. Gary J. Bagley, pastor at St. Benedict, former youth director Dec. 16, 1946 -- Nov. 14, 2006

By Staff
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A Mass of Christian Burial for the Rev. Gary J. Bagley, former director of the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo's youth department and pastor of St. Benedict parish, will be offered at 10 a.m. Saturday in St. Benedict Church, 1317 Eggert Road, Eggertsville, with Bishop Edward U. Kmiec presiding.

Father Bagley, who constantly ministered to the needs of young people during his vocation, died unexpectedly Tuesday in Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital in Amherst. He was 59.

He had served as pastor of St. Benedict parish since 2001 and was president of the board of directors of Hopevale Inc., a social services organization dedicated to youth.

A Buffalo native, he was a graduate of Diocesan Preparatory Seminary in Buffalo.

He announced his intention to become a clergyman while still a boy. His father, Howard, was painting the side of the family home and a neighbor remarked that Gary would have to do the same when he grew up.

The boy, who was 6 or 7 at the time, replied, "Oh no, I'm going to be a priest," recalled Father Bagley's mother, Beatrice.

He went on to earn a bachelor's degree and master's degree in divinity from St. John Vianney Seminary in East Aurora. He also attended Fordham University and the Catechetical and Pastoral Institute in New Orleans.

He was ordained in 1972, in his home parish of St. John the Baptist in the Town of Tonawanda. His first assignments were as chaplain of St. Vincent de Paul Camp and as assistant pastor of St. Christopher parish in the Town of Tonawanda.

Father Bagley served on the faculty of Bishop Turner High School in 1976 and became diocesan coordinator of youth retreats and associate director of the diocesan youth department the same year -- beginning a ministry to young people that lasted his entire priesthood.

He served as director of the diocesan youth department from 1986 to 2001.

"Father Bagley had a tremendous impact on many young lives during his 25 years in the diocesan youth department. His legacy lives on through them, many of whom have become leaders in our diocese today," Kmiec said.

At various times in his priesthood, Father Bagley served as chaplain to Sacred Heart Academy and Immaculata Academy.

In the early 1980s, he developed a program called "The Puzzle Project," providing confidential counseling to anyone affected by an abortion.

He was part of several Catholic task forces and committees, at both the state and diocesan level, examining issues such as teen pregnancy, sex education and pastoral care for homosexuals.

Father Bagley also served for six years as a member of the board of directors of Our Lady of Victory Infant Home. He was a frequent columnist for the "Western New York Catholic" newspaper and for national publications.

A former chaplain and active member of Ellicott Creek Volunteer Fire Co., he was named an honorary member of Eggertsville Hose Co. in 2005.

In addition to his parents, survivors include two brothers, Thomas E. and James H., and a sister, Mary M.

-- Jay Tokasz
