

Rev. Kenneth B. Murphy, at 78; pastor founded suicide hot line

By Tom Long
GLOBE STAFF

The Rev. Kenneth B. Murphy, former pastor of Holy Name Church in West Roxbury and founder of Rescue Inc., died Saturday at his home in Hyannis. He was 78.

Father Murphy founded Rescue Inc., a telephone hot line for those contemplating suicide, in 1959. At the time, he was assistant pastor of St. Francis de Sales Church in Charlestown.

His anti-suicide work earned him national attention. In a 1961 Saturday Evening Post article, he said his involvement began one night in February 1959, when he was preparing to go to bed and his telephone rang. It was a 17-year-old parishioner. "Father, I'm going to kill myself," the teenager said.

Father Murphy had previously counseled the youth about his problems. "But I had dismissed them as being trivial, the kinds of things that bother all of us from time to time and then disappear," he said. "Now I found that they hadn't disappeared."

Father Murphy talked the youngster out of suicide and the following day accompanied him to a psychiatrist.

One week later, Boston police called Father Murphy and asked him to help them assist a man who was threatening to jump from a bridge. Father Murphy talked him down.

The next week, police asked him for similar help. This time, a young man was standing on the eighth-floor ledge of a building in downtown Boston. When Father Murphy arrived, a jeering crowd was urging the young seaman to jump. Father Murphy again talked him down.

The idea that people could be filled with such despair gnawed at the young clergyman. "Experts told me that suicides kill themselves because they feel utterly bereft, cut off from all contact with other human



REV. KENNETH B. MURPHY

beings," he said. "It seemed to make sense that if you could show such a person that you genuinely cared whether he lived or died, you might save his life."

That knowledge led Father Murphy to found Rescue Inc. with \$5,000 in seed money donated by Cardinal Richard Cushing.

In an annual report of Rescue Inc. that he presented at the Algonquin Club in Boston in 1963, Father Murphy reported that he and his volunteers had received calls from 3,189 people threatening suicide and that only two callers took their lives. The agency operated for about 10 years.

Father Murphy was born in Boston. He graduated from Boston College and St. John's Seminary. He assisted at parishes in Weymouth, Charlestown, and Lowell and was pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in South Boston until 1973, when he became pastor of Holy Name Church in West Roxbury, where he had been an altar boy to the parish's first pastor.

"We moved here when I was 2, and I never dreamed I'd be the pastor," he said in a story published in the Globe on April 25, 1977. "It's a delight. It's a beauty and a joy."

He retired in 1996.

He leaves a brother, R. Leo of Tampa, Fla.

A funeral Mass will be said at 11 a.m. Friday in Holy Name Church in West Roxbury.

Rev. John Chapman, 90

Retired pastor of Belmont church

The Rev. John Rea Chapman Sr.,