

# Monsignor Simon E. Kenny, 86, chaplain in two wars, Pylesville pastor 16 years

By ERIN TEIXEIRA  
SUN STAFF

Monsignor Simon E. Kenny, who was an Army chaplain in two wars and then became the longest serving priest for St. Mary of the Assumption Roman Catholic Church in Pylesville, Harford County, died Friday of complications of bone cancer. He was 86.

Monsignor Kenny, a native of Midland in Western Maryland, is remembered as a wise student of the Bible who could be strict and serious one moment and then lighthearted and joking the next. After his death, friends found several joke books beside his bed.

"He used to sit here in the rectory and tell joke after joke and have us all in stitches — we thought he had made them up himself," said the Rev. Steven Girard, a friend of Monsignor Kenny since 1978. "He was really something else."

Ordained a priest at 25 at the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore, he was assigned to St. Mary's in Hagerstown in 1938. Two weeks after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, he requested a release from his duties to become a military chaplain.

He served 20 years on active duty and four in the active reserves in posts throughout the United States — including Texas and New York — and England, France, Germany, Japan and Korea, among others. Father Kenny received battle ribbons, campaign medals and other military honors.

"He was pretty much on the front lines of the major European campaigns during World War II," said Hank McGraw, a longtime parishioner and friend.

When Father Kenny retired from the Army in 1967, after having also served in the Korean War, he had achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel.

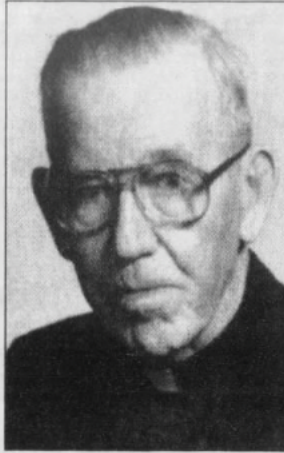
That year, he returned to Maryland to begin a different phase of his life: He asked to be assigned to a one-priest country parish.

He was sent to St. Mary's, where he joined 300 families living in northern Harford County and southern Pennsylvania. He became a spiritual guide, a visionary and an inventive fund-raiser at the parish.

Among his greatest achievements in fund raising was expanding St. Mary's small but popular fried chicken dinner gatherings into a 2,000-plate revenue-generating event.

"Those chicken dinners were famous, and he made them into an art," Mr. McGraw said.

In 1969, Father Kenny announced plans to erect an education building and hall. He concluded his remarks saying, "I pledge the first \$1,000." Within seven years, the building was paid off. It was named for him.



**Monsignor Simon E. Kenny** was assigned to St. Mary of the Assumption Roman Catholic Church after retiring from the Army as a lieutenant colonel.

During his 16 years at the parish, he expanded St. Mary's grounds from 5 to 15 acres and led the parish as it quadrupled in size through rapid development in surrounding areas.

In the midst of it all, he focused on knowing his congregants personally, no matter their age or their ability to tithe.

When the McGraws moved to nearby Street in 1971, Father Kenny was one of their first visitors to the home they were building.

He urged them to join the parish and, since the couple had little cash, quickly signed them up to volunteer, Mr. McGraw said.

Monsignor Kenny — who attended St. Joseph's Parish School, St. Charles College and St. Mary's Seminary on Paca Street in Baltimore — was "very dedicated to Mary and the blessed sacrament," said John Jeppi, a nephew, of Woodbrook. He was named a monsignor in 1982.

Said Mr. McGraw, "He was a regular, down-to-earth person, but if you were talking to him you never forgot he was a priest."

A viewing will be held at 5 p.m. today at the Cardinal Shehan Center for the Aging, 2300 Dulaney Valley Road in Timonium, with a funeral Mass at 7 p.m.

Two other viewings will be held at St. Mary's in Pylesville, at 5 p.m. tomorrow with a vigil service at 7:30 p.m.; and at 11 a.m. Thursday with a Mass of Christian burial at noon.

In addition to Mr. Jeppi, Monsignor Kenny is survived by a sister, Sister Patricia Kenny of Emmitsburg; a nephew, Joseph Jeppi of Rodgers Forge; and several grandnieces and grandnephews.