

Rev. Joseph Messer

Roman Catholic priest recalled for his dry sense of humor served parishes in Glen Burnie and Severna Park

BY JACQUES KELLY

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The Rev. Joseph Valentine Messer, a Roman Catholic priest who served in Glen Burnie and Severna Park, died Wednesday of complications from dementia at Stella Maris Hospice. The Timonium resident was 90.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., he was the son of Henry Philip Messer, who managed the old John Murphy church goods firm, and the former Mary Magdalen Goeckler, a homemaker. After his family moved to Halethorpe when he was a boy, he attended Ascension School and was a Catonsville High School graduate.

According to an Archdiocese of Baltimore biography, he became a Westinghouse Corp. technician and also served in the Army from 1948 to 1949. He was also a Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. worker and oversaw operation of its boilers at Spring Gardens and Middle River.

In 1952, when he was 28, he entered the seminary and studied at the former St. Charles College in Catonsville. He then began his philosophy and theology studies at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg. Archbishop Francis P. Keough ordained him in 1961 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen.

"He was a simple man who was humble and reverent," said his nephew, Paul Gleichauf, an Ellicott City resident. "But he also had an irreverent, humorous streak in him. He loved practical jokes. Yet he looked stoic and always had a smile ready. He never lost that sense of humor."

Father Messer was initially assigned as a curate to St. Clare's Parish in Essex. He became an associate pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church in Severna Park and held that post from 1970 to 1982.

Father Messer then served at St. William of York Church on Edmondson Avenue in the Hunting Ridge-Ten Hills neighbor-

hoods.

In 1986, he was assigned to the Church of the Good Shepherd Parish in Glen Burnie, where he retired in 1994 but remained in residence until he moved to Mercy Ridge in Timonium in 2007.

"He always had a joke or a funny story that he could tell spontaneously," said a former parish member, Matthew Donlan, a Pasadena resident.

Family members recalled that Father Messer collected bad puns and used them regularly. He also feigned being offended when persons winced when hearing them.

"He was well loved by everyone, old and young, in the parish," said Marcela Lavicka, a Glen Burnie resident. "He put a lot of substance in his homilies. He loved being a priest. And except for the times he played golf, he always wore the Roman collar or a cassock."

The Baltimore Archdiocese's announcement of his death said he was "well known among his brother priests as an excellent confessor and spiritual direc-



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tor."

He belonged to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and attended Prelature of Opus Dei conferences. He read works of theology and philosophy. Friends said he enjoyed dining at Tio Pepe restaurant on Franklin Street.

He was a hiker and often walked throughout Patapsco State Park or on trails at Emmitsburg. He was also an amateur photographer and recorded his vacations with a slide camera.

A Mass of Christian burial will be offered at 11 a.m. today at the Church of the Ascension, Potomac and Poplar avenues in Halethorpe.

In addition to his nephew, survivors include two brothers, Lambert Messer of Catonsville and Gerard Messer of Micco, Fla.; and additional nieces and nephews. jacques.kelly@balt.sun.com