



Father Francis E. O'Brien Pilot file photo

## Obituary: Father Francis O'Brien dies suddenly

Father Robert M. O'Grady LOCAL FRIDAY 26TH OF SEPTEMBER 2008

Born in Framingham and raised in Natick and the only child of the late Francis and Gertrude (Fair) O'Brien, Father Francis E. O'Brien died suddenly at his family home in Natick on Sept. 18. He had just celebrated his 68th birthday on Sept. 9.

He attended the parish school at St. Patrick, Natick and graduated from Our Lady Help of Christians High School in Newton. He entered archdiocesan seminaries beginning at Cardinal O'Connell in Jamaica Plain and completing seminary studies at St. John's Seminary.

His first assignment following ordination was as an assistant at Christ the King, Hudson. Five years later he found himself assigned briefly as associate at St. Mary, Quincy.

In 1972 he was named associate at St. Patrick Parish in Watertown where for 16 years he served not only the parish but in a particular way the parish high school. He was literally day and night involved with the students, their lives and their families. There probably was not an event connected with the school during those years that Frank missed. This personal relationship with so many in the school and parish community -- a hallmark of Frank's whole priestly life -- was so remarkable that even after 1988 he was constantly back to the parish to celebrate weddings or baptisms or attend wakes and funerals.

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In 1998 he was named parochial vicar at Immaculate Conception in Everett where he remained only briefly until he was named pastor at nearby St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Medford. Never shy of work nor absent from an event he took to the new parish readily and people welcomed him with the same graciousness and warmth that Frank showed them.

In 1995 there was a kind of homecoming for him. Cardinal Law named him pastor at St. George in Framingham. His father had grown up in the parish and coming from neighboring Natick he was familiar with the territory. Additionally, his mother Gertrude was in declining health and the assignment to St. George made it easier for him to see her regularly.

He himself had experienced some health problems and his mother's death yet he accepted the challenge that many pastors had in helping parishioners from neighboring closing parishes to be welcomed to new parishes. He and the people at St. George were especially effective in bringing together their longtime parishioners and those from St. Jeremiah.

Death came suddenly and apparently painlessly for him, though as a great shock to his many friends and the parishioners of St. George. Interestingly he had just preached at the funeral of his predecessor, Msgr. John Lawler, a few weeks prior to his own death.

Father O'Brien, who was called Fran, Franny or Frank, would have been overwhelmed by his funeral Mass. Basically an uncomplicated man, who preferred that you be the focus of his attention rather than the reverse, his funeral was a tribute to his priestly zeal and enthusiasm, cut short in our eyes.

Seán Cardinal O'Malley was the principal celebrant of the funeral Mass on Sept. 22 at St. George Church. Father Vincent Mellone, pastor of St. Barbara Parish, Woburn who had been a seminary contemporary, and served with Frank at Watertown and Medford was the homilist.

There was standing room only in the church that seats about 500 people. More than 50 brother priests joined with West Regional Bishop Walter Edyvean as concelebrants with Cardinal O'Malley. Among them were classmates: Msgr. George Carlson, Holy Name, West Roxbury; Father Brian Flatley, St. Agnes, Arlington; Father Benjamin LeTran recently appointed parochial vicar at St. George; and Father John Grimes pastor of Most Precious Blood, Dover and vicar forane of the area.

Following the funeral Mass Father O'Brien was buried with his parents in St. Patrick Cemetery, Natick.