

Rev. John McGee, priest and historian, dead at 71

The Grand Rapids Press

The Rev. John McGee was surrounded by friends and parishioners up until he died Monday night after a more than two-year bout with cancer.

"The problem wasn't getting people to provide care. It was a matter of keeping the numbers down," said Julie Mollan, a parish secretary who helped coordinate the hospice care.

"Father McGee was alert right up until the end," she added. "He was loved. He'll be missed."

McGee, 71, died about 9 p.m. in the rectory at St. Paul the Apostle Church, 2750 Burton St. SE. He'd been pastor there since 1979.

"His death diminishes us all in the Diocese of Grand Rapids," said the Rev. James Cusack, pastor at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, 1449 Wilcox Park Drive SE.

"He was a terrific human being. He cut a real swath through this area," added Cusack.

McGee, who wrote the history of the church in this diocese and was known for his great love of Ireland, attended St. Thomas School

from 1925 to 1930 and Catholic Central High School from 1930 to 1934.

He attended St. Joseph's Seminary for three years before moving to Baltimore to spend one year studying philosophy at St. Mary's Seminary from 1937 to 1938.

In 1938 he studied theology at St. Mary's Seminary. From 1939 to 1943 he attended Sulpician Seminary at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.

He was ordained in 1943 at St. Andrew's Cathedral here by Bishop Casimir J. Plagens.

"He was a tireless worker," said Cusack. "He was filled with boundless energy. He was something of a Renaissance man. He showed us that the pen is mightier than the sword."

Visitation will be from 7-9 p.m. Wednesday and from 2-4 p.m. Thursday at O'Brien-Gerst Funeral Home. The body will be moved to St. Paul the Apostle Church on Thursday night for a Mass at 7:30 p.m.

Bishop Joseph Breitenbeck will officiate at another Mass at 11 a.m. on Friday. Burial will

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Rev. John McGee had been pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Church since 1979.

McGEE

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follow at St. Patrick's cemetery in Parnell.

After he was ordained, McGee served as an assistant pastor for three years at St. James, then became a professor at the first seminary that trained him — St. Joseph's Seminary — from 1946 to 1948.

He moved into administrative work in 1948 and continued in that role at St. Andrew's Cathedral until 1957. Then he returned as a pastor to several Michigan churches.

From 1957 to 1968, he served at St. Henry's in Rosebush. He moved to St. Pius X of Grandville in 1968 and pastored there until 1973. Then he served at St. Roberts Rectory in Ada for six years and pastored St. Paul the Apostle from 1979 to the present.

He has authored three historical books: "The Catholic Church in Grand River Valley;" "Passing of the Gael;" and "Bend in the River."

In his last book, "Passing of the Gael," McGee traced the history of the Irish settlements in West Michigan with particular emphasis on Parnell, a small community 12 miles northeast of Grand Rapids.