

Saranac priest remembered for his courage

By Ed Golder

The Grand Rapids Press

The Rev. Albert L. Watson, a country priest remembered by his colleagues as a man who faced numerous health problems with courage and faith, died of a heart attack Wednesday in his parish rectory at Saranac. He was 64.

"He was a very dedicated priest. He spent almost six years here before he took a full vacation," noted Michael Lamphere, Parish Council president at St. Anthony's Church where Watson was pastor for ten years.

Watson was ordained in the Grand Rapids diocese in 1954. Despite continuous bouts with diabetes, heart problems and cancer, he stayed on as pastor of St. Anthony's until he died.

"It was very heroic of him really," said the Rev. Louis Baudone, pastor at St. Margaret Mary in Edmore and St. Bernadette of Lourdes in Stanton.

Baudone was stationed at a Lake Odessa parish near St. Anthony's for five years. He and Watson shared a camaraderie as country priests and a common outlook on their roles.

He said he visited Watson often

during the five years he was in Lake Odessa, and provided transportation for him when his health began to fail.

Baudone received word of Watson's death Thursday morning when he returned from a meeting of the diocese priests in Traverse City.

"I was going to take him on a color tour to Paw Paw," Baudone said. "Take a ride through the countryside, pick up the year's supply of wine. . . It came as a great shock."

Baudone said that just before Watson's death, the priest commented to him about all the suffering he had seen in his life. They talked about the role of the priest as the suffering servant, as Jesus was.

"By the time we parted, I think he'd accepted it pretty well," Baudone said. "That was the first time I'd ever heard him complain."

Auxiliary Bishop Joseph McKinney, who studied with Watson in the 1940s at St. Joseph's Seminary in Grand Rapids, will deliver the homily at Watson's funeral.

"He didn't take the easy way out," McKinney said of the priest. "He stayed on when other priests were leaving. He had a strong relationship with Christ."

Added Lamphere: "He was all heart."

Watson is survived by a brother, Merlin Watson of Florida; a niece, Michelle Anderson of Wyoming; and a cousin, Dorothy Schrepper.

A rosary and scripture service will be at 7 p.m. Friday at St. Anth-

ony's Church, and visitation will continue until 8:30 p.m.

Bishop Joseph Breitenbeck will celebrate a funeral mass at 11 a.m. Saturday at SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Ionia. Burial will be at 2 p.m. at Resurrection Cemetery in Grand Rapids.