

Rev. O'Donnell, former pastor in Helena, dies in Hawaii

Rev. Robert J. O'Donnell, 55, a former pastor of two Helena parishes and chancellor of the Catholic Diocese of Helena, died July 29 in Honolulu, Hawaii, after an extended illness.

The cause of death was an inoperable brain tumor.

He was born in Helena on June 25, 1940, to Arthur W. and Montana Ann (Parr) O'Donnell. He was educated at St. Helena Grade School and attended Cathedral High School for two years before moving to Portland, Ore. He returned to Helena and graduated from Carroll College in 1962.

He attended St. Thomas Seminary in Denver and was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Helena on May 28, 1966, at St. Helena Cathedral.

Father O'Donnell was associate pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish, Butte, during the summer of 1966. He taught theology at Girls' Central High School, Butte, in 1966-68, and at Butte Central High School, 1969-70. During the 1968-69 school year he was an assistant principal at Helena Central High School. He was appointed principal at Butte Central in 1970.

From 1972 to 1981, Rev. O'Donnell served as co-pastor and later coordinator of the pastoral team at St. Helena Cathedral. In 1981, he was named chancellor and communications director of the Diocese of Helena.

He returned to parish work two

years later, first as pastoral team coordinator and then as co-pastor of St. Mary Parish, Helena.

He also directed the diocese's centennial celebration in 1984.

In 1986, Rev. O'Donnell was granted permission to serve as a parish priest in the Diocese of Honolulu. He worked as an associate pastor in Salt Lake and Kailua, then was named pastor of Holy Trinity Parish, Kulouiu, in 1989.

While in Hawaii he served on the diocesan board of education, chaired the presbyteral council, taught, and directed retreats and workshops.

He led Holy Trinity Parish in its battle with the state to keep the church and school safe and accessible while construction crews widened the Kalanianole Highway.

After a period of declining health, he resigned as pastor and retired on medical disability last February.

Rev. O'Donnell was preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by a brother, Rev. Thomas O'Donnell of Kalispell.

A memorial Mass will be celebrated at St. Helena Cathedral on Friday, Aug. 4, at 11 a.m. Main celebrant will be Most Rev. Alex J. Brunett, bishop of Helena.

A funeral Mass will be celebrated Friday at Holy Trinity Parish, Honolulu. Burial will follow in the priests' plot on Oahu.