

REV. WILLIAM T. O'CONNOR, 61

Rev. William T. O'Connor, 61, was committed to helping the poor and opened a health clinic in a church basement. Father O'Connor, pastor of St. Paul Church in Chicago Heights, died Sunday, Oct. 5, of cancer in the parish rectory. Born in Chicago, Father O'Connor attended Quigley Preparatory Seminary in Chicago and continued his studies at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein. He was ordained in 1968. As a priest at St. Basil Catholic Church, Father O'Connor helped found the St. Basil Free People's Clinic. His brother Thomas remembered a sign above a cardboard box at the clinic that read, "Pay what you can and take what you need." Fluent in Spanish and a frequent traveler to Mexico, Father O'Connor helped develop the Hispanic ministry in the southern suburbs. Despite St. Paul's grim location between a garbage dump and a boxcar factory, Father O'Connor would often proclaim, "I'm 'Bill of the hill' where St. Paul's is the place where elegance is a way of life," recalled Rev. John Siemianowski. Father O'Connor instilled the same pride in the more than 800 families, many newly arrived from Mexico, who made up the parish. Father O'Connor worked to help his new parishioners adjust, regardless of their legal status. He would often say, "People come first and rules . . . they will follow," remembered Siemianowski. Father O'Connor is survived by his mother, Veronica Mary Olson; two other brothers, Gerald and James; and a sister, Mary. Visitation will be from 3 to 9 p.m. Wednesday in St. Paul Catholic Church, 206 E. 25th St., Chicago Heights. Mass will be said at 11 a.m. Thursday in the church.