

North American Conference of Redemptorists

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Fr. Eugene Roy Harrison C.Ss.R., a proud Navy veteran who was particularly effective in ministering to those who were ill or had lost a loved one, died on February 2 at St. Luke's Hospice Care Center in Kansas City. He was 62 and had suffered a massive stroke and a fall that resulted in irreparable brain injuries.

Eugene was the first child of Homer and Ellen Harrison, born on June 21, 1958 in Richland, WA. He developed a love of books and learning at an early age because his family moved so frequently that it was difficult for him to form lasting friendships. As the elder brother of two sisters, he was a disciplined, self-reliant caretaker. He remained devoted to his family throughout his entire life.

Eugene was baptized in the Baptist Church during high school, and he enlisted in the US Navy after graduation. He participated in bible studies and a youth group in the military, and his love of God and desire to be of service continued to grow. He attained the rank of Second Class Petty Officer (E-5) before he was discharged from service.

Eugene initially was interested in attending a Bible College, but he changed his mind and earned a degree in political science from San Jose State University. He worked on several political campaigns for Democratic candidates, most notably Michael Dukakis' 1988 presidential bid against George H.W. Bush. He became somewhat disillusioned with a political career, and went to work at a radio station in Seattle. As he advanced in age, his political allegiance shifted right, and he became a staunchly conservative Republican.

An avid hunter and fisherman, Eugene enjoyed time in the great outdoors. He was a perpetual student with many interests, including history and archaeology. He loved to watch classic movies, mysteries and historical documentaries, and was known to binge on several television programs that caught his fancy. He drifted from organized religion and was enjoying his work at a radio station in Seattle when he told friends about his frustration with organized religion and introduced him to Catholicism.

After a year of attending Mass regularly and speaking with Fr. George Dawson, he was received into the Church at Sacred Heart Parish on August 5, 1990. Eugene's desire to serve God was rekindled, and he investigated a religious vocation. Fr. George lent him a copy of Ray Mermet's biography of St. Alphonsus, which helped him decide to become a Redemptorist.

He professed temporary vows on August 15, 1996 and perpetual vows on October 15, 2000. He was ordained to the priesthood at St. Alphonsus Parish in Grand Rapids by Bishop Robert Rose on July 1, 2001.

Although Fr. Eugene suffered chronic pain from several medical issues, he was willing to serve where he was needed. He learned the ropes of parish ministry at St. Alphonsus Parish in Grand Rapids. He preferred a warmer climate and was happy to transfer to New

Orleans as associate pastor at St. Alphonsus Parish in 2008.

Fr. Eugene relished his time in The Big Easy, and especially enjoyed the weather, the music and the cuisine. Fr. Gerry LaPorte remembers that Fr. Eugene packed a six-shooter but admits that he didn't have the courage to ask whether or not it was loaded. Fr. Eugene spent many hours in the back yard and befriended stray cats. As the clowder of cats grew, Fr. Thomas Pham started to relocate a few at a time across the river to thin their numbers. Their absence apparently went unnoticed.

Fr. Eugene was assigned at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Redemptorist Church in Kansas City in 2015. He is remembered for his warm and thoughtful homilies, and the depth of his care for others, despite his curmudgeonly behavior.

“He was a trusted and reliable collaborator in our various pastoral ministries. Although he was never an officially appointed associate pastor, he certainly fulfilled the position by participating in daily and weekend confessions, liturgies, daily duty and as a monthly celebrant at the African-American church of St. Monica's and at the famous ‘Hallmark Cards’ church of Our Lady of Sorrows,” said Fr. Gary Ziuraitis, pastor.

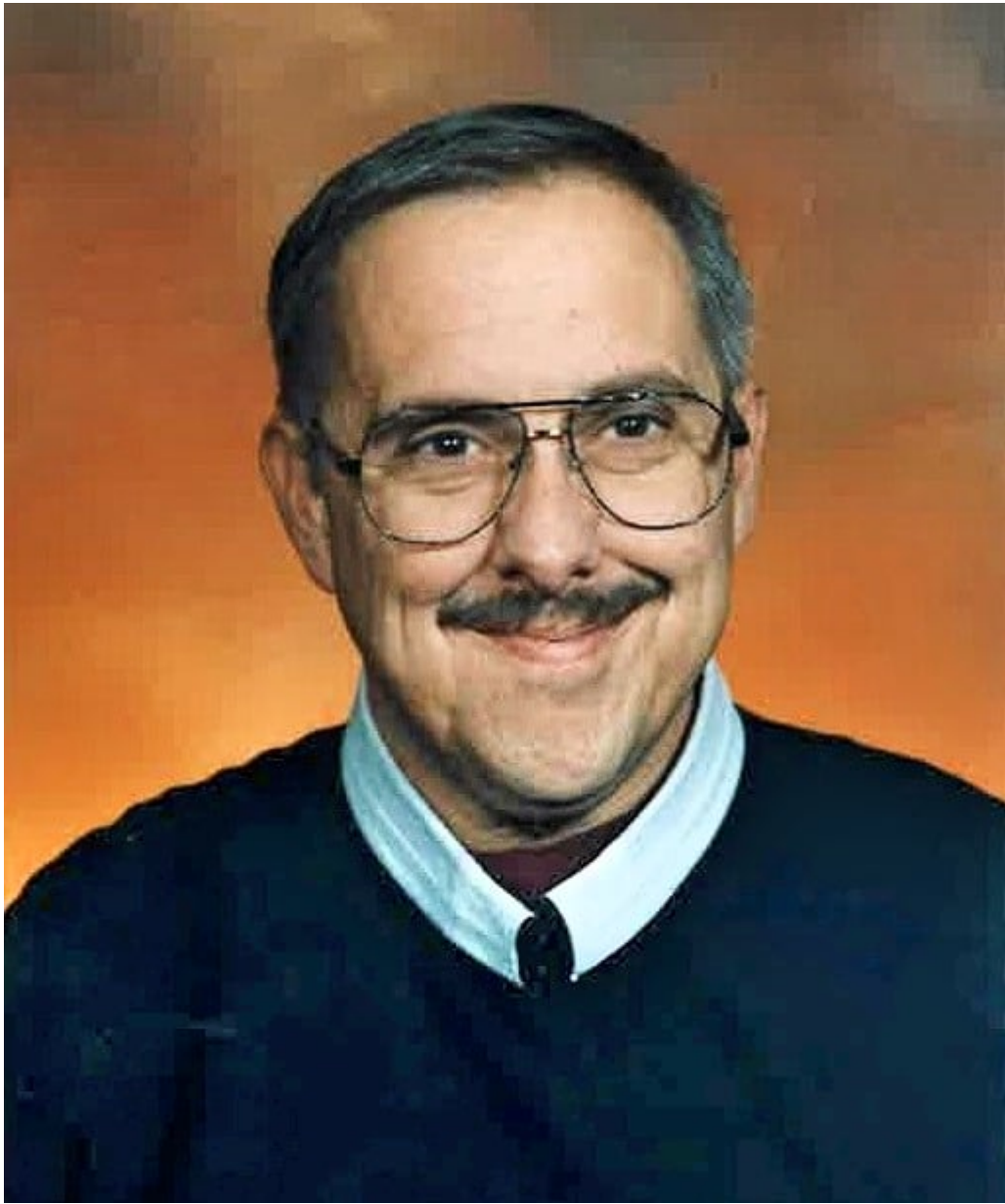
Daily activities often took him to area hospitals to administer the sacrament of the sick, or to administer emergency baptisms or to accompany parents and relatives during an infant's health crisis at Children's Hospital. His ministrations were always greatly appreciated.

“Fr. Gene became our community grocery shopper after the death of Br. Charles Long. If you mentioned a favorite food, snack or liquid beverage – even in an offhand remark – you could bet it would appear in the kitchen or common room in abundance! The community abstains from meat on Fridays. Maybe because of his Seattle connections, he would especially beam at the ‘catch of the week’ he provided at the Friday evening community meal,” Fr. Gary said.

He remembers that Fr. Eugene always seemed to prefer his previous appointment. When he first was sent to New Orleans, he talked about how much he loved Grand Rapids and its people. When he arrived in Kansas City, he always talked about how much he loved New Orleans and its people, as well as the New Orleans Saints football team. Now that he has reached his ultimate eternal reward, I am sure he is telling the great cloud of witnesses how much he loved Kansas City and its people and the Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs!”

Funeral services will be held at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Redemptorist Church in Kansas City. Visitation is scheduled from 4:00 until 8:00 pm on Friday, February 5. A Mass of Resurrection is scheduled at 9:30 am on Saturday, February 6. Burial will follow at 4:00 pm at the Redemptorist Cemetery in Liguori. May Fr. Eugene rest in the eternal peace of the Redeemer.

Submitted by Kristine Stremel, with contributions from Fr. Gerry LaPorte, Fr. Gary Ziuraitis, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Redemptorist Parish staff members Pat McDonald and Anna Elliott.



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