

In Memoriam

A gentle, gentle soul

[Click here](#) to read the homily delivered by Very Rev. Patrick Woods, C.Ss.R., during the funeral Mass at the St. John Neumann Residence at Stella Maris.

Redemptorist Brother Gilbert Mary Hunter, who could find a cheerful word for anyone he encountered, died Saturday, March 13, at St. John Neumann Residence, Stella Maris, in Timonium, MD. He was 89 years old.

Born in Boston on Aug. 10, 1920, Brother Gilbert was the son of Michael and Margaret Clifford Hunter. He was given the baptismal name of John Lawrence and grew up in St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. He was drawn to the life of a Redemptorist Brother and made his first profession of vows in 1940 and his final profession in 1945.



Brother Gilbert served variously as an office worker, sacristan and maintenance worker. His first assignment was to Buffalo, NY, and his second was to St. Cecilia Church in East Harlem, NY. Father John Gauci, who grew up in that parish, recalled that "Brother Gilbert raised us all." The young Brother trained the parish boys as altar servers, organized them into a church cleaning crew, and encouraged them in their ball games, Father Gauci said.

Further assignments were to Redemptorist communities in Pittsburgh, PA; Ilchester, MD; Esopus, NY; Washington, DC; and Boston.

Citing personal reasons, Brother Gilbert applied for a dispensation from his vows, which was granted in 1956. He became a chiropractor and was licensed in the State of New York. Living simply, giving financial help to his family, and becoming active in parish life, Brother Gilbert still maintained his ties of friendship with a number of Redemptorists.

It was in 1996, after he retired professionally and after he had cared for his mother in her last illness, that he began to listen to his former confreres who told him, "Gil, you never really left us." With the encouragement of many Redemptorists, especially the late Father Edward Tardiff, Mr. Hunter applied to be accepted back into the Redemptorists.

As it happened, the Provincial Superior then was the late Father George Keaveney, who remembered Brother Gilbert from Boston as being one of the people who inspired his own vocation to the Redemptorists. With permission from the General Government in Rome for a shortened novitiate, Father Keaveney warmly received Brother Gilbert's vows on Oct. 16, 1997, at St. John Neumann Residence, then in Saratoga Springs, NY.

Father Arthur Gildea, a former rector at St. John Neumann Residence, described Brother Gilbert as "a gentle, gentle soul." As the sacristan, Brother Gilbert would see to it that each of priests in residence had the proper colored stole for the daily concelebrated community Mass. At the end of the liturgy, he would collect the stoles and see to it that they were properly folded and stored. Generally he would be the last Redemptorist out of the chapel and the lay people who frequented the Mass would wait for him, to ask his advice, to request his prayers, to see if he or any of the other confreres needed anything. "He was very devoted to the laity," Father Gildea said. Many of the confreres referred to these daily Mass-goers as "Gilbert's Sodality."

"He did have his idiosyncrasies, he added: "He loved to rest with the Lord, as he called it. He'd go to the chapel and stretch out on a pew, a pillow under his head and one under his feet. He'd say his rosary or other prayers. You might think he fell asleep, but no, he was just saying his prayers. I think he grew a lot in holiness in his old age."

Ann Ruggeri, retired head of nursing at the residence, recalled: "When he came back (to the community) he was so grateful to the Redemptorists. He was a wonderful worker and a very joyous man."

Father Michael Sergi, another former rector there, said that "Gilbert was really a joy to live with. He always complimented everyone — the nurses, the doctors. He was always thanking people." He also looked after Father Sergi, the priest said, warning him not to let the "old guys get you down."

Brother Gilbert's devotion to Mary was of long-standing, but when he received permission to go to Medjugorje, his love for her became even deeper and more tender and he spoke of her frequently to anyone open to hearing him.

Brother David Skarda, who was serving at the Redemptorist college in Suffield, CT, in the 1970s, first met Brother Gilbert there as a visiting chiropractor, John Hunter. When the latter later returned to community life, Brother David found him to be "an absolute joy to have in our community," he said. "As the sacristan, he kept the chapel beautifully and there were such wonderful flowers. If anyone there had a green thumb, it was Gilbert. He was a real asset."

Father Woods, writing at the beginning of his first triennium as Provincial Superior, reaffirmed Brother Gilbert's place in the community: "How blessed the Province is to have your good humor and deep faith as inspiration to our confreres at St. John Neumann Residence. I appreciate the dedicated service that you provide in the sacristy and the many behind-the-scenes things you do to make the community life better at the residence. The Congregation was deeply blessed by your return to us. God is good."

When the Redemptorists closed their nursing home in Saratoga Springs, the community there was dispersed according to their health care needs. Brother Gilbert, along with confreres in need of full-time nursing care, was moved to the Redemptorist wing of Stella Maris, a facility owned by the Sisters of Mercy in Timonium, MD.

Brother Gilbert is survived by two nephews, Donald Holmes of California and Paul Durgin of Massachusetts. There also are cousins and lifelong friends.