

In Memoriam

Fr. Creaven: Always ready to pull up stakes for God

Father John Creaven, a Redemptorist priest for 60 years, died Saturday, January 22, at the St. John Neumann Residence at Stella Maris, in Timonium, MD. Father Creaven was 87 years old and had suffered from serious digestive problems for many years.

A Mass of Christian Burial was offered January 27 at Our Mother of Perpetual Help Church in Ephrata, PA, with burial in the Redemptorist cemetery of the nearby St. Clement Mission House. Father Creaven had been assigned to St. Clement's twice, from 1963-67 and from 1987-2007.

Born on June 21, 1922, in Jamaica Plain, MA, Father Creaven was the son of Malachy and Bridget Collins Creaven and grew up in St. Thomas Parish.

Drawn to the Redemptorists from an early age, he was accepted at the congregation's minor seminary in North East, PA, after completing grammar school. He made his novitiate in Ilchester, MD, and professed his first vows in 1944. He continued his studies at Mount St. Alphonsus Seminary in Esopus, NY, and was ordained to the priesthood on June 19, 1949.

Like most of his confreres of that time, Father Creaven's first assignment was to a foreign mission. He served from 1950-54 in Brazil. His next three assignments were to the Southeast United States: in Hampton, VA; Ft. Oglethorpe, GA; and Tampa, FL.

From there, he was assigned in 1960 to St. Joseph Church in Rochester, NY. The following year, he went to Our Lady of Fatima Church in Baltimore and in 1963, Father Creaven accepted his first assignment to St. Clement Mission House in Ephrata.

In 1967-68, he served at St. Boniface Church in Philadelphia and then moved on to St. Clement Church in Saratoga Springs, NY, where he served for seven years. His next assignment, in 1975, was to St. Mary's Church, Annapolis, MD; two years later, Father Creaven was assigned to Mission Church (Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help) in Boston.

From 1979-83, he served at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Bradford, VT, and was responsible for two chapels, Our Lady of Light in South Stratford and St. Francis of Assisi in Norwich. His ministry took him next to Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Baltimore, where he served for four years.

Father Creaven's lengthiest assignment came in 1987, when he was named again to St. Clement Mission House, Ephrata. From there, he assisted at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in New Holland and St. James Church in Lititz.

Father James O'Blaney, pastor now at St. James, said Father Creaven was well-loved by the parishioners in the Lancaster County churches.

"He had a good sense of humor and people liked his company," he said. "He kept up with his friendships and when news of his death reached us, a good many people spoke warmly about him."

Father Raymond Collins, who was Father Creaven's rector at Ephrata for six years, noted that "people enjoyed talking with him and you always got a smile when you mentioned his name."

Father James Small of the Ephrata community described his confrere as a "swing man" because even in semi-retirement he made himself available to help out wherever he was needed.



“He had a difficult time with his back; he was in great pain. But he had an old car he used to drive around — very slowly,” he said. From his early years, Father Creaven was a very good car mechanic and also good at working with electricity, Father Small recalled.

“You could set your clock by the time he was in chapel,” he added. “He was very, very faithful to his schedule. He was a good man and suffered a lot with pain.”

Father Patrick McGarrity, rector at Ephrata now, described his friend as “a delightful storyteller with a quiet Irish wit about him. People used to love it when he would leave the altar and process down the aisle blessing those on the left and the right — as if he were the pope!”

Father Creaven’s daily schedule included morning meditation, then breakfast — invariably one banana, two slices of toast and 12 grapes — and then back to the chapel.

“He was especially devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and St. Joseph,” Father McGarrity said. He joked that Father Creaven was always the first into the refectory for lunch, but only had a cup of soup and a piece of fruit; 2:30 p.m. was his break for a cup of tea and two plain doughnuts — no sugar or icing accepted, just plain doughnuts. Because he had great difficulty in digesting foods, Father Creaven’s supper always consisted of pureed mashed potatoes and pureed carrots.

If he had not had the chance to celebrate Mass at one of the churches, Father Creaven could be found at 7:10 p.m. celebrating Mass in the house chapel and enjoying the quiet for a long thanksgiving afterwards, Father McGarrity said.

Due to Father Creaven’s health problems, he was assigned in 2007 to the St. John Neumann Residence in Saratoga Springs, NY, where he could get around-the-clock nursing care. When that property was closed in 2009, Father Creaven was among the confreres who were transferred to the Redemptorists’ new facility at Stella Maris in Maryland.

Father Creaven was predeceased by his parents, his brother Malachy, and his sister Eileen Higgins. He is survived by his sister Rita Morley of Hull, MA; sister-in-law Mary Creaven of Quincy, MA; and longtime friends Jim and Maria Costello of East Earl, PA.