

In Memoriam

Fr. Hurley, former Provincial, remembered as gentle spiritual giant

Note: To view photos from Fr. Hurley's funeral, [click here](#).

Redemptorist Father Joseph Hurley, formerly Provincial Superior of the Baltimore Province, died unexpectedly on Friday, Oct. 30, at Our Lady of Lourdes Rectory in Seaford, DE. Father Hurley, who was 81, apparently died of a heart attack or stroke during the early morning hours.

Associate Pastor at the Seaford church from July of 2005, he was known especially for his gift of mentoring people seeking a deeper understanding of their faith and teaching those who sought to be received into the Church at the Easter Vigil. The last night of his life was devoted to this work.



A native of Fall River, MA, Father Hurley was born July 5, 1928, one of three sons of the Honorable Joseph L. Hurley, former Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts and later a Superior Court Justice, and Celeste Tracy Hurley. He graduated from Msgr. James Coyle High School and attended Harvard for one year before applying to the Redemptorists. He attended St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA, for two years and made his novitiate in Ilchester, MD. He made his first profession of vows in 1949 and his final profession three years later. In the meantime, he completed his theological studies at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus.

Father Hurley was ordained to the priesthood on June 20, 1954. He was sent then to continue his studies, earning a Master's Degree in Sociology from The Catholic University of America. Later in his career, he studied at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. His first pastoral appointment, in 1957, was to St. Mary's Church in Annapolis, where he was responsible for developing an out-mission, which grew to become St. Joseph Church in Odenton. In 1961, he began his work in teaching and formation, for two years at the novitiate in Ilchester, then two years at the seminary in North East, and, in 1965, as rector of the new college-level seminary in Suffield, CT. In 1972, he was chosen to serve at Holy Redeemer College in Washington, DC.

At this time too, Father Hurley, Father Paul Bryan and one of Father Hurley's classmates who has since left the Congregation, Sal Umana, were asked to form a Renewal Team for the Province. Having worked closely with Father Hurley, Father Bryan found him to be "a humble introvert with a wonderful inner life ... Joe imitated Christ in the depths of himself ... he never was ambitious, but had that obedience and responsiveness of a true servant." Mr. Umana, who kept in touch with Father Hurley, after posting news of his death on a web site for former Redemptorists, noted: "From the number of e-mails posted, Joe Hurley was a giant of a man who touched the lives of many people and very different generations. It seemed that no matter whom he met, he cast something of a spell on them. All agree that he was a holy man, a humble person, the essence of tranquility ... You simply became a better person for having talked with Joe."

In 1975, Father Provincial Superior Joseph Kerins chose Father Hurley to serve with him as Provincial Vicar of Baltimore, based at the Redemptorist Provincial Residence in Brooklyn. Father Hurley was elected Father Provincial in 1978, a position to which he was re-elected for a second three-year term. Father Lawrence Lover, Provincial Canon Lawyer, who also served in formation, parish and administrative roles, said: "Joe was wonderfully laid-back, unassuming, and very capable at any job he did." He added that his confrere was well liked throughout the North American Provinces. "Joe was very quiet, but very sharp and when he made decisions it was because it was the right thing to do," Father Lover said.

Relieved of the burden of administrative duty, Father Hurley spent 1984 serving at the Redemptorist retreat house in Tobyhanna, PA. The following year, he was asked to serve as the first Redemptorist pastor of St. Patrick Church in Enfield, CT. Father James Dowds, then newly ordained, said it was wonderful to have Father Hurley as

his first pastor. "Joe was kind and gentle and steady and consistent," he said. Father Dowds became active as a church prefect, in the educational ministry and the music ministry. "Joe encouraged each of us to go with our gifts, and he'd support you. He was slow to criticize and quick to praise. Joe had time for anybody and everybody and he never carried tales," he said. What touched him most, though, was when he became a military chaplain and was sent to the Persian Gulf. "There was a lot of concern then about men being killed over there," Father Dowds explained, "and Joe called my mother every week to ask how she was doing and listen to her concerns."

Carol Waterman, who was named cantor for the parish, said she appreciated the support Father Hurley gave his parishioners. "He would sing parts of the Mass -- and, you know, a lot of priests just don't -- and he was very participatory," Mrs. Waterman said. "He gave people who worked with him the latitude to do what they could do; he was a quiet presence, very reverent, very pastoral."

In 1993, the Province needed a Novice Master and Father Hurley agreed to undertake the formation of a new generation of students. He served first at Esopus and, when an interprovincial novitiate was opened in Glenview, IL, he traveled out there. Candidates he guided through their novitiates included not only those from the U.S., but also from Asia, South America and Europe.

After serving four three-year terms as Novice Master, he continued his lifelong habit of happily doing, as he would say, "whatever the Province needs me to do." His final assignment was to Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Seaford, DE, a largely agricultural area that straddles the Mason/Dixon Line and lies, in part, in the Diocese of Delaware and, in part, in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Father James Small, a classmate of Father Hurley, said, "I hear he's been making quite a career in working with the migrants in Seaford." Father Small was never stationed with his classmate, having served for 30 years as a missionary in Brazil, but he said, "We all knew he was a gentle gentleman and I never heard anything negative said about him. He was a very kind man."

Father John McKenna, pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes, speaking to a congregation stunned and saddened at the death of Father Hurley, reminded the people:

"He brought to us a lifetime of faith, a wealth of experience, his good and generous heart.

"I had the privilege of living in Redemptorist community life with Father Joe. Each morning we prayed together, we shared meals, car rides. He took on the important work of mentoring our seeking brothers and sisters on their journey into the faith. He prepared his classes with great diligence. But, in truth, he was the class, he was the living sermon of what a mature Christian Catholic lives like."

Father Hurley is survived by his brothers John and William and Bill's wife Mary; four nieces, Anna Celeste Grudinskas, Elizabeth Mary Landoli, Mary Julia Hession, Josephine Madeline White, and their spouses and children.