

In Memoriam

Rev. Maggs drew people to God with gentleness

Redemptorist Father William Maggs, who served for 20 years as a missionary in Brazil and, when he returned to the Province, preached parish missions around the Northeast, died March 6 at Hahnemann Hospital in Philadelphia. He was 64 and had been hospitalized for a genetic liver disease.

Father Maggs's kindness and gentleness were the qualities that stood out so clearly to his confreres and family.

A classmate and former Redemptorist Provincial, Father George Keaveney, said, "He was the kindest man I've ever met. In all the years I've known him, I never heard him say one unkind remark about anyone." Wherever he went to preach a parish mission, Father Keaveney said, he would be invited back because the people loved his preaching and the priests enjoyed having him as their guest.



A native of the Bronx, NY, Father Maggs was born Jan. 10, 1941, the oldest of the four children of Charles and Maureen O'Sullivan Maggs. While he was still a young child, the family moved to Bethlehem, PA, and he attended Bethlehem Catholic High School for two years before applying to St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA, to follow in the footsteps of his maternal uncle, Redemptorist Father William O'Sullivan, a missionary to Brazil. He continued his studies at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY, making his first profession of vows in 1961 and his final profession in 1964. He was ordained to the priesthood June 19, 1966.

Father Paul Miller met his younger confrere when they were both at Esopus, where the former taught the latter how to ride and care for horses, a good preparation for a rugged missionary life. Father Miller was ordained in 1962 and was already in Brazil when Father Maggs was sent to Telêmaco Borba for his first assignment. Father Miller said he "did whatever he was asked and never complained" as he learned to minister to "staggering numbers" of Catholics spread out in dozens of mission stations. Most of them he could reach by Jeep®, but some by horseback when the roads ran out.

During his years in Brazil, Father Maggs was assigned also to Ponta Porã, Miranda, Campo Grande, back to Miranda, Tibagi, Bela Vista, back to Campo Grande and Ponta Porã, Paranaguá and Antonina. During these years of service, he twice contracted hepatitis.

Father Krug, who met Father Maggs when they were teenagers in North East and discovered they both had Redemptorist uncles in Brazil, said, "We followed each other around Brazil for 20 years," being stationed together only for one year at Miranda. The two confreres shared adventurous vacations, including a trip to Bolivia where they ended up with one train ticket for the two of them and were helped out by a Bolivian medical student who lent them his own ticket when they could no longer hide out from the conductor, Father Krug said.

When Father Maggs was transferred back to the Province in 1988, he filled in for his friend at Krug family events, baptizing Father Krug's great-nephew and visiting and blessing his sick relatives. "Bill is a great man, a wonderful man and Redemptorist, a man of faith," Father Krug said. The spiritual ties between them grew so strong that Father Krug said he awoke at 4:30 a.m. on March 6 and started praying for Father Maggs. He learned by phone a few hours later that his friend had died -- at 4:30 a.m.

In 1988, Father Maggs was assigned to St. Cecilia Church in East Harlem and the following year he went to St. Peter the Apostle Church, his base while preaching hundreds of parish missions and retreats. Father Joseph Krastel, who partnered his friend on missions in the U.S., Dominica and St. Lucia, said Father Maggs "was a dedicated meat and potatoes man of the Redemptorist mission -- a great missionary, a great teammate. He was open to the people and they had no fear of him. There were always a tremendous number of Confessions when

we went on mission together." He described Father Maggs as "a gentle, kind guy, almost unflappable, who was calm and could smooth over any situation."

Father John Hamrogue, who served at St. Peter's, said that while the missionary was on the road a lot, "we were always happy to have him around when he came home." He described his confrere as "a welcoming person who liked to gather people together," such as he did for the 75th anniversary of the Brazilian ministry. "Some people are just loved, and he was one of them," Father Hamrogue said.

Father Frank Brown offered an example of why Father Maggs was loved. In an e-mail to Father Hamrogue, he said: "He was such a good, caring and gentle confrere.... He was so kind to me when I was on sabbatical in Mexico. He would e-mail me and keep me up on events in the Province."

A classmate, Father Paul Lavin, said that "he was the most caring guy." If he and Father Maggs were logged on to the internet at the same time, the latter would send an instant message, beginning a conversation with him, keeping up the communication. "When we saw each other at West End, we'd always go for a walk and talk about everything, the ministry, our joys and hurts, other things we could share," he said. "He was probably the most beloved person in our class because he was so easy to be with. He was attentive to others and aware of their needs." He noted, too, that Father Maggs always kept in touch with the many friends he had made in Brazil.

Father Miller, who serves now at Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, NY, where Father Maggs had been rector since July of 2005, said his onetime "trainee" in Brazil was "very gentle, kind, upbeat, a true Redemptorist. He lived his life in imitation of Christ." Even though Father Maggs had been shy since youth, "people recognized in him a kind of holiness and saw his great devotion to Our Lord in the Eucharist and to the Blessed Mother," he added. "He was like a child in completely trusting God."

To his siblings, Father Maggs was always their big brother "who made sure we were okay," according to his brother Kevin. The two became close again after Father Maggs returned from Brazil and they would enjoy having tailgate parties and happily arguing and kidding each other over the merits of their favorite teams, the priest championing the Giants and his brother, the Eagles. "Bill was as loving and caring a human being as I've ever known. Anybody that knew Bill would never say a bad word about him," Kevin Maggs said.

Their sister, Maureen Allocca, has great memories of time spent with Father Maggs, she said. "He used to stay with us a lot because we have a guest room," she said. "He was just here for Super Bowl Sunday." Her brother always put others first and her friends came to know him and feel very close to him, she added. "He was so kind and so gentle," Mrs. Allocca said. She has special memories of the time the two of them went to Ireland together to see the home of their maternal grandparents. They had a week together before Father Maggs went on to help with the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Limerick.

Father Maggs is survived by his two brothers, Kevin, who lives in Pennsylvania, and Charles, who lives in Arizona; his sister, Maureen Allocca, who resides in New Jersey; 11 nieces and nephews and 12 great-nieces and -nephews.