

THE WESTERN
KENTUCKY



Catholic

CATÓLICO DE KENTUCKY OCCIDENTAL

June 2017

A Special Edition in Honor of Bishop John J. McRaith

owensborodiocese.org



To serve and not be served

The Western Kentucky Catholic celebrates the life of Bishop John J. McRaith, who died on March 19, 2017.

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Bishop McRaith celebrates Mass while Mary Margaret Drury serves during the May 16, 2008 staff day at Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center, Bowling Green. **Staff memories begin on page 21**



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A note from the editor

The Western Kentucky Catholic was already in the process of completing its April 2017 issue when our retired bishop, Bishop John J. McRaith, died on March 19, 2017. We were only able to fit a shortened form of his obituary into the April paper. Due to the already-packed budget for the May paper, we were again limited to one story about the late bishop's impact on the diocese (specifically, the founding of Gasper River Youth Camp). Our readers know the WKC traditionally does not print in June and July, but this year, in honor of Bishop McRaith, our office received permission from Bishop William F. Medley to print a June 2017 special edition.

-Elizabeth Wong Barnstead, Tina Kasey, and Laura Clarke

On the cover

In this fall 2008 photo, Bishop McRaith and several staff members and their families make burgoo at the St. Raphael double-wide, outside the bishop's shed. Standing from left are Bob Vollman, Tami Schneider-Urcia, Bishop John McRaith, Luis Aju, Sr., Matt Monsour and Ernie Taliferro. Seated are from left: Mary Vollman, Mark Vollman, Betty Medley-Wallace, Cathy Hagan, and Bev Howard. Photo by Mel Howard.

THE WESTERN KENTUCKY  Catholic

Official newspaper of the Diocese of Owensboro

Published monthly, 10 times a year at
600 Locust Street, Owensboro, KY 42301

Telephone (270) 683-1545

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View current and archived issues at
owensborodiocese.org/western-kentucky-catholic/

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To Report Allegations of Sexual Abuse

Anyone aware of the abuse of a person under the age of eighteen is required by law to report this to the proper state authorities: local law enforcement or the Kentucky Child Abuse Hotline (toll-free: 1-877-KYSAFE1; 1-877-597-2331). In addition, to report to the diocese abuse by church personnel (paid or volunteer) either past or present, please call the Pastoral Assistance Coordinator at this confidential phone line: 270-852-8380. The Diocese of Owensboro revised its sexual abuse policy, effective July 1, 2014 and it is available at parishes and also on the diocesan website (owensborodiocese.org/safe).

Para Hacer Informe de Alegatos de Abuso Sexual'

Cualquier persona que sepa de un abuso de un menor de dieciocho años es obligado por ley informarles a las autoridades estatales apropiadas: policía local o la línea dedicada para el Abuso Infantil de Kentucky (gratis: 1-877-KYSAFE1; 1-877-597-2331). Además, para informar a la Diócesis sobre el abuso por parte de algún personal (pagado o voluntario) de la Iglesia, en el pasado o presente, favor de llamar a la Coordinadora de Asistencia Pastoral a esta línea confidencial: 270-852-8380. La Diócesis de Owensboro acaba de revisar su reglamento sobre el abuso sexual, efectivo el 1 de Julio del 2014 y está disponible en todas las parroquias y también en el sitio web diocesano (owensborodiocese.org/safe).

Bishop McRaith left a path for us to follow

My dear people of God,

In the weeks since the passing of Bishop John Jeremiah McRaith, I have been the recipient of many messages expressing condolences and kindness. These have come from as far away as the Holy See, expressing the prayerful support of Pope Francis, and from as close-to-home as the people who might meet me on the street or in the store.

Bishop John had an amazing capacity to make everyone feel important and valued. For him, this was not feigned or an acquired public relations act, but rather a humble manifestation of his genuine concern for others. Yes, he had a remarkable connection to hundreds of people, had visited their homes, knew their children and grandchildren and knew their “stories.”

He encountered tens of thousands of people and genuinely saw merit in all of them. But even if he met a person but once, and may not have committed a name to memory, the affection and care was no less. And in keeping with the spirit of the Gospels, he perhaps held most dear those whom the world may not readily cherish, the “least among us,” to remember Jesus’ words.

Though a native Minnesotan, Bishop John felt right at home here in western Kentucky, not in the least because of growing up on a farm in rural Minnesota. His strong support of the farming community came directly from his own love of the land.

Bishop John was ahead of the curve in welcoming international priests to serve in our parishes, and when people would say “they talk funny” he would say, “what do you mean? You people have an accent!” (He never picked up much of a Kentucky accent, but he did ultimately become an adopted son of Kentucky.)

On the day of Bishop John’s funeral, as I looked upon St. Stephen Cathedral, filled to standing room only, I realized that so very many of these people counted Bishop John as a dear friend.

As the funeral procession made its way to Mount St. Joseph, where he would be buried, hundreds stood in silent tribute alongside scores of tractors, farm implements, and even riding lawn mowers, a recognition of his love of the earth



Bishop Medley and Bishop McRaith smile during the August 2014 Boone Lodge celebration and dedication at Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center. File photo.

and, even more, his love of the people of the earth. This “silent salute” was one of the most moving things I have ever seen.

For those of us who mourn Bishop John, the road before us is the one he has shown. We may not know what lies ahead for each of us, but if our eyes are fixed on Jesus we will arrive where we long to be.

Most Reverend William F. Medley
Diocese of Owensboro

Bishop John J. McRaith remembered for ‘profound impact’ on people of western Kentucky



Guarded by some of his fellow farmers, the casket of Bishop John J. McRaith processes through Owensboro on a wagon pulled by his tractor, which had been a gift from the people of the diocese on his 20th anniversary in 2002. On the back of the wagon a sign reads: "Thank you for your support to the farming community." Photo by Elizabeth Wong Barnstead/WKC.



Owensboro Catholic 4-6 Campus students look on as the wagon bearing Bishop John J. McRaith's casket arrives on their campus during its procession to St. Stephen Cathedral on March 23, 2017. Photo by Laura Clarke/WKC.

BY ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

The overcast, drizzly weather on March 23, 2017, did not stop crowds from standing along the route from Glenn Funeral Home to St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro.

They gathered to bid a final farewell to a beloved shepherd, father-figure and friend to countless people within the Diocese of Owensboro, Kentucky: Bishop John Jeremiah McRaith, who served the diocese from December 1982 to January 2009.

Accompanied by five farmers, Bishop McRaith's

casket was processed through town on a tractor-pulled wagon; a nod to the bishop's Minnesota farming roots and lifelong love of the land.

In fact, the tractor itself had been a gift to the bishop from the people of the diocese, who raised funds to buy it for his 20th anniversary as bishop in 2002.

The procession passed Owensboro Catholic Schools' 4-6 Campus, where schoolchildren held paper flowers - upon which were written prayers for

a giant spiritual bouquet. The children sang "Sing Out Earth and Skies" by Marty Haugen, as another reference to the late bishop's rural roots.

The procession also passed Owensboro Catholic High School, where the entire student body had exited the building to stand along the sidewalk.

When the procession reached St. Stephen Cathedral, the farmers lifted Bishop McRaith's casket from the wagon and transferred it into the hands of several diocesan priests. The priests carried it up the

steps of the cathedral where it was received by Bishop William F. Medley, who sprinkled it with holy water.

Following this, a Mass for the Dead was celebrated at the cathedral by Fr. Ed Bradley. The funeral Mass would be celebrated the next day.

In his homily, Fr. Bradley spoke of Bishop McRaith's lifelong passion for rural life and farming: "He not only had a knowledge of rural life; he was a champion of rural life. He loved farmers and farming."

Fr. Bradley added that the pectoral cross worn by Bishop McRaith had tiny vials of soil from different places where the bishop had ministered.

Bill Blincoe, director of School Food Service in the diocese, read the Jeremiah 7:23-28 reading at this liturgy.

Blincoe, who had become close friends with Bishop McRaith and the McRaith family near the end of the bishop's life, later told *The Western Kentucky Catholic* that he remembered regretting "that I hadn't had an opportunity to meet him earlier in my life."

"From an influence and connection standpoint, I would have to rank Bishop John right up there with my dad," said Blincoe, who added that the bishop also left a "profound impact" on Blincoe's wife, Sarah, and daughter, Gracie. (The bishop had frequently urged Blincoe to buy a cat for Gracie, often referring to the status of the "cat purchase.")

Blincoe told the WKC that though his time with Bishop McRaith "was very limited as compared to most others that enjoyed his company - I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to connect with him. We wasted no time delving into our pasts and getting to know each other quickly. Within a couple weeks, I felt that I had known him my whole life."

An all-night vigil was held at the cathedral and was attended by many wishing to give their final respects to the bishop.

At 6 p.m. that evening there was a vigil service which included several hymns, readings and a Gospel (Matthew 12:23-28), as well as a time of shared memories from several people who had been very close to the bishop.

Memories were shared by John McRaith, one of Bishop McRaith's Minnesota cousins; Rose Murphy Crabtree, a family friend from the Owensboro area; Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, another close Owensboro friend; Kathy Spaeth, a family friend from Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; Mary Margaret Drury, who had been a close friend and personal assistant to Bishop McRaith; and Fr. Joe Mills, who worked with Bishop McRaith in the diocesan tribunal for many years.

Fr. John Vaughan presided at the vigil service and gave the homily.

"He was a man of God," said Fr. Vaughan in his homily. "A man who loved God. One compelled by the love of Christ, as St. Paul says."

Fr. Vaughan said it was that call that led Bishop McRaith "to accept the call to priestly ministry and episcopal service to the Body of Christ."

Bishop McRaith's Mass of Christian Burial was held the following day, March 24, at the cathedral; Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of the Archdiocese of Louisville presided and Bishop Medley gave the homily.

Also present at the funeral Mass were Cardinal Justin Rigali, retired bishop of Philadelphia who now resides in the Knoxville area; Bishop Terry Steib, retired bishop of Memphis; Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv. of Lexington; Bishop Charles Thompson of Evansville; Bishop Gerald Gettelfinger, retired bish-



The farmers who had ridden on the wagon with Bishop McRaith's casket prepare to transfer the casket into the hands of several priests, who will bring it to Bishop Medley inside St. Stephen Cathedral on March 23, 2017. Photo by Elizabeth Wong Barnstead/WKC.



John McRaith, a younger cousin of Bishop McRaith, says a few words about him during the March 23, 2017 evening vigil service at St. Stephen Cathedral. John McRaith said that the local Minnesotans were sad when hearing that "one of our best players," Fr. McRaith, was being sent to Kentucky. "But it all makes sense now; love has to be shared, and Bishop John was that love." In the foreground can be seen Bishop McRaith's chalice, which was set on a pedestal during the vigil. Photo by Tina Kasey/WKC.

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The Our Father is prayed during Bishop John J. McRaith's Mass of Christian Burial on March 24, 2017. Photo by Laura Clarke/WKC.



Dozens of tractors line the highway on the way to the cemetery of the Ursuline Sisters of Mount St. Joseph – Bishop McRaith's final resting place. Photo by Elizabeth Wong Barnstead/WKC.



A crowd gathered at the Rite of Committal at the Mount cemetery, where Bishop John J. McRaith was laid to rest. Photo by Elizabeth Wong Barnstead/WKC.

op of Evansville; and Bishop Richard Stika of Knoxville.

In his homily, Bishop Medley said Bishop McRaith had had “a great affection for Pope Francis.”

Bishop Medley said he remembered Bishop McRaith expressing regret in 2015 during Pope Francis' visit to the United States that he would not be able to travel to see him.

“He said, ‘I would love to meet him. I would love to tell him myself how much hope he gives me for the Church,’” recalled Bishop Medley. “Many have spoken in recent days of Bishop John’s deep love of creation.”

“When Pope Francis published his encyclical, ‘Laudato si,’ a treatise on the care of God’s creation, I told Bishop John, ‘I think the pope found your

notes,’” said Bishop Medley.

Following the liturgy, the funeral procession took the body of Bishop McRaith to its final resting place – the cemetery at the motherhouse of the Ursuline Sisters of Mount St. Joseph in Maple Mount.

Sr. Cheryl Clemons later told the WKC that Bishop McRaith had chosen the Mount as his place of burial for several reasons.

Bishop McRaith had been an Ursuline Associate and had also befriended a number of Ursuline sisters throughout his life. He also visited the Mount enough to know that “people regularly go” to the cemetery to pray.

“It would also be accessible for his friends to visit,” said Sr. Clemons.

As a final salute to Bishop McRaith, dozens of local farmers brought out their tractors and other

farm equipment to line the country highway on the way to the Mount’s cemetery.

Fr. J. Patrick Reynolds, vicar general of the Diocese of Owensboro, presided at the Rite of Committal at the cemetery.

Fr. Reynolds said a few words during the burial rite, recalling that Bishop McRaith “empowered us through his preaching, his joyful enthusiasm and hearty laughter, feeding us with the Bread of Heaven, and in conferring the gift of the Holy Spirit upon us so that we could love Christ’s Church and serve as its good stewards.”

The traditional Irish melody, “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” was sung at the conclusion, in honor of the Bishop’s Irish roots.



Mel Howard, reflected in the mirror behind Bishop McRaith, took this picture during a 1989 staff day at Mount St. Joseph Conference and Retreat Center in Maple Mount. Photo by Mel Howard.



Standing in his office with some Owensboro Catholic students, Bishop McRaith reads a copy of *The Western Kentucky Catholic* in this Oct. 28, 1993 photo. In the early years of the bishop's administration, Catholic school students would tour the pastoral center to learn more about the meaning of the word "diocese." In this picture, Bishop McRaith was telling the students he wanted to see them in the WKC one day. Photo by Mel Howard.

Bishop McRaith's vision for his diocesan paper

BY MEL HOWARD, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

Bishop John McRaith was about the smartest country man I ever knew. He loved people, and he liked horses, farm tractors, gardening, his beer, a good pipe, and a good meal.

I liked that he got along well with foods for both town and country folks, comfortable with oxtail soup or Hoppin' John as well as street, deli, or fine restaurant food. Feeding people was most likely his continuing daily care. Bishop John fed people in many ways: cooking for us, listening to our stories and our sins, affirming the work we did, honoring our age, background, and personhood. The food that Bishop John firmly ensured for us was the Holy Eucharist, the "source and summit of the Christian Life." The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was the center of his own life and his daily prayer. Wherever Bishop John traveled in the Diocese of Owensboro, most likely he was on his way to offer Mass and share food with people of a school or parish. Wherever he went, he first greeted the local priest or deacon, or seminarian, and shared with them his support and care.

I worked for Bishop John McRaith as founding editor of the diocesan newspaper he started, *The Western Kentucky Catholic*, (WKC) and as Director of Communication. How this came about started at Trinity High School in Whitesville where I taught English and sponsored the school's student newspaper. In 1983, Bishop John came to Trinity to celebrate Mass with the community. I had two photographers and a reporter and a student with a camcorder

dogging his steps all day there. Before he left he asked the pastor who was responsible for those kids being in his face all those hours. Later, I got a phone call from Sr. Rachel Willett, SCN, Bishop's secretary, and then from Sr. Sharon Grant, SCN, Director of RENEW. The Bishop wanted to talk with me.

I thought, "Uh-oh."

Bishop John and I did talk; he opened with laughter about the kids being always around him. He really liked seeing young Catholics doing church work. He didn't mind them getting in his way or hearing those camera shutters snapping, he said. Bishop John then told me of his desire to have a newspaper for the people of the diocese so that we all could put names with faces from every parish in western Kentucky – a paper about the people and by the people. He could have hired a national journalist to do this paper, but he said he wanted a person who was local and knew the people to start the paper. Those qualities, local and knowing the people, became the spirit and the content of *The Western Kentucky Catholic*. Over time, many older Catholics in our parishes would send in their photos and articles for publication.

Bishop John loved our senior Catholics in the diocese. He was among the first three U.S. Bishops to open a diocesan office for ministry to senior Catholics, our Office of Wisdom, directed by Ginny Knight-Simon who took and received hundreds of pictures of Wisdom groups in parishes throughout

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WKC founding editor, Mel Howard, with Bishop McRaith on Jan. 5, 2009, the day Bishop McRaith announced his retirement. Photo by Lois Rutigliano.

the diocese and wrote their stories for the WKC Wisdom column. This was a popular local feature of our diocesan paper for several years.

After Bishop John retired and earned the title Bishop-emeritus, he told me that The Western Kentucky Catholic he knew as he stepped into retirement in 2009 was exactly what he had in mind in 1983 so that western Kentucky Catholics in the 32 counties of the diocese could know one another better as a local church. Together we in the 78 parishes, the 19 Catholic schools, Brescia University, and the 11 women religious communities knew that The Western Kentucky Catholic was about us as a local church. We all wrote for the paper; we all took those pictures. The WKC was like our own family album. My role as editor was mainly to enable as many as possible of those words and images to make it into the WKC's pages.

I thanked the Bishop for his kind words for my work, and he surprised me: "It is not your daily work that made this paper widely read; it is the people, the ones who sent us their writing and their pictures, and wanted the whole diocese to know their stories." That's exactly what he had in mind for the diocese's paper. He and I spoke just before his passing, and he said, "The paper gives me real joy. It's still going on, you know, the WKC, and it still feeds our people."

Mel Howard, founding editor of The Western Kentucky Catholic, served as editor and director of communications from 1985-2015. He writes from Whitesville.



Bishop's homily quotes reflect servant's heart

Editor's note: Jim Mattingly, superintendent of the Office of Catholic Schools, shared this collection of quotes from Bishop McRaith's many Masses celebrated at the Catholic Pastoral Center/McRaith Catholic Center.

"Life is full of difficult times. But there will come a day when all of our worries will go away."

"In our ministries we need that (mustard) seed of faith to help ourselves and others grow closer to God."

"We must realize that we all have our own list of weeds that can choke the growth of the seed of faith that was planted in us at Baptism."

"(In the parable of the potter and the clay) we are reminded that as God is forming us we often add on things of our own design that don't fit God's design. And He has His way of causing us to see those things and change them. This is a process of constant conversion."

"There is only one Good Shepherd. But the more we can be like Him, the better shepherds we can be to His flock."

"We don't have to have all the answers. But if we have faith in God the Spirit will lead us to the answers."

"All of us are called by God, some of us many times. But often the calls come to us through other people. We must be open to the call even if it comes from someone from whom we would not expect it."

"If we are 'in charge' that means we are servants to other people."

"We can choose to depart from God, but God will never depart from us. He is the Good Shepherd and He will follow us until our last breath to bring us back to Him."

"We are grateful to Mary for bringing us the gift of God to our lives. In turn we are called to bring Jesus to the rest of the world."

A good steward, a disciple of Christ

BY TINA KASEY, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

“He didn’t believe he owned anything,” said Tom Lilly, former director of the Office for Stewardship, about the late Bishop John J. McRaith. “He felt like it was all God’s.”

Bishop McRaith brought the word “stewardship” to the forefront of people’s minds in the church of western Kentucky and beyond as he was a member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee on Stewardship. This group wrote the bishops’ pastoral letter, “Stewardship: A Disciples’ Response” in 1992.

The introduction to the letter, written by Bishop McRaith, says, “Once one chooses to become a disciple of Jesus Christ, stewardship is not an option.”

This phrase is used by multitudes of diocesan stewardship offices nationwide and sums up Bishop McRaith’s view of stewardship: stewardship stems from being a good disciple of Christ.

However, the bishop’s view on stewardship went back even further to when he was the executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference in the 1970s. He believed that the farmers, the food they grew, and the natural resources available should be treated as gifts from God to help meet the needs of the people.

In 1991, Bishop McRaith formed the Office of Stewardship and asked Lilly to be the director. At the time, Lilly was the development director for the Owensboro Catholic schools. Lilly said he was “asked to pray about it.” When it came time to give the bishop his answer, the bishop said in a half-joking manner, “If you don’t say yes after praying, I’m

going to ask who you have been praying to.” Lilly accepted the job offer.

The spirituality of stewardship was important to Bishop McRaith. He wanted the Church to understand “the truth” about stewardship before anyone was ever asked to give. Lilly said the bishop wanted people to understand that everything is temporary and we should take care of what is entrusted to us. “The challenge was to act like it wasn’t permanent,” Lilly said.

Bishop McRaith would publish a financial report each year in *The Western Kentucky Catholic* newspaper showing how diocesan money was spent. He believed in being accountable to God and man for how money was spent in the diocese.

The bishop was known for comparing stewardship with asking a child to share their only cookie. A child typically responds with a resounding “no.” Lilly said that Bishop McRaith would say it’s cute when you are a child and you are responding as such, but not if you are adult and refuse to share what God has blessed you with.

“Being a good steward is part of being a good disciple of Christ,” Bishop McRaith is quoted saying in a diocesan stewardship video. “It helps me understand who God is and who I am.”

The bishop gave conferences/seminars centered on the importance of stewardship in church life. Some of those took place regionally, while a two-day retreat was held in Wisconsin in 1999 with Lilly accompanying the bishop.

Lilly said that the belief that everything belongs



Bishop McRaith plants his garden at St. Raphael in 2003. He believed in being a good steward of the land as well as time, talent and treasure. File photo.



In November 2006, Tom Lilly, center, is surrounded by diocesan staff as Bishop McRaith says a prayer of blessings. Lilly retired from the diocese to take a position as the executive director of St. Mary’s Medical Foundation in Evansville, Ind. after serving the diocese for more than a decade. File photo.

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to God is what compelled Bishop McRaith to give of his time, material possessions and money to others.

A story that has impacted Lilly the most and shows the true character of Bishop McRaith was a time the bishop was attacked in his home. He was

robbed at knifepoint and Lilly said the bishop was more worried about the soul of the man and how by robbing him, it would rob others.

Bishop McRaith told his assailant that he was robbing from his own brothers and sisters. Lilly said

the man took \$200 and left \$100 for his “brothers and sisters.”

Lilly visited Bishop McRaith often at the Carmel Home. He said even two weeks before he passed, the bishop was discussing stewardship with him.

Office of Hispanic Ministry first established under McRaith

In 1997, Bishop John J. McRaith established an Office of Hispanic Ministry in the Diocese of Owensboro. Since then and continued under the guidance of Bishop William F. Medley, ministry to Hispanics and Latinos has flourished in western Kentucky.

Sr. Fran Wilhelm, OSU, director of Centro Latino, a resource center in Owensboro for local Latinos, said she is grateful for the support from Bishop McRaith in the early years of starting this ministry: “He commended us highly for what we were doing, and thanked us for taking the initiative.”

Patti Gutiérrez, one of the founding members of the Hispanic ministry office, said the late bishop was

“very social and loved being with the people,” and that the language barrier (he did not speak Spanish) never bothered him.

Former director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry, Luis Aju, said he is grateful to Bishop McRaith “for receiving everyone in the diocese, without making any distinction because we are all children of God.”

The following are select photos from the many Hispanic Ministry events that took place under Bishop McRaith’s administration.



Bishop McRaith participates in an immigration “think tank” at the Catholic Pastoral Center in 2007. Photo courtesy of Patti Gutiérrez.



Bishop McRaith poses for a picture with Hispanic parishioners of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Henderson on Dec. 12, 2008, who depicted the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego as part of the Guadalupe feast day celebration. Photo courtesy of Ashley Wilkerson.



In this March 11, 2008 photo, Bishop McRaith participates in a Hispanic Ministry event with several Hispanic families at the Catholic Pastoral Center. Photo courtesy of Luis Aju.



A pastoral plan for diocesan Hispanic ministry was approved by Bishop McRaith on Nov. 10, 2006, and presented in a diocesan celebration at SS. Peter and Paul Parish, Hopkinsville, on Nov. 18, 2006. The plan went into effect on Jan. 1, 2007. Photo courtesy of Patti Gutiérrez.

Shepherding the flock of western Kentucky

BY TINA KASEY, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC



Bishop McRaith and Fr. Joe Mills at the May 2014 celebration for Sr. Joseph Angela Boone, OSU, at the Catholic Pastoral Center. File photo.



Bishop McRaith and Fr. John Vaughan in the foyer of St. Stephen Cathedral following Thanksgiving Mass in 2003. File photo.



Bishop McRaith and then-seminarian Will Thompson share a chuckle before Thompson's diaconate ordination in April 2014. File photo.

“He had a shepherd’s heart,” said Fr. Joe Mills, former judicial vicar in the diocesan tribunal and vicar general, about Bishop John J. McRaith, who passed away on March 19, 2017. “He respected people and was always affirming and encouraging,” Fr. Mills said. “Everyone appreciated and admired him, Catholics and non-Catholics.”

When Bishop McRaith arrived in 1982, he didn’t know anyone. Yet, being the extrovert that he was, that issue didn’t intimidate him. He jumped right into the episcopate and took his pastoral heart to the streets. Listening sessions were important to him so he could learn more about what the men and women of the diocese had to say. He was known for being a pastoral bishop and that showed as he began building the offices, ministries and staff at the Catholic Pastoral Center.

“There was such a warm atmosphere in the pas-

toral center,” Fr. Mills said. “He trusted you and you wanted to do your best. It was a ministry, not a job.”

In October of 1991, a diocesan synod was held. The only other synod held in the diocese of Owensboro was in 1943. According to minutes from the synod committee meeting, the goal of the synod was to create a long-range plan for the diocese, develop a greater sense of the diocesan Church, renew the diocese spiritually and help plan how the diocese would evangelize.

“He brought new life and new energy to the diocese,” Fr. John Vaughan said. Fr. Vaughan was coordinator of staff and vicar general for seven years and shared a duplex with Bishop McRaith.

“He was a night owl,” Fr. Vaughan said. “We spent many late nights together chatting.”

Fr. Vaughan said Bishop McRaith loved having people over to visit: “His thought was why have two

people when you could have ten people over to visit.”

Fr. Vaughan said his heart was for evangelization: “He always closed his prayer intentions and Mass with ‘In whose service we are.’”

Fr. Will Thompson remembers being interviewed by the bishop while he was in the process of becoming a seminarian. “The bishop asked me, ‘why do you want to be a priest?’ I responded with ‘I love Jesus.’”

He said Bishop McRaith pulled out his pipe and said, “That’s good enough reason for me.”

Fr. Thompson went on to say that Bishop McRaith always made a point to reach out and visit with the seminarians as they went through formation.

At the time Fr. Thompson attended seminary, the diocese sent the seminarians to the University of

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Then-seminarian Ryan Harpole meeting with Bishop McRaith in 2007. File photo.

St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., which was the home-state of Bishop McRaith. One time the bishop flew up to visit the seminarians instead of driving and had to rent a vehicle. He was offered a free rental vehicle upgrade, which turned out to be a Ford Mustang GT.

“I had to help pull him out of that car because it was so low to the ground, in the ice and snow, trying not to fall down myself,” Fr. Thompson said with a laugh.

Fr. Thompson said that while the bishop allowed the vocation director to do his job, he took an interest in the seminarians to make sure they “had the necessary tools to be a priest.”

Fr. Ryan Harpole was a seminarian when Bishop McRaith retired. He remembers helping Bishop McRaith pull wagons of children around on the bishop’s farm and in the countryside. “He would drive on the edge of the road,” Fr. Harpole reminisced. “I just watched the back to make sure we didn’t lose anyone!”

“He was such a people person,” Fr. Harpole concluded. “He always wore a smile and wanted to talk

to you.”

Fr. Julio Barrera had a unique connection with Bishop McRaith from the very beginning. Fr. Barrera, from Mexico, was accepted to enter the seminary program through the Diocese of Owensboro without ever visiting the diocese and with no actual interview with the bishop. What Fr. Barrera does have is a May 2006 email from Fr. Andy Garner, vocations director at the time, letting him know the bishop welcomed him to the diocese and into the seminary in the United States.

When Fr. Barrera did meet Bishop McRaith in December 2006, through some interpretation, the bishop told the then-seminarian, “I want you to bring your traditions to our diocese; your faith to our churches.”

That made a huge impact on Fr. Barrera. He said during his time as a seminarian, Bishop McRaith would show his support and ask if they needed anything in their formation.

“I am and always will be so thankful to Bishop



Bishop McRaith holding up a bottle of tequila, a gift from then-seminarian Julio Barrera, in August 2007. File photo.

John,” Fr. Barrera remarked.

Fr. Ed Bradley was baffled when he was asked to be pastor of St. Stephen Cathedral in 1985. “I had never been a pastor anywhere,” said Fr. Bradley.

His entire experience was centered around education, and most recently as the principal of Owensboro Catholic High School. When he expressed his concern to Bishop McRaith, the bishop exclaimed that he could hire anyone to be a principal, but he couldn’t hire just anyone to be a pastor for the cathedral.

Fr. Bradley decided to give it his all and said, “Those 10 years as pastor were the best years of my life.”

Fr. Bradley said that Bishop McRaith, “Lived his faith so much.”

It was from living out that faith that first led to a soup kitchen in the basement of the cathedral, to a shelter for women and children, to now the Daniel Pitino Shelter and St. Stephen Cathedral Soup Kitchen.



Father Ed Bradley, the 6th principal of Owensboro Catholic High School, is shown here in a 1983 photo talking with Bishop John McRaith. File photo.

‘Love of community’ reflected in Bishop McRaith’s respect for religious life

BY ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC



Bishop McRaith attends the December 1993 groundbreaking for the Passionist nuns’ new chapel in Whitesville. File photo.

The late Bishop John J. McRaith liked to tell a humorous story about the time the cloistered Passionist Nuns of St. Joseph Monastery decided to move from Owensboro into quieter Whitesville.

“Bishop McRaith reported that he said ‘Oh yeah?’” But we have a different memory,” said Sr. Catherine Marie, CP, superior at the time of the nuns’ decision to relocate and add a retreat house

to their ministry.

“We specifically remember him saying, ‘Well, if you wait until you have the money, you will never do anything for the Kingdom of God,’” said Sr. Catherine Marie. Six years later, Bishop McRaith presided at the blessing of the nuns’ new chapel and monastery.

Many religious communities based in the Diocese



Bishop McRaith smiles with Sr. Darlene Presley, who celebrated her final profession of vows and Sr. Kathleen Mulchrone, who celebrated her 50th jubilee, together at the cathedral in June 2008. File photo.

of Owensboro area have fond memories of Bishop McRaith, who died on March 19, 2017.

Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, an Ursuline Sister of Mount St. Joseph, came to know Bishop McRaith not only as a coworker and in his capacity as an Ursuline Associate, but also as a close friend: “He became friends with several of us.”

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Bishop McRaith presides at the final vows of several Passionist nuns on Aug. 6, 2006. File photo.



Shortly after the Glenmary Sisters moved from Cincinnati to Owensboro, Bishop McRaith blessed their Central Office in summer of 1991. In this photo, Bishop McRaith stands beside Sr. Mary Joseph Wade, who is doing a reading during the blessing. Photo courtesy of the Glenmary Sisters.



Religious women celebrating jubilees stand with Bishop McRaith on the steps of St. Stephen Cathedral in April 2005. Photo by Lois Rutigliano

“Deeper than his love of consecrated life was his love for people,” said Sr. Cheryl, adding that the bishop “always respected the sisters he worked with” – many of whom were Ursulines, whose mother-house was located just outside Owensboro.

Sr. Cheryl said Bishop McRaith loved “the idea of community – he was by nature a relational person” and that this was reflected in his respect for religious life.

“He envied the community life,” said Sr. Cheryl. She said when Bishop McRaith was a priest serving in his home Diocese of New Ulm, Minn., there was a time that the pastoral center staff actually lived in the same building and shared chores and other household duties.

When he arrived as third bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro, Bishop McRaith often worked to model the Catholic Pastoral Center’s spirituality on religious life.

“He built in (staff) retreat days, daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours,” said Sr. Cheryl.

Bishop McRaith was responsible for the Home

Mission Sisters of America (also known as Glenmary Sisters) moving their central office from Cincinnati to Owensboro.

He had personally invited the Glenmary Sisters to Owensboro, and blessed their new central office in summer 1991.

Glenmary Sister, Sr. Catherine Schoenborn, said that the late bishop always showed appreciation for their mission work, which often takes the Glenmary Sisters to communities on the margins of society.

“On a personal note, he wrote me to thank me for my ministry work as I moved to help open a new mission area and again to congratulate me on my 60th anniversary as a Glenmary Sister,” said Sr. Catherine.

“Bishop McRaith was a very humble, welcoming man. He welcomed the poor and was very supportive of our missions,” added Sr. Kathleen Mulchrone, while fellow Glenmary, Sr. Darlene Presley, described him as “a gentle giant and a grandfather figure to so many.”

Sr. Sharon Miller, the Glenmary Sisters’ community president, said that when someone was in his presence, “no matter how busy he was, Bishop McRaith made you feel like the most important person on his agenda.”

Sr. Cheryl said Bishop McRaith visited the Mount for celebrations and other events when he was available, including his famous hayrides during the Mount St. Joseph picnic: “He wanted to do something for the picnic, and do something he enjoyed.”

“It was a chance for one-on-one conversation with the bishop,” said Sr. Cheryl of the hayrides, which were originally pulled by the bishop’s two horses, Mike and Maggie. Later on, the horses were replaced by a John Deere tractor, but the hayrides continued for many years.

Bishop McRaith also requested, and was permitted, to be buried in the Mount’s cemetery.

Passionist nun, Sr. Mary Magdalen, CP, remembers the late bishop’s first contact with the Passionist community was actually before his episcopal ordination as bishop of Owensboro.

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Sr. Fran Wilhelm, OSU; Sr. Joseph Angela Boone, OSU; Sr. Rosemary Keough, OSU; and Sr. Elaine Burke, OSU, stand with Bishop McRaith at an anniversary party for Sr. Fran on Aug. 1, 2007. Photo courtesy of Patti Gutiérrez.

The bishop-elect had needed some adjustments made to his alb, and because some of the Passionist sisters did that kind of work, he was brought to their monastery for a consultation.

“Mother Margaret Mary, the superior at the time, met him and asked Sr. Rita Marie to make the adjustments to his alb,” said Sr. Mary Magdalen, and also recalled Fr. McRaith telling the priest accompanying him, “what a blessing for the diocese!” of the cloistered nuns.

“Throughout his time as bishop of the diocese, whenever he came for a visit with the community, or whenever he celebrated Mass for professions, jubilees or funerals, he always expressed his gratitude for having a contemplative community in the diocese, and for our prayer support of the diocese,” she added.

Both Sr. Mary Magdalen and Sr. Catherine Marie recalled a particularly moving occasion of support

for the local religious.

“When Sr. Jeanne Marie, one of the nuns who came from the community in Scranton, Pennsylvania, to found our community in Owensboro, was dying in our infirmary, Bishop McRaith came to visit her,” said Sr. Mary Magdalen.

Sr. Catherine Marie added that the bishop had asked Sr. Jeanne Marie “to pray and offer her sufferings for some of his special intentions that he confided only to her.”

“He obviously understood the interconnectedness of our vocation with that of priests, other religious and laity,” said Sr. Catherine Marie.

Editor’s note: While this story included reflections from several of the religious who served in the diocese during Bishop McRaith’s time, this is not an exhaustive list of the numerous religious whose lives were impacted by the kindly shepherd.



Bishop McRaith “wanted to do something for the picnic, and do something he enjoyed,” remembers Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, of the late bishop’s famous tractor-pulled hayrides at the annual Mount St. Joseph picnic. In this 1997 photo, Bishop McRaith pulls a wagon while waving to an Ursuline Sister. File photo.



Ever happy with his pipe, Bishop McRaith’s picture is taken with several of the Misioneras del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus ad Gentes serving at the time in the Diocese of Owensboro. The occasion was Bishop McRaith’s 80th birthday celebration on Dec. 5, 2014. Photo by Mel Howard.

Mark and the bishop

BY MIKE BOGDAN, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

Only two months after his ordination as the third Bishop of Owensboro, Bishop John McRaith celebrated Mass at Christ the King Church in Madisonville with people with physical and developmental disabilities. At the reception after the liturgy, Bishop John met Mark Vollman and his parents. Bishop John asked Mark's mother, Mary, "What does he do?" Mary said, "Nothing right now." Bishop John said he would see if he could find work for him at the Catholic Pastoral Center. And so it happened.

For Bishop John's entire time here as Bishop of Owensboro, and now under Bishop Medley, Mark has been an employee of the diocese. His original duties included emptying the trash, loading and unloading the

dishwasher, cleaning the stairs (a task accomplished involving large amounts of drama) and running the universe. Due to a stroke he suffered several years ago, his physical responsibilities have been eliminated, so he just runs the universe.

When Mark made the rounds to empty the trash in the various offices, he would sometimes ask the occupant, "Are you busy or not busy?" Bishop John's patience during these encounters was limitless. He

knew that no matter what his answer was, he was in an important meeting which could take some time.

Mark was occasionally the subject of a homily at daily Mass at the Pastoral Center at which he was regularly the Altar Server. In one homily, Bishop John pointed out Mark's practice of talking to Jesus as he wandered the hallways and emptied the trash.

Bishop John suggested that whatever our ministry was in the diocese, we should be communicating likewise.

Mark once drew a picture during a Religious Education class and showed it around at the Pastoral Center. On the bottom of the picture was a bishop with a very large miter. Just above that was a picture of a person. When asked who that was, he explained, "Jesus." Above that was a face with a beard. He said that was "God." Above that was another figure. That was "the Altar Server," which explained how Mark was able to run the universe and still empty the trash.

In 1986, when Bishop John was serving on committees in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the American bishops released a Pastoral Letter on the economy which contained the line, "We believe the person is sacred—the clearest reflec-



Accompanied by his mother, Mary Vollman, Mark Vollman kisses Bishop Emeritus McRaith's hand on the occasion of the bishop's 80th birthday celebration on Dec. 5, 2014. Photo by Mel Howard.



Mark Vollman serves at the March 23, 2005 Chrism Mass at the Owensboro Sportscenter, where Bishop McRaith presided. File photo.

tion of God among us." Those of us who were given the opportunity to work with Bishop John and Mark were privileged to witness that sacred image, that clear reflection of God in the mutual respect and love which characterized their wonderful relationship.

Mike Bogdan is director of music in the Office of Worship.

Under McRaith, diocese paved way for international priests

BY ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

During the homily for the March 24 funeral Mass for Bishop John J. McRaith, Bishop William F. Medley, current bishop of the Diocese of Owensboro, spoke of the international priests who joined the diocese under Bishop McRaith.

“Today, if you visit almost any diocese, you’ll find priests from all over the world who come as missionaries to the United States’ Church,” said Bishop Medley. “Maybe you don’t know that Bishop John was one of the first bishops in this country to prepare our diocese to receive and welcome international priests.”

In a later interview with The Western Kentucky Catholic, Fr. Darrell Venters, pastor of St. Jerome Parish in Fancy Farm, explained that other U.S. dioceses had certainly been welcoming international priests before the Diocese of Owensboro pursued this in the early 2000s.

But what set the western Kentucky diocese ahead was the quality of “acculturation” provided by Bishop McRaith’s leadership.

“Acculturation’... is the process of adapting to another culture through the process of learning about the culture and assimilating it in to one’s life,” said Fr. Venters, who was vicar for clergy and chair of the diocesan priests council when he and the bishop began talking about the possibility of international priests.

Fr. Venters explained that acculturation is not

the abandoning of one’s own culture, “but adapting to the new one.”

“Bishop McRaith was ahead of the curve,” he added.

New home

Fr. Venters said the bishop had considered the upcoming priest retirements and anticipated ordinations in the early 2000s, and realized there would be a significant shortage to serve the numerous parishes across the diocese.

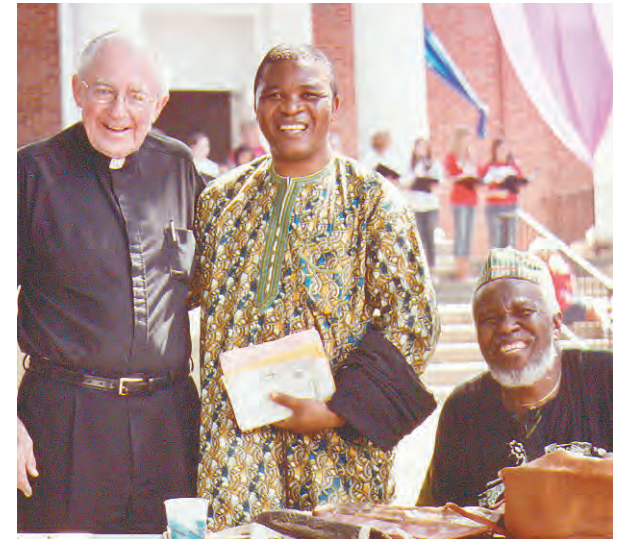
The bishop obtained input from the parishes and deaneries – “we looked at pros and cons,” said Fr. Venters – and the process took a year before getting the green light to bring in international clergy.

Fr. Chrispin Oneko, today the pastor of St. Denis in Fancy Farm, was the first international priest to arrive.

Fr. Oneko, who is from Kenya, told the WKC he interviewed with the bishop in September 2003 and arrived in Kentucky in January 2004 after serving for several years in the Diocese of Mandeville, Jamaica.

(Fr. Oneko said he did not know at the time of his arrival that Owensboro has a “sister diocese” relationship with Mandeville, in which the two share resources and support – but it was a happy coincidence.)

Fr. Oneko said he had always lived in a hot climate prior, and the bitter cold of a Kentucky January



Bishop McRaith visits with Fr. John Okoro at the Nigeria-themed table during the 2005 Multicultural Festival in Owensboro. Also pictured is Jubemi Ogisi, head of Brescia University’s psychology department at the time. Photo by Lois Rutigliano.

was rather shocking. Fortunately, Bishop McRaith, Fr. Venters and Fr. John Vaughan greeted him at the airport with two jackets, “and told me to put them on immediately.”

This early act of welcome set the tone for Fr. Oneko’s new life in western Kentucky. Fr. Oneko first became associate pastor at St. Stephen Cathedral, and lived with Fr. Vaughan and Fr. Anthony Shonis.

“It was a very good community filled with lots of laughter,” he said, adding that Bishop McRaith would come and visit them “quite a lot.”

Fr. Oneko, who often joined the bishop on grocery errands, appreciated the family-like atmosphere, and said the bishop “realized I was far from home and could easily feel homesick.”

“(Bishop McRaith) was so fatherly, very loving, kind, and made me feel at home,” said Fr. Oneko. “He reminded me of my archbishop at home in Kenya.”

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Fr. Oneko said his Kenyan archbishop would sometimes talk on the phone with Bishop McRaith, and the two “got along very well, laughing and conversing.”

‘Just call me Bishop’

Fr. John Okoro, today the pastor of St. William and St. Lawrence Parishes in eastern Daviess County, arrived in Kentucky in January 2005, and was first placed at Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Henderson.

Fr. Okoro said it is appropriate in his Nigerian culture to call bishops “My Lord” or “Your Lordship,” and that he first greeted Bishop McRaith this way upon meeting him during a confirmation at Holy Name.

“He said, ‘No, just call me Bishop,’” said Fr. Okoro, adding that the bishop insisted on carrying his own bags instead of passing them off to someone else.

Fr. Okoro said it was not “a shock, so to speak, but it was different from back home.”

“I knew from his humility, his simplicity... he was a very simple man (and) very down-to-earth,” said Fr. Okoro. “He was always very concerned about how you were doing – especially those of us from other

countries – and how we were adapting to the new culture, the new environment.”

Fr. Okoro said Bishop McRaith was “always available” and easy to approach, and added that like Pope Francis’ recommendation to clergy today, “he smelled like the sheep.”

No discrimination

In preparation for international priests, Fr. Venters said he spoke with several other dioceses’ vicars for clergy and read what resources were available at the time.

He also said the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released guidelines for accepting international ministers in the U.S., but that came out “after we were already inviting them to come here.”

Thanks to Bishop McRaith and Fr. Venters’ careful planning, the Diocese of Owensboro’s acculturation process is remarkably thorough, and other dioceses have since contacted Owensboro for guidance.

Generally, the international priests live with diocesan priests for a period, and are able to study for the driver’s test, learn diocesan policies and take care of other necessities. The priests also attend an accul-

turation program, and when applicable, an accent reduction component.

Fr. Oneko said he was formally introduced to all of the priests shortly after his arrival, when attending convocation at Lake Barkley. He remembers Bishop McRaith telling his fellow priests: “You have to help Chrispin, he’s also learning. Don’t discriminate against him.”

As a result, Fr. Oneko said he is thankful not to have encountered discrimination in the many years serving in the diocese.

Fr. Oneko said he remembers Bishop McRaith greeting him and saying “Fr. Chrispin, you have been a good man and have paved the way for other international priests. If things didn’t work out well with you, maybe the diocese would have been discouraged (from more international priests).”

But Fr. Oneko knows the success of this project – with 12 international priests in the diocese today, and counting – was largely due to Bishop McRaith.

“He reminded me that I have a ‘father’ who is my bishop, and ready to give advice whenever possible,” said Fr. Oneko.



In this photo, Bishop McRaith attends a RENEW meeting at St. Anthony Parish in Axtel in 1984. File photo.

Bishop McRaith’s dedication to the laity produced lay ministry programs, RENEW

When Bishop John J. McRaith arrived in the Diocese of Owensboro in 1982, he brought with him a passion for developing lay ministry. He realized that many Catholics in ministry lacked the basic formation to minister to others, and wanted to change that. This was a primary factor in launching RENEW as the first diocesan program under his administration in order to strengthen and further develop the laity in their Catholic faith, spirituality and ministries. In addition to RENEW, Bishop McRaith was deeply involved and in support of Brescia University’s lay ministry program, which formed lay leaders for many years.

Bishop McRaith loved the land, local farm community, as gifts from the Creator

BY TINA KASEY, THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

To say farming was in his blood is no understatement for the late Bishop John J. McRaith. He was born and raised on a farm in Hutchinson, Minn. with his primary education taking place in a one-room schoolhouse. He expressed his love and concern for rural life and farming families as he was appointed co-director and then director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (now Catholic Rural Life) in 1972 and 1975 respectively.

According to Catholic Rural Life's website, "McRaith inspired many during those years not to give up on the rural church, insisting that food and land and other natural resources must be understood and treated as gifts from a loving Creator to meet the needs of all."

Bishop McRaith remained close to farmers in the Diocese of Owensboro when he was appointed Bishop in 1982.

In 2003, local farmer, the late Rick Kamuf, and Bishop McRaith worked with the diocesan rural life committee to found what is now known as the annual Rural Life Celebration. This event awards a humanitarian of the year, provides a free meal for attendees with locally-grown food, and reviews local agriculture.

Bishop McRaith spoke at the event saying, "How to steward the gift of land is one of the most serious

issues facing this world."

He then went on to say, supporting small farming is important. "If the power that goes with owning land is in the hands of very few people - the temptation may be to misuse that power for their own gain at the expense of others."

Bishop McRaith easily correlated the impact the farming community had on a global level. "We also see the importance of care for that land, since these same acres of land will have to feed people for only God knows how long."

In September 2009, the committee gave the then-retired Bishop McRaith the Lifetime Achievement Award. At the event, attended by several hundred attendees, 14 people spoke in front of the crowd about personal experiences with Bishop McRaith.

One of those speakers was Bill Kuegel, local farmer and friend of Bishop McRaith. Kuegel and the bishop spent a lot of time together, discussing farming concerns and life in general. The Western Kentucky Catholic approached Kuegel after the bishop's passing, asking him to reflect upon their friendship and working relationship.

Here is what he had to say.

"Bishop McRaith was the kindest, gentlest, and most considerate person I've ever met. He was so sweet and persistent about the future of the human



Bishop McRaith sitting in his tractor. File photo.



Bishop Emeritus McRaith, conferred the diocesan rural life committee's Lifetime Achievement Award to Bill Kuegel on Aug. 8, 2010. File photo.

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race. A top concern of his was the farmer, God's steward of His creation.

He was raised on a farm in Minnesota and he would tell me about the cold weather. He and his brothers had to chop the frozen silage out of the silo and then would throw it down to the cows. The temperature would be 30 degrees below zero sometimes.

He would tell me about the man in charge of his schooling and how every year this man will come around and try to move Bishop McRaith toward becoming a priest.

'I didn't want to be a priest at the time but every year I would get closer to the calling God was leading me to and eventually, through this man's guidance, I ended up a priest,' the bishop told me once.

I think the bishop loved me and he loved my wife and family almost as much as I did, which was a great joy for us. He was loving, caring, pleasant, and

always friendly, not only to me, but to everybody he met.

He was concerned about the future of farming. He had a great fear about agriculture becoming too large. I remember telling him once about a farmer who had 10,000 acres in southern Illinois, another 10,000 acres in central Illinois, and another 10,000 acres in northern Illinois, and that the farmer formed all of this with one set of equipment.

I could tell during the discussion he was not pleased with this. And after he thought for a moment he asked me, 'Bill, when is enough, enough?' I had really never thought about that, but the thought of giant agriculture made him very unhappy. He was afraid that once agriculture became too big, it would affect the price to the consumers and there would be even more poor people in this country than existed at that time.

The only thing that came close to his concern for the poor was the small family farm and its preservation. This was one of the concerns that he had when he started the celebration of rural life which became one of his passions. Rick Kamuf worked with the bishop very closely on this project and they loved spending time together. Those two are probably more alike than anybody else that I knew.

I can't find enough words in my simple mind to describe the bishop. I've met a lot of people, including presidents, senators, governors and representatives, but no one who has had more of an influence on my life than Bishop McRaith. He was a person so Christ-like, you just had to love him.

I am sorry that all of you could not have known Bishop McRaith as I did. He was my friend whom I greatly admired."



Betty Medley-Wallace (former director of family life) and her father, Marion Cecil of Cecil Farms, pose with Bishop McRaith for a picture in 2008. File photo.



Bishop McRaith giving Mike Thompson and others a ride on his wagon pulled by his horses, Mike and Maggie in 2002. Photo by Lois Rutigliano.



Rick Kamuf is pictured here with Jeff Nalley in the background at the first rural life celebration for farmers in 2003. File photo.

Greatly missed, greatly loved: Past and present staff remember Bishop McRaith

Editor's Note: The WKC asked past and present staff of the McRaith Catholic Center/Catholic Pastoral Center for their favorite memories and reflections about Bishop McRaith.

An honor and a privilege

Mary Margaret Drury, diocesan bookkeeper and personal assistant to Bishop McRaith

One of the first things I picked up on from the bishop was his non-judgmental attitude toward everyone. He made everyone feel special and everyone was special to him. It has been an honor and a privilege to know Bishop John, to work with him, and for him, and care for him for 34-plus years. Bishop, save a place for me.

Living hug

Patty Blair, former lay ministry and formation director



Mary Margaret Drury, Donna Biggs and Bishop Emeritus McRaith at Mary Margaret's 50th anniversary of working for the Diocese of Owensboro, on May 10, 2016. Photo by Elizabeth Wong Barnstead.

I had the blessed privilege of serving the diocese under Bishop John McRaith. He truly loved the people of western Kentucky and treated his staff like family. He would always greet us with that sweet smile and a living hug. Most days started with Bishop John celebrating Mass for the staff. A special memory for me was around the death of my mother. She was in the hospital for the last time and I spent much of my time by her side. I dropped by the office and saw Bishop John. I apologized for taking time off from work. He gently told me that the diocese would still be here, but I only had a few days left with my mother and that was where I needed to be. When my family and I walked into the church for her funeral, there stood Bishop John. I was so touched that he took time out of his busy schedule to be with us during our time of grief. He was truly a man of the people, walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

Good mood

Carolyn Howard, Bishop McRaith's second administrative assistant

No matter what was going on, he always would come into the office in a good mood. He was always smiling and would stop by the different offices and chat with whomever was in there. If he got to our office before I did, he would turn on my lamp for me. If I got to the office before he did, he would come in



Bishop McRaith talks with coworker and friend, Sr. Joseph Angela Boone, OSU, during the jubilee celebration for religious sisters on Sept. 15, 2007. Photo by Larena Lawson.

and say, "Carolina!" like he was so happy to see me every day. He sure made me feel especially special and he indeed had a gift to make everyone feel that way! I truly could go on and on. He was an amazing human being. I feel truly blessed that I and my family (my kids called him Daddy Too) got to know him, work with him, and most important pray with him through the years. We miss him very much!

Father to us all

Betty Medley-Wallace, formerly served in Catholic schools office and family life office

The one thing I remember and was so touching to me as a new hire was in the mornings when Bishop John would come to work the staff would gather



Ginny Knight-Simon, left, with Bishop McRaith at the Sept. 24, 2001 Sophia Awards Mass at St. Stephen Cathedral in Owensboro. File photo.

in the chapel for morning prayer. After prayer he would make it a point if at all possible to stop in everyone's office to say a few words and see how we were doing that day. His deep sincerity and concern he had toward all of us that made me feel he was like a "father" to all of us. As I continued to work there throughout the years he became close to not just my family but all those who worked there. All of our families have stories of the parties at the trailer, the horses and hayrides. When we would gather together we always began with Mass. This may be outside on his porch, in the garage or in his living room. Mass was such an important part of Bishop John and we celebrated as family each and every time we came together. Bishop John continued to stay a part of my life and my family's even after he retired. One of my last favorite memories of Bishop John was when he and my dad (who is a resident at the Carmel Home) sat together and talked about old times. They laughed and cried together as they discussed growing older and where they were in life at that time. Both hard workers who loved the land,

caring, kind and faithful servants. Bishop John was indeed a good and faithful servant and I will never forget the opportunity he gave me at that time in my life. He will always hold a special place in my heart.

New superintendent

Jim Mattingly, superintendent of the Office of Catholic Schools

Fourteen years ago, I was asked to see Bishop John about the job of superintendent. I hadn't been a superintendent before, so I needed some time to think about it. I asked Bishop John if I could think about it for a month. Bishop John said, "I don't care how long you think about it, as long as you take it!"

Growing

Elaine Thomas, administrative assistant in Office of Administration

I heard Bishop John say more than once, "If nothing else grows, weeds will grow."

Love for Catholic schools

Ann Flaherty, assistant superintendent of the Office of Catholic Schools

I had never physically encountered a real bishop before I met Bishop John Jeremiah McRaith. Those encounters happened by virtue of being employed at Owensboro Catholic High School. Mr. Harold Staples, OCHS principal, had asked Bishop McRaith to lead morning prayer every year on St. Patrick's Day. Bishop McRaith was invited every year to Agriculture Day at OCHS and was able to come to some of these days throughout the years. Bishop McRaith loved celebrating the Rainbow Mass for all of our Catholic schools every other year. Bishop McRaith awarded OCHS students their diplomas each year during the graduation ceremony. After graduation

each year Bishop McRaith invited OCHS faculty and staff to a meal at his house in St. Raphael. He would listen intently to us, smoking his pipe at the head of the table as we shared stories and laughter. After I was hired for my current job working in McRaith Catholic Center, I learned of the unbelievable blessing of a bishop saying almost daily Mass here. I literally was able to "sit at his feet" and learn from him as he interpreted the Gospel for the day, receive the Body of Christ from his hands and receive the sign of Christ's peace directly from him.

Planting potatoes

Donna Sauer Miller, civil and canon lawyer formerly serving in Diocese of Owensboro tribunal (Note: Bishop McRaith commissioned Donna to study canon law at St. Paul University in Ottawa 2001-2004.)

One of my fondest memories of Bishop John occurred when I worked in the marriage tribunal. Shortly after lunch on a spring Friday afternoon in 2005, he came into my cubicle and asked what I was doing later in the afternoon. I had no plans, so he told me to come out to the trailer at St. Raphael as soon as I could get away. After checking with my



Bishop McRaith celebrates Mass in the pastoral center chapel in December 2007. Photo by Mel Howard.

boss, Fr. Mike Clark—who told me I did not need his permission since the bishop was his boss also—I drove out to the country “estate.” Upon arriving, I promptly learned that I was tapped to help plant potatoes in the freshly tilled garden. Having come from the office, I clearly was not dressed for such an earthy task. But our resourceful shepherd graciously offered me a pair of his overalls. Most women can imagine my panic at not knowing whether I could squeeze into the slender man’s garment. Luckily, the proverbial shoe fit, so I wore it. We had a lovely time planting potatoes, but mostly I enjoyed his stories of performing such down-home tasks as a young Irish lad in Minnesota. Now he enjoys Heaven’s abundant gardens.

Friend and spiritual mentor

Louanne Payne, director of Diocese of Owensboro tribunal

Where do I begin when it comes to Bishop John Jeremiah McRaith? The word “loving” immediately comes to mind. He truly loved like no other person I have ever known. I am inspired to be a better person because of what he taught me by word and example. There are many stories and lessons that I could share but one of the greatest lessons he ever taught me was when I was going through a very difficult time when my mom died. I went to Bishop John, whom I considered a dear friend and spiritual mentor, worried that I could not pray because I was so consumed by grief. Returning to work even seemed unbearable to me at that point in my life. One of the things I can still hear him saying to me is, “That’s okay. It is at times like these that we are praying for you and that is enough. You don’t have to do it alone.” Another invaluable lesson he taught me that day was to give myself permission to be where I am and feel what I

feel and not to expect too much out of myself. I will always be thankful to God and my life will forever be changed by the incredible blessing of having been loved by Bishop John Jeremiah McRaith!

Wednesday evenings

Bill Blincoe, director of the School Food Service Office

I had the opportunity to meet Bishop John for the first time in October 2014 when I joined the staff of the McRaith Catholic Center. I immediately felt his sincerity – his raw honesty... Not long after we met, I began visiting with Bishop John periodically through the week but always on Wednesday evenings... Perhaps we both instinctively realized that our time was limited – and so, it was – way too short. We wasted no time getting to know each other, our families, our past, our hopes and fears... We talked politics, sports, likes and dislikes and we agreed that we were both blessed beyond words. Through our friendship, I was fortunate enough to develop a relationship with Bishop John’s family and closest friends. The fruit didn’t fall far from the tree – his family and circle of friends reflect his approach, manner and values. I miss him so – we all miss him so – however I feel blessed to have my time with him and be counted among the thousands/tens-of-thousands of people that he touched in his life and thought of him as their best friend. Miss ya’ buddy...

Welcoming

Sister Joseph Angela Boone, OSU, former director of administration

He was the most welcoming individual, no matter who you were. You were the only person in his presence at that time. I had a nephew who was a priest in another diocese, and when passing through



With friends Sr. Amelia Stenger, OSU, and Mary Margaret Drury, Bishop McRaith stands behind a bench at Mount St. Joseph which Drury had ordered and had engraved in honor of his 25th anniversary in 2007. File photo.



Patty Blair talks with Bishop McRaith at the May 16, 2008 staff day at Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center. File photo.



Bishop McRaith and Carolyn Howard during the "infamous" garage door opener incident. File photo.

Owensboro he stopped at the Catholic Pastoral Center to meet up with me. I said, "Do you want to go meet Bishop John?" He said, "You don't have to make an appointment?" You could visit with Bishop John without an appointment. You never felt like you were invading his privacy... I really feel privileged that he hired me when he did.

Stories

Cathy Hagan, administrative assistant in the Office of Stewardship

Where to start? I guess back in 1985 when I began working at the Catholic Pastoral Center. My first morning on the job, bright and early, a head poked around the door frame. It was none other than Bishop John. He had a warm smile and welcomed me to the pastoral center. What a way to start a new job! I had been here for about a little over a year when my mom became ill with cancer. She was in the hospital for about two weeks before she died. One day I was sitting at my desk and Bishop John walked by. He asked me what I was doing at work. I told him that

I felt that if I was not at the hospital I should be at work. He said that is when you go home and get some rest. Mom died on Christmas Day and Bishop John was home in Minnesota visiting with family and could not get here for the funeral. He called our family that night and talked with each one of us and told us he loved us. He was a man of great love! We had overnight staff days at Mount St. Joseph once a year. During that time there was nothing he loved more than for us to share our stories. He wanted to know where we came from and how we came to be at the pastoral center. He took such delight in listening to our stories. He fully believed that each one of us was placed here by God. He was right. I feel so privileged to have worked with him and to have shared in his life story.

Sense of humor

Gayle Strehl, switchboard operator for 20 years

Bishop John had such a sense of humor. His office used to be by the elevator and he could see his house that he shared with Fr. John Vaughan at the time. Once, they got a new garage door opener and the remote worked from Bishop John's office. (All of the staff) watched out the window and when Fr. John opened the garage, (Bishop John) shut it with the garage door opener. (This happened several times in a row.) We all got a big laugh out of that. He was funny and he liked that kind of stuff... Also, he was very good to my husband when he was sick and said Mass at our house. He came to the hospital to see Phil several times. He was so joyfully devoted to visiting the sick.

A bishop with email

Matt Monsour, former diocesan technology coordinator

My first real interaction with Bishop John was when he took my Christian Leadership Institute (CLI) group for a hayride. I was 15 and didn't know much, but I knew bishops weren't supposed to drive tractors and live in doublewide trailers! Seven years later I learned more about our beloved bishop. To my surprise this farmer-bishop was forward-thinking enough to employ a technology coordinator for the diocese. He needed a new one and this green college grad with a computer science degree needed a job. Bishop John took a chance and hired me. Among the many things I would soon learn was that Bishop John actually didn't like computers! But, he insisted on using one anyway and checking his own email. A bishop having email was unheard of 2002! More than once when I called in after hours, expecting to dial an extension into the automated system, Bishop John answered the phone! He had the phone system set to ring to his phone after hours so, if at all possible, no one who called a church needing help would have to listen to a machine. These are a few small



Gayle Strehl receives ashes from Bishop-Emeritus McRaith in the pastoral center chapel on Feb. 13, 2013 – Ash Wednesday. Photo by Mel Howard.



On Sept. 22, 2005, Ben Warrell, Melinda Prunty, Bishop McRaith and Sr. Joseph Angela Boone, OSU, smile for a picture with a \$100 bill – the first donation to the future youth camp fund. Photo by Mel Howard.

examples of the humble farmer-bishop's care for his people and responsible management of his diocese. Little did I know I would call the bishop who drove a tractor my friend.

Walked the walk

Ginny Knight-Simon, former director of the Office of Wisdom

For 21 years I was the coordinator of the Office of Wisdom, a senior citizen ministry. That was (Bishop McRaith's) special project. On Wisdom Day, Bishop John came and talked with everyone and had lunch with them. He had a really big heart for the senior citizens... He was all for the downtrodden, the homeless, agriculture and he was a wonderful steward. For a while he lived in a house on Locust Street that had a hole in the floor. He was not only a man for the Catholic Church; he was a man for the whole community. Everyone knew him, and he will be remembered as the man who walked the walk.

Uncommon, common man

Karen Jarboe, former administrative assistant in

the Office of Catholic Schools

I met Bishop John in the fall of 1992, after I was offered the position of administrative assistant in the Catholic Schools Office for the Diocese of Owensboro. A few days after accepting the job, I was introduced to Bishop John at the Mount St. Joseph annual picnic. He was driving a tractor, pulling a trailer full of people. He stopped long enough to shake my hand and welcome me on board. Little did I know that the short encounter would tell me volumes about the man I would come to know as shepherd and friend... He prayed with us often. Any day he was in town, he would join a small group for morning prayer, then celebrate Mass for anyone who wanted to attend. He once told me, "If we're too busy to pray, we need to close the doors." The short homilies presented at these daily liturgies provided an insight to his deep faith and love of God... I've recently heard Bishop John described as an "uncommon, common man." How accurate a picture this phrase paints of the good friend I was blessed to know for almost 25 years. I miss him, but rejoice in the fact that he "fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith."

'God's got this'

Martha Hagan, vice-chancellor and administrative assistant to Bishop Medley

God has a way of placing in our lives the people we most need. Bishop McRaith is one of those people for me. I was privileged to work for him for many years. He taught me great lessons about living a life that is simple, generous, other-centered, accepting, and, most of all, rooted deeply in a relationship with Jesus. He had the beautiful gift of seeing Christ in every person – even (maybe especially) those who disagreed with him, who were unkind to



Bishop McRaith's second administrative assistant, Carolyn Howard, stands in front of the bishop and his tractor at the 2007 Mount St. Joseph picnic in Maple Mount. File photo.

him, and even stole from him. Bishop John played a large, supporting role in my efforts to adopt both of my daughters from China as a single mother. He was there through the long adoption processes to remind me that yes, I was crazy but that God has a long history of asking people to do crazy things. Many of my memories of Bishop John are so simple – his easy smile, the smell of his pipe, his chuckle, his stories, wagon rides, popping into my office just to say hello. I still talk to him regularly, and I can still hear him say, "Aw, honey. It'll be fine. God's got this." God has you now, Bishop John, and all is certainly fine. Rest well.

Open to the Holy Spirit

Melinda Prunty, former director of the Office of Youth Ministry (Note: Melinda now serves as a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives representing the 15th district.)

I am humbled when I think about the distinct

honor and privilege it was to have the confidence of Bishop John to hire me to work in the Office for Youth Ministry, first as associate director and then as director for a total of nearly 20 years. He taught me so much about humility, respecting privacy, loyalty, friendship and family. He didn't always know how to take me, but he trusted me and always remained open to the Holy Spirit in all things. Together our greatest accomplishment was and is Gasper River Catholic Youth Camp and Retreat Center. Along the way we had many other adventures: CLI, NCCY, Youth 2000 and more... I have never been sorry that I joined the Catholic Church and I am so glad Bishop John was a part of that amazing commitment I made in my life and how that has all played out these past almost 30 years. I pray he will do what he can from heaven to continue to make this world a better place and intercede on my behalf personally. There aren't enough words to express the love and gratitude I feel for him and about him. He will truly be missed.



Cathy Hagan smiles with Bishop McRaith during his 80th birthday celebration at the newly-renamed McRaith Catholic Center on Dec. 5, 2014. Photo by Mel Howard.



The Daviess County Quilting Group which meets weekly at the Catholic Pastoral Center to make quilts primarily for hospice gave Bishop Emeritus McRaith a quilt with two dozen photos of the bishop from his boyhood in New Ulm, Minn., to the present day. The group delivered the quilt on Oct. 31, 2012 before the bishop was scheduled to have back surgery in Louisville. In this picture, Fr. Mike Clark leads prayer for healing with Bishop Emeritus McRaith, diocesan staff and the quilters. On the quilt was inscribed: "In appreciation for all that you have done in our Diocese of Owensboro and Western Kentucky. In celebration of your 78th birthday and your 30th anniversary as Bishop. May this quilt keep you warm on the inside as well as the outside. May God bless you with His peace." *This photo originally appeared in the Dec. 2012 issue of the WKC.*

Unconditional friend

Luis Aju, Sr., former director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry

Dear Bishop John,
Rest in peace, after your many years as Bishop of our Diocese of Owensboro, KY. You have left a high legacy of your episcopal ministry, as well as a person highly known for great virtues as a person and as a good shepherd. Bishop John, for many of us you are a father, a counselor, but above all an unconditional friend who made no difference from people. Your love, your compassion for the sick and the poor was unconditional. You emphasized and encouraged us, as well as managed our talents with others. Your favorite word was always "stewardship," that everyone is responsible for managing the use of their talents in the service for others. It is highly admirable, your example of love for all. The work of love will always

be in the hearts and minds of many men and women with whom you shared your lifetime. Bishop John, a thousand thanks for receiving everyone in the diocese, without making any distinction because we are all children of God. Peace and love in your new life that God our Creator has given you. We will always love you.

Good steward

Kevin Kauffeld, chancellor

Bishop John McRaith, a man that had an uncanny way of laughing and lighting a pipe all at the same time and all the while paying close attention to every word his visitor would be saying. That's the memory I will always have of the man that gave me the opportunity to work in the Church, but more specifically, learn about to living as good steward. Even if you didn't specifically understand the basic

tenets of stewardship, giving of your time, talent and treasure, all one needed to do was watch how Bishop John lived his life. From the numerous times he joined the staff for daily morning prayer to the many



Bishop McRaith shakes the hand of Ernie Taliaferro, diocesan CFO, during a Christmas party with the seminarians at SS. Joseph and Paul Parish, Owensboro, in winter 2007. File photo.



Bishop Emeritus McRaith greets Richard Murphy, diocesan director of social concerns, and Murphy's grandson, Breandan, in 2014. File photo.

miles driven to celebrate the many Masses, special events, confirmations, ordinations and the lists goes on, Bishop John's time was our time. Bishop John found great joy in celebrating the Mass, always a priest, first. If you knew Bishop John, you know that he was the neighborhood contact for a few bucks for anyone willing to come and knock at his door. Even in his later years, at the bemoaning of many of his friends, he kept giving away his treasure even at the risk of his own safety. He is quoted as saying, "I can't stop giving for fear of missing that one person that may actually need it."

Kind to every person

Donna Biggs, administrative assistant in the Office of Faith Formation

Bishop John was the most kind and gracious person that I had ever met. I learned so much from him about how to be kind to every person. He always said, "You never know what that person is going through in their life." One of my many memories of him is when I took my two sons to visit him at St. Raphael and my youngest son, Ben, saw one of the many stray cats that hung around out there. He asked Bishop John if he could have one of the cats and Bishop John said, "Of course you can and I'll even put it in the car for you!" Well, needless to say that started my son's love of cats and we've had them ever since. Ben has never forgotten where he got the first cat that we named "Sparkles!" On a more serious note, Bishop John always loved celebrating Mass and Mary Margaret Drury and I had the honor of attending the very last Mass he celebrated. That will always remain in our hearts as a gift from God as he was a special gift from God to the people of the Diocese of Owensboro. He is so missed and much loved!

Did you know? The bishop with a trailer



Good friend Robertus Murphy, Bishop McRaith, and another friend barbeque chickens at the bishop's St. Raphael farm property during a Sept. 24, 1990 picnic. File photo.

St. Raphael's property on the western side of Owensboro once housed a Catholic church and a school. Over time, both closed due to number of parishioners and availability of priests, but the property remained. Enter Minnesota farm boy Bishop McRaith, seeking a home away from home to enjoy the beauty of God's creation and grow a garden. It was not long after the bishop's 1982 arrival in the Diocese of Owensboro that he put a mobile home out there. Eventually a double-wide trailer followed, as well as a good-sized shed. St. Raphael's came to be known as a place for casual, barbeque-picnic gatherings of friends, families, diocesan staff, parish groups, youth group visits, and much more, naturally including a wagon ride pulled by either the bishop's horses, Mike and Maggie, or his tractor.

El Obispo McRaith estableció un camino para nosotros seguir

Mi estimado pueblo de Dios,

En las semanas desde el fallecimiento del Obispo Juan Jeremías McRaith, he sido el recipiente de muchos mensajes expresando pésames y bondad. Han llegado desde tan lejos como de la Santa Sede, expresando el apoyo de las oraciones del Papa Francisco y de tan cerca como de las personas que me encuentran en la calle o en la tienda.

El Obispo Juan tenía una capacidad increíble de hacer a todos sentirse muy importantes y valorados. Para él, eso no era nada simulado ni un acto aprendido de relaciones públicas, sino una manifestación humilde de su preocupación genuina por el prójimo. Sí, poseía una extraordinaria conexión con cientos de personas, había visitado sus hogares, conocía a sus hijos, nietos y sabía sus “historias.”

Él se había encontrado con miles de personas y verdaderamente veía el valor en cada uno de ellas. Sin embargo, aunque solo se podía haber encontrado con alguien en una ocasión, y quizás no había memorizado su nombre, su afecto y cariño no era menor. Y siguiendo el espíritu de los evangelios, le daba mucha importancia a los que el mundo no aprecia mucho, los “más pequeños entre nosotros,” para recordar las palabras de Jesús.

Aunque nació en Minnesota, el Obispo Juan verdaderamente se sentía en casa aquí en Kentucky occidental, por una gran parte porque creció en un rancho en una parte rural de Minnesota. Su fuerte apoyo hacia la comunidad agrícola le venía directamente de su propio amor por la tierra.

El Obispo Juan estuvo a la delantera en dar la bienvenida a los sacerdotes internacionales para servir en nuestras parroquias y cuando la gente decía “es que hablan raro” él diría, “¿Qué quieres decir? ¡Ustedes tienen un acento!” (A él nunca le pegó fuerte el acento de Kentucky, aunque al final de todo se hizo



El Obispo Medley y el Obispo McRaith sonríen durante la celebración y dedicación del Boone Lodge en el Campamento Juvenil y Centro de Retiros de Gasper River en agosto del 2014.

un hijo adoptivo de Kentucky.)

El día del funeral del Obispo Juan, mientras miraba a la Catedral que se llenaba hasta que ya no había donde sentarse, me di cuenta que muchísima de esta gente contaba al Obispo Juan como un apreciado amigo.

Mientras que la procesión fúnebre estaba en ruta hacia el Monte San José, donde le íbamos a sepultar, cientos de personas se detenían en tributo silencioso al lado de tractores, herramientas agrícola y hasta máquinas grandes de cortar césped. Fue un reconocimiento de su amor a la tierra y aún más de su amor a la gente de la tierra. Aquel homenaje en silencio fue una de las cosas más conmovedoras que he visto.

Para nosotros que estamos de luto por la muerte del Obispo Juan, el camino que hay que recorrer es el que nos enseñó. Aunque no sabemos lo que viene en nuestro camino, si fijamos nuestra mirada en Jesús llegaremos a donde anhelamos llegar.

Obispo William F. Medley
Diócesis de Owensboro



El Padre Julio Barrera y el Obispo McRaith. Foto de los archivos.

Pastoreando el rebaño de Kentucky occidental

El Padre Julio Barrera tuvo una conexión singular con el Obispo Juan J. McRaith desde el principio.

El Padre Barrera, de México, fue aceptado para entrar al seminario a través de la Diócesis de Owensboro sin ni siquiera haber visitado a la diócesis y sin una entrevista actual con el obispo. Lo que el P. Barrera sí tiene es un correo electrónico del Padre Andy Garner, director vocacional en aquel entonces, dejándole saber que el obispo le daba la bienvenida a la Diócesis y al seminario en los Estados Unidos.

Cuando el P. Barrera conoció al Obispo McRaith en diciembre del 2006, a través de un intérprete, el obispo le dijo al seminarista, “Quiero que traigas tus tradiciones a nuestra diócesis; tu fe a nuestras iglesias.”

Esto tuvo un gran impacto en el P. Barrera. Dijo que durante su tiempo como seminarista, el Obispo McRaith le mostraba su apoyo y preguntaba si le hacía falta algo en su formación.

“Estoy y siempre estaré agradecido por el Obispo Juan,” comentó el P. Barrera.



Querido Obispo John,

Descanse en paz , después de sus muchos años como Obispo de nuestra Diócesis de Owensboro, KY.

Usted ha dejado un alto legado, de su ministerio Episcopal, como también una persona altamente conocido por sus grandes virtudes en su vida como persona y como un buen pastor. Obispo John, para muchos de nosotros usted es un padre, un consejero, pero sobre todo un amigo incondicional que no hizo diferencias de las personas. Su amor, su compasión hacia los enfermos y pobres fue incondicional. Usted nos recalco y nos animo, administrar nuestros talentos con los demás, su palabra favorita siempre fue el Stewardship, que cada quien es responsable de administrar el uso de sus talentos al servicio de los demás. Es altamente loable su ejemplo de amor para todos. Sus obras de amor estarán siempre en el corazón y mente de muchos hombres y mujeres con quienes compartió su tiempo de vida en el tiempo y espacio que lo tuvimos. Obispo Juan, mil gracias por recibir a todos en la Diócesis, sin hacer ninguna distinción, todos somos hijos de Dios. Paz y bien en su nueva vida que Dios nuestro creador le ha dado. Siempre lo amaremos.

Luis Aju

El Obispo McRaith encantaba la tierra, los agricultores, como dones del Creador

POR TINA KASEY, EL CATÓLICO DE KENTUCKY OCCIDENTAL

El finado Obispo Juan J. McRaith conocía bien de la agricultura. Nació y fue criado en un rancho en Hutchinson, Minnesota y su educación primaria fue en una escuela de un solo salón. Expresó su amor y preocupación por la vida rural y las familias agrícolas mientras servía como co-director y después como director de la Conferencia Católica Nacional de la Vida Rural (ahora La Vida Rural Católica) en los 1970s.

El Obispo McRaith siempre permaneció cerca a los agricultores en la Diócesis de Owensboro desde cuando fue nombrado obispo en 1982.

En 2003, agricultor local, el finado Rick Kamuf, y el Obispo McRaith trabajaron con el comité diocesano de vida rural para fundar lo que ahora se conoce como la Celebración Anual de la Vida Ru-

ral. Este evento otorga un premio cada año, provee una comida gratuita a los asistentes del evento con la cosecha local y se trata de la agricultura local.

El Obispo McRaith habló en el evento diciendo, “Cómo administrar el don de la tierra es uno de los asuntos más serio que enfrentamos en este mundo.”

El Obispo McRaith relacionaba con facilidad el impacto que la comunidad agrícola tenía a nivel global. “Vemos también la importancia de cuidar la tierra, porque estas mismas hectáreas tienen que alimentar a la gente por un tiempo que solamente Dios conoce.”

En septiembre del 2009, el Obispo McRaith ya jubilado recibió el Premio de Reconocimiento a la Trayectoria del comité de la vida rural.

La Oficina de Ministerio Hispano fue establecida bajo McRaith

En 1997, el Obispo Juan J. McRaith estableció una Oficina de Ministerio Hispano en la Diócesis de Owensboro. Desde aquel entonces, y ahora bajo la dirección del Obispo William F. Medley, el ministerio a los Hispanos y Latinos ha florecido en Kentucky occidental.

La Hermana Fran “Panchita” Wilhelm, OSU, directora del Centro Latino, un centro de recursos en Owensboro para Latinos locales, dijo que está agradecida por el apoyo del Obispo McRaith en los primeros años de empezar este ministerio: “Él nos animaba mucho por lo que hacíamos y nos agradeció por tomar la iniciativa.”

Patti Gutiérrez, una de los miembros fundadores de la oficina de ministerio hispano, dijo que el obispo finado fue “muy social y le encantaba estar con la gente,” y que la barrera del lenguaje no le molestaba (no podía hablar español).



En esta foto del 11 de marzo del 2008, el Obispo McRaith participa en un evento del Ministerio Hispano con varias familias en el Centro de Pastoral Católico. Foto por cortesía de Luis Ajú.

El director anterior de la Oficina de Ministerio Hispano, Luis Ajú, menciona que está agradecido al Obispo McRaith “por recibir a todos en la diócesis, sin hacer distinciones porque todos somos hijos de Dios.”

En seguida se encuentran fotos de los muchos eventos del Ministerio Hispano que se llevaron a cabo durante la administración del Obispo McRaith.

Continúa en la última página

Se recuerda al Obispo Juan J. McRaith por su ‘impacto profundo’ a la gente de Kentucky occidental

POR ELIZABETH WONG BARNSTEAD, EL CATÓLICO DE KENTUCKY OCCIDENTAL



Guardado por algunos de sus compañeros de agricultura, el ataúd del Obispo Juan J. McRaith procesa alrededor de Owensboro en una carreta llevada por su propio tractor, lo cual fue un regalo de la gente de la diócesis en su 20 aniversario en 2002. Atrás de la carreta un letrero decía: “Gracias por su apoyo a la comunidad agricultura.” Foto por Elizabeth Wong Barnstead/WKC.

El clima nublado y lluvioso del 23 de marzo del 2017 no afectó a la gente que se detuvieron en el camino desde la Funeraria Glenn a la Catedral de San Esteban en Owensboro.

Se congregaron para despedirse por última vez de su querido pastor, figura paterna y amigo de una cantidad innumerable de personas en la Diócesis de Owensboro, Kentucky: el Obispo Juan Jeremías McRaith, quien sirvió a la diócesis desde diciembre del 1982 al enero del 2009.

Acompañado por cinco agricultores, el ataúd del Obispo McRaith procesó a través del pueblo en una carreta llevada por un tractor; un gesto hacia sus raíces agrícolas de Minnesota y su amor a la tierra de toda su vida.

De hecho, el tractor mismo fue un regalo al obispo de la gente de la diócesis, quienes juntaron fondos para comprárselo en su 20 aniversario como obispo en 2002.

La procesión pasó por la Escuela Primaria Católica de Owensboro en su Campus 4-6 y también pasó a la Escuela

Secundaria Católica de Owensboro, donde todos los alumnos salieron para pararse a la orilla de la calle.

Cuando la procesión llegó a la Catedral de San Esteban, los agricultores levantaron el ataúd del Obispo McRaith de la carreta y lo transfirieron a las manos de varios sacerdotes diocesanos. Los sacerdotes lo llevaron por las escaleras de la catedral donde fue recibido por el Obispo William F. Medley, quien hizo la aspersión con agua bendita.

Enseguida celebraron una Misa para Difunto en la Catedral precedida por el Padre Ed Bradley. La Misa Exequial se celebrará el siguiente día.

En su homilía, el Padre Bradley habló de la pasión por agricultura y la vida rural que el Obispo McRaith tuvo toda su vida: “No solamente tenía conocimiento de la vida campesina; fue un defensor de la vida rural. A él le encantaban los agricultores y la agricultura.”

Se llevó a cabo una vigilia de toda la noche en la catedral y asistida por muchos que querían despedirse del obispo. A las 6 p.m. aquella noche hubo un servicio de vigilia lo cual incluyó varios himnos, lecturas y el Evangelio (Mateo 12:23-28), además de un tiempo de recuerdos compartidos de varias personas cercanas al obispo.

Compartieron recuerdos John McRaith, uno de los primos del Obispo McRaith de Minnesota, Rose Murphy Crabtree, una amiga de Owensboro; La Hermana Cheryl Clemons, OSU, otra amiga cercana de Owensboro; Kathy Spaeth, una amiga de Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; Mary Margaret Drury, una amiga cercana y asistente personal al Obispo McRaith; y el P. Joe Mills, quien trabajó con el Obispo McRaith en el tribunal diocesano por muchos años.

El Padre John Vaughan presidió el servicio de vigilia y dio la homilía.

“Fue un hombre de Dios,” dijo P. Vaughan en su homilía. “Un hombre quien amaba a Dios. Uno guiado por el amor a Cristo, como lo dice San Pablo.”

La Misa de Exequias del Obispo McRaith fue celebrada el siguiente día, 24 de marzo en la catedral; el Arzobispo José E. Kurtz de la Arquidiócesis de Louisville presidió y el Obispo Medley compartió la homilía.

También presentes en la Misa de Exequias estaban el Cardenal Justin Rigali, arzobispo emérito de Filadelfia

quien ahora reside en Knoxville; Obispo Terry Steib, obispo emérito de Memphis; Obispo John Stowe, OFM Conv. De Lexington; Obispo Charles Thompson de Evansville; Obispo Gerald Gettelfinger, obispo emérito de Evansville; y el Obispo Richard Stika de Knoxville.

En su homilía, el Obispo Medley dijo que el Obispo McRaith tenía “un gran afecto por el Papa Francisco.”

El Obispo Medley dijo que recuerda que el Obispo McRaith expresó que lamentaba no poder haber viajado a ver al Papa cuando visitó a los Estados Unidos en 2015.

“Dijo, ‘me hubiera encantado conocerlo. Me gustaría expresarle personalmente la mucha esperanza que me da por la Iglesia,’” contó el Obispo Medley. “En los últimos días muchos han hablado del amor profundo que el Obispo Juan tenía para la creación.”

“Cuando el Papa Francisco publicó su encíclica, ‘Laudato si,’ un tratado del cuidado de la creación de Dios, le dijo al Obispo Juan, ‘creo que el Papa encontró tus notas,’” dijo el Obispo Medley.

Después de la liturgia, la procesión funeraria llevó el cuerpo del Obispo McRaith al lugar de su descanso final - el cementerio de la casa madre de las Hermanas Ursulinas del Monte San José en Maple Mount.

La Hermana Cheryl Clemons, OSU, después contó al WKC que el Obispo McRaith había escogido al Monte con su lugar de entierro por varias razones.

El Obispo McRaith era un Asociado de las Ursulinas y era amigo de muchas hermanas ursulinas a través de su vida. También visitó al Monte con frecuencia y sabía “hay gente que va seguido” al cementerio para rezar.

Un homenaje final al Obispo McRaith fue que docenas de agricultores locales llevaron sus tractores y otras herramientas del campo y los puso a lo largo del camino al cementerio del Monte.

El Padre J. Patrick Reynolds, vicario general de la Diócesis de Owensboro, presidió el Rito de Sepelio en el cementerio.

El P. Reynolds dijo unas palabras durante el sepelio, recordando que el Obispo McRaith “nos dio fuerzas a través de su prédica, su entusiasmo jovial y su risa fuerte, alimentándonos con el Pan del Cielo y otorgándonos el don del Espíritu Santo para que podríamos amar a la Iglesia de Cristo y servir como sus mayordomos fieles.”

A life at peace for ‘a very kind man’

BY TINA KASEY, SPECIAL TO THE WESTERN KENTUCKY CATHOLIC

Sr. M Francis Teresa Scully, DCJ, administrator for the Carmel Home, a personal care and nursing home in Owensboro, said having Bishop John J. McRaith at the Home was, “the end all to beat all. It was great grace for the home.” Bishop McRaith passed away March 19, 2017.

The bishop spent his remaining four months on this earth at the Carmel Home, the same home which cared for his mother, Marie, before her passing in 1994. Prior to that, he was at Bishop Cotton Apartments for a little more than a year.

Sr. Scully said she knew Bishop McRaith well due to his mother staying at the home for nearly three years. She chuckled remembering Bishop McRaith asking her if he could bring his mother from Minnesota to the Carmel Home.

“What else could I say but, ‘yes, Bishop’” she laughed.

Sr. Scully said the bishop was incredibly attentive to his mother while she was at the Carmel Home. “He would visit every day, sometimes twice a day.”

During those trips to visit his mother, Bishop McRaith took time to meet and interact with the staff. His attention to the staff continued even as he returned to the Carmel Home to live in November 2016.

“He didn’t look down on anyone,” Sr. Scully said. “He befriended himself to everyone.”

Sr. Scully said that Bishop McRaith’s mother described him best by telling her one day, “John is a very kind man.”

His kindness extended to everyone, as he never

met a stranger. He connected with people no matter their walk of life.

Sr. Scully said the bishop reached out to those on the “outskirts of Church.” She said he always had guests attending Sunday Mass in his room at the Carmel Home.

Sr. Scully said he loved his priests and enjoyed sharing meals with them. He ate lunch and dinner with them frequently in the Carmel Home. One day, he joked with Sr. Scully saying she was spoiling his priests, to which she responded, “and we will continue to do so.”

Sr. Scully said they worked hard to put a few pounds on the bishop when he came to live at the home. About a month before his passing, Bishop McRaith found her and said, “Sister, I have gained twenty pounds!” She laughed and told him, “Bishop, I look forward to the day when I can be excited about gaining twenty pounds!”

Sr. Scully said Bishop McRaith was a night owl. This meant he met many of the employees of the Carmel Home who worked the overnight shift. She said he enjoyed getting to know them personally because everyone was important to him.

“He spent a lot of time in prayers in the evenings,” said Sr. Scully. The Carmel Home has 24 hour Adoration in their Chapel. It was not uncommon to find Bishop McRaith there at all hours of the evening or night.

Sr. Scully said up to the end, the bishop was “happy and completely at peace in his life.”



Bishop McRaith gives communion to his mother, Marie McRaith, at Christ Mass in 1991. File photo.



Bishop Medley and Bishop McRaith sharing the Sign of Peace at the Carmel Home in April 2010. File photo.

'A guide to a most successful life'

Editor's note: This article was written by Lois Remington Willette and *The Western Kentucky Catholic* received permission through the diocesan Archives to reprint on May 15, 2017. Willette passed away on December 9, 1984 in Olivia, Minnesota.

Fr. John McRaith, New Ulm, spoke to the Olivia and Danube high school seniors who attend St. Aloysius church this past Sunday. He consented to my reprinting part of his homily here.

Fr. McRaith presented the students "a guide to a most successful life."

"Let's take an honest look at success, because I think we have two standards afoot in our society.

Normally, success includes what I earn per year, my savings, what I own, what my chances for advancement are to get a bigger or more important job, my prestige in the community, the power I have and how well I take care of my family.

The other success standard is one that no one will deny, but many ignore. Think about this one.

Each of you has a set of talents and opportunities. The question is, what are you going to do with them? Those of you who will be truly successful will take the talents and opportunities you have right now and then look at the needs of the world and your community. Really check this, not what the market will take, but what is really needed. Then take your talents and use them with the opportunities and needs. Develop them and serve others with them.

With this plan you may or may not have money or power. That is only an accident, depending on how the foolish world places values.

My father was poor his whole life. Now at 84 he has some money because the world decided his 100 acres was worth more than before. But he was successful. He really cared for the land because he believes that others should have a chance to own it and use it. He was a great success.

You will be successful and the world will be successful

if, with your talent to be a doctor, farmer, lawyer, teacher, mother, father, scientist or any one of the many jobs, you serve others in some way.

I am sure of this. Because Jesus gave us all the guidelines when He said, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' He goes on to say that that means you lay down your life for a friend.

It means we lay down everything we are, our talents, our opportunities, our life. That is the great gift. Everything we have is a gift and to love as He loved, we lay it down, not for a price, but because we have the gift and they have the need.

That's the secret of success and it's tough to do. But at least buy the plan. See what the world needs, admit what the world needs and fit it into your talents and opportunities. We don't do that very well in our world.

To try this plan and measure your success, you will need great help and support. That is what the church is all about. That is why we are here to profess our faith in Jesus and what He said, that is why we celebrate his great act of love, laying down His life. We are here to support one another in our commitment to that goal in our own lives.

So we stay with the church. You'll have, and you'll hear, many complaints - the church is too fast, too slow, too much, too little. Those are our human inabilities getting in the way of allowing each of us to minister with our gifts. But on the long haul, you can't make it very well without being supported in the church.

With the help and support of the church which is another way of saying the help and support of each other, you can lay down your talents and opportunities for your friends, the world. And you will be a success." ■

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El Obispo McRaith sonríe con cuatro de los adolescentes quien fueron actores en la representación de la aparición de Nuestra Señora a San Juan Diego en 1531. Fue parte de la gran celebración de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe en la Iglesia San Pedro y San Pablo en Hopkinsville el 12 de diciembre del 2005. Foto de los archivos.



El Obispo McRaith participa en una reunión estratégica sobre la inmigración en el Centro Pastoral Católico en 2007. Foto por cortesía de Patti Gutiérrez.