

Father Connolly, Severn pastor for 16 years

Patrick Hickerson THE BALTIMORE SUN

The Rev. Joseph M. Connolly, an outspoken Roman Catholic priest and pastor of St. Bernadette parish in Severn for 16 years, died Thursday at the Knott Wing of Stella Maris in Timonium.

Father Connolly, who had suffered from emphysema for years, was 68.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, he introduced changes to the Mass -- the basic church service for Roman Catholics -- before those measures were detailed in the Second Vatican Council of 1964.

Those changes included saying the service in English, instead of the then-traditional Latin, and facing the congregation, not the altar, during all parts of the Mass. Such steps, accepted practice now, were considered by many at the time to be daring and controversial.

During the civil rights movement, he marched in favor of racial integration in Selma, Ala., in 1965 and participated in a highly visible demonstration to end desegregation at the Gwynn Oak amusement park in Baltimore County on July 4, 1963. He was the second local Catholic priest instrumental in the Gwynn Oak protests to die in recent weeks. A colleague and friend of Father Connolly's, Monsignor Austin L. Healy, died Feb. 12.

In 1984, Father Connolly was the only Baltimore diocesan priest among 97 Catholics who signed a full-page advertisement in the Oct. 7 issue of the New York Times arguing that opposition of "committed Catholics" to abortion was not necessarily as "monolithic" as some bishops were insisting.

Two months later, he met with former Archbishop William D. Borders, and both agreed that the issue should not have been raised in "the popular media." The position taken in the advertisement was considered counter to acceptable Roman Catholic teachings.

In a letter Friday to fellow priests, Monsignor W. Francis Malooly, chancellor of the Baltimore archdiocese, reported Father Connolly's death and described him as "a dynamic, dedicated priest."

The letter continued: "Joe was outspoken in pointing out injustices and was, to say the least, not at all intimidated or awed by anyone."

Father Connolly, a Baltimore native, was educated at St. Mary's School, Govans, and then at Loyola High School and Loyola College.

After his first year of college, during World War II, he entered the Marine Corps, was commissioned a second lieutenant and served in Guam and China before returning to the United States in August 1946.

The next year, he entered St. Mary's Seminary, then located on Paca Street in Baltimore. The following year he was sent to the North American College in Rome for studies in theology. He was ordained a Catholic priest in Rome in 1951.

When he returned to the United States, he was named assistant pastor at the Church of St. Charles Borromeo in Pikesville. At the same time, he served as chaplain of the Newman Club at Morgan State University.

After five years in Pikesville, he was transferred to St. Gregory the Great in Baltimore, where he remained for 10 years.

From 1967 to 1976, he served as pastor of St. Katherine of Siena and was later named pastor of the newly established parish of St. Bernadette in Severn. He remained there until his retirement in June 1992.

Father Connolly was a member of the Catholic Interracial Conference and the Archdiocesan Commission on Christian Unity. He was a director and vice president of the Baltimore Urban League and was a member of the Citizens Planning and Housing Association, the Catholic Theological Society, the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice and the National Liturgical Conference.

Father Connolly was appointed to the Archdiocesan Urban Commission and was also the archdiocesan director of radio and television communications, as well as director of the archdiocesan bureau of information.

From 1963 to 1968, he participated in "Faith to Faith," a locally televised panel discussion with a minister, a rabbi and himself intended to foster interfaith communication and dialogue.

Viewings will be held from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. today and from 9 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. tomorrow at St. Bernadette Church, 801 Stevenson Road, Severn. A wake service will take place at 7 p.m. today at the church. A concelebrated Mass of Christian burial will be offered at 11 a.m. tomorrow at the church.

He is survived by a sister, Elizabeth Connolly Scott of Baltimore; and a brother, Paul Connolly of Lynchburg, Va.

The family has suggested memorial donations could be made to the American Lung Association, 1840 York Road, Timonium 21093.