

Rev. Mike McCaffery passes, age 85

Pastor. Mentor. Teacher.
Community Leader. Friend.

Rev. Mike McCaffery was all of these and more, and loss of the much-loved priest casts a long shadow on the Archdiocese of Edmonton where he served for more than five decades. Father McCaffery died Jan. 12 due to possible complications related to COVID-19. He was 85. He had been living at Villa Vianney, the residence for retired priests.

FUNERAL MASS LIVESTREAMING

The funeral Mass will be livestreamed on Jan. 20, 2021 at 11 a.m. via:

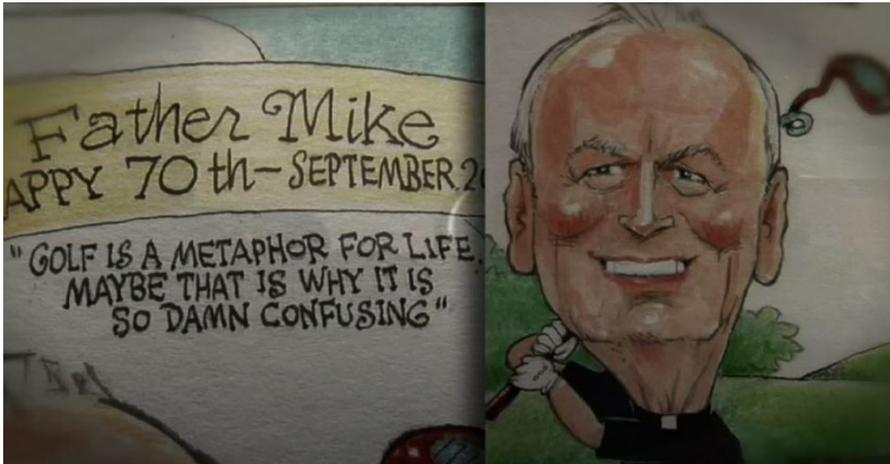
- Facebook (@archedmonton)
- YouTube (@archedmonton)
- Twitter (will appear as @archedmonton tweet at broadcast time)
- Telus Optik TV Channel 877

“This morning I was very saddened to learn of the death of my friend and brother priest, Father Mike McCaffrey,” Archbishop Richard Smith said in a statement:

“As I tried in my mind to capture the significance of his death, superlative phrases sprang to mind, as I am sure was the case for many others who knew him, like ‘Death of a legend,’ ‘the passing of an era,’ or ‘the end of an institution.’ These are all true, so extensive was the impact of his priestly ministry on the people of this Archdiocese, and so many were his accomplishments.

“My heart goes out to the members of his family, to his many friends, and to his brother priests in the Archdiocese, who mourn his death. Father Mike was well loved and greatly respected as a priest who loved to help other people, especially those on the peripheries. May our merciful Lord now grant to Father Mike the gift of everlasting life.”

A former chancellor of the Archdiocese, professor at Newman Theological College, Father McCaffery had many roles in ministry in the Edmonton Archdiocese. Out of all of them, he said he enjoyed being a parish priest best.



Celebration of Fr. McCaffrey's 70th Birthday

"I've done many jobs but I've always considered pastoral ministry to be the most fulfilling," Father said in an interview in 2011. "I enjoy journeying with people – the good, the bad and the ugly."

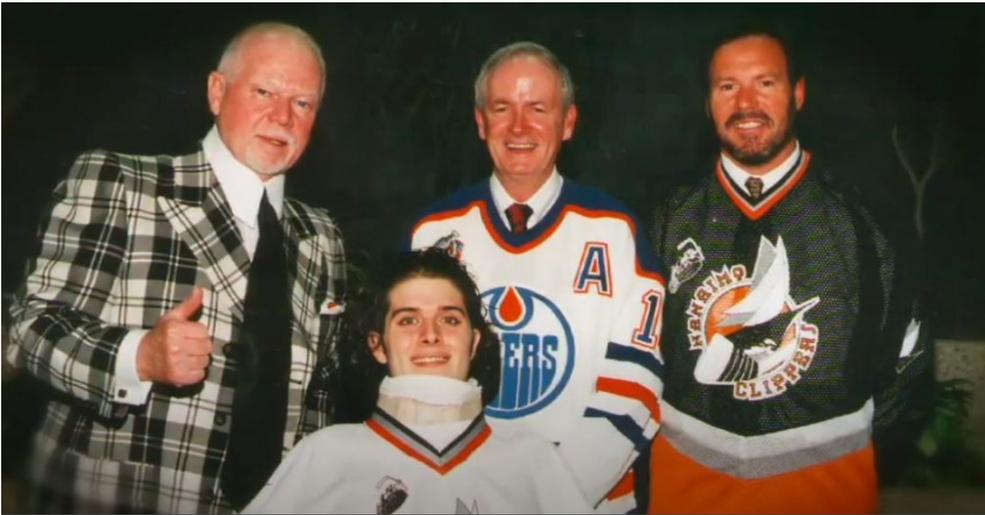
"He is definitely a healer," said Tim Spelliscy, the former Global TV executive who has known Father McCaffery for more than three decades. "One thing about Mike is he is a listener. Listening is a tremendous quality. And he takes time, he's patient and he listens very carefully. It's a fantastic quality."

Spelliscy met McCaffery, whom he considered a close friend and spiritual adviser, in the 1970s when he worked as associate pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church.

"He had long scraggly black wild hair, a bit of a hippy, a bit more modern than the priests of that era. He spoke his mind on a lot of issues. I still recall when he did a homily one morning on optional celibacy, which created quite a buzz among the congregation."

Over the years, Spelliscy, like hundreds of others, developed a close friendship with Father McCaffery.

"There is a good reason for his popularity: generosity," added Josee Marr, the former chancellor of the Edmonton Archdiocese and a close, personal friend of Father McCaffery.



Father Mike with some of his 'hockey buddies.'

“From the vulnerable and un-noticed person to the famous and wealthy, he offered time, talent and treasure without counting the cost. Organizations could always count on Father Mike to enhance both profile and donations for their fundraiser events. Everyone agrees that the word ‘no’ was absent from his vocabulary because ‘yes’ took precedence,” Marr said.

“Father Mike became a good friend, after retirement. We enjoyed dinners and movies, going for coffee and walks in the river valley. I, among many others, will miss his friendship and kindness dearly.”

Born Charles Michael McCaffery on Sept. 17, 1935 in Bassano, Alta, he spent his early years in Brooks before moving to Edmonton. He was the third child in a family of six. His parents, Dr. Hugh and Isobel McCaffery.

His mother was Anglican, his father was a devout Catholic and a great-grandfather was a Presbyterian minister. A favorite uncle was Mormon. To Father McCaffery, the various faiths had more in common than they did apart.

Growing up in Edmonton, McCaffery was being steered to become a dentist like his father. “But I was never much of a student. I was never interested in some of the academic stuff but I was always interested in learning,” McCaffery recalled.

When he graduated from St. Joseph’s High School, the priesthood hadn’t even entered his mind. But the recently ordained Father Bill Irwin, founder of Catholic Social Services, was tapping one of McCaffery’s best friends to become a priest and they dragged McCaffery to a meeting.

McCaffery “sort of fell in love with a girl” and began struggling with his decision to become a priest. He took some time off and worked for the social action department of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in Ottawa. He studied at St. Joseph Seminary in Edmonton from 1954 to 1961, when he was

ordained on Sept. 23 of that year at St. Joseph's Basilica by Archbishop Anthony Jordan.



Rev. McCaffery served as President of Newman Theological College and is fondly remembered by the college community for his endless contributions.

Father McCaffery served as an assistant at St. Anthony's parish in Edmonton and Sacred Heart parish in Red Deer. In 1970, he took a leave to complete his master's degree at Fordham University in New York City and a religious leaders' certificate at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. He moved to Vancouver to work with recovering heroin addicts. He took on duties in Edmonton studying alcoholism in isolated northern communities.

Father McCaffery served as a fifth-step listener for recovering alcoholics, listening to their stories and helping them come to terms with their actions. In the late 1970s, he co-founded a workshop called "New Beginnings" which has helped countless participants deal with feelings of loss and grief stemming from divorce, separation, and death.

McCaffery returned to the Edmonton Archdiocese in 1972 and served at various parishes. He taught at Newman Theological College and was later appointed vice-principal and then president of the college from 1978 to 1983. His compassionate stewardship made a lasting influence on Newman Theological College, so it was natural to honour his name and legacy with the establishment of the Fr. Mike McCaffery Chair in Pastoral Theology in 2007.

Father McCaffery also served as vice-rector of St. Joseph Seminary for six years before returning to parish work as a pastor.

In 1987, Father McCaffery became rector of St. Joseph's Basilica. Spelliscy laughed as he tells of how Father McCaffery loved to tell the story about arranging the 1988 wedding of Wayne Gretzky and Janet Jones, both non-Catholics. "The archbishop was out of town and Father Mike said 'What the heck!'"

"Wayne Gretzky's wedding is what I'm remembered for," Father McCaffery said in an interview. "That certainly made me famous for five seconds."

In an interview, the late Archbishop Joseph MacNeil said he entrusted McCaffery with many positions of responsibility during his years as archbishop of Edmonton "because he was the right man.

"I consulted with other people and they'd said, 'Obviously, Father McCaffery is the best person for the job.' In each instance that's the way it worked out. He made me look very intelligent, very smart."

As chancellor of the Edmonton Archdiocese through most of the 1990s, Father McCaffery handled sexual abuse cases and began the reorganization of the parish structure. McCaffery officially retired in 2000. But he continued to perform Baptisms, weddings and funerals. He also celebrated Mass for the St. Mark's Deaf Community.

In an interview, he said his two regrets are that he never learned to speak French, and that he never nourished his piano-playing abilities. However, he has worked hard at his golf, travelling yearly to Palm Springs with other Edmonton priests to play. "I'm addicted to golf. I really enjoy it."

Father McCaffery continued to give back to his community. He was awarded as a Paul Harris Fellow, the highest recognition given by the Rotary Club, and received the Monsignor Bill Irwin Award of Excellence in Community Leadership. He was also named to the Alberta Order of Excellence in 2005.

"Father Michael McCaffery is a model both of what it means to serve others and what it means to be an Albertan. Throughout his life and his career as a Roman Catholic priest, he has demonstrated a remarkable ability to reach and comfort those around him," reads the citation when he received the Alberta Order of Excellence in 2005. "He has also shown the great sense of energy, individuality and pioneering spirit that defines the Alberta character."

Throughout his ministry, Father McCaffery kept close ties to community, working with the Family Service Bureau of Central Alberta, Social Planning Council in Red Deer, the Edmonton Housing Authority, the Rotary Club, the United Way,

Catholic Social Services and the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

He has also served a wide range of community initiatives, including the United Way's Success by Six, the Junior Chamber of Commerce and the Progress Club of South Edmonton. In 1989, he was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship for his many years of service to the Rotary Club.

Father McCaffery always loved sports, and he golfed well into his retirement. He also kept his legendary sense of humour. His business cards said: "C.M. McCaffery – Retired but Hatching, Matching and Dispatching." And when he said Grace, he included a prayerful pitch for whichever of the city's sports teams was in need of heavenly intervention.

In a 2011 interview with the *Western Catholic Reporter* – as he celebrated 50 years of priesthood – he deadpanned: "I saw a lady the other day who said, 'Oh, you are celebrating 50 years of priesthood. I thought you'd be dead by now or married.'

His Alberta Order of Excellence citation reads: "The thousands of people whose lives have been enriched by his care and support over the years certainly know why. He has a unique ability to reach the hearts and souls of those around him, and he has put that gift to great use throughout his career."

-With files from Lasha Morningstar

VIGIL PRAYERS

Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 7pm hosted by Star of the North Retreat Centre on Zoom.

Join Zoom Meeting: *(Link opens at 6:45 p.m.)*
Click link below, and **enter passcode: Vigil**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87488390619?pwd=K0ExNElpZjU3dW1UeFNuYUVwNit2Zz09#success>

OBITUARY

At Connelly-Mckinley Funeral Home:

<https://www.connelly-mckinley.com/obituaries/charles-michael-mccaffery-father-mike/>

Please share your condolences and memories in the

comments below: