

# Catholics remember Charles G. Tildon Jr.

Charles G. Tildon Jr., who served the church in a variety of capacities and received the papal honor of being named to the Knights of St. Gregory the Great, died Dec. 16 of cancer. He was 81.

A funeral Mass will be offered at 11 a.m. on Dec. 21 at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland; a wake will be held at 10 a.m. Cardinal William H. Keeler, retired archbishop, will preside at the funeral Mass. It will be concelebrated by Archbishop William D. Borders, retired archbishop, Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar, and others. Monsignor Damien Nalepa, pastor of St. Gregory the Great, Baltimore, will deliver the homily.

“Charles Tildon was ‘the good steward’ of the Lord who daily exhibited that graced quality of a loving concern for the individual while having a deep concern for the community and the good of all,” said Bishop Madden. “On a personal level, he also exhibited a gifted ability to be able to differ with someone on an issue while exhibiting great respect for the person. At times like this one often thinks of how much we will miss Charles, but on deeper reflection his presence from all the persons, institutions and good causes helps us to realize the truth of the matter – he is with us still.”

Mr. Tildon, a former president of Baltimore City Community College, was named the first chairperson of the National Advisory Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1969.

“It was the highest lay policy body in the United States,” said his wife of 49 years, Louise Tildon.

He also served on the Urban Commission, the archdiocesan urban Council of Elders and was elected to the archdiocesan pastoral council. He was a past member of the archdiocesan finance committee, and at the time of his death he was on the investment committee of the board of financial administration.

He also served as a consultant for the National Black Catholic Congress and was a founder of BLEWs, the Black/Jewish Forum of Baltimore. A member of the archdiocesan Council of Catholic Men, Mr. Tildon was active in civil rights and in the community, and he was a corporator at his home parish, St. Gregory the Great. He was instrumental in forging a relationship with The Catholic Review that helped create the Africentric column.

“Charles is a giant of a person, not only in the church but in the community and in his efforts to reach out to people to uplift them and improve their quality of life,” said Monsignor Nalepa. “He was instrumental as chairperson of the board in establishing the Sandtown/Winchester Senior Center.”

“He’s just an outstanding man,” said Therese Wilson Favors, director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries. “He was so dedicated to a mission, and he was wonderful in engaging people to see the mission. He was very diplomatic and had a strong sense of perseverance and of self-determination. It was not just about Mr. Tildon, but how it would benefit the whole community.”

She added that Mr. Tildon was instrumental in pressing for representation of African-Americans on archdiocesan committees and boards.

In recent years, he helped coordinate a program offered through the Office of African American Catholic Ministries that promoted effective parenting in the black community.

“With his leadership, we were able to get 15 trained leaders to facilitate groups in schools and parishes,” Ms. Favors said, adding that he also volunteered with the 175th anniversary celebration for the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

“Charles Tildon exemplified by his decisions and outreach what it means to share the charity that Christ shares with us. He felt that he had the responsibility of reaching people in the routine of their daily lives,” said Archbishop Borders.

Bishop Gordon D. Bennett, S.J., former urban vicar, said he “had a great deal of respect for Charles Tildon. He was enormously helpful to me when I first came to Baltimore. He was very candid and challenging in my ministry as urban vicar.”

Sister Rosalie Murphy, S.N.D., said, "Charles Tildon represented so much of what the church has become while retaining what is essential to being Catholic. He held in high esteem the rites and rituals of the church, its ministers and its mission to preach the Gospel. He personified collegiality with grace and a large measure of good humor."

"I think everybody who knew him knew he was a deeply spiritual person," Mrs. Tildon said. "Prayer was very important to him. He lived the tenets of the church; he was very anxious that African-Americans be given equal opportunity in the church."

As a young man, Mr. Tildon had personally experienced the indignities of the church's segregation policies, having been forced to sit in the back pews of his church and use a separate confessional.

He told The Catholic Review that when he lived in Atlanta more than 50 years ago, "I had to walk past five Catholic churches just to find one that I could attend for Mass. I will never forget that feeling."

Mrs. Tildon recalled that Cardinal Lawrence Shehan was instrumental in helping him get his mother into Stella Maris; she was the first African-American there.

"He and Cardinal Shehan had many dialogues together," she said. "They were very close."

Mr. Tildon, who graduated from what was then Morgan State College, taught school in Baltimore City. He later worked as the associate director of Provident Hospital, served as executive director of the Maryland Service Corps and was an assistant secretary of the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by his son, Charles "Chuck" G. Tildon III, and two grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Gilchrist Center for Hospice Care, 6601 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21204.