

Deacon Keenan, longtime St. Ursula minister, remembered as ‘people oriented’

By Maria Wiering

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Deacon Robert “Bob” G. Keenan Sr., a longtime deacon at St. Ursula in Parkville and a retired public school teacher, died Sept. 23. He was 77.

Deacon Keenan was ordained in 1972. He ministered from then until his death at St. Ursula, with the exception of 2003-2006, when he ministered at St. Clare in Essex. He also taught middle and high school biology in Baltimore County Public Schools, retiring in 1994.

He applied his teaching experience to parish life, leading classes on baptismal preparation and offering funeral services.

“He was very people oriented,” said Father D. Stephen Cotter, St. Ursula’s associate pastor. “He had people’s interests in mind whenever he preached and interacted with them, making them feel comfortable.”

Deacon Michael Baxter described Deacon Keenan as having a “strong faith” and “love of church.”

“He really wanted to bring people to the church,” said Deacon Baxter, who has ministered alongside Deacon Keenan at St. Ursula since 2009. “Everything he saw was a means of evangelization. He always tried to look at all the ministries he did as a way of bring people closer to God, closer to the church.”

As a longtime St. Ursula parishioner, Deacon Baxter has known Deacon Keenan since the 1970s.

“For me, personally, he was always kind of a larger-than-life kind of guy, which is kind of contradictory, since he was a humble person,” he said. “He was just a real mentor to me. As a deacon going through formation, he helped me a lot, and in my ministry as a deacon, he was a big influence.”

Deacon Keenan’s homilies made the Gospel and Scripture seem personal and challenging, Deacon Baxter said. “He would always take from the readings and somehow turn it into an action-plan for you.”

Deacon Keenan was married to his wife, Olivia or “Libbi,” for 53 years. They have five children and 11 grandchildren; the latter called him “Daddy-O.”

“He was very devoted to his family,” Deacon Baxter said. “He was always very

supportive, very loving. It was really obvious that his family was really front and center in his life.”

According to an obituary on Legacy.com, Deacon Keenan died surrounded by family. In an interview with the Catholic Review in 2003, Deacon Keenan said he “had a call to serve God’s people” and saw his diaconate vocation as a natural extension of his profession.

“They have the same missionary call, to help and serve others,” he said of teaching and ministry, adding that deacons bring to parishes “another realm of the church’s life in the sense that people might be able to personally relate to us. ... We bring an understanding to the parish from a family point of view and worldly experience.”

Visitation will be available Sept. 25-26 from 3-5 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. at Evans Funeral Chapel and Cremation Services, 8800 Harford Road in Parkville, and 9:30-10:30 a.m. Sept. 27 at St. Ursula, 8801 Harford Road.

A funeral Mass will be offered at 10:30 a.m. Sept. 27 at St. Ursula, followed by internment at Moreland Memorial Park in Parkville.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks donations be made to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital or St. Ursula.

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