

Donald J. Reitz, first lay superintendent of schools in Baltimore Archdiocese, dies

Donald J. Reitz, the first lay superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, was described as a “renaissance man,” equally adept at writing books on education as he was maintaining a car.

Reitz was 84 when he died July 2 after a long illness.

He led what was then known as the archdiocesan Division of Schools from 1976 to 1979, taking a leave of absence from the Professor of Education post he held at what was then Loyola College.

During that time, he renewed a friendship with Monsignor Paul G. Cook that began in the late 1940s, when the two had been high school classmates at St. Charles Minor Seminary in Catonsville.

“I was working at the Catholic Center when he became superintendent,” said Monsignor Cook, then the secretary of the education department. “He was very collegial, a pleasure to work with. Don got along with everyone. He was known by so many Catholic teachers from the courses he taught at Loyola.”

At Loyola College, his students had included the late Bishop William C. Newman, his predecessor as superintendent of schools. At St. Charles Minor Seminary, where he returned in the late 1950s to teach English, history and public speaking, his students included Wilmington, Del., Bishop W. Francis Malooly.

“I was always amazed at the way he was able to combine intellectual gifts with mechanical gifts,” Monsignor Cook said. “He published several books, and liked working on his automobiles, re-lining the brakes. He was a renaissance man. He could do everything.”

Larry Callahan, president of Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Essex, worked

under Reitz at the Catholic Center and was among his successors as superintendent.

“Don never sat still, his assistant had a hard time trying to tie him down,” Callahan said. “He always had a yellow pad in front of him, and was always taking notes.”

When Reitz was hired, the Catholic Review reported that he was one of just 16 lay superintendents among 162 dioceses in the U.S.

“He recognized the problems we faced, which are similar to the ones facing Catholic schools today,” Monsignor Cook said. “He helped schools stay open, and raised the level of Catholic education.”

Reitz grew up in St. Ambrose Parish in Park Heights. His siblings include Sulpician Father Louis Reitz.

He studied philosophy, and earned a bachelor’s degree from St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Baltimore; a master’s degree from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.; and a doctorate from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore with a dissertation titled, “An Analysis of the Distinction between Policy-Making and Administration in Educational Organizations.

Reitz held several leadership positions at Loyola College, where he was named outstanding teacher in 1969; served the Maryland Catholic Conference as head of its education committee; and gave of his time on numerous boards, including as chairman of the Maryland chapter of Citizens for Educational Freedom, which took him to Annapolis to testify in support of aid to nonpublic schools.

The late Cardinal William H. Keeler awarded Reitz a papal medal, the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice.

Reitz and his wife, Nancy, a former member of the board of directors of the Cathedral Foundation, publisher of the Catholic Review, were married for 52 years.

“Don felt that the only way the Catholic Church would continue and grow was to ensure that Catholic schools were first, Catholic, and then schools,” she said. “Catholic education was most important to him.”

They raised four daughters and a son at Sacred Heart Parish in Glyndon, where she served as director of religious education and pastoral associate, and moved to Our Lady of Grace in Parkton three decades ago. Father Michael Triplett, the pastor, offered a funeral Mass there July 7.

Read more obituaries here.

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