

Father Charles Riepe, Harford leader, dies at 75

Father Charles K. Riepe always viewed life as a constant education – for himself and others.

When news began to circulate that the 75-year-old priest died Feb. 7, friends and colleagues affirmed he was more than successful in that mission. The former principal and president of The John Carroll School in Bel Air was remembered as an ardent supporter of Catholic schools, author and a man who gave his time, money and spirit to the church.

“Charlie was a good teacher,” said longtime friend Monsignor William F. Burke, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi in Baltimore. “When he spoke, people learned. He knew the Scripture and knew the liturgy very well.”

A funeral Mass was to be offered Feb. 12 at 10:30 a.m. at St. Ignatius, Hickory, with Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien as a principal celebrant.

A Baltimore native, Father Riepe attended St. Charles College in Catonsville after graduating from Gilman School.

After receiving his master’s degree in theology from the Pontifical University of Innsbruck in Austria, he was ordained a priest in 1960.

Just before his ordination, he completed a revision of the book, “The Mass of the Roman Rite.” He also published “Living the Christian Seasons.”

He returned to Baltimore in 1960 to begin his priestly life, first serving as an associate pastor of St. Gregory the Great in Baltimore. He then moved to St. Joseph, Fullerton, where he remained for two years.

In 1964, he began a decades-long connection with The John Carroll School during its founding year. He wore many hats at the school, including religion department chair, school chaplain, JV boys baseball coach and finally principal in 1968.

During the school's formative years, Father Riepe wanted to develop a strong athletic program and a major football team, school officials said. More importantly, he oversaw the school's transition to an independent Catholic school under the Archdiocese of Baltimore's auspices.

In 1971 he became the school's president and helped form a board of trustees.

He became a trusted friend and mentor to all around him, including campus minister Patti Murphy Dohn.

Ms. Murphy Dohn said that "the legacy which Father Riepe leaves behind to all of us at John Carroll is one of enduring service to Catholic education and the church, excellent academics, great athletics and a strong spiritual foundation based on the sacraments of Christ and his church."

According to the archdiocese, Father Riepe served briefly as pastor of Sacred Heart, Glyndon, in the 1970s. He was rector of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, from 1979-80.

He moved to Needham, Mass., where he was headmaster of St. Sebastian School from 1980-90. He returned to Baltimore to become chaplain of The Johns Hopkins University, where he served for 12 years. During that time, he served three years on the board of trustees for John Carroll.

He retired from ministry in 2002, but remained active, contributing substantially to John Carroll and Upper Chesapeake Medical Center in Bel Air through his family inheritance.

A longtime member of Upper Chesapeake's Foundation Board, Father Riepe recently asked to step down from his post for health reasons. Fellow trustees began the process to make him an emeritus member just two days before his death.

"It is a true loss for the community," said Fred Thursfield, executive director of the foundation board, of Father Riepe's death.

Tom Kelso, current chair of John Carroll's board of trustees, said life as a student and colleague under Father Riepe was a constant education.

“I learned that leadership is not about doing what is popular,” Mr. Kelso said. “Rather it is about combining vision, a vision so far into the future that many others cannot see it, with the ability to harness the tremendous energy and intellect of the hundreds of people dedicated to the cause.”