

Father Hemler, an ‘inspiration’ to Fallston parish, retires

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Father Edward B. Hemler wasn't about to let health problems stop him from giving First holy Communion to the children of St. Mark in Fallston last spring.

In the months leading up to the special liturgy, the longtime pastor had undergone heart bypass surgery, artery bypass surgery and a leg amputation. Not too long before the Mass, he suffered a fall that left him battered and bruised.

Despite all that, Father Hemler sat in his wheelchair at the Mass and lovingly lifted the consecrated host before each child, offering it with familiar words he had spoken countless times before: "The Body of Christ."

"It was simply the most amazing miracle," remembered Bridgit Goedeke, St. Mark's administrator of faith formation. "I had moms say to me that no one ever did it the way he did. He met the children eye-to-eye. It was beautiful."

Goedeke said the priest had earlier shown good humor at a First Communion rehearsal when a child asked to see Father Hemler's prosthetic limb.

After nearly 47 years in active ministry, Father Hemler has retired and taken up residence at Mercy Ridge in Timonium. Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien made the official announcement Feb. 10.

The 73-year-old priest, who has dealt with an aortic aneurism and a tracheotomy in the last several months, said he has "thoroughly enjoyed" every assignment he's had - encompassing work in Catholic education and parish leadership.

"At St. Mark, I never considered it work," said Father Hemler, who became pastor of the Harford County faith community in 1997 after serving several years as an associate pastor there. "I loved it so much."

Inspired by the priests of his home parish of St. Mark in Catonsville, Father Hemler entered St. Charles Minor Seminary in Catonsville as a teen before continuing his priestly studies at St. Mary's Seminary on Paca Street and Roland Park. He later earned a doctorate in education from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Father Hemler's early assignments included stints as associate pastor of St. Stephen in Bradshaw and a religion teacher at The John Carroll School in Bel Air. He was the assistant superintendent of Catholic schools beginning in 1968 before moving to California in 1971 to serve as dean of studies at St. Patrick Seminary.

After four years in California, Father Hemler moved to Hawaii, working for seven years in administration with a community college and serving as a weekend associate at a Honolulu parish.

Father Hemler returned to the Baltimore archdiocese in the early 1980s, serving as associate pastor of St. Mark, Catonsville. He was named pastor of St. Anthony Shrine, Emmitsburg, in 1983 - taking on an additional pastorate at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Thurmont in 1987. He arrived at St. Mark, Fallston in 1992 and oversaw the restoration of parish buildings when he became pastor.

"I think he has made the community very family-like," said Charlotte Henderson, St. Mark's pastoral associate. "He's been an inspiration to all of us."