

Father John Moore, founding pastor of Holy Family in Middletown, dies

Father John C. Moore, founding pastor of Holy Family Catholic Community in Middletown, died June 24 in Adamstown. He was 83.

“He was a charismatic leader,” said Deacon Paul Gregory Rausch, who knew Father Moore for more than 30 years. “He worked to empower the people.”

Established as an independent mission in 1986, Holy Family gained parish status in 1989. Father Moore was its first pastor, and remained in that role until his retirement in 2004. Under his leadership, the faith community erected a church building that was dedicated March 14, 1997.

Deacon Rausch said Father Moore listened to proposals offered by Holy Family parishioners, pointed them in the right direction and gave them the authority to make their ideas come to life. According to Deacon Rausch, Father Moore encouraged a post-Vatican II liturgy, and was an “excellent homilist.”

A Philadelphia native, Father Moore earned a bachelor’s degree in education/English and master’s degree in theology from La Salle University in Philadelphia. He also completed graduate work at Villanova University in a suburb west of his hometown, and The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

He had a knack for languages, and was fluent in Latin, French and Italian.

Father Moore served as a Christian Brother for 23 years. He taught at a school in Pennsylvania before being assigned as a teacher and administrator at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson in 1961. In 1964, Father Moore taught at St. John’s College High School in Washington, D.C.

Father Moore was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore in 1978. He served as an intern at St. Thomas More in Baltimore, 1975-78, while he studied at St. Mary’s Seminary in Roland Park; and as associate pastor of St. Rose of Lima in Brooklyn, 1978-79; St. Thomas More, 1981-85; St. Clement Mary Hofbauer in

Rosedale, 1985-86; and St. John the Evangelist in Frederick, 1986-89.

During his time in Frederick, his ministry included the mission in Middletown, a few miles to the northwest.

In a 2007 article in the Catholic Review reporting on the dedication of Holy Family's parish center, which was named the Father John Charles Moore Center in his honor, Father Moore reflected with a smile upon Bishop P. Francis Murphy's request for him to establish a parish in Middletown.

His response, he said, was, "Where's Middletown?"

"I loved what I did and I loved the people there," Father Moore told the Review. "I tried to listen every day to God speaking through human words."

His successor in Middletown, Father J. Kevin Farmer, now pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Frederick, said that Father Moore welcomed him at Holy Family "very, very graciously."

Father Farmer recalled fondly that Father Moore had a very specific way of doing things, and did not mind sharing his thoughts. Father Farmer said he "hates" writing, but Father Moore's encouragement led him to write weekly to his congregation in the parish bulletins.

Years later, Father Moore frankly told Father Farmer, then a first-time pastor, that his initial letters were not good, but that they improved over time. Father Farmer said that was one of the best compliments he could receive.

"He had a very, very deep connection to that community," Father Farmer said. "It was a place where he was very much loved until the end."

Father Farmer said he was happy to build upon the legacy that Father Moore built at Holy Family. The parish, he said, was built on a foundation of Jesus Christ, followed by Father Moore and the people.

Father Moore and leaders of other local churches founded the Ministerium of the Middletown Valley. They met regularly to offer support and offered ecumenical

opportunities to gather as a faith community. Both Father Farmer and Deacon Rausch noted that as one of his great accomplishments.

Father Moore will lie in state at Holy Family Catholic Community, 7321 Burkittsville Road, Middletown on July 2 from 1 to 5 p.m. A funeral Mass will be offered by Bishop Adam Parker at 5 p.m.

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org.