

Father Paul Reich, Marianist who welcomed hundreds into the Catholic Church, dies at 90

When Deacon Vito Piazza Sr. was in formation to become a permanent deacon, he was “disconcerted” about the prospect of delivering homilies. Marianist Father Paul A. Reich, the longtime associate pastor of Deacon Piazza’s parish of St. Joseph in Sykesville, gave his friend some much-needed advice and reassurance.

“He told me that each and every time you preach, you speak about the love of God and the love of Jesus Christ,” remembered Deacon Piazza, director of St. Mary’s Spiritual Center and Historical Site on Paca Street in Baltimore. “It was simple advice, but extraordinarily profound. It was his credo that I adopted.”

Father Reich, who served at St. Joseph as associate pastor for 29 years, died April 4 in Dayton, Ohio, at age 90. A funeral Mass was offered April 12 at Queen of Apostles Chapel in Dayton.

Father Reich, a Pittsburgh native who had two uncles who were Marianists, spent all his ministry at St. Joseph leading the RCIA program that welcomes people into the Catholic Church. Deacon Piazza worked closely with his friend in that program for 12 years. He estimated that Father Reich was responsible for initiating more than 500 people into the Catholic Church.

“He loved it,” said Deacon Piazza, who also serves as a chaplain at the Springfield Hospital Center in Sykesville and the Greater Baltimore Medical Center in Towson.

Deacon Piazza called Father Reich a “wonderful, gentle confessor” and an “extraordinary teacher.”

“He had a great sense of humility,” said Deacon Piazza, who was vested by Father Reich during his 2013 ordination to the diaconate. “He was my spiritual mentor.”

In a 2007 interview with the Catholic Review marking his golden jubilee as a priest,

Father Reich said he left a Marianist high school to enter the Marianist novitiate in New York and professed his first vows as a Marianist in 1946.

After attending college at the University of Dayton, he studied theology and prepared for the priesthood at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. Taking his classes in French and Latin, the young seminarian studied with seminarians from other religious orders including Redemptorists and Dominicans. He was ordained in Switzerland on July 14, 1957.

Father Reich told the Review that he remembered thinking during his ordination that he was becoming a person “to be truly of service to other people.”

Much of his ministry prior to arriving at St. Joseph in 1986 was in Catholic education. Father Reich was a theology, Latin or mathematics teacher at several high schools in New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida – often serving as chaplain of athletic teams, according to the 2007 Catholic Review article. The priest was also the pastor of a church in Connecticut for nearly a year.

Father Reich described St. Joseph parishioners as “supportive” and “very cooperative,” saying he was deeply grateful to the people he served in Carroll County. He foresaw staying active in the priesthood for as long as his health remained strong.

“I’ve never lost the desire to be a priest,” he said. “It’s what I’ve always wanted to be.”

Father Reich retired as associate pastor of St. Joseph in 2015, moving to Dayton.

Deacon Piazza said Father Reich was beloved by parishioners, hundreds of whom turned out for an April 8 memorial Mass at St. Joseph.

“He really lived his vows,” Deacon Piazza said. “He lived out the Marianist charism of welcome.”

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