

Monsignor Tinder's death is 'devastating blow'

While parishioners at Towson's Immaculate Conception were coming to terms with his retirement announcement in mid-November, Monsignor F. Dennis Tinder was talking about a greater transition.

"We get so tied to this world with its shifting that we forget that we were made to go home," the pastor told The Catholic Review. "The God who made us is holding us and carrying us home."

The 67-year-old priest died in his sleep Dec. 4 at Mercy Ridge Retirement Community in Timonium.

A funeral Mass is scheduled to be offered by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien Dec. 12 at Immaculate Conception at 11 a.m. Monsignor Richard W. Woy, the Archdiocese of Baltimore's vicar general, is to preach the homily.

Monsignor Tinder's body will lie in state at the church Dec. 10 from 2 to 9 p.m. and Dec. 11 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. with a special Mass Dec. 10 at 7 p.m. and a wake service Dec. 11 at 7 p.m.

"The death of Monsignor Tinder is a devastating blow to the Immaculate Conception community and an immeasurable loss for our entire archdiocese," Archbishop O'Brien said of the 41-year priest. "At all four parishes where he served, as well as in his various administrative positions, Monsignor Tinder served always with a joyful heart and with great love for the Lord and those he served."

Monsignor Tinder had back surgery in December 2008 and recovered slowly. It was discovered he was battling a neuromuscular disease, and, in his final days, was diagnosed with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, most commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease.

Father Michael Foppiano, one of Immaculate Conception's associate pastors, said the past year was physically painful for Monsignor Tinder.

“He was the kind of priest that was at the back of church after every Mass,” Father Foppiano said. “He just was not able to get around and he couldn’t stand for very long. His mind was always in it.”

Father Foppiano called Monsignor Tinder the “definition of a mentor.”

Monsignor Tinder grew up at Immaculate Conception and attended its elementary school. He then studied at St. Charles College, a former minor seminary in Catonsville, for six years before attending Mount St. Mary’s Seminary and University in Emmitsburg. He was also a long-serving member of that school’s board of trustees.

Mount president Thomas H. Powell said Monsignor Tinder’s death caused him “great sadness.”

Monsignor Tinder was to receive an honorary doctorate of divinity at the university’s May 2010 commencement exercises and will now be honored posthumously.

He was ordained in 1968 and assigned to St. Pius X, Rodgers Forge, for five years. He then worked in the archdiocese’s vocations office until the early 1980s. He served as pastor of St. Joseph, Fullerton, for a decade before transitioning to St. Jane Frances de Chantal in Pasadena, where he was pastor for 10 years.

He served Immaculate Conception for the last nine years. A parish celebration was going to be held Dec. 6 after the 11:30 a.m. Mass so friends could wish the retiring priest well. It became a Memorial Mass instead.

Dan Cahill, a parish corporator, developed a friendship with Monsignor Tinder. Cahill said the pastor led a capital campaign that resulted in spectacular church renovations.

“I could see early on he had a vision of what he wanted to achieve at Immaculate,” Cahill said.

Not everything was easy.

When Monsignor Tinder announced the July closure of the parish-run Towson

Catholic High School, because of dwindling enrollment and a rising deficit, he faced harsh criticism. Supporters said Monsignor Tinder did not want to pass Towson Catholic's troubles off to a successor, so he shouldered the heavy burden.

Father Foppiano said Monsignor Tinder showed strength, even as his body was failing.

"I don't know how he stood there and took that," Father Foppiano said. "I know at this point in my life, I wouldn't have been able to take that."

Cahill said Monsignor Tinder was a private man with a deep faith.

"If there were more people like him in church life, you'd see so many more people acknowledge their faith and practice it," Cahill said.