

Thrifty Iowa man leaves surprise \$1.4 million bequest to his parish

DAVENPORT, Iowa – Lifelong bachelor Clair Adams, 95, of Clinton lived simply and was buried in a favorite red fleece jacket that cost \$9 at Wal-Mart. What he didn't spend on himself – an estate worth a little more than \$1.4 million – he bequeathed to his parish, Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace in Clinton.

"This is the largest single gift our parish has ever received and it speaks to Clair's love for his parish, his faith in God and his desire to leave a legacy that will touch the lives of countless present and future parishioners," said Father Tony Herold in a statement read Sept. 5-6 at Masses.

Father Herold, pastor of Prince of Peace, told The Catholic Messenger, Davenport diocesan newspaper, that he was flabbergasted to learn of the bequest. "What a tremendous gift. It truly is an answer to prayer!" he said.

Adams, who had lived at Eagle Point Nursing Home since 2004, "was very unassuming," Father Herold added. "No one would have thought that he would have that much money to leave the parish."

The bequest comes six months after Prince of Peace dedicated its new church in northwest Clinton, a building which brings together Clinton's Catholics in one church building for the first time. The project has been financially challenging.

"While I am overwhelmed by this extraordinary gift, I also am aware that we have many challenges ahead of us. We still need our parishioners to pay on their pledges, support the parish and be faithful stewards of their resources. This gift, however, does open up opportunities for us," Father Herold said.

The parish's leadership will address how best to use the gift and welcomes input from parishioners, he added. "We are grateful to Clair Adams and all who leave legacies of love to our community as we strive to live out the Gospel message in our day."

Adams' gift was a surprise to most parishioners, but not all. Deacon Jeff Schuetzle and his wife, Dawn, knew their longtime friend intended to donate his estate to his parish. They had been paying his bills for him the past seven years.

"He said he was going to help Father Tony build a new church," said Deacon Schuetzle, who had power of attorney for Adams.

The Schuetzles' friendship with Clair Adams and his late brother, Marv, began about 20 years ago at the former St. Mary's Catholic Church in Clinton where the two brothers attended Mass. The Schuetzles' oldest child, Allison, was about 5 at the time and would stop to say "hi" to the two men who lived in the same apartment building as her great-aunt.

Her family began visiting Clair Adams and regularly stopped by the apartment after the 9 a.m. Sunday Mass. Their friendship blossomed.

"He lived in a little basement apartment. He never wanted to buy anything. Nobody ever knew he had money," Dawn Schuetzle said. "You'd say, 'Clair, you need new shoes.' And he'd say, 'No, these shoes are fine.'"

"When Clair discovered he and Allison shared the same birthday - Oct. 29 - that sealed the deal," Deacon Schuetzle said.

Adams was a lifelong member of the parish and lifetime member of the St. Edward's Council Knights of Columbus. Born in 1913 in Clinton, he attended St. Mary's Catholic School and Clinton High School.

A U.S. Army veteran, he served in World War II and retired in 1968 as a master sergeant. He worked at the Clinton Corn Company, Royal Cloak Company, Bell's Café, Yellow Cab Company and Gibson Dry Cleaners. And he loved to golf, the Schuetzles said.

"He had a sense of humor that put a smile on anyone's face," said Allison (Schuetzle) Schultz, now a fifth-grade teacher at Prince of Peace Academy in Clinton. Adams made it to her wedding and she visited him in the nursing home with her daughter, Sophie, who celebrated her first birthday just two days after Adams died Aug. 12.

“Clair was a man of faith and his church family was very important to him,” Deacon Schuetzle said in the homily he delivered at Adams’ funeral Mass. “When Clair had to give up driving he called for a taxi, but when other parishioners got wind of this Clair had a ride every week. The church meant the world to Clair and for my family it was the beginning of a very beautiful friendship with Clair and a glimpse of the fullness of God’s love.”

“He literally could have traveled the world and instead he wanted to give his money to Father Tony to help the church,” Allison Schultz said. “I thought, ‘Wow, what an unselfish, caring, extremely generous person he is.’”