

McQuaid shares in the celebration of student's life

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — After McQuaid Jesuit High School senior Thomas Christopher Rodenhouse died suddenly of spinal meningitis on Friday, March 8, the McQuaid community joined together to honor and remember one of its own.

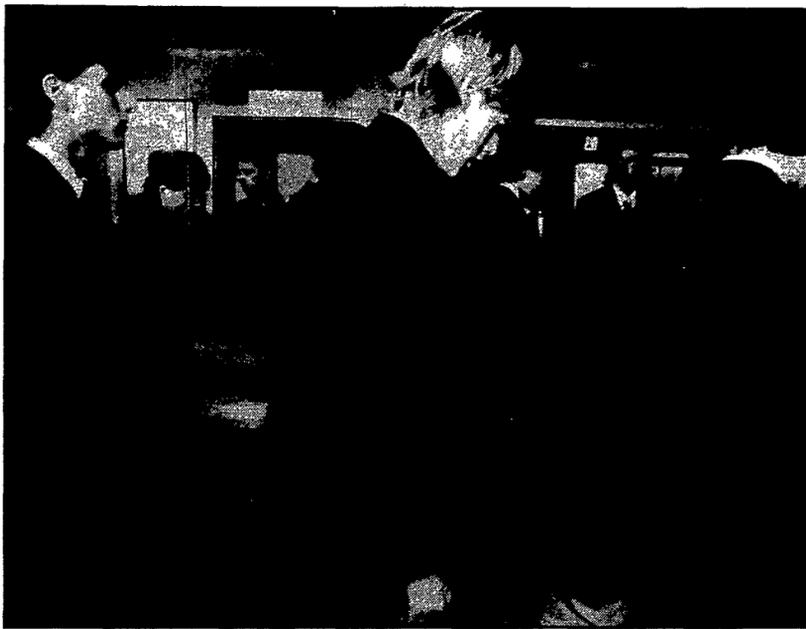
Mass of Christian Burial was held for the 18-year-old Rodenhouse — known as "Chris" — at McQuaid Jesuit High School on March 11. Rodenhouse's parents, Dr. Thomas and Sally Rodenhouse of Honeoye Falls, requested that the Mass take place at the South Clinton Avenue school, said Father Paul Nochelski, SJ, principal.

"Chris' allegiance, and that of his family, was so strong to the school that the decision seemed natural," explained Father Nochelski, who attended grammar school with Dr. Rodenhouse. Both Father Nochelski and Dr. Rodenhouse were also members of McQuaid's first graduating class in 1958.

Father Nochelski said preparations for the Mass of Christian Burial began immediately after the Rodenhouse family notified the school of its decision. Members of McQuaid's faculty and administration then attempted to notify all faculty members — as well as each member of the senior class — of Rodenhouse's death and of funeral arrangements over the weekend.

"We felt this ideally should be a personal thing," noted the principal.

Before the 11 a.m. Mass on the day of the funeral, members of the senior class lined the hallway at the entrance of the high school to solemnly greet family and friends upon their arrival.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Pallbearers escort the coffin of McQuaid Jesuit senior Thomas Christopher Rodenhouse past seniors who had lined the school's main hallway to solemnly greet family and friends attending the Mass of Christian Burial. The funeral Mass took place March 11 in the school's gymnasium.

During the Mass of Christian Burial, which was held in the school's gymnasium, senior class members paid tribute to Rodenhouse by standing throughout the service.

According to Father Nochelski, more than 1,200 people participated in the service to celebrate Rodenhouse's life — a life Father James P. Higgins, SJ, said was "God's uncompleted masterpiece, but a masterpiece nonetheless."

The Rodenhouses asked Father Higgins, who taught their son during his freshman year at McQuaid, to deliver the homily. The Jesuit now lives at Canisius College near Buffalo.

During his homily, Father Higgins recalled memories of Rodenhouse in class, offering glimpses into the young man's personality — such as his endearing smile, his positive attitude and his lust for life — with the congregation.

Throughout the service, the congregation sang such hymns as *On Eagle's Wings* and *Let There be Peace on Earth*. Members of the school faculty produced a program of readings and lyrics for the service. A friend of Rodenhouse designed the cover for the program. The drawings depicted things that were special to Rodenhouse — including skiing, sailing, lacrosse, soccer, hockey, his dog, nature and Jesus, according to Father Nochelski.

After the Mass, Dr. Robert Bakos — a partner of Dr. Rodenhouse — offered insights into the concept of "holy dying" in the eulogy for Rodenhouse. McQuaid senior Callin Macaulay, one of Rodenhouse's closest friends, followed the eulogy with a few words in honor of his friend.

After the Mass, senior class members again lined the hallway as the funeral procession left the school.

Any juniors and seniors who wanted to leave school to visit the grave site were excused from classes, said Father Nochelski, who added that about half of the senior

class did go to Pine Hill Cemetery in Rush for interment.

Father Nochelski noted that the option not to attend the Mass was offered to students. About a dozen underclassmen spent the hour in the cafeteria instead of attending the Mass in the gymnasium, the principal said.

"Some students just weren't able to deal with it," said the fifth-year principal, who noted that many students were experiencing death for the first time.

Likewise, the *Catholic Courier* refrained from interviewing any students out of respect for what Father Nochelski called "their private emotions."

Father Nochelski noted that the school is trying to accommodate the needs of grieving students. Last week, faculty members — especially guidance counselors — participated in several presentations focusing on how to work with grieving students.

Students have taken part in the counseling opportunities, which are offered in group and individual sessions, said Father Nochelski.

Gerry Pashby, the primary therapist and director of social work at the DePaul Mental Health Clinic, was at McQuaid on the day of the funeral. Pashby is a counselor for three diocesan high schools — McQuaid, Aquinas Institute and Bishop Kearney — and he regularly visits McQuaid on Thursday mornings.

Pashby noted that counselors are aggressively trying to make students aware of their presence at McQuaid.

"We roamed the halls (on Monday) checking for kids who might need to talk," he said.

Pashby stressed that it is essential for students to talk about their grief to a counselor, to their family or to each other.

"Things like this hit people in different ways. It's bound to effect them eventually," he said.

Pashby wants students to know that if they need him, he will be there.

"I'm as close as the telephone, so they can reach out. If I get a call, I can be at the school for them," Pashby explained.

With the the family's consent, school officials are in the process of establishing a memorial scholarship in memory of Rodenhouse, according to Father Nochelski.

The principal noted that the opportunity the family provided for the McQuaid community to share in Rodenhouse's funeral liturgy was special.

"The service exemplified the best of the liturgy as well as an expression of faith and what community is all about," Father Nochelski said. "Out of such a tragedy, we are strengthened as to who we are as believers, and we learn that we need to approach death with faith and hope."

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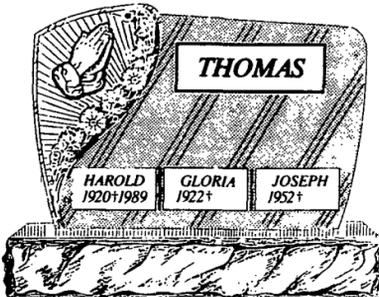
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