

Fr. George Norton; hospital chaplain

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Father George R. Norton, a diocesan priest since 1983 and beloved hospital chaplain, died March 1, 2004, at St. Ann's Home in Rochester following a long illness. He was 67 years old.

Father Norton was born in Lee, Mass. He was a noted radio announcer for many years in New England prior to entering St. Bernard's Seminary in 1976. In Rochester he was host of a diocesan-produced radio program.

He was ordained in 1983, at age 46, by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. He then served as priest intern at St. Mary, Canandaigua, and as parochial vicar at Holy Ghost, Gates. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he also served as diocesan director of communications.

Father Norton began part-time hospital chaplaincy at Rochester General Hospital in 1989, later moving to Genesee Hospital where he was named full-time chaplain in 1995. He subsequently became director of pastoral care for Via-Health — the merged Genesee and Rochester General hospitals — and remained in that position for Rochester General after Genesee



closed in 2001.

"I had always felt that it was the kind of ministry I could apply myself to," Father Norton said in a 2002 *Catholic Courier* interview. "I also felt that I would be able to reach out to people. It's a very rewarding ministry. You see people at their most vulnerable time; and you can be of some service to these people."

Father Norton was a member of the National Chaplain's Association and National Broadcasting Group. In his free time he enjoyed reading as well as visiting Civil War sites, often traveling with his close friend, Father Leo Reinhardt, pastor of Ithaca's Immaculate Conception.

Illnesses hampered Father Norton in recent years, especially in his ability to walk. But he continued to thrive in his ministry, according to the Rev. Christine Baker, who has succeeded him as pastoral-care director at Rochester General.

"He had his little motorized scooter with the Ferrari sticker. He was always zipping all over the hos-



pital and he got where he needed to go," said Rev. Baker, a Presbyterian minister who worked with Father Norton for three years. "He was just delightful. He gave a real strong sense of love and support."

Rev. Baker added that Father Norton knew numerous staff members, patients and families on a first-name basis.

"He was just such a strong support for the staff. His ministry here is very difficult to quantify. He was such a fixture here that folks are really shocked he is gone, even though he hasn't been here for over a year," she commented. "He was just very gracious, very humble. He was a wonderful mentor and colleague."

"He was a tremendously generous person, always willing to give of his time. He was a person who truly loved people," Father Reinhardt added. "He'd say hello to many of the maintenance staff, people in the cafeteria. It didn't make any difference if they were pa-

tients, doctors, support help. He always tried to appreciate everyone as a person."

Faced with mounting health problems in mid-2003, Father Norton retired from both the hospital and the diocesan priesthood. He resided at St. Ann's Home until his death.

Father Norton's funeral Mass was to take place March 4 at Rochester's Blessed Sacrament Church, where he had resided and been an assisting priest for several years. Bishop Clark was to serve as celebrant with Father Reinhardt serving as homilist. Interment was to be at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Father Norton is survived by several cousins. Father Reinhardt noted that because Father Norton had no family in the Rochester area, he became more or less adopted by Father Reinhardt's family. "My nephews and nieces always considered him Uncle George," the Ithaca priest said.

Memorial donations can be made to the Mary Parkes Asthma Center, c/o Maureen Prince, RN, 220 Alexander St., Suite 406, Rochester, NY 14620.

Fleming chapel ceases Sunday Mass

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

St. Isaac Jogues Chapel in Fleming, which is slated to close June 13, celebrated its last regular Sunday Mass on Feb. 29.

A special Mass to mark the chapel's closing also is scheduled for 10 a.m. on June 13, according to Father Donald Curtiss, pastor of Good Shepherd Catholic Community in Aurora (Our Lady of the Lake, Ferry; St. Michael, Union Springs; St. Patrick's, Moravia; and St. Bernard's, Scipio Center). The chapel is available for weddings and funerals through June 13, he said.

Father Curtiss has been overseeing St. Isaac's since the November death of its longtime administrator, Father Albert Shamon. A well-known columnist for the *Catholic Courier*, Father Shamon oversaw St. Isaac's for 18 years. Due to the priest shortage, no replacement can be found for Father Shamon, Father Curtiss said.

"We just don't have the personnel to cover it, and none of the parishes in Auburn have the resources to take it on," Father Curtiss said of St. Isaac's. He added that a St. Isaac's

parishioner has offered to buy the church when it closes and may turn it into a youth center or child-care center.

St. Isaac's opened in 1946 as a mission of St. Bernard's in Scipio Center. About 125 people were still attending Mass at St. Isaac's as of last week, Father Curtiss said, with a number of other St. Isaac's members already attending church services in Auburn.

Father Curtiss noted that St. Isaac's members are saddened by the closing. "It's like a death in the family," he said.

Mary Dygert has attended St. Isaac's for 49 years with her husband, Gerald. She noted that she and her spouse are considering joining St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Auburn. Nonetheless, she'll miss St. Isaac's, she said, noting that her husband helped build the church and that she belonged to a rosary group there.

"It breaks my heart," she said of the closing. "You feel like you've lost someone very close to you. Very few Sundays have we gone anywhere else."

Dygert and her husband are in

their 80s and are still mobile, she said, but they are concerned about driving to St. Francis in the winter. The church is seven miles from their home and they sometimes get snowed in.

Father Curtiss acknowledged the concerns of older St. Isaac's parishioners such as the Dygerts who can no longer attend a church close to home.

"Hopefully, people will be offering rides to church," he said of members of neighboring parishes. He urged people who need such rides to contact the church they would like to attend and ask for assistance.

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