

DEACON JACK O'LEARY - A GIFT TO OUR PARISH

Deacon Jack O'Leary passed away peacefully at home a little over a week ago, ready to join his dear wife, Marilyn, who went before him and who he missed so much. Since I knew Jack for less than three years at a time when he had become a "senior deacon" and was spending his winters as a snowbird in Florida, I didn't feel that I could adequately speak to his invaluable involvement in parish life during his more active years of ministry. So I asked staff members to share, if they wished, some thoughts about Jack. Here they are....

James and I met Jack for the first time in RCIA - Jack was covering the session on marriage. We didn't know a lot of people in the parish at the time and his humor and relaxed disposition made us feel welcomed. The few times I interacted with Jack, mostly in staff meetings, he was very supportive of the religious education program and offered to visit classrooms to talk about baptism and first communion.

Jack had a wonderful sense of humor and that came through in his ministry. I think people, myself included, really enjoyed being around him; he could put a smile on anyone's face. Jack appreciated the particular irony of a situation, and he would respond in a lighthearted manner. However, he was not all fun and games. Jack was very active in strengthening the faith in others. He made himself available to visit the sick and distribute Holy Communion. Occasionally, he would speak to the Religious Education students at St. Joseph's, and through the years, he baptized many children. He never bragged about himself but frequently spoke highly of others. Jack's faith shined through in his smile, and he will be missed.

Jack officiated at well over 100 Baptisms. At each one he gave a letter to the parents of the Baptized child which was to be opened when that person was confirmed. Jack's letter was both folksy and inquisitive and reaffirming.

Jack, along with his wife Marilyn, were members of the Archdiocesan Marriage Tribunal and would interview and assist those wishing to start annulment proceedings.

Jack's homilies were always insightful, relevant, and often filled with a folksy humor or a story to help bring home the Gospel message. At the end of Jack's homily at the funeral of our former pastor, Father Sayers. Jack made the comment. " If we didn't know Father Sayers and all of his quirks, likes, and dislikes; we would have had to create him!

Jack, thank God, you were there for us, we didn't have to create you...God did it for us!!! Rest in peace!

I have no doubt that those reflections could be echoed hundreds of times over by all those who met Jack and were touched by his ministry as a deacon. If I were to describe the Jack O'Leary I knew in a nutshell, it would be: rough around the edges with a deeply generous and compassionate heart of gold. The "rough around the edges" bit

describes the witty, sardonic and sometimes sarcastic one-liners Jack could use to cut through what one of my seminary psychology professors called the “fluff” that sometimes obscured the real point of a discussion or debate. Jack always helped to make sure we got to the heart of the matter in our staff meetings. But then there was that “heart of gold” which revealed the core of his faith, lived out in marriage, ministry and friendship and shared lovingly with this faith community. Thank you, Jack. Rest in peace, and enjoy eternity as much as you enjoyed your life in this world.

Fr. Bob