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SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO - NEW ROCHELLE, NY

July 15, 2010

May he rest in peace!



Father Jonathan Parks, SDB

Born: September 26, 1949

Professed: August 15, 1969

Ordained: May 19, 1978

Died: July 11, 2010

By Father Michael Mendl, SDB

Fr. Jonathan D. Parks, pastor of St. Rosalie Catholic Church in Harvey, La., since 2004, died on July 11 at West Jefferson Medical Center in Marrero, La., after a months-long illness. He was 60.

Fr. Parks, the son of Charles and Elaine Weicks Parks, was born in New Orleans and raised in Gretna, La., where the family belonged to St. Joseph's Parish.

Jon was introduced to the Salesians when he attended Archbishop Shaw High School in Marrero, where he was in the second graduating class (1967). Strongly influenced by the Salesians who taught him, especially Fr. Paul Avallone, the school's first director and principal, he entered Don Bosco Seminary in Newton, N.J., in 1967 and made his religious vows as a Salesian on Aug. 15, 1969.

Jon earned a Bachelor's degree from Don Bosco College in Newton in 1972 and was assigned to teach U.S. history and religion at Archbishop Shaw High School for two years. ▶



Fr. Jon (second from left) at St. Rosalie assisting Bp. Emilio Allue at the blessing of the statue of Don Bosco with youths.

In 1974 he enrolled in the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio, for theological studies. He earned an M.Div. and was ordained a priest on May 19, 1978, in Columbus. After ordination Fr. Parks served young people and the Salesians as a teacher and school administrator in Cedar Lake, Ind. (1978-1979), Ramsey (1979-1980, 1988-1990), Tampa (1983-1988), Boston (1980-1983), and East Boston (1990-1993, 2001-2004). He also was vocation director from 1983-84 and 1993-96.

After earning a doctorate in educational administration/superintendency at Boston College in 1996, Fr. Parks was appointed superintendent of schools for the Eastern Province in 1999 and served until 2004. He assisted St. Rosalie Church as associate pastor from 1996 to 2001.

Fr. Parks was a frequent speaker at the National Catholic Education Association and a member of various boards, including the National Religious Vocation Conference and Cafe Hope in Marrero. He was a member of the presbyteral council of the archdiocese of New Orleans and a consultant to the Office of Education of the archdiocese.

Former provincial Fr. James Heuser said of Fr. Parks: "The West Bank of New Orleans gave us a gift in Fr. Jon, with his strong sense of family and friendship, and an effusive and joyful ▶

Frank J. Methe/Clarion Herald



Archbishop Gregory Aymond incenses the remains of Fr. Jonathan Parks.

Southern style. It blended well with the warm relational approach advocated by Don Bosco. In these last years he returned to the West Bank and was a gift to them, enriching many who struggled through hard times with his priestly zeal and simple devotional faith. Greatly loved by many, he will be greatly missed."

Fr. Parks is survived by his twin brother Joseph Anthony Parks, his younger brother Kenneth and his sister Christine (Raymond) Fleming; stepsisters Charlene and Eileen and stepbrother Charles.

A wake was held for Fr. Parks at the Alario Center in Westwego, La., on Wednesday, July 14, followed by the Mass of Christian Burial.

There was a private memorial service at St. Rosalie Church in Harvey on July 14 for parish leadership committees, school staff, Salesians, and members of the family.

Fr. Parks was buried in a family plot in West Lawn Cemetery in Gretna at in the presence of family and Salesians. A dinner for family and friends followed at the Four Columns Restaurant in Harvey.

Later in the summer the New Rochelle Province will hold a memorial service for Father Parks in the New York area. †

Message from Fr. Provincial

Life is changed, not ended

Yesterday the Salesian community in Marrero, the province of St. Philip, the parish of St. Rosalie, and the archdiocese of New Orleans bade farewell to our confrere and brother, Fr. Jonathan Parks. This was my first Salesian funeral as provincial. Conflicts caused by travel to meetings in foreign countries prevented me from participating in the province celebrations for Fr. Tyminski, Bro. Cauda, and Bro. Zito.

The funeral of Fr. Jonathan Parks fulfilled what our Constitutions (#54) indicate with regard to the death of a Salesian. The confreres of our Louisiana community gathered around Fr. Jonathan with prayerful and loving support throughout his illness, especially during the last week of suffering. In his community, Fr. Jon experienced the promise of Don Bosco to his dying Salesians: "When the hour comes for him to bring his consecrated life to its highest fulfillment, his brothers help him to enter fully into Christ's paschal mystery" (C. 54a).

During the funeral liturgy I was struck at how this Constitution was fulfilled not only by the Salesian community but also by the entire West Bank community as well. The funeral liturgy took place in the Alario Center, a multi-purpose building that could house up to 2500 people. This hall was filled with Salesians from the community and province, parishioners, students, teenagers, toddlers, parish staff, Shaw alumni, friends, archdiocesan priests, Archbishop Gregory Aymond and his auxiliary Bishop Shelton Fabre. This assembly came together to celebrate the life and death of a Salesian, a priest, an educator, a colleague, and a friend. Fr. Jonathan had entered the life-journey of all these people. At the time of his death, they came together to accompany him on his way to the Father.

This funeral celebration gave communal form to the promise Don Bosco made to his Salesians at the time of death: "Death for the Salesian is made bright by the hope of entering into the joy of his Lord, and when it happens that a Salesians dies working for souls, the Congregation has won a great triumph" (C. 54b). ▶

The celebration was characterized by the child-like joy that Fr. Jonathan brought to St. Rosalie Parish, the Salesian community, and the Parks family. Throughout the ceremony, photos of Fr. Jon in "Sponge Bob" attire and enjoying silly games with the children enlivened the sadness of the event with the hope of entering eternal joy with God in heaven.

As we move on in the life of our province, we must come to a few realizations. The death of Fr. Jonathan Parks has left our province lessened because of this loss. For this we grieve. At the same time, we firmly believe that his passing will have a lasting effect on our communities and province members. "The memory of departed confreres unites, 'in a love that will not pass away,' those who are still pilgrims with those who are already resting in Christ" (C. 54c). It is our prayer that the passing of Fr. Jonathan Parks will help unite in love the members of our province and the greater Salesian Family for the sake of God's Kingdom, especially the young most in need.

As I was going through this funeral experience, I remember remarking how it was a Jonathan Parks type of experience *par excellence*. In many ways, Fr. Jon's assignment as pastor in St. Rosalie Parish was a blessing for his development as a Salesian and a person. ▶

During the years that he served as pastor of this parish community, his gifts and his person flourished as if they had finally found their home.

In my comments at the end of Mass, I thanked the parishioners of St. Rosalie's and the 35 archdiocesan priests present (mostly colleagues of Fr. Jon on archdiocesan boards and commissions) for drawing out the very best from Fr. Jonathan during his service at St. Rosalie. At the same time, I thanked his Salesian confreres for helping Jonathan fulfill what he thought to be the greatest blessing of his life: being professed as a member of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

In his last days, Fr. Jonathan Parks confidently proclaimed that he was going home to his Father. During this period after his death, we join together in carrying on his deathbed prayers for vocations to the Salesian and priestly life.

For those of us who were not able to travel to New Orleans for the funeral, we will hold a memorial service for our dearly departed Fr. Jonathan Parks at the Marian Shrine during the second Salesian retreat in August.

For us who believe, life is changed, not ended.



Frs. Thomas Dunne, James Curran and Thomas Ruckert bless the remains of Fr. Jonathan Parks at the Alario Center.

Frank J. Methé/Clarion Herald

