

Region mourns loss of Father Hembrow, beloved priest, friend

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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JERSEYVILLE – The Rev. William Hembrow, 84, a priest who left an impact with literally generations of people for his care, generosity and kindness, died Tuesday morning.

Father Hembrow was serving humanity through his final day of life, visiting a nursing home facility Monday. Hembrow's death was sudden as he died in his sleep, church officials said.

Hembrow was pastor at Holy Ghost Church in Jerseyville and St. Mary's Catholic Church in Fieldon until the time of his death. Rev. Patrick Gibbons, the priest for St. Francis Catholic Church, has served in Jerseyville for the past 18 years. He had a close relationship with Father Hembrow.

Rev. Gibbons said losing Father Hembrow was "like losing a close family member."

"I feel a huge loss," Gibbons said. "He had a generous heart. What I will remember about him most is his openness to people. He was always willing to help and so generous."

Father Hembrow was marking his 40th year at Holy Ghost Church in Jerseyville, arriving at the parish in September of 1976.

Rev. Gibbons said Hembrow loved people and was very down to earth.

"Father Hembrow was unique," the Rev. Gibbons said. "He was extremely popular and attracted people from five counties to his church. He had a gift for words."

One person said on Facebook that Father Hembrow's passing is a great loss to the Jerseyville community and Catholic Church.

"Father Hembrow had an insatiable love for football and oftentimes his sermons somehow included football," the person said.

Terrie Kallal said everyone thought Father Hembrow was someone special.

"He was healthy and had been to Jerseyville Manor on Sunday seeing residents," she said. "Everyone thought he was amazing."

Principal Janet Goben of St. Francis School in Jerseyville said Father Hembrow's loss was a "shocker."

"Father Hembrow always encouraged and was very positive," she said. "He was always willing to help anybody. Everyone loved him. I was blessed to have him as my boss. He was always so supportive."

Perhaps what people will remember most about Father Hembrow was his gift of giving sermons at Mass.

“He said what he felt he had to say,” Goben said of his sermons. “His sermons were right to the point. I just loved him. He always had a story. Even if you weren’t Catholic, Father Hembrow always made you feel welcome.”

Rev. Gibbons wanted to go to confession to Father Hembrow on Monday, but said he didn’t make it and he now regrets that.

Gibbons said Father Hembrow got his wish of working as a man of God through the last hours of his life.

“He wanted to die with his boots on,” Gibbons said. “I have heard him talking about retirement for 15 years, but I don’t know if he ever would have retired.

"He got his wish of dying with his boots on, working until the very end.”