

Archbishop Murphy dies today at 64; prayer service set



BARRY WONG/SEATTLE TIMES

Archbishop Thomas Murphy died today of a cerebral hemorrhage.

*His legacy will be:
'A pastor who
loved his children'*

BY SALLY MACDONALD
Seattle Times religion reporter

Catholic Archbishop Thomas Murphy, for whom illness became a lesson on the gift of life and the grace of God, has died. He was 64.

Murphy died at 8:30 a.m. today after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage last night at Providence Seattle Medical Center. He never regained consciousness.

Murphy had been in the hospital since Friday, undergoing chemotherapy for leukemia.

He died surrounded by 20 members of his staff and several close friends.

The Thomas Bells, named after the archbishop when he blessed them in August 1994 for the remodeled St. James Cathedral, rang this

morning, letting parishioners and others know of the death. At his death, the front door of the cathedral was draped with purple shrouds.

A special prayer service has been scheduled for 8:30 p.m. today at the cathedral, said the Rev. George Thomas, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

"We'll take time to mourn this loss, but we will be very aware of the time ahead of us," Thomas said.

The archbishop was told about two days ago that he would be facing some very difficult days, Thomas said.

"I'm very much at peace with this," Thomas said. "I felt the chemotherapy he was going through was very much a burden on his shoulders.

"I know he would want us to remember him as a pastor who loved his children."

Catholics visiting the cathedral

today to mourn the archbishop recalled him in much that way, citing his friendliness and thoughtfulness.

"Tears come to my eyes because everybody has a feeling in their heart, and it was nice to know him for the short time," said Mary Brown while visiting the cathedral.

"It will be a great loss to the community, and I know he is loved and did a great service to the city of Seattle," said Pat Zoberst, a parishioner.

No funeral arrangements have been made, although Thomas said the archbishop left a letter with instructions on how to celebrate his life after he died. The instructions remain unopened, "but he will throw us some curves," Thomas said.

Thomas said there will be a "grand celebration" of Murphy's life sometime next week at the cathedral.

As spiritual head of 353,000 Catholics in Western Washington since 1991, Murphy was the Pacific Northwest's most powerful religious leader and a national presence among the country's Catholic hierarchy.

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back)

Until it was announced he had cancer, he was considered to be a dark-horse candidate to replace Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, his friend and mentor who died last fall.

Murphy was diagnosed in December with acute myelogenous leukemia, a cancer of the blood, but had returned to work in February after undergoing chemotherapy and frequent blood transfusions.

Murphy announced last week that the cancer apparently had recurred, but went ahead with plans to attend a national bishops' meeting in Kansas City.

He became ill with low blood pressure and other symptoms on the flight and was returned to Seattle aboard a medical-emergency plane Friday. Doctors immediately began a second round of chemotherapy.

Last night before he was stricken, Murphy told visitors that dying was a "communal experience," that dying affects all of us, said Sister Sharon Park. It was the one issue he wanted to talk about, she added.

In a vigil that began after his cerebral hemorrhage last night, staff and friends gathered in his hospital room, praying and at times sharing the moments with songs.

Said Jim Britt, archdiocesan spokesman who was in the room: "It was very beautiful, very peaceful . . . a very special moment."

The silver-haired and kindly looking Murphy described himself as shy and an introvert. In recent months, he had written movingly and often of his illness in the archdiocesan weekly newspaper, The Catholic Northwest Progress.

In one column, he said the prayers, cards, letters and phone messages he'd received had taught him how precious life was and "made me aware of the power of prayer and faith in ways I never dreamed possible."

In the reality of sickness, he wrote, he found joy, hope and God's grace.

"He was a person who loved his people and celebrated life," said Thomas, adding that Murphy often reminded people "never to take it (life) for granted, live life, love life."

Murphy was born Oct. 3, 1932, on Chicago's West Side, in a neighborhood that was primarily Irish and Catholic. His father was an insurance agent and his mother a hotel maid.

Like many boys in that time and place, he decided early he wanted to enter the priesthood. In high school, he worked as a receptionist at the rectory, answering phones and locating priests-on-call in emergencies.

In a 1995 interview with The Seattle Times, he recalled that his father, on his deathbed, had said: "If you're going to become a priest, be a good one."

Murphy was ordained in 1958. He was a priest in the Chicago archdiocese, president-rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Ill., and bishop of the Helena-Great Falls, Mont., diocese.



BETTY UDESEN/SEATTLE TIMES

Archbishop Thomas Murphy, left, with Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen the day Murphy arrived in Seattle.

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Highlights in life of Archbishop Murphy

- Born in Chicago — 1932.
- Attended Quigley Preparatory Seminary in Chicago and St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Ill. Degrees in philosophy and religious studies — 1932-1958.
- Ordained in Chicago — 1958.
- Theology instructor, Loyola University, Chicago — 1967-1973.
- Associate moderator, Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women — 1968-1971.
- Appointed Bishop, Great Falls-Billings, Mont. — 1978.
- Appointed coadjutor Archbishop of Seattle — 1987.
- Assumes title of Archbishop of Seattle, succeeding Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen — 1991.
- Diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia, a cancer of the blood. — 1996.
- Dies — June 26, 1997.

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PAT ZOBERST
Parishioner

He was named coadjutor of the Seattle Archdiocese in 1987 after the Vatican had removed, and then restored, the authority of Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen who was thought to be too lax on some issues, such as homosexuality.

Murphy took charge of the archdiocese when Hunthausen retired in the summer of 1991.

At the time, Catholics remembered previous archbishop Thomas Connolly, who died in 1990, for building buildings and Hunthausen for raising Catholics' social consciousness. They wondered what Murphy would be remembered for.

Many now agree it will be for an archdiocese that's brimming with vitality, particularly among young people and ethnic groups. There are about 353,000 registered Catholics in the archdiocese, up from 290,000 in 1985.

Murphy attributed the growth to people moving here to work at Boeing and high-tech companies or to serve at military bases like Fort Lewis.

But he said the growth had been fueled by "a hunger on the part of people for something more" than jobs and material acquisitions.

Murphy was viewed as moderate-to-liberal on issues of Catholic tradition, although he was a strong advocate of what he termed "issues that enhance the human person."

In 1992, he announced a \$6 million plan to help alleviate hunger, poverty and homelessness in Tacoma's troubled Hilltop neighborhood. The archdiocese also provided more than \$120,000 to help create jobs and job training for people in the hard-hit timber communities around Grays Harbor County.

Murphy was constantly worried about how to serve his local parishes in light of a nagging shortage of priests.

There are about 200 priests for the archdiocese's 197 parishes and community programs. Some parishes have been served by teams of priests. Some priests serve multiple parishes, and some parishes have lay pastoral-life directors, with priests coming in to celebrate the Eucharist. Murphy did his share, going on the road constantly, even throughout his illness, to visit parishes and conduct services.

Murphy lived long enough to ordain three priests at St. James Cathedral June 7, a moment that he had feared he would miss.

Whenever he was asked, and it was often, Murphy would say he believed it unlikely the church would begin ordaining women as priests, given Pope John Paul II's declaration that the subject was closed and the ban on women priests was irrevocable. Murphy said he didn't think future popes would decide otherwise.

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A petition by some Catholic groups urging reforms that included the ordination of women priests and married priests could polarize the church, he once said.

Murphy joined other Catholic leaders in opposing the state's two anti-gay-rights initiatives and, more recently, in calling for a congressional override of President Clinton's veto of a bill banning partial-birth abortions.

But he also said he would not threaten members of the church with excommunication for belonging to groups like Planned Parenthood or Catholics for a Free Choice, an abortion-rights group, as at least one bishop did.

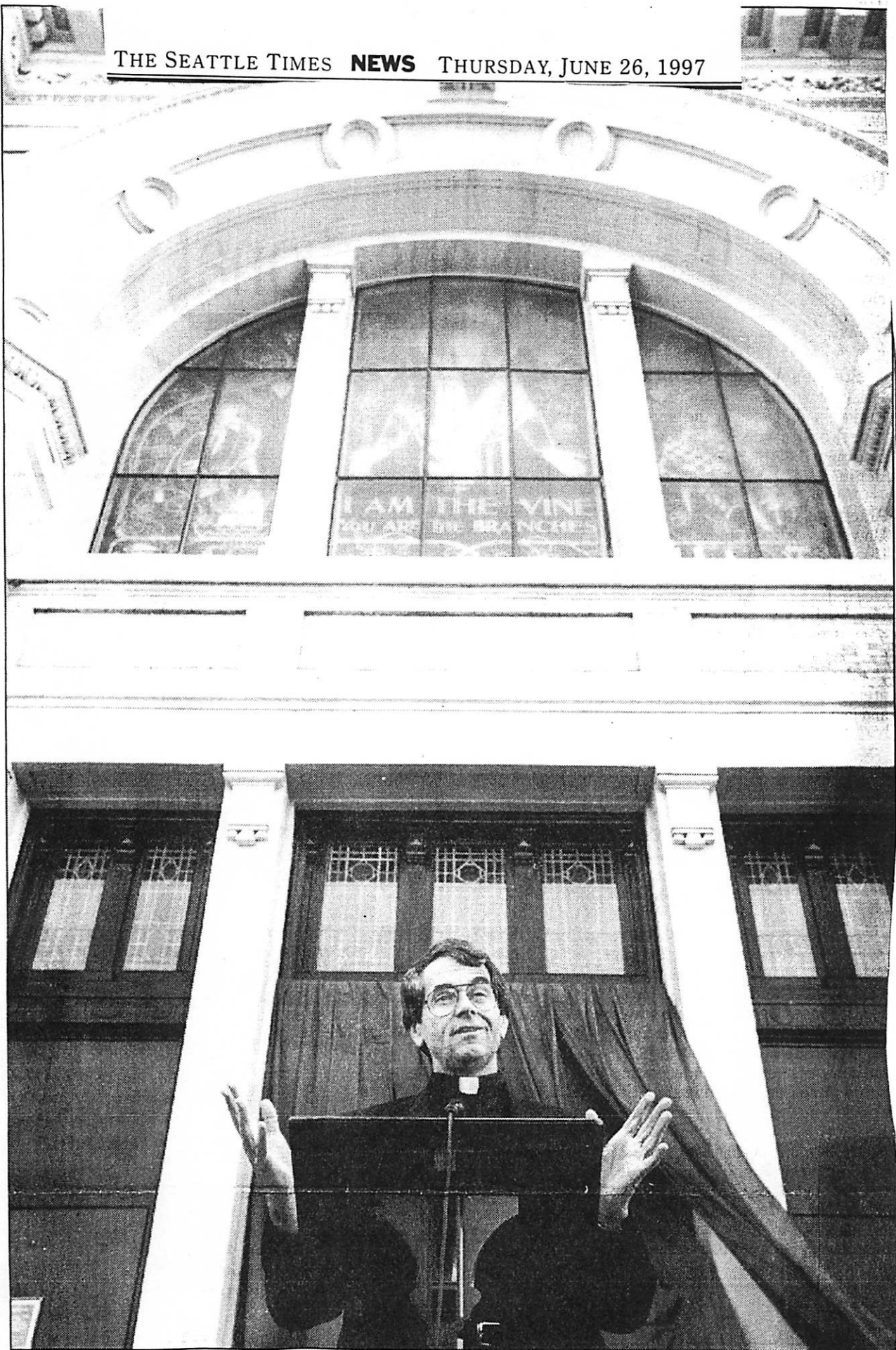
On the other hand, Murphy didn't believe Catholics should belong to groups that support abortion or other values and positions that contradict church teaching.

Last February, even though he was still undergoing cancer treatment as an outpatient, he reiterated his views against physician-assisted suicide during a special prayer service for the sick at St. James Cathedral.

In his homily that night, the archbishop told worshippers: "The great temptation today is to remove the aging and dying from our midst in the name of compassion or a false sense of autonomy. There is the great cry to legalize assisted suicide to protect the dying from what they fear most: intractable pain, loss of control, human dignity and financial stress. Yet, assisted suicide is not compassion.

"True compassion is the willingness to share the pain of others, to be present to them, to learn from them and to recognize that human life is a gift of God."

Seattle Times staff reporters Lee Moriwaki, Susan Gilmore, Arthur Santana and Antoinette Alexander contributed to this report.



BENJAMIN BENSCHNEIDER / SEATTLE TIMES

The Rev. George Thomas, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Seattle, responds to questions outside St. James Cathedral today after announcing the death of Archbishop Thomas Murphy.