

Archbishop celebrated life

In marking the death of Archbishop Thomas Murphy, the spiritual shepherd of 353,000 Catholics in Western Washington, we note with admiration his ability to celebrate life even as it ebbed away from him.

That was no more apparent than in February when Murphy, 64, resumed his public duties after initial treatment for leukemia by presiding over a healing service at St. James Cathedral.

As the prelate said that night, he was able to speak to ill and dying people before he was stricken. "Tonight I can speak with them — and there is a difference." To minister to others when directly confronting mortality is an accomplishment of no small import.

Following the December diagnosis, the archbishop focused his remaining time on trying to reach the young to ask them: "How are you going to use the gift of life?"

In contrast with his more controversial predecessor, Raymond Hunthausen, Murphy's emphasis in the six

years he presided over the archdiocese was on encouraging people to join the priesthood, serving the poor and the homeless and promoting religious instruction.

It is fitting, and was of immense pleasure to him, that he could hold off death until he ordained three priests earlier this month, an occasion he feared he would miss.

Regarding another of Murphy's priorities, we are grateful for his leadership at a critical time — the transformation of the welfare state. His was one of the strongest voices, as he declared that welfare reform legislation ran counter to Christian values of advocacy for the needy and repeatedly warned policy makers against ignoring the long-term effects on children.

On that night at the cathedral, when he returned to his vocational duties, Murphy's first words were, "My friends, you have no idea how good it is to be here." If he is where we think he is now, we imagine that he feels similarly.