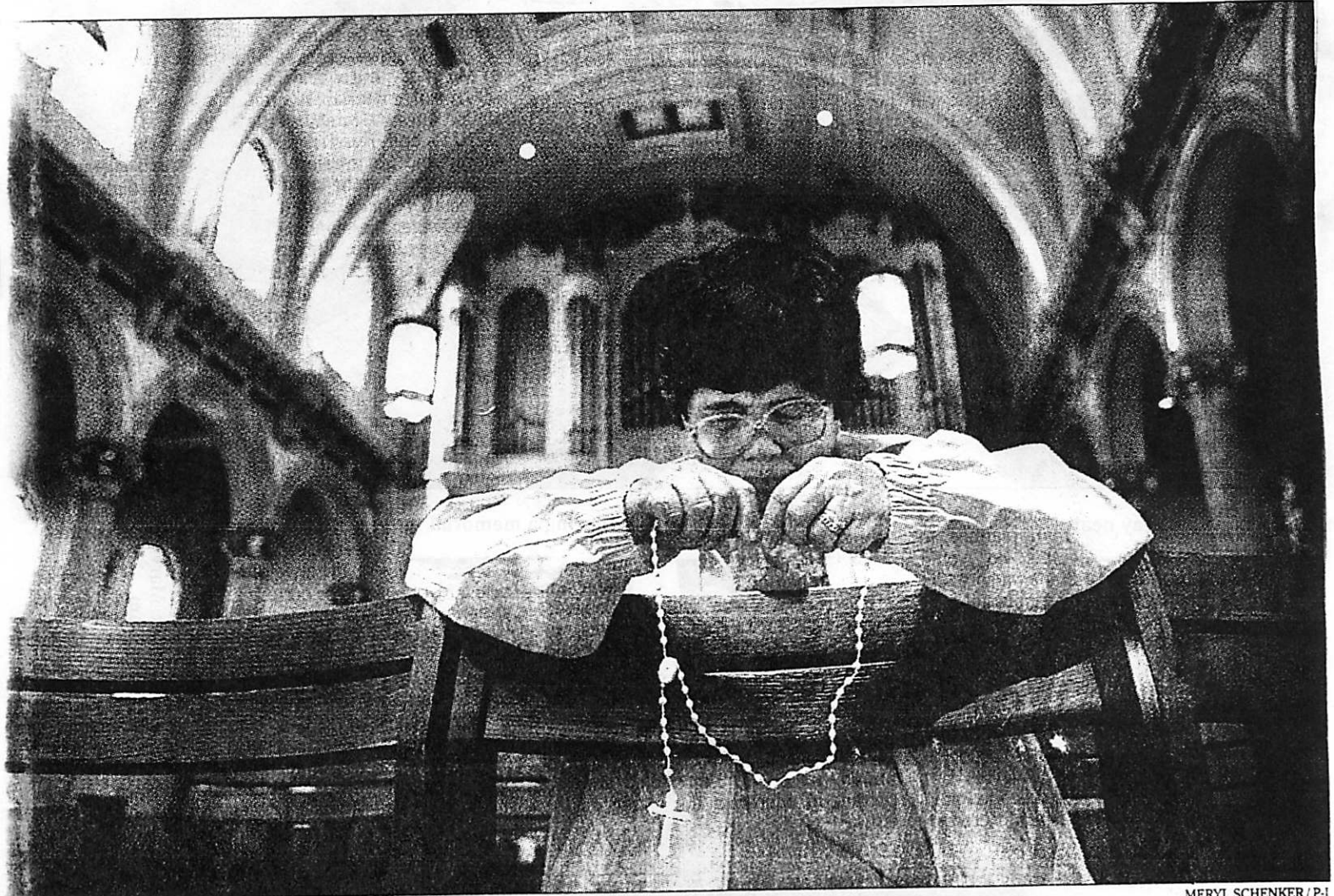




Bell tolls for archbishop

Leukemia takes Murphy at 64



MERYL SCHENKER / P-I

Meddad Cabiao of Seattle prays for Archbishop Thomas Murphy, who died at age 64, at St. James Cathedral before Mass yesterday.

He is recalled as a compassionate spiritual leader

By JOHN IWASAKI
P-I REPORTER

As the bell named in his honor tolled yesterday at St. James Cathedral, Seattle Archbishop Thomas Murphy was remembered as a compassionate spiritual leader who never forgot the common parishioner.

Murphy knew the leukemia he battled the past seven months "would finally have the last word," said the Rev. Michael Ryan, cathedral pastor. "But I believe he had the last word in his mind. Though I don't want this, I will accept

Ryan said a funeral will be held Thursday for Murphy, who died yesterday at Providence Medical Center. He was the first Seattle Catholic bishop to die in office in 65 years. The time of the service at St. James will be announced today.

Murphy, 64, suffered a brain hemorrhage Wednesday night, slipped into unconsciousness and died after being removed from life-support.

He died the same day the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that there is no constitutional right to assisted suicides. Murphy's whole-hearted embrace of the church's long-standing opposition to euthanasia was reinforced in his illness.

a steward of the gift of life," Murphy said in a sermon earlier this year.

Life is a gift from God "that we dare not destroy," he said.

Murphy was the spiritual leader for the Roman Catholic Church in Western Washington, which counts 353,000 registered Catholics in 170 parishes. He came to Seattle in 1987 as a coadjutor archbishop in a power-sharing arrangement with his predecessor, Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, and assumed full control when Hunthausen retired in 1991.

CONT'D ON BACK



MIKE URBAN

ishioners kneel and pray near the empty chair of Archbishop Thomas Murphy during a memorial service at St. James Cathedral yesterday.



MIKE URBAN / PA

Archbishop Thomas Murphy talks with youths at a workshop at St. Mary Magdalen in Everett last week as part of a church outreach program.

Murphy was regarded as a moderate on church issues and a progressive on social issues, speaking out for labor, welfare recipients and racial minorities, and against the death penalty.

Within the church, he followed the strictures laid down by the Vatican. Even though most U.S. Catholics favor the ordination of women and married men to the priesthood, Murphy vigorously sought single men willing to commit themselves to priestly celibacy. He did not challenge Vatican restrictions on liturgy, homosexual rights, divorced Catholics or priests who left ministry.

On social justice issues, however, Murphy was an outspoken champion of the poor, of unemployed timber workers, of immigrants and of racial and ethnic minorities. He established a \$500,000 fund to

provide seed money for the state's economically-depressed timber communities. He was the first speaker at President Clinton's 1993 Forest Summit in Portland. He was the first Catholic bishop to speak to the annual convention of the state Labor Council. He established separate offices to serve the spiritual needs of Hispanic, American Indian, Pacific Island and black Catholics.

"He was a pastor par excellence. He deeply loved the ordinary people," said the Very Rev. George Thomas, vicar for ministers at the Seattle archdiocese.

Parishioners attending a noon Mass at St. James yesterday, some of whom wept softly, agreed.

"He was the soul of this place," Wendy Fotre said. "He had such a gentleness and a kind heart."

To Kay D'Ambrosio, Murphy was "a people's archbishop. He was very lovable, especially with children. He was holy, but he was down to earth, too."

An administrator to oversee day-to-day operations of the Seattle archdiocese will be elected within a week by the board of consultors, composed of the heads of 10 regional areas of the diocese along with Thomas and the Very Rev. James Picton, vicar for parishes.

The administrator, a priest within the archdiocese, will serve until Pope John Paul II names a new archbishop, a decision that Thomas said may not be made for months.

"I know the archbishop had strong feelings that we not abandon the ordinary work of the diocese," Thomas said.

"He was the soul of this place. He had such a gentleness and a kind heart."

- Wendy Fotre, parishoner

Murphy had been undergoing chemotherapy since Tuesday after tests last weekend confirmed the return of acute myelogenous leukemia, a cancer of the blood and bone marrow. He was initially diagnosed in December, spent 39 days in the hospital and was readmitted June 20. In recent days, Murphy was in "inordinately good spirits," Thomas said. "He seemed very happy and just ready to face the future."

Thomas administered the anointing of the sick, the church's sacrament of last rights, after Murphy suffered the brain hemorrhage.

Doctors performed a CAT scan and determined that Murphy would not regain consciousness, Thomas said. Murphy's family decided to remove a ventilator at 8:15 a.m. yesterday, and the archbishop died about 15 minutes later, surrounded by about 25 family members and close friends.

Murphy was "sent out of this life surrounded by prayer and song," archdiocesan spokesman Jim Britt said.

The previous Seattle bishop to die in office was Bishop Edward O'Dea, who established St. James Cathedral in 1904 and died in 1932.

The fragility of life and the value society places on the living - and the dying - were issues Murphy pondered for the past six months. He said he greeted each morning with thanks for another day, valued his friendships more deeply and took nothing for granted.

Assisted suicide is not compassionate, he said in a homily at a Mass marking the World Day of Prayer for the Sick in February.

"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 from God," Murphy said.

Reflecting on his hospital stay in December and January, Murphy recently said, "I discovered that the quality of life (and) the quality of dying depends on the quality of relationships. The most horrible cries are people dying and no one is present."

More than 700 parishioners gathered last night for a special prayer service at St. James, where one of four bells in the south tower rang through the day. The bell, known as the "Thomas Bell" and inscribed with his name, was blessed by Murphy in August 1994.

In a short service, Ryan extolled Murphy as a gentle, compassionate man — "our friend, our leader, our shepherd."

"This night is not about darkness. It's about light," Ryan said. "Archbishop Murphy would be bowled over by the presence of all of you here."

The assembled came from all walks: nuns and non-believers, lifelong Seattle residents and fresh immigrants, the young and old. Many, like Catherine Schmitz-Robinson, said Murphy was inspiring and refreshingly approachable.

Schmitz-Robinson said that during a religious gathering in May the archbishop walked up to her two young daughters, who were frantically searching for a table of cookies amid a reception room throng.

"He took them by the hand and said, 'Would you girls like a shortcut to the cookies?' He was just wonderful," she said.

A prayer vigil will be held Wednesday night.

Murphy had an "infectious, irrepressible laugh that you couldn't hear without knowing something good was happening," said Ryan.

Sister Joyce Cox, Murphy's assistant for nine years, said the archbishop had a spirit of gratitude, humility and "compassion for those who had no voice."

"I saw him with sensitivity to women (in society) and women in the

church," she said. "A tremendous asset of his was appointing women to key positions and making sure that areas open in the church could be filled by women."

Bishop William Skylstad of the Catholic Diocese of Spokane, who had known Murphy since 1978, said Murphy had "a tremendous passion for serving people in the church. . . . I'll remember him as a very gifted archbishop who had an unusual amount of gifts wrapped up in a single person."

Murphy was born Oct. 3, 1932, to Irish immigrants in Chicago, where he grew up an avid Bears and White Sox fan. He was ordained in 1958 and served with the Chicago archdiocese until 1978, when he was appointed

bishop of the Great Falls-Billings diocese in Montana.

He came to Seattle in 1987 after the Vatican removed and then restored the authority of Hunthausen. Rome was critical of what it viewed as Hunthausen's lack of firmness in dealing with such issues as homosexuality, marriage annulments and the role of women in the church.

In 1990, Hunthausen suspended a diaconate program, a men-only ministry allowed to do some sacraments, saying he would not ordain any more deacons until the church better addressed the role of women.

Last November, the archdiocese announced that it was launching a pilot project to resume the diaconate. Murphy and others saw deacons, who are typically married men, as a way to relieve some of the burden on the diminishing number of priests.

In some media reports, Murphy was mentioned as a possible successor to Chicago Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, a friend who died of cancer in November, but Murphy discounted those reports. Chicago Archbishop Francis George, a former bishop of Yakima who succeeded Bernardin, yesterday mourned Murphy's death.

"He was a source of inspiration in his life and his actions, which were fed by an imagination that was as lively as his intelligence was deep," George said.

Accolades poured in from government and church leaders in Washington. Gov. Gary Locke said Murphy was "a public conscience for all people in our state." Seattle Mayor Norm Rice said he would "never forget Archbishop Murphy's strength and support when this community mourned the loss of four Seattle firefighters" in the 1995 Pang warehouse fire.

"Archbishop Murphy lived a life which was a brilliant reflection of the Christian community's deepest concerns for those who are most vulnerable in our community and throughout our world," said the Rev. Thomas Quigley, president-director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

Thomas summed up Murphy's legacy this way: "I know he'd want us to celebrate life and never take life for granted. . . . That was his repeated theme over and over again: Live life, love life, love one another."

■ P-I reporter Robert L. Jamieson Jr. contributed to this report.

The archbishop on life and dying

Archbishop Thomas J. Murphy spoke about life and death last month at a gathering of the leadership of Catholic Community Services. An abridged version of his remarks follows:

"(At Providence Hospital last December), they told me I had complete kidney failure and that I would probably be on dialysis for the rest of my life. Secondly, they said I had leukemia, and I wasn't expected to live more than just a few days. I called my brother and I told him I was dying and I cried like I have never cried in my life . . .

"The first week in the hospital I couldn't move. I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't eat. I couldn't talk coherently, I couldn't think. I tell you, I never experienced the gift of life — and the respect for life — as I did in those first few days. Isn't it wrong that we have to be motionless, in pain, near death, in order to realize how much we treasure life? . . .

"With my brother, my sister-in-law and other close friends with me, it became clear that the quality of living depends on the quality of your relationships. And just as you need people in life, you need them for the quality of dying . . .

"My next door neighbor was a 21-year-old man who had no faith tradition. He had cancer and was told he had only two weeks to live.

"We became friends. He didn't know what an archbishop was. He told me when he saw all those men

dressed in black coming into my room he thought, 'Either you are very sick or very bad.'

"Knowing that he had so little time to live, I asked him, 'Do you have any regrets?' He wanted to think about that. Later he came back and said, 'Yes, I have regrets. I regret that I didn't take enough time to say thank you.'

"He died about three days later. His funeral began with someone stepping forward and saying, 'Thank you.' . . .

"I go to Providence every three weeks for a blood transfusion because I can't generate enough blood to keep me going . . . When the nurse brings in a pint of blood, you don't know who has given it. I don't know if it's a man or woman, tall or short, fat or skinny, Native American, Asian, Hispanic or white.

"But someone anonymously, and with no strings attached, has given me a gift that keeps me alive. That pint of blood is a symbol of people sharing the gift of life. I pray for each of them when I receive their gift. And I say thank you.

"That's why I call those days in the hospital a grace and a blessing. I learned more fully the preciousness of life. I learned that the quality of your relationships will determine the quality of your journey to death.

"And, I learned to say, 'Thank you.' "

■ This material was provided by Catholic Community Services of Western Washington.