

Pastor's death is sudden

Holy Spirit leader dies from disease

By Dan Meisler

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The Rev. William Thomas, pastor at Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Church in Hamburg Township since 1999, died Monday in Koblenz, Germany, from Legionnaire's disease.

Thomas, 68, had established the school at the church, its cemetery, and a perpetual Eucharist Adoration available for prayer 24 hours a day.

Todd Borek, who is handling the funeral arrangements



William Thomas

and also attends Holy Spirit, said he was told that Thomas was in Germany to help a group of travelers. Thomas was selected because he knew German and has some established relationships in that country from his previous visits and studies there.

Thomas had been on a leave of absence from the church since 2005, but the Lansing diocese hasn't said why.

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"He was very likable and friendly," Borek said. "I had always hoped that he would return to the parish."

Mike Falinski, who has attended Holy Spirit for 18 years, served on the parish council and said that although he and Thomas sometimes disagreed, the late father "was a fascinating individual."

"He swung back and forth between being very serious and having a great sense of humor," Falinski said. "I thought he did a great job. He was a very devoted pastor."

Both Falinski and Borek described the pastor as conservative and loyal to the diocese bishop.

Yet, he was also compassionate.

"I thought one of the neatest things about him was his generosity and humanity. He adopted a boy in the Middle East and paid for his education. He was just touched by people he met," Falinski said.

He was also very sensitive to criticism, Falinski added.

"Sometimes he was maybe overly sensitive," he said. "He tried very hard to be everything to everybody, and it was very difficult."

Thomas also traveled a lot, having visited Germany and Israel.

Thomas was born on Christmas Day, 1938 in Lansing, the only son of Wesley and Wilma Thomas.

He earned a bachelor's degree in New Testament studies from Bob Jones University and a master's degree in education from Calvin College.

The Rev. Carl Mengeling, Bishop of the Lansing Diocese, will officiate at a memorial mass scheduled at 11 a.m. today at the Holy Spirit church, 9565 Musch Road, Hamburg Township.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Legionnaire's disease is a form of pneumonia caused by a bacteria, and is usually treatable with antibiotics if caught early.

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