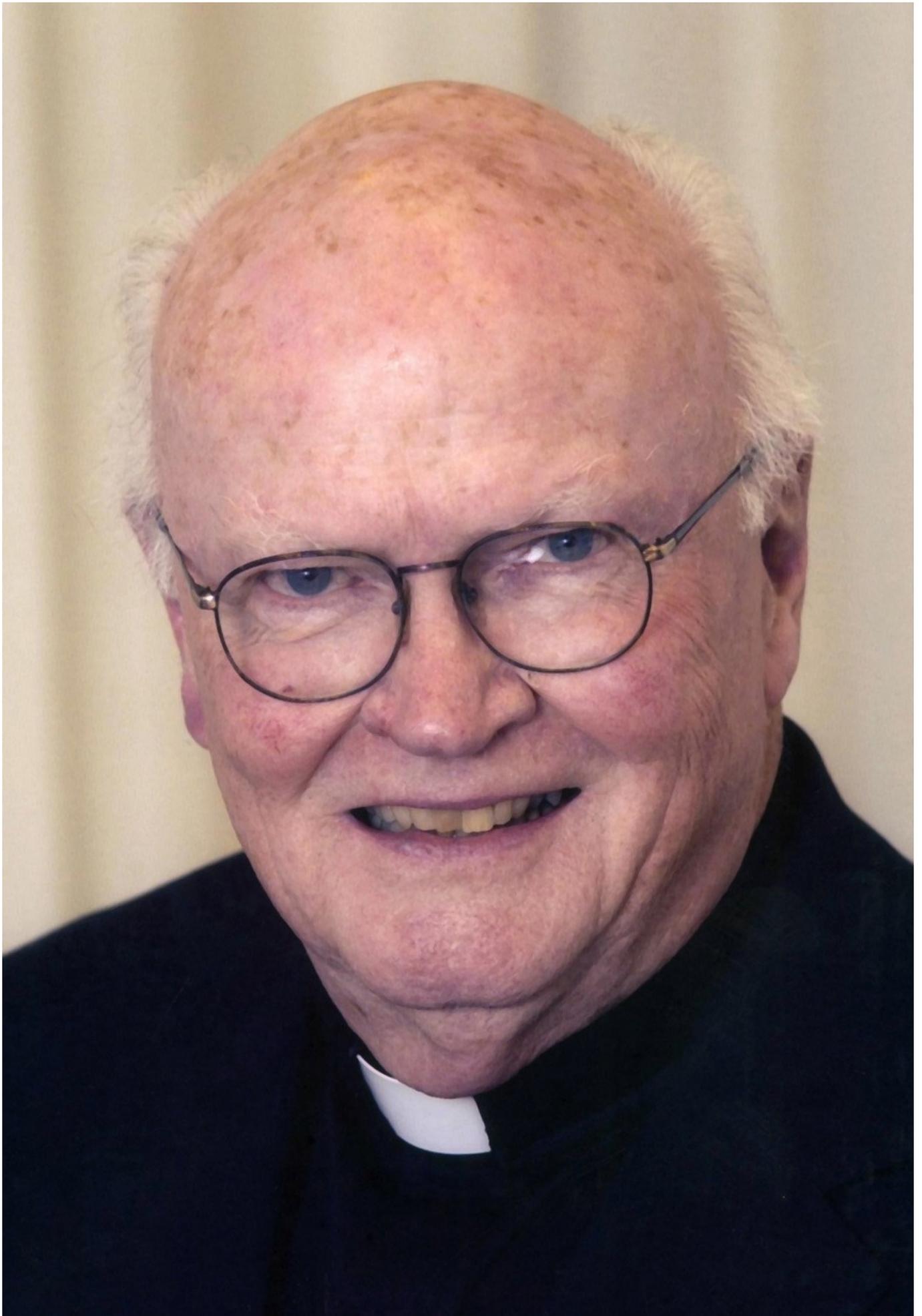


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Jesuit Father William J. Byron, a former president of The Catholic University of America in Washington and University of Scranton, Pa., and known for his writings on the relationship between business practices and Catholic spirituality, died at age 96 April 9, 2024. He is pictured in a file photo. (OSV News photo, CNS file)



by OSV News

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Philadelphia — April 15, 2024

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Jesuit Father William J. Byron, known for his leadership of Jesuit institutions of higher learning and his many years of lecturing, teaching and writing on the relationship between business practices and Catholic spirituality, died at Manresa Hall, the health center of the Jesuit community at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia April 9. He was 96.

Byron was a former president of the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania, 1975-1982, and The Catholic University of America in Washington, 1982-1992. He spent a year as acting president of Loyola University New Orleans, 2003-2004, and served as president of his high school alma mater, St. Joseph's Preparatory School in Philadelphia, 2006-2008.

His other leadership roles for the Society of Jesus included rector of the Jesuit community at Georgetown University in Washington, 1994-2000.

A funeral Mass for Byron will be celebrated April 20 at St. Matthias Church in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. A viewing will take place in the church at 10 a.m. followed by

the Mass at 11 a.m.

Jesuit Father Joseph Marina, current president of the University of Scranton, said Byron "will be greatly missed."

"As I walked into his room at the Jesuit infirmary, Father Byron was sitting up in his chair, alert but struggling," Marina said in an April 9 message to the university community. "He managed to ask if I was the president at Scranton now. When I nodded yes, he said, 'Take good care of it.'"

"Father Byron is among those who have given greatly to build a solid foundation for our mission and success at Scranton on which we continue to flourish to this very day," Marina added.

During his tenure at Scranton, among other things, Byron launched a multimillion-dollar capital campaign for the school. Also, a new undergraduate college, the School of Management, was created, along with new programs including nursing and physical therapy.

After serving as Scranton's 21st president, Byron became the first member of a religious order to be named president of The Catholic University of America in Washington. He was the school's 12th president.

"Father Byron was an exceptional leader in Catholic higher education," Catholic University's current president, Peter Kilpatrick, said in an April 9 message to the university community. "Father Byron was known for being an inspiring intellectual who had an ability to connect powerfully with people and with ideas. Alumni remember him fondly for his close relationships with students, and for his leadership."

He tripled the university's endowment while fundraising the first \$50 million that went toward the construction of more undergraduate housing, the Columbus School of Law building and the Pryzbyla Center, a venue at the heart of the campus for concerts, live stage performances, public forums and lectures.

After helming the nation's only papally chartered university, he became a professor at Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington. At the same time he was rector of the Jesuit community at Georgetown and director of the university's Center of Advanced Study of Ethics. He then was pastor for three years at nearby Holy Trinity

Church, 2000 to 2003. Next, he was acting president at Loyola University New Orleans, followed by two years as a professor of economics at Loyola Maryland in Baltimore, 2004 to 2006, the year he became president of St. Joseph's Prep.

Before retiring from academia in 2009, Byron taught a graduate course in the Haub School of Business at St. Joseph's University. In his later years, he continued writing and publishing. In 2019, he moved to Manresa Hall at St. Joseph's University, "where he enjoyed visits with students and never missed an opportunity to sing the St. Joseph's prep fight song," said a news release from the Jesuits' USA East Province, based in New York.

Whether he was serving "as an administrator, professor or parish priest," Byron "always made a concerted effort to build up community with his Jesuit brothers in unassuming ways and to promote the apostolates of the Society of Jesus with a discerning, generous, and upbeat spirit," the province said in a statement.

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Byron was the author of more than 20 books and dozens of articles. In 2001, he became a regular columnist for Catholic News Service. The biweekly column, titled "Looking Around," covered current issues. He wrote his last column, which ran April 18, 2017, as a "fond farewell" to "those who have enjoyed my writing over the years."

"Writing a column is like putting a note in a bottle and tossing it into the river so it can float down and across the bay and out into the ocean. You never know whose shore it will wash up on," he said, noting that the latest of his many books, "Growing Old Gratefully," would be published later that year by Paulist Press.

"Old age is a gift," he said. "I can attest to that, so why not welcome it with gratitude?"

A Pittsburgh native who grew up in Philadelphia, William James Byron was born May 25, 1927. His father, a physician, died when Bill was 1, and his mother moved with him and his older brother, Harold, to Philadelphia's East Germantown neighborhood. Both boys graduated from St. Joseph's Preparatory School.

After Bill turned 18, he registered for the draft and subsequently spent 17 weeks in the Army's basic training camp near Macon, Georgia, but was never deployed overseas. After the war, he went to Germany as part of the Army of Occupation, where he joined the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division. He finished his tour of duty there in November 1946 and returned to Philadelphia.

He joined the Jesuit order in 1950 and was ordained a priest in 1961 by Archbishop Francis P. Keough of Baltimore. He held degrees in philosophy and economics from St. Louis University, two theology degrees from Woodstock College and a doctorate in economics from the University of Maryland. Over his lifetime, he received 30 honorary degrees.

Byron's career as an administrator began in October 1969 as an associate professor and rector of the Jesuit community at the now-closed Woodstock College, the Jesuit seminary in New York. It was relocated to New York from Baltimore in 1969 and closed in 1974.

He served on a number of boards for Catholic entities including the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, which in 1999 bestowed on him its Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for his contributions over the years to the advancement of Catholic higher education. He was a founding director and chairman of Bread for the World, a Christian lobby group that fights hunger.