News



Msgr. Robert D. Fuller, a popular Arizona priest, who in the early 1980s worked for Renew international, died Jan. 23, 2019, at age 88. Renew, based in Newark, N.J., is dedicated to fostering spiritual renewal in the Catholic tradition at the parish-level, empowering individuals and communities "to encounter God in everyday life." Msgr. Fuller is pictured in a an April 24, 2013, photo. (CNS photo/James S. Wood courtesy Diocese of Tucson)



by Catholic News Service

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Tucson, Ariz. — January 29, 2019

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Msgr. Robert Fuller, an Arizona priest who was a national leader of the Renew movement in the early 1980s and a beloved pastor in the Tucson Diocese, died Jan. 23. He was 88.

"We are privileged from time to time to meet a living giant," said retired Tucson Bishop Gerald Kicanas, who worked with Fuller for most of the last two decades. "I experienced that when I met Fuller. He was an outstanding priest, a great preacher and a person of deep faith. He now enjoys the fulfillment of what he preached."

Tucson Bishop Edward Weisenburger will be the main concelebrant of a funeral Mass Feb. 1 for Fuller at St. Augustine Cathedral in Tucson, followed by interment at Holy Hope Cemetery.

Born Sept. 8, 1930, in Iowa, he attended parochial elementary schools in Keokuk and Marshalltown, Iowa, before moving to Tucson with his family. He graduated from Tucson Senior High School in 1948 and entered Los Angeles College Junior Seminary and went on to St. John Seminary in Camarillo, California.

He was ordained a priest for the Tucson Diocese April 25, 1956. Among his assignments was serving in the diocesan tribunal (1957-62), then as director of the Bureau of Information, which later became the diocesan Communications Office. He was chancellor of the diocese (1962-70).

He was appointed editor and business manager of the Arizona Register, as the diocesan newspaper was called, on June 7, 1963, after serving as assistant editor in 1961-63.

He was named a monsignor in 1965, and that year was named administrator at All Saints Parish in Tucson, where he served for four years. In 1969 he was named administrator of St. Augustine Cathedral Parish, then in 1970 was the founding pastor at St. Pius X Parish, where he served until 1981.

Fuller left Tucson for five years, from 1981 to 1986, to work for Renew, an organization based in Newark, New Jersey. Renew is dedicated to fostering spiritual renewal in the Catholic tradition by empowering individuals and communities to encounter God in everyday life.

He said he traveled so much around the country for that ministry that he was asked by national airport officials to serve on an advisory board, but he politely declined.

He returned to Tucson in 1987 to serve as pastor at St. Frances Cabrini Parish, where he was a master of "eight-minute homilies." He retired as pastor in 2018 after more than 30 years. He also was vicar for education and as vicar for Pima Central parishes for part of that time.

He subsequently published a series of books called "Homilies From the Heart," with proceeds benefiting the Casa Maria Soup Kitchen for low-income residents.

Msgr. Thomas Cahalane, pastor of Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in Tucson, said Fuller was one of his oldest friends.

"He was the first priest who greeted me when I got off the airplane 56 years ago," he told Catholic Outlook, Tucson's diocesan newspaper. "We became close and fast friends, kindred spirits."

Fuller had a great gift of language, being able to express truths in ways people could understand.

"He was able to communicate things in the moment they were happening. It’s a unique gift, being able to communicate and articulate the here and now, while still being in the present moment," Cahalane said, "just like his homilies."

Once asked about the highlights of his priestly ministry, Fuller said: "It’s filled with what I see are highlights -- every baptism, every wedding is a highlight."

"It’s my privilege to proclaim God’s word and bring it into (people’s) lives," he said. "The church isn’t just the priests. It’s the people of God who are the church."

Fuller is survived by a sister in California, Peggy Angelastro, and her husband, Mike; two sisters-in-law; and nephews, nieces and great-nephews. Besides his parents, he was predeceased by brothers Milton and Cyrus and a sister, Nikki Marshall.

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