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Well-worn Mass kit links Ore. priests across time

Ed Langlois Catholic News Service | Jul. 8, 2010

PORTLAND, Ore. -- An aging leather case used by priests on sacramental missions of mercy for decades has been passed on to the next generation, providing a link to clergy in Oregon's past.

The little leather kit includes a book of prayers, holy water, an antique-looking ring holder with holy oils, a pix and a purple stole priests use when hearing confessions and giving last rites.

Though it seems to predate him, the first known user of the kit was Father Augustine Meyer. Born in 1911 in Cottonwood, Idaho, he came to Portland to attend Catholic boarding school and discerned a call to priesthood. He entered Mount Angel Seminary and was ordained in May 1937.

Father Meyer served across the state before he became pastor of St. Henry Parish in Gresham in 1951. There, he oversaw construction of the current St. Henry Church in 1964, seen in its time as one of the finest in the region. He died in 1971 after a long illness.

The next keeper of the kit was Father Gregory Gage. His path crossed with Father Meyer's during several parts of his life and it appears he saw the elder priest as a mentor.

Father Gage was born in Los Angeles in 1939, two years after Father Meyer was ordained. The Gage family moved to Grants Pass, Ore., and likely met Father Meyer there. Young Greg Gage, perhaps under his parish priest's tutelage, discerned a priestly vocation. He entered college at Mount Angel in 1957 and graduated in 1962. He was ordained in 1967.

After ordination, Father Gage was named associate pastor at none other than St. Henry Parish in Gresham, a decision no doubt welcomed by Father Meyer, in his 16th year as pastor there at the time.

Four years into his service at St. Henry, Father Gage saw his old friend die. The sacramental kit likely changed hands then. It could even have been used to anoint the dying Father Meyer.

Father Gage would serve for more than 30 more years around western Oregon. No doubt the kit saw many hours of use at hospitals, homes and accident scenes.

Father Gage retired in 2003 because of the onset of Parkinson's disease. As he approached his own end, he was cared for by Jim Riggleman, a former infirmary worker at Mount Angel Benedictine Abbey. When Father Gage died in 2007, he left the kit in Riggleman's hands.

At the abbey, Riggleman met Brother Luke Marshall and came to admire the young Benedictine monk. When Riggleman found that Brother Luke was preparing to be ordained a priest, he knew he wanted to pass the sacramental kit to him.

"Over the time I was there, he was very humble, and he is going to make a great priest, I am sure," Riggleman

told the Catholic Sentinel, newspaper of the Portland Archdiocese.

Brother Luke was born and raised in the eastern Oregon town of Pendleton. He sensed a call to priesthood young. He entered Mount Angel Seminary in 1998 as a seminarian. But in 2002, his father unexpectedly died.

The death led to a deepening of faith and a strengthening of his religious vocation. Brother Luke returned to Pendleton to manage his father's estate and console his family. Several months after his father's death, he decided to reconsider his vocation, moving to Portland and working in banking.

In 2005, he resumed the discernment of his religious vocation, but this time as a Benedictine. He was drawn to the monastic way of life, with spiritual reading, public prayer, manual labor and common life. He became a novice in 2007 and is still in the course of priestly formation.

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