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Arlington Diocese Mourns the Loss Of Msgr. William T. Reinecke

By MICHAEL F. FLACH

The Arlington Diocese has spent the past week trying to cope with the tragic death of one of its most well-known and respected priests.

The Aug. 11 suicide of Msgr. William T. Reinecke, 53, chancellor and vicar general of the diocese, stunned Catholics throughout the 21 counties of Northern Virginia. Feelings of pain, sorrow, guilt, betrayal and anger have swept through clergy and laity alike.

The question on everyone's mind — a question that will never be fully answered — is "Why?"

Friends and co-workers sensed that Msgr. Reinecke was ~~struggling~~ with severe depression the last few weeks of his life. They had pleaded with him to seek medical help.

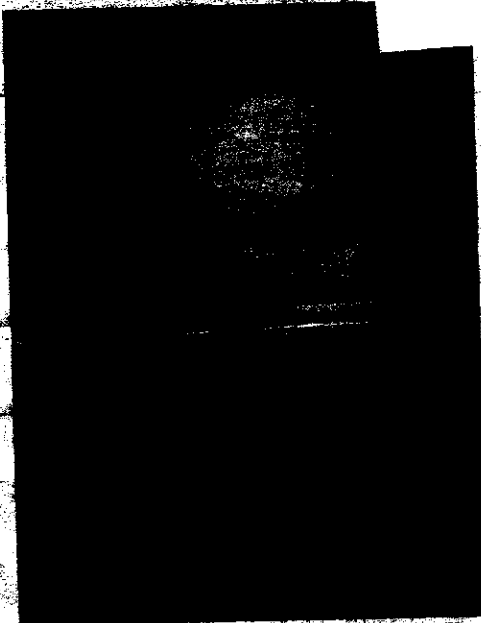
On Aug. 10, he ~~apparently~~ drove out to Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, a retreat house run by the Trappists. His younger brother, Patrick, was concerned enough about Msgr. Reinecke's mental state to drive up from Williamsburg Aug. 11. He discovered the body after several hours of searching the monastery grounds.

Chancery personnel gathered in the education office the morning of Aug. 22. They were told of Msgr. Reinecke's death by Father Robert Rippy, vice chancellor and associate pastor of Our Lady of Loretto Parish, Arlington. Many who had worked with Msgr. Reinecke for more than a decade were overcome with emotion at the news.

Bishop John R. Keating has appointed Father Rippy chancellor and central staff director (moderator of the curia), effective immediately. Father William J. Schopps will be administrator of St. James Parish until a new pastor is appointed.

Bishop Keating presided at an emotional wake service Aug. 13 at St. James Church where Msgr. Reinecke was pastor. Father James A. Verrocchia, vice principal of Bishop O'Connell High School, was homilist.

Hundreds of friends, both lay and religious, crowded into the church on the 18th anniversary of the diocese to pray for the soul



HERALD FILE PHOTO

Msgr. WILLIAM T. REINECKE

of the man who had faithfully served the Church in his native Virginia for 27 years, first in the Richmond Diocese and, since 1974, in the Arlington Diocese.

"At times like this," Father Verrocchia said, "healing and forgiveness are important if we are to call ourselves followers of the Lord Jesus."

He quoted an old German proverb, "Those who live in the Lord never see each other for the last time."

Father Verrocchia said Msgr. Reinecke never sought attention or glory but preferred to come in quietly and leave before anyone noticed he was gone.

"Bill was always there for us priests," he said. "No matter what the request, he always responded graciously and promptly."

He implored the congregation to build upon the humility of Msgr. Reinecke by making a difference in their lives.

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"May our lives be changed because of his," he said. "May we grow together, support each other and heal together."

"Bill, until we meet again, go forth in God's name and be at peace," Father errecchia said.

Bishop Keating celebrated the funeral last Aug. 14 at the Cathedral of St. Thomas More. Allenstown Bishop Thomas J. Welsh, Richmond Bishop Walter F. Sullivan, Richmond Auxiliary Bishop David Foley and Bishop Adrian Veale, T.O.R., retired bishop of Baton Rouge, concelebrated.

"The good servant is loyal to the end," Bishop Keating said in brief remarks at the beginning of Mass. "The good servant seeks either recognition nor recompense."

"If Msgr. Reinecke could write us a letter today," the bishop said, "he could use the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: While I was with you I did not put myself forward, instead, I made myself your servant in order to win over as many of you as I could."

A steady rain added to the somber mood at Thursday night's wake service. The sun broke through an overcast sky as the Gospel was read on Friday, drenching the cathedral sanctuary in sunlight.

Msgr. John P. Hannan, pastor of St. Andrew Parish in Clifton, was homilist.

In addressing his fellow priests, Msgr. Hannan said the priesthood is the greatest vocation in the world because it was founded by Jesus Christ.

"We are all human," he said. "No one is worthy of the priesthood."

He asked the laity and women religious to give priests their love, prayers and support.

Msgr. Reinecke always showed great concern for others, Msgr. Hannan said. "He was born and raised a Virginian."

Msgr. James W. McMurtre, pastor of St. Theresa Parish in Alexandria, was Msgr. Reinecke's close friend for 20 years. They had dinner together at least once a week and were regular partners on the golf course.

"For 27 years the Church in Virginia was blessed to have had him," Msgr. McMurtre said. "He worked in 20 parishes — as finance committee, the board of consultors, vicar general, chancellor, in the parish. His contributions and friendship will be missed."

He described Msgr. Reinecke as an intense individual who masked his shyness with a quiet, gentle smile. "He was a self-effacing, quiet person who never liked the fanfare."

"He had a great knack of writing letters to priests explaining diocesan policies and procedures without being offensive," Msgr. McMurtre said.

Msgr. Reinecke was an avid golfer who just started playing the sport two years ago. "He fell in love with the game," Msgr. McMurtre said. "His great frustration was that he did not become the equal of Jack Nicklaus."

William Reinecke was born in Williamsburg, Va., on Feb. 2, 1928, and graduated from Walsingham Academy in Williamsburg and

graduated in 1957. He attended St. Bernard Abbey in Alabama and St. Mary's College in Baltimore, from which he graduated in 1961.

His theological studies were completed at St. Mary's Seminary in Roland Park, Md. He was ordained May 1, 1965, by the Most Rev. John J. Russell, then Bishop of Richmond.

He earned his S.T.B. from St. Mary Seminary, and his M.A. and J.C.L. from Catholic University in Washington.

His parish assignments included: St. Mary, Alexandria, 1965; St. Charles Borromeo, Arlington, 1969; in residence at Our Lady of Lourdes while studying at CUA, 1974-75; in residence at Queen of Apostles, Alexandria, 1976; and in residence at Our Lady of Lourdes, 1979.

He was named pastor of St. Ambrose Parish in Annandale in 1980 and remained there for more than a decade. The bishop appointed him pastor of St. James Parish in June 1990.

One can't begin to list the many Catholic organizations which benefited from Msgr. Reinecke's generosity. During his years of priestly ministry he served as secretary of the Diocesan Development Commission and Finance Commission, chaplain of the Arlington County Fire and Police Department and vicar to permanent deacons.

Bishop Welsh first asked Msgr. Reinecke to work in the Chancery Office in 1979, the same year he was named a prelate of honor (monsignor). His responsibilities the last 13 years included vice chancellor, chancellor, vice chancellor of the tribunal, episcopal vicar, moderator of the curia and vicar general.

He had been moderator of the Great Society since the June 1990 death of Msgr. Justin D. McChm.

Msgr. Reinecke had been closely associated with the *Arlington Catholic HERALD* since the paper was established by Bishop Welsh in 1976, first as secretary and most recently as treasurer.

"I am deeply shocked and saddened to hear of the untimely death of Msgr. Reinecke," said Charles W. Carruth, founding editor of the *HERALD*. "I knew him for many years in his capacity as chancellor of the diocese, as secretary of the board of directors and later as treasurer of the *HERALD*."

"His objectivity in dealing with others was marked by fairness and genuine concern, but always for the common good as he perceived it to be. He will be missed, not only in the central offices, but throughout the Catholic Diocese of Arlington."

A memorial service was held Aug. 17 at St. Bede Church in Williamsburg.

Msgr. Reinecke is survived by two brothers, Ralph of Vienna and Patrick of Williamsburg.