

Bishop George E. Rueger dies at 89

By Mark Sullivan

Telegram & Gazette Staff

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WORCESTER - Bishop George E. Rueger, who celebrated the 60th anniversary of his ordination as a priest last year, died Saturday at Christopher House in Worcester. He was 89.

A funeral Mass will be 11 a.m. Saturday, at St. Paul Cathedral on Chatham Street for Bishop Rueger, who retired as auxiliary bishop of Worcester. In that position, which he held for 18 years from 1987 to 2005, he assisted Bishop Timothy J. Harrington, Bishop Daniel P. Reilly and current Bishop Robert J. McManus.

Bishop McManus said in a statement released Sunday: "I am profoundly saddened by the death of Bishop George Rueger. He was a kind and gentle priest and bishop who dedicated every moment of his life to the people of the Diocese of Worcester, whom he loved so deeply.

"His humility, which was grounded in a complete commitment to his vocation to the priesthood, was an inspiration for all of us who are ordained," Bishop McManus said.

"As a good steward of all the gifts God gave him, he lived simply and shared all he had with those in need. May Christ greet his immortal soul with the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Join me in my Father's house.'"

The Diocese estimated Bishop Rueger had confirmed 20,000 teenagers over the years.

A Telegram & Gazette photo taken at a memorial ceremony for the six Worcester firefighters lost in the Worcester Cold Storage and Warehouse Co. fire in December 1999 shows Bishop Rueger seated between President Bill Clinton and firefighters' union local president Frank Raffa as they wipe tears from their eyes.

George Edward Rueger, born in Framingham in 1929, attended South High School and St. Peter High School in Worcester. After a year at the College of the Holy Cross, he entered Cardinal O'Connor Minor Seminary in Jamaica Plain, and completed his studies for the priesthood at St. John Seminary in Brighton.

He was ordained a priest in January 1958 by Worcester Bishop John J. Wright and served as an assistant pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in East Millbury and St. Peter Parish in Worcester. He was named first headmaster of Marian Central Catholic High School in Worcester in 1965.

He was named assistant pastor of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Leominster in 1974 and pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Hopedale in 1977; served from 1978 to 1980 as diocesan superintendent of Catholic Schools; and was named pastor of St. Peter Parish in Worcester in 1981.

He was named auxiliary bishop of Worcester and titular bishop of Maronana by Pope John Paul II in 1987.

In 2002, the Worcester Diocese defended Bishop Rueger, and Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo cleared him of any wrongdoing after Sime Braio of Shrewsbury alleged in a lawsuit he was abused by Bishop Rueger as a 13-year-old altar boy, 40 years before at Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Worcester.

Bishop Rueger described the allegations as “totally unfounded” and the accuser withdrew the case the following year, explaining he was doing so “willfully and voluntarily.”

In 2004, after Bishop Rueger reached the mandatory retirement age of 75 and had submitted his resignation to Pope John Paul II, the St. Vincent de Paul Society announced the Bishop Rueger Fund for the Poor, honoring his dedication to those in need.

The diocesan Adopt-a-Student program established the Bishop George E. Rueger Scholarship, to be given annually in honor of the bishop’s support for education.

Bishop Rueger’s body will be received at St. Paul Cathedral on Friday, with a liturgy at 1 p.m., followed by viewing and visitation from 2 to 7 p.m., and a vigil service with vespers at 7 p.m.

The funeral Mass will be carried in Worcester on Charter TV3 and live-streamed by the diocesan TV channel at worcesterdiocese.org. Burial will follow in Clinton. Arrangements are being handled by Alfred Roy and Sons Funeral Home of Worcester.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Bishop Rueger's name are requested to either the Priests' Retirement Fund or the Adopt-a-Student Program, Diocese of Worcester, 49 Elm St., Worcester, Mass., 01609.