

Father Maurice F. Peterson – 1954-2022

The Reverend Maurice Francis Peterson, a senior priest of the Diocese of Yakima, died Saturday, October 15, at Pacifica Senior Care in Ellensburg, a few days after suffering a seizure. He was 68 and had been diagnosed with frontal lobe dementia about two years ago. The family is grateful to Pacifica for the compassionate care he received, especially by Ahna Soli and Jamie Harper, Fr. Maurie's nurse, as well as for the care of his friends, especially Anne Devney, Mark Farrell and Patti Canterbury, in his illness.



Fr. Maurie was born January 15, 1954 in Spokane to Eugene and Betty (Morgan) Peterson. A lifelong Catholic, he attended Lourdes Academy in Ellensburg, then Morgan Middle School and Ellensburg High School, graduating in 1972. He received a B.A. degree in Education and Music Performance from Central Washington University four years later. He often was the principal oboist for school performances, and was a skilled pianist.

In 1979, he entered seminary studies for the Diocese at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn. Under the tutelage of the Benedictine monks who staffed the seminary, Fr. Maurie deepened his appreciation for the Church's liturgy and sacred music. He completed his studies in 1985, having also taken a leave of absence between 1980-82 to return home as a family caregiver.

After graduating with a Master of Divinity degree, he helped care for his mother, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She died in 1986. Fr. Maurie was ordained a priest on May 13, 1987 at Holy Family Catholic Church in Yakima by the Most Rev. William Skylstad. He began a three-year assignment as associate pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church in Richland and also was appointed to lead the Diocesan Worship Commission.

In 1990, Fr. Maurie was appointed pastor of St. Henry's Catholic Church in Grand Coulee, where he helped oversee its merger with St. Benedict Catholic Church in Coulee Dam, across the Columbia River in the Diocese of Spokane. He also began corresponding with a new bishop, the late Cardinal Francis George, who helpfully offered to send Fr. Maurie a cat to keep him company up north, before asking for his thoughts on several ideas for Church worship the bishop had been pondering.

From 1994-2000, Fr. Maurie served as pastor of the Catholic parishes in Cashmere-Leavenworth, and was then pastor of Holy Apostles Catholic Church in East Wenatchee for two years before beginning a sabbatical in October 2002. About this time, he was diagnosed with a painful arthritic condition in his back and was granted a medical retirement by then-Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J. in 2003. In retirement in Ellensburg, he lived a quiet life of prayer and study in keeping with his Benedictine education.



Fr. Maurie also developed a ministry of visiting the sick and elderly, and was active with the funeral luncheon committee at St. Andrew Catholic Church. He often could be found having lunch at The Tav restaurant in Ellensburg, always ready to share his thoughts on a variety of subjects.

Besides his parents, Fr. Maurie was preceded in death by his brother, Jim Peterson. He is survived by another brother, Pat (Kathy) Peterson of Texas; nephews Jeff (Fawn) Peterson of California, Scott (Rachel) Peterson and Gregg (Elisa) Peterson of Texas, and Chris (Bree) Peterson of Washington; and 11 great nieces and nephews and two great-great nieces.

Visitation will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, October 26, 2022 at Johnston & Williams Funeral Home, 301 E. 3rd Ave. in Ellensburg, and again at 6 p.m. prior to a 7 p.m. Vigil Service at St. Andrew's, 401 S. Willow St.

Yakima Bishop Joseph J. Tyson will preside at the Funeral Mass at 11 a.m. Thursday, October 27, at St. Andrew's, with burial following immediately at Holy Cross Cemetery on Dry Creek Rd. in Ellensburg, followed by a luncheon at the parish.

Memorial contributions are suggested to the Priest Retirement Fund of the Diocese of Yakima, P.O. Box 2189, Yakima, WA 98907.

Johnston & Williams Funeral Home and Crematory of Ellensburg has been entrusted with caring for Fr. Peterson and his family. Online condolences may be left at www.johnston-williams.com.

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