



Bishop William R. Fey O.F.M. Cap

January 19, 2021

BISHOP WILLIAM R. FEY, O.F.M. Cap.

Bishop William Regis Fey, O.F.M. Cap., recently retired as the second bishop of the Diocese of Kimbe, Papua New Guinea, died late Tuesday night, January 19th, at Shadyside Hospital from Covid-related illness.

Bishop Fey was born in Pittsburgh on November 6, 1942 to Regis Fey and Dorothy (Clair) Fey, attending Middlesex Township Elementary School and St. Paul Grade School in Butler before enrolling at Saint Fidelis Seminary, Herman, for his high school and college education.

Upon completing his second year of college studies, Bishop Bill was invested with the Capuchin habit in Annapolis, MD on July 13, 1962, receiving the religious name Elroy. He made his profession of vows one year later on July 14, 1963. He relinquished his religious name in favor of retaining his baptismal name, William, when that option became possible in 1968. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1968.

He completed his theological studies at Capuchin College in Washington, DC in 1969 and received a Master of Arts degree from the Catholic University of America in 1970 before enrolling for doctoral studies at Oxford University in England, where he was awarded a Ph.D in Philosophy in 1974. His doctoral thesis was titled "John Henry Newman, Empiricist Philosophy and the Certainty of Faith." His interest in the work of the future saint would continue throughout his life: He revised his doctoral thesis and published it in book form as *Faith and Doubt: the Unfolding of Newman's Thought on Certainty* (Patmos Press: 1976), wrote scholarly articles and delivered numerous papers and lectures on Cardinal Newman's thought and writings over the years.

Prior to his consecration as Bishop in 2010, Father Bill served the Capuchin Order and the Church as a passionate educator of friars and seminarians for more than thirty years, holding teaching positions at St. Fidelis College in Herman, PA (1974-1979), Borromeo College of Ohio in Wickliffe (1979-1986), St. Fidelis College in Madang, Papua New Guinea (1988), and Holy Spirit Seminary/Catholic Theological Institute, Bomana, Papua New Guinea (1988-2010), serving also as the Dean of Studies there from 2000-2010. He was especially fond of the three terms he spent as Visiting Lecturer in Philosophy at St. Bonventure College in Lusaka, Zambia. It was during his sabbatical year in 1986-87 that

he began to seriously consider the previously latent idea of missionary service. He sought and was granted assignment to the Capuchin mission in Papua New Guinea upon the completion of his sabbatical, arriving there in the Spring of 1987. After a year of orientation in the Southern Highlands of the country, Father Bill took up residence at the national seminary in the National Capitol District and began the next chapter of his life in earnest. He saw his work there as both a continuation of his former labors and as a new challenge of teaching in a radically different culture and context. "I try to help them find truth in their own thinking," he said, "the truth when things go well and the truth when things are out of their control."

From the final years of his theological studies, throughout his doctoral work and teaching career, Father Bill maintained an active involvement with the pastoral work of the Church, giving retreats and days of recollection, regularly assisting with sacramental work at local parishes and serving as a spiritual director and mentor for generations of friars, seminarians and laity. Coupled with his academic and intellectual fervor was a passion for ensuring the best possible formation of his Capuchin students and other seminarians. He served variously as Secretary for Formation in the Capuchin Province of St. Augustine in Pittsburgh, Director of the Capuchin Formation Program at Borromeo College in Ohio, Secretary for Formation for the Capuchin Vice-Province of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, Rector of the Capuchin Friars College in Bomana and Chairperson for the Association of Melanesian Formators of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Bishop Fey was a brilliant and very active man, yet he had a gentle spirit, strong but never harsh or unduly stern. He was known for his wry sense of humor, seemingly able to find a bit of comedy even in very difficult situations. He delighted in describing even embarrassing moments for himself, enjoying telling about occasions when he acted foolishly. He enjoyed telling about the time while he was in England when he was granted access to Cardinal Newman's private study where, upon being handed a priceless volume (Perrone's *Praelectiones Theoloicae*) from one of the shelves, he accidentally fumbled it – not onto the floor but right into the dirt and ashes of a waste basket. He was a highly competitive man as well, whether at the card table or on the tennis (or handball, or squash) court. He often competed against himself, sometimes seeing how much he could cram into a time period: he was known to cut the grass while running so that he could get a good workout and finish a chore at the same time. He worked hard, often leaving himself little room for rest and recuperation.

It was his compassionate heart, though, that most likely led to his being named the second Bishop of Kimbe in 2010. He was a true missionary, and his love for the people of Papua New Guinea was evident from the beginning of his time there. He went to a diocese that had not had a bishop in over two years and spent himself as a true shepherd there, one who – in the words of Pope Francis – had "the smell of the sheep" about him. He had few priests, no funds, and poor prospects but he threw himself into his work. His

labors wore away at his health over time. He suffered two strokes, the first in 2016 and the second in 2018, but recovered from both to a large extent. He was past the mandated age for a bishop's retirement when he finally returned to Pittsburgh in 2020.

Bishop Bill Fey was heavily involved in the work of ecumenism while in Papua New Guinea, serving as Secretary for Ecumenism for the Catholic Bishops Conference of the country. It is perhaps God's plan that he died during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity late Tuesday night at the age of 78, his years full of wisdom and grace, serving 57 years as a Capuchin friar, 52 as a priest and 10 as a bishop.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his brother Robert. He is survived by his sister-in-law Paula ((Bybee) of Mars PA, his brother Joseph (Carol) of Valencia PA, and two sisters, Carol (Daniel) Mioduszewski of Rio Communities NM and Patricia (Terry) Rings of Lake Charles LA.

Bishop Fey's body will be received at Our Lady of the Angels Church, Lawrenceville, at 6:00 PM on Sunday Evening, January 24th. Viewing will begin at 6:30 PM and a Vigil Service will be conducted at 8:00 PM

His Funeral Mass will be held at 10:00 AM on Monday, January 25th, on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, at Our Lady of the Angels Parish, St. Augustine Church, after which his body will be transported to Herman, PA for burial at St. Mary of the Assumption Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Capuchin Friars, 220 37th Street, Pittsburgh. All donations received will be forwarded to the Diocese of Kimbe, Papua New Guinea.

Professional Services by D'Alessandro Funeral Home and Crematory Ltd., Lawrenceville

Cemetery Details

St. Mary's Cemetery - Herman

821 Herman Rd.
Butler, PA 16002

Previous Events

Mass

JAN **25**. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Augustine Church
225 37th St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15201

Tribute Wall



“ *Bishop William R. Fey O.F.M. Cap*

January 13, 2023 at 04:43 PM