

Father McEntee (1924-2008)

Griffintown icon was the last of a special breed of Montreal's Irish Roman Catholic priests.

Alan Hustak, The Gazette

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MONTREAL - Gruff but charitable, strict but forgiving, Thomas McEntee was the last of special breed of Montreal's crusty Irish Roman Catholic priests.

He died of cancer Thursday on the eve of what would have been the 54th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

He was 84.

Father Thomas McEntee was a recipient of a St. Patrick's Society Irishman award in 2002.

ANDRE PICHETTE/Gazette File Photo

Long after parishioners moved out of Griffintown, McEntee kept the spirit of the historic, impoverished Irish neighbourhood alive. On the Feast of St. Ann each July, McEntee presided over an always well attended outdoor mass in the park where Griffintown's parish church of St. Ann's used to be. As a way of getting former residents of the neighbourhood together he also instituted a service in memory of Mary Gallagher, a murdered Griffintown prostitute whose ghost is said to haunt the neighbourhood every seven years.

He also took part in the annual march to the Black Stone for more than 50 years.

"He was a stickler for detail, especially a stickler for liturgical detail. Some people thought he was aloof. But he was generous and he always gave of himself generously," said David Fitzpatrick, the priest who will deliver the homily at Monday's funeral. "He was a saint. By that I mean he was a sinner trying to do his best until the end."

Thomas Daniel McEntee, the son of a plumbing contractor, was born on April 26, 1924. He grew up in a cold water flat on Ottawa St. in the shadow of St. Ann's church, which was torn down in 1970.

He had strong family ties to the district - his uncle was a Montreal city councillor Thomas O'Connell.

McEntee was educated by Christian Brothers, attended Canon O'Meara Academy and was active in the Boy Scouts. **He dropped out of high school in 1941 to join the Canadian navy.**

Once the Second World War was over he completed his high school in Boston before entering St. Paul's seminary in Ottawa in 1949.

On May 30, 1954, McEntee became the first priest to be ordained in St. Gabriel's Church in Point St. Charles. During the 1960s he was priest in charge of St. Philip Neri Mission for English-speaking Catholics in Pointe aux Trembles, then served as an assistant at St. Kevin's parish until 1974, when he was named pastor of St. Edmund of Canterbury in Beaconsfield. He remained there until he retired in 2000.

He was also the chaplain to HMCS Donnacona, chaplain of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and in 1977 founded a self-help group for executives who had been thrown out of work, Executives Available, or Cadres Disponibles.

For his ministry he was recognized as "a positive force in the community" and he was awarded the Order of Canada in 1990.

McEntee's contributions range from having assisted in the establishment of local Alcoholics Anonymous recovery groups, halfway houses for ex-prisoners, Big Brothers and Big Sisters organizations as well as Executives Available.

"He was a very generous human being. He always found time to bring consolation to people," said John Walsh, the pastor at St. Jean de Brébeuf parish.

"We used to call him the hearse chaser because he went to every funeral. He never left anyone he met out of his mind or out of his prayers. He was always involved. He was the kind of guy who, if there were no problems, he'd create one so he could solve it."

McEntee was a recipient of the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal Community Service Award and in 2002 was awarded the Simon McDonough Humanitarian Award by the United Irish Societies. He was chief reviewing officer of the St. Patrick's parade in 1982, and was Irishman of the Year in 2002. A scholarship in his name has been established by the Irish Studies Foundation at Concordia University.

The funeral will be at 11 a.m. Monday at St. Edmund of Canterbury Church, 105 Beaconsfield Blvd.

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