

Ordained in 1929

Bishop Weldon

Dies; In Post

27 1/2 Years

Directed Expansion Of Church

The Most Rev. Christopher J. Weldon, retired bishop of the Springfield Roman Catholic Diocese, died at 6:02 a.m. today in Mercy Hospital. The cause of death was heart failure, according to hospital officials.

He was 76, and had served as the diocese's fourth bishop for 27 1/2 years before his retirement for reasons of health in 1977.

On March 19, 1976, he had a pacemaker implanted in his chest to ease a heart condition, following a severe myocardial infarction.

The retired church leader, who had been in and out of the hospital several times during the winter, was

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admitted to Mercy's coronary care unit last Friday in critical condition.

He had rallied briefly, but his condition deteriorated again Monday night, a hospital spokesman said.

A liturgy of Christian burial is scheduled Wednesday at 11 a.m. in St. Michael's Cathedral on State Street, according to a spokesman for the Diocese of Springfield. Other arrangements are incomplete, he said.

Time of Important Change

Weldon was the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Western Massachusetts during a time of important changes.

He oversaw a major expansion of the church's physical facilities — building schools, churches and numerous other facilities, among them the hospital in which he died. He also implemented a series of social welfare programs.

At the same time, he was responsible for closing several parochial

schools plagued by financial difficulties. In 1975, he decided to charge tuition for students at the remaining schools.

He had robust health until he contracted hepatitis during a confirmation tour. After that time, he had to interrupt his heavy schedule on several occasions because of exhaustion.

The bishop was born in New York City, the third of six children of the late Patrick and Mary (Dwyer) Weldon. He was educated in the public schools of New York and later attended the Petit Seminaire in Montreal. He studied for the priesthood at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers, N. Y.

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Weldon was ordained to the priesthood by Patrick Cardinal Hayes on Sept. 21, 1929. He did postgraduate work in philosophy at Catholic University in Washington, D.C.

He served as assistant at St. John's Church in White Plains, N. Y., and the Church of St. Francis at Mount Kisco, N.Y. For five years he was spiritual director of Newman School for Boys, Lakewood, N.J.

In 1936, Weldon was transferred to Blessed Sacrament Church in Manhattan, where he remained until 1942, when he joined the Navy as a chaplain. He served in the Navy for four years and saw duty aboard the aircraft carrier Guadalcanal before being discharged as a lieutenant commander.

Upon his return to New York, he was appointed master of ceremonies to Francis Cardinal Spellman. In 1947, he was named assistant director of Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of New York, and later was elevated to papal chamberlain with the rank of very reverend monsignor.

Catholic Charities Work

At the close of 1947, he was named executive director of the Catholic Charities of New York and was made a domestic prelate with the title of right reverend monsignor.

He was appointed bishop of Springfield on Jan. 31, 1950 and consecrated on March 24 that year in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, by Cardinal Spellman.

Weldon believed that the church should not remain aloof from secular life.

New Programs

He gave leadership to new programs for the elderly, for troubled children, for unwed parents and for the drug dependent.

"The church was and is still afraid of getting involved in civic and political matters," he once said. "But we're not functioning in the community if we ignore what is happening around us."

At a meeting in West Springfield of New England Catholic Bishops in 1974, he called for an increase in state welfare benefits. "We must not be indifferent to the actions of our officials but must insist that our love for the poor be translated by them

into fitting programs," he said.

In addition to his responsibilities as bishop, which included participation in Vatican II at Rome, the bishop also undertook community responsibilities, including offices in the Pioneer Valley United Way. He was for 14 years a trustee of the University of Massachusetts, which conferred an honorary doctorate on him in 1976. He also received honorary degrees from Holy Cross, Boston College, Assumption, St. Anselm's and Iona. He was given the Greater Springfield community's highest award, the Pynchon Medal.

Asked Assistance

In his 70th year, Weldon petitioned Rome for assistance, and the Most Rev. Joseph F. Maguire, auxiliary bishop of Boston, was named on April 3, 1976, as coadjutor bishop of Springfield with right of succession.

Weldon asked for papal permission to retire, and that took effect on Oct. 15, 1977. Maguire insisted that Weldon remain in the Elliot Street residence but, after hospitalization in 1979, he moved to a ranch house on Cunningham Street.

The bishop is survived by two sisters, Miss Margaret Weldon, and Mrs. Alice Lynch, who were with him at the time of his death; two nephews, Thomas Cooke of Bergenfield N.J., and Dr. Gerald Weldon Lynch, president of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, affiliated with City University of New York; and a niece, Patricia (Cooke) McGuinness of Emerson, N.J.