

‘Father Pete’ receives ‘outpouring of love’ before his passing

By ANITA LEE
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The Rev. Peter Francis Mockler was a stalwart of the Biloxi Diocese, a priest with a head for figures and a heart for the children of God, especially his parishioners at St. Ann in Lizana and Our Lady of the Gulf in Bay St. Louis.

Cancer claimed Mockler, 65, Thursday morning. He died in the rectory, said his cousin, the Rev. Tommy Conway.

“He was a kind, gentle shepherd,” Conway said. Mockler left a legacy on the Coast that will be felt for generations, hosting thousands of volunteers at St. Ann after Hurricane Katrina, advising the Diocese on financial campaigns and investments, mentoring parishioners and supervising construction and renovations at St. Ann.

“He was very quiet but he was very headstrong,” Conway said. “When he made up his mind about something, it would be very difficult to change it. He was very firm in his beliefs and he was very decisive. There was no wishy-washiness with him.”

Mockler was from County Galway, on Ireland’s West Coast. He was the oldest of three boys and nine girls. His brother, the Rev. “Paddy” Patrick Mockler, serves as pastor of Most Holy Trinity Parish in Harrison and Hancock counties. Their father died when Mockler was only 15.

“It was probably very difficult for all of them,” Conway said, “but his mother was a great woman. Father Peter was very involved with the family and helped raise the rest of them.”



SUBMITTED
The Rev. Peter F. Mockler, working at his desk, St. Ann Catholic Church, Lizana.



SUBMITTED
A stained glass window at St. Ann commemorates the work of post-Katrina volunteers.

Mockler visited his mother each year. His body will be returned to Ireland for burial, as he wanted because his mother, 89-year-old Mary Mockler, is still living. Memorials are being planned at both St. Ann and Our Lady of the Gulf, where he served as pastor from 1988 through 2000.

It was at St. Ann, in 1985, that Karen Parker of Lizana met “Father Pete,” as his parishioners called him. She was, she said, a broken spirit, having survived a robbery and kidnapping.

“I didn’t think I could do

anything,” she said. “He said, ‘Yes you can, yes you can.’ There were a lot of things I discovered about myself that I didn’t know was in me. But he guided me. He did that for a lot of people, anybody that was willing and open.

“You couldn’t help but be touched by him.”

Mockler served at St. Ann from 1980 through 1988, then returned in 2001, while suffering from his first bout with cancer. The parishioners, Parker said, wanted him back. He was also pastor for Our Lady of Chartres Mission in Lizana.

The rectory had fallen into disrepair. He had to contend with squirrels in the attic that set off the doorbell at all hours, and holes in the floor. But Father Pete soon set things right, Parker said. The parish of more than 200 families thrives today.

Mockler was on his annual visit to Ireland when Hurricane Katrina hit. He returned after the storm to find volunteers swarming the church property.

As he surveyed the scene, Mockler was quiet. So was Parker. She was not sure how he would react. “I like what I see,” he finally said. And so began Project Hope & Compassion. Under Mockler’s leadership, St. Ann has built showers and rest rooms to accommodate the volunteers who continue to stream in.

Jo Sharp, whom Mockler hired as parish secretary while at Our Lady of the Gulf, believes God brought the priest into her life. She was a people pleaser. “He would say, ‘Jo, you’ve got to take up for yourself,’” she said. ““You can’t let people walk over you.”

The Rev. Paddy Mockler said: “He had a great life and he had a great death. There was a tremendous outpouring of love in the last few weeks. He had a great stream of visitors — priests, nuns, people coming to see him constantly.”

When he passed away, his siblings were with him. They called their mother to

break the news, he said, and learned her priest was at her house, praying with her.

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USM bringing Delta blues to The Mary C.

By CECILY CUMMINGS
Special to the Sun Herald

The USM Gulf Park campus invites Coast music lovers to “Bringing the Delta to the Gulf Coast,” a lecture, musical-culinary offering and jam session that will offer a glimpse Delta blues and some tastes of Delta cuisine, from 6 to 7:30 tonight.

The event will be at The Mary C. O’Keefe Cultural Center, 1600 Government St., Ocean Springs, where Robert Terrell, the director of entertainment from the B.B. King Museum, will discuss the history of the Delta blues. A short performance by 81-year-old Mississippi blues man Leo “Bud” Welch will follow.

“This is just a way to connect the audience members to the Delta and to highlight its rich history and culture,” said USM librarian Shugana Williams.

The event was an inspired by a photography exhibit by Kathleen Robbins, which will be hanging at USM through Monday.

“The title of the show is



COURTESY MARY C. O’KEEFE CULTURAL CENTER
‘Bringing the Delta to the Gulf Coast’ features a performance by 81-year-old Mississippi bluesman Leo ‘Bud’ Welch.

‘Into the Flatland’ and has images of the photographer’s home in Greenwood,” Williams said. “The idea was to have a round-table discussion to talk about the history of the Delta and for the photographer to come and talk about her show.”

Among the guest speakers will be C. Sade Turnipseed, who will talk about a cotton pickers’ monument she’s trying to create in Indianola.

The Mary C. Cafe will offer a sampling of Delta cuisine including catfish and hushpuppies.

“Catfish is a staple of the Mississippi Delta,” Williams

said.

After the presentation, the stage will be open to any and all musicians who would like to join in on a blues jam session.

“This will be an opportunity for people who never had a chance to visit the Delta, or who love the area and the miles are a barrier to go as often as they like ... to come and just enjoy the culture of the Delta,” Williams said.

This event is sponsored by the Mississippi Humanities Council, and admission is free.

Details: 214-3423.

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