



October is Respect Life Month!!

Womb to Tomb... and Father Tom Stout

Respect Life Ministry seeks to protect and defend the human dignity of people in every age, stage and circumstance; we say, "From conception to natural death" for the sake of precision in light of specific assaults. But last week another expression, "Womb to Tomb," better captured the experience that stirred my heart as I watched our church family gathered after the death of Father Tom Stout.

Traveling from different parts of Southern Illinois people gathered at St Patrick Catholic Church in Cairo . There, Father Tom was surrounded by his loving, extended natural family on one side, his family of brother priests on the other, friends all around, as stories of Cardinals, "Teens Encounter Christ," laughter, family and friendship were recalled. Together everyone's hearts echoed the prayers voiced by Bishop Schlarman and Bishop Braxton, as his life was remembered, his passing mourned, and his destiny contemplated with confident hope in the resurrection. I suspect that most everyone experienced a grace-filled stirring when the dozens of priests, the deacons, and the bishops gathered as the liturgy concluded and raised their voices with the prayerful song, "Salve Regina." But as powerful and long-lasting as that image will be in my memory, there is another scene, a common one, one often repeated...

The kindness and generosity of the ones who prepared and presented the meal was a background scene. (In this case, there were two meals really, one after the mass for most of the priests who had to leave, and a second after the cemetery for others who returned to be with the family...still, the food never seemed to run out.) This is a scene that is repeated over and over in parishes large and small. But every time the meals are prepared and served it is for a unique and unrepeatable person; it is a common event that is transformed into a moment of uncommon grace because it demonstrates again the truth that we are more than individuals on a journey, we are connected in community and it is there too that the fullness of our dignity finds expression.

We respect life by protecting and defending human dignity from "womb to tomb." Just as we care for the unborn baby in the womb by caring for the mother, care for life from "womb to tomb" includes caring for the loved ones who gather at the end, when once again life is hidden from our view. Father Tom's life was remembered not only during the beautiful Mass, but in a tender way also at the meal in the basement. Those who prepared the meals (that day and any day a mourning family is served) are most sincerely appreciated in the way they too respond to the call to be a "Witness to Life."

*After reading this short reflection, please consider passing it along as appropriate.
Thank you!*