

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Joseph A. Schuster, retired priest who was devoted to helping the poor, the hungry and the homeless

Feb. 12, 1939 -- July 23, 2007

By Staff (<http://buffalonews.com/author/staff/>) | Published July 26, 2007

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When Joseph A. Schuster retired as a priest in the Catholic Church -- where his ministry largely involved helping the poor, the hungry and the homeless -- he continued his work through myriad human service agencies.

Mr. Schuster died Monday in Niagara County Hospice House. He was 68.

Born in Lackawanna, Mr. Schuster earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and mathematics from Stonehill College in North Easton, Mass. He also earned a master's degree in mathematics from the University of Notre Dame.

He entered what is now Christ the King Seminary Sections in East Aurora in 1962 to study theology in preparation for the priesthood. He was ordained in the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo in 1966 and served his first year as an administrator at St. Isidore Church in East Otto.

Mr. Schuster later served as chaplain of Scout Haven, a Boy Scout camp; associate pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Church; professor and head of the mathematics department at Diocesan Preparatory Seminary; and associate pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Niagara Falls.

While assigned to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Mr. Schuster gathered a group of friends and, in 1972, founded Catholic Worker of Niagara Falls, a human service agency dedicated to the poor, the hungry and the homeless. For the next 19 years, he led the agency's growth to include Maranatha, a shelter for homeless adults; the Lamp-stand, a year-round dining room; three youth homes; a shelter for victims of domestic violence; a health clinic staffed by volunteers; a drop-in center; and a youth center.

Mr. Schuster also served on the boards of several other agencies and sat on an advisory committee to Niagara County's commissioner of social services.

After 25 years in the priesthood, Mr. Schuster was granted a leave of absence in 1991 and subsequently retired.

But he continued his commitment to the poor and the homeless as executive director of Fillmore-Leroy Area Residents [FLARE], a human

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service and housing agency in Buffalo's Masten District. Beyond housing issues, Mr. Schuster obtained funds and oversaw the renovation of FLARE Center, and founded the Teaching and Restoring Youth program, the first such effort in Buffalo to redirect young prostitutes to more productive lifestyles.

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Mr. Schuster later became executive director of Concerned Ecumenical Ministry, an agency that served residents of Buffalo's Upper West Side. The agency's ministries include Loaves and Fishes dining room.

He served in the same capacity at Asbury Shalom Zone, founded by the Buffalo District of the United Methodist Church, to help Buffalo's Hispanic community.

After retiring a second time, Mr. Schuster worked part time in the private sector until illness sidelined him.

Yet he continued fund raising on behalf of Mark's Place, a home in Niagara Falls for people living with HIV/AIDS, and was an activist for equal rights for the lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender community.

Many honors were bestowed on Mr. Schuster. Among them was being named a Citizen of the Year in 1989 by The Buffalo News, which recognized him as being "socially responsible before it was fashionable."

Surviving are his spouse, Brian E. Bussard-Schuster; three adopted sons, Mark, Michael and Jon Paul; and a brother, Albert J.

Services will be at 7 p.m. Monday in Unitarian
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Universalist Church of Niagara Falls, 639 Main St.

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-- Janice L. Habuda

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