

His words live on

The Rev. Lawrence Dunklee died earlier this year, but his wisdom and wit remain through a 'treasure trove' of his writings

The Rev. Lawrence Dunklee — known for his inspirational messages — lost a brief but courageous battle with esophageal cancer Jan. 7.

Before his death, the 58-year-old priest had been director of the Center for Spiritual Care at Sacred Heart Hospital, where he touched the lives of many with his helpful homilies.

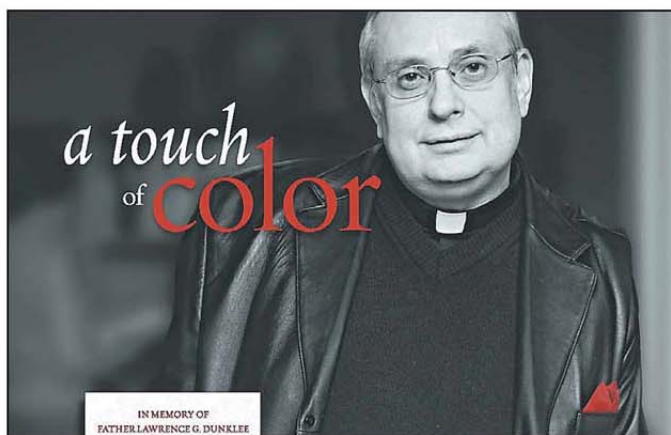
Several weeks after Dunklee's death, Mary Ellen Bliss, his longtime administrative assistant, searched his computer and found "a treasure trove" of more than 20 homilies and reflections he had given over the past several years.

Many people had told Bliss how Dunklee had



Off Beat
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Contributed photo

"A Touch of Color," a book of reflections and homilies written by the late Rev. Lawrence Dunklee, is scheduled to be released the week of the Aug. 15. Dunklee, director of the Center for Spiritual Care at Sacred Heart Hospital, died in January after a brief battle with esophageal cancer. The book will be sold at the hospital's gift shop. A price has not been determined.

Book/Dunklee left behind a message

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touched their lives with his words. She began thinking about putting them in book form "so that we could share his inspiring words with all



Bliss

those who loved him so much." That book — "A Touch of Color" — is scheduled to be released week of Aug. 15. The publication includes multiple photos of Dunklee, and quotes taken from his numerous writings are displayed in the 100-plus pages.

"Father Dunklee had a unique fondness for writing and offered eloquent insights into everyday spiritual and ethical issues that people face in today's world," said Faye Deich, chief operating officer at Sacred Heart Hospital. "His book is filled with the rich prose and wonderful use of language that he was known for."

The book will be sold at the Sacred Heart Hospital gift shop. All proceeds will be used to support the healing ministry of the Center for Spiritual Care. A price has not been determined.

"His mother (the late Kathleen Dunklee) would be so proud of him," said Bliss, who worked with Dunklee for 10 years, "and (while Dunklee was very humble), he would

be proud of his work continuing."

God's work

Dunklee was born in Elroy and earned a bachelor's degree from Edgewood College in Madison. He then entered St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, where he received his Master of Divinity degree in 1978. Dunklee was ordained a priest for the Diocese of La Crosse later that year.

Wearing his black cleric suit for the first time, Dunklee asked his mother how he looked. Looking her son up and down, she told him to wait there. When she returned, she had a red silk handkerchief, which she arranged in the breast pocket of his suit coat, giving him "a little touch of color."

"From that day on, Father Larry became well known for the red silk handkerchief he always wore in his suit coat pocket in honor of his dear mother," according to the explanation in the book about its title.

Dunklee's first assignment as a priest was as associate pastor at St. Michael Parish in Wausau. He later earned a master's degree in religious studies with a concentration in medical ethics from St. Louis University.

Dunklee arrived in Eau Claire in 1990 and worked as a priest chaplain at Sacred Heart Hospital until 1992. He returned to Eau Claire in 2005 when he was appointed director of pastoral care for Sacred

Heart Hospital. The next year, he was named the hospital's director of mission integration and founded the hospital's Center of Spiritual Care — "a center of faith, life and hope."

Inspirational words

Monsignor Edmund Klimek, senior priest chaplain at Sacred Heart Hospital, knew Dunklee for more than 30 years and considered the late priest a close, personal friend.

"Father meant very much to me and to many others," said Klimek, who described Dunklee as a deeply humble, spiritual man who was blessed with the gift of words.



Klimek

Dunklee's inspirational homilies were well known and drew crowds to Mass every weekend, Klimek said. Dunklee often was invited back annually to speak at events.

"His wit and wisdom were renowned," Klimek said.

The former can be seen in his "Homily for 30th and 55th Anniversary Mass," in which Dunklee starts out by sharing a bit about his favorite pastime as a growing boy — "saying Mass."

"Much to my older brother Dennis' chagrin, my mother would instruct him to be my 'server,'" he wrote. "As we made

our way to our bedroom, Dennis would mutter to me, 'All right but make it a low Mass and don't preach.'"

"Flash many years ahead to my ordination day. My family was proudly in attendance, and as we came to the Sign of the Peace, my brother once again quietly whispered in my ear, 'Make it a low Mass and don't preach.' And here we all are ... 30 years later."

In another selection, Dunklee — whose own parents, Lawrence and Kathleen, are dead — talked about remembering loved ones who have passed away.

"This is a time when rather than running away from memories we cling to them ever more tightly, we embrace them ever more passionately," he wrote.

The book also includes a message from Dunklee that Klimek read after his death.

"The last few months have not been easy, but with God's grace, I, too, am finding peace. I ask that you continue to remember me in your prayers, as I will remember you in mind. God bless you all."

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