

Eulogy for Wayne P. Nicholson
June 22, 2019

I stood every Sunday at the altar with Wayne after he invited me, with Bishop Geper's permission, to return as St. Johns' deacon after a hiatus of 18 months

several times each year we sang Wayne's favorite hymn, "General Seminary," from "Praise II," a poem by seventeenth-century priest and poet, George Herbert

this hymn was for Wayne the outward sign of his deep faith, of his drive to purge his demons, of his intense desire—as he once told my husband—to be the rector of a parish at prayer in the name of our loving maker, our "King of Glory"

I am thankful for those 12 years standing with Wayne: He strengthened my faith, and I believe that he strengthened the faith of the congregation as well

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Wayne served God with a sense of urgency

He had been a corporate travel agent for many years

He had struggled in those years with substance abuse until his uncle and close friends rescued him from his addiction

Thankful to be alive and healthy, Wayne immersed himself in the life of the church

In San Francisco, where he became active in an Episcopal parish, which led him to dish out meals at a homeless shelter, a ministry that was a force in his belief that he had a call to priesthood

He enrolled in General Seminary, where he took part in daily worship, and where he and his classmates led worship in lower Manhattan in the days following the devastation of 9 eleven

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After his ordination, Wayne served first in a small parish in New York State, then here at St. John's, at Harry's urging after he had studied what the parish had to offer

from the beginning of his ministry here Wayne was forthright: he did not hide his sexual orientation, nor his struggles with addiction

They were, indeed, at the center of his story—and at the center of his preaching

They were at the center of his drive to speak of God's love and forgiveness for everyone

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The parish responded with love to his forthright message, as did those who dropped by to see what St. John's was all about, and those Wayne met in his many commitments in the community at large

The parish joined with him in opening our doors and our hearts to the homeless men, women, and children who came to us each winter

. . . to the people we served in our laundry ministry, and in our work through the John H. Goodrow Fund

To the people who did not find a spiritual home elsewhere. . .

who heard Wayne's invitation to join us in worship, emphasizing that our altar is not ours, but God's

In the words of one of his favorite hymns: “All Are Welcome in This Place”

PAUSE

Wayne had endless energy: he liked a “busy” parish, and in St. John’s he had just that, a “pastoral sized parish” with a program mentality: a parish that had too much to do, but that responded to Wayne’s energy

He supported Sister Diane in her leadership at Emmaus Monastery, celebrating the Eucharist with them on many Sunday evenings

And he supported her in her discernment of vocation that eventually led to her ordination as a priest, a life-long dream

Wayne was our priest, but he was in many ways a chaplain to the community

He was on the board of the free medical clinic in Mt. Pleasant, and he was active in the local clergy association, as well as in the diocese, where he made many friends over the years of attending committee meetings, conventions, and clergy gatherings

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Wayne shared his love with his parish in many ways

He was a good cook who enjoyed entertaining: our choral schools were often recipients of his hospitality, as were the carolers who carried Christmas cheer to homebound parishioners, and to residents of Lynnwood Home:

after caroling Wayne would serve cookies and hot chocolate, then sit down at the piano and lead us in “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”: there were few dry eyes

He and Harry would travel near and far to our choral scholars' concerts and recitals

his example reminded us all to draw our CMU students into our lives and to be present at the significant events of their lives

when Harry's nephew Zach needed a break from his parents, Wayne and Harry took him, a gift of months that grew into years

when my mother died, Wayne and Harry, who were visiting a former choral scholar nearby, came to her funeral, giving me the strength to get through her Catholic priest's awful homily

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Wayne did most everything with gusto

He was a skillful weaver, a passionate gardener, a gifted interior designer

He was—truly—a larger than life presence, especially when he draped his tall, thin frame with richly embellished vestments

Wayne welcomed me as his colleague, and gave me the permission to write prayers and liturgies for use in the parish

For that I will always be thankful

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These past two weeks Henry and I have been enjoying our rental cottage in the dunes at Saugatuck

Wayne and Harry spent a few days there with us on two or three different occasions

I remember especially the first visit: Wayne, sweeping in the door with a basketful of fixings for pie, grilled chicken, and salad

. . . Wayne, changing into swimming trunks and grabbing his towel as he hurried down the steps to the beach

It was that visit I learned that Wayne LOVED shopping

He and Harry joined us in cruising through the variety of shops in downtown Saugatuck, many of them catering to good cooks

We also took them to Sunset Junque, a truly funky “not quite antique” shop south of town on the Blue Star Highway

There Wayne drooled over a Rumanian confessional, ornately carved and painted, and costing somewhere over a thousand dollars

He did buy some beautiful paving stones and wind chimes for their garden on High Street, as well as the “talk quietly” figures hanging on the wall of the undercroft

Henry, Harry, and I bought a statue of Buddha, which we sneaked into the church garden one evening

It was there long enough for Wayne to notice it with laughter, but it was soon gone: we never knew where, or how

Perhaps Wayne knows now

What we know? We will miss him