



Priest who founded Holy Faith, Queen of Peace dies

By Maru I. Opabola / Staff writer

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The Rev. James Flannan Walsh, a priest of the Diocese of St. Augustine who helped found two Catholic parishes in Gainesville, died Tuesday in Gainesville after a long illness.

Walsh helped to establish Holy Faith Parish in 1972 and Queen of Peace Parish in 1987.

When Walsh's illness first forced him to step back from his leadership role at Queen of Peace in 1992, the Rev. Jeff McGowan became the lead pastor of Queen of Peace soon afterward. McGowan continued to seek advice from Walsh and regularly met with him for lunch. Soon the two were close friends.

"He was a faith-filled man," McGowan said of Walsh. "He absolutely believed and he didn't have to speak it. People felt it in his company."

Walsh was born in Kinnitty, Birr, County Offaly, Ireland, on Jan. 9, 1941, to John Walsh and Katie Daly. He attended St. Patrick College in Carlow for his seminary studies and was ordained on June 12, 1965, by Bishop Peter Birch.

In August 1965, Walsh came to Florida to serve in the Diocese of St. Augustine, which at that time included all of Florida with the exception of the Archdiocese of Miami.

In 1969, he earned a master's in history from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Walsh served in parishes in Gainesville, Pensacola, St. Augustine and Orlando's Union Park. He also served as archivist of the diocese, priest-director of Catholic Charities in Gainesville, moderator of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women in Gainesville and as

an associate liaison of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement.

Betty Brown Spears, 80, was a dedicated member of both Holy Faith and Queen of Peace parishes under Walsh's leadership and knew him for nearly 45 years. "A holy man," said Spears in a telephone interview regarding her beloved former priest. "Father Walsh was the best friend I ever had. He helped me to raise my children and grandchildren."

Spears said Walsh was always available to answer parenting questions for her family and as recently as six weeks ago aided her grandson with a science project on evolution.

Walsh is survived by Sister Marie Walsh of the Order Presentation Convent, Killinarahm Tullamore, County Offaly, Ireland; Mercy Sister Ita Mercedes Walsh of the Convent of Mercy, Castelbar, County Mayo, Ireland; Holy Ghost Father Michael Walsh, Kasiyn Catholic Church, Pemba, Zambia, and sister-in-law Peggy Walsh of Kinnitty, Birr, County Offaly, Ireland.

Visitation for Father Walsh will be held Monday at 6:30 p.m. at Queen of Peace Catholic Church, 10900 SW 24th Ave., Gainesville. The vigil service will begin at 7 p.m.

The funeral Mass also will be held at the church on Tuesday at 11 a.m.