

BROTHER THOMAS GREGORY DUFFIN, TEACHER

By **James Janega**, Tribune Staff Writer

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History always held a fascination for Brother Thomas Gregory Duffin, C.F.C., particularly the beginnings of the Congregation of Christian Brothers, who taught at Brother Rice High School on the Far Southwest Side, where he went to school.

Taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience after graduating, Brother Duffin was quick to join their order. He went to college and graduate school, studying history and the classics, before returning as a teacher to the high school he left only a few years earlier. Brother Duffin, 55, died Monday in Christ Hospital and Medical Center in Oak Lawn from complications related to diabetes.

For the past 17 years, Brother Duffin taught religion at St. Laurence High School in the southwest suburb of Burbank, also run by the Christian Brothers.

"He had gone to the brothers' schools. He saw what the brothers did and liked it," said Brother Edwin Hennessy, C.F.C., who knew Brother Duffin for more than 20 years and who managed the house next door to St. Laurence, where Brother Duffin lived since he began teaching in Burbank.

"He was a taskmaster. He expected good work," Hennessy said.

"Students didn't want to get into his class, but once they got in, they realized he was a person who was only out for their best interests," he said.

Although Brother Duffin tried to be stern with his students, other Christian Brothers remembered him as quick with a friendly greeting, skilled with needlepoint and a season-ticket holder to the opera and symphony. And especially, he was remembered as a man who enjoyed recalling humorous stories about his life as a teacher.

Above everything, Hennessy said, Brother Duffin enjoyed teaching with others in his order.

"It was a community life--there's a certain amount of camaraderie among the brothers. The aspect of making a sacrifice and helping others appealed to him," Hennessy said.

Brother Duffin took his vows 38 years ago, enamored with the tale of how Edmund Ignatius Rice, a wealthy Irish businessman living in County Waterford, spent his own money to open a school for the county's poor children in 1802. Brother Duffin's high school was named for Rice, and the religious order he joined sprang out of Rice's first school in Ireland.

One of Brother Duffin's most prized possessions was a photograph of himself standing with his mother and Pope John Paul II when Edmund Rice was beatified in 1996, Hennessy said.

Brother Duffin is survived by two brothers, Robert and James.

Visitation will be held from 2 to 9 p.m. Wednesday in the chapel at St. Laurence High School, 5556 W. 77th St., Burbank.

A funeral mass will be said at 1 p.m. Thursday in Holy Redeemer Catholic Church, 9523 S. Lawndale Ave., Evergreen Park.

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