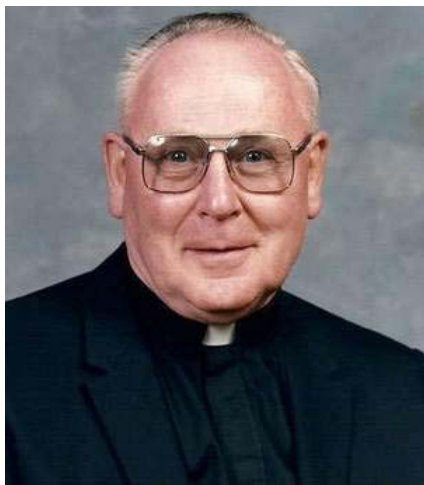


John Bryson: DJ priest a favorite among students

May 21, 2011 | Comments



The Rev. John Bryson

BY JOE ROSSITER

DETROIT FREE PRESS
STAFF WRITER

FILED UNDER

[Local News](#)
[Obituaries](#)

The good times rolled all night long with plenty of great music, dancing and teenage mingling at Notre Dame High School on Fridays during the 1950s and '60s, and the Rev. John Bryson, affectionately known as the DJ priest, was responsible for fostering the party-like atmosphere.

A member of the Marist Fathers for 65 years and a favorite among students, the Rev. Bryson became famous for turning the school cafeteria into a weekly showcase for local musical talent.

He died Tuesday at the Marist House in Framingham, Mass., at age 87. The cause of death was not given.

"Though he was a very gentle and retiring sort, he was a dynamo when it came to entertaining young people," recalled the Rev. Leon Olszamowski, who graduated from Notre Dame in 1965, became the school principal in 1987 and is the current president of Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy in Pontiac. "He was very passionate about the kids having the opportunity to get together and socialize, and that was one of the great characteristics of the man."

After arriving at the new all-boy Catholic school in Harper Woods in 1955, where he was assigned to teach religion and manage the cafeteria, the Rev. Bryson also was asked to supervise the Friday night student dances at the school.

In its heyday, nearly 1,500 teens jammed the school cafeteria to be entertained by a virtual who's who of local musical talent that included Marvin Gaye, the Supremes, Little Stevie Wonder, the Temptations, Bob Seger and Ted Nugent.

Twitter

Facebook

Share

Email

Print

A A A

careerbuilder.com



ADVERTISEMENT

TOP STORIES

[Odds for a summer job are not so hot](#) - 10:04 PM, Jun. 4, 2011

[Water shaped Michigan's past, now it's a key to state's future](#)

[Next GM: Execs say carmaker focused on long-term success](#)

[SEE ALL TOP STORIES](#)

MOST POPULAR

- [1. Hackers pilfer Sony data again](#)
- [2. Family members of those Jack Kevorkian assisted are grateful for his help](#)
- [3. Mitch Albom goes one-on-one with new Pistons owner Tom Gores](#)
- [4. Ex-diplomat 'as good as they come'](#)
- [5. Detroit 4, Chicago 2: Miguel Cabrera, Justin Verlander top White Sox](#)



[Longer I-275 Metro Bike Trail](#)



[Great Lakes can save our future](#)



[New Pistons Owner Tom Gores](#)

MOST COMMENTED

Occasionally, local disc jockeys from radio stations CKLW, WXYZ and WKNR worked the dances spinning records and introducing new acts.

"Father Bryson was a devoted priest, scholar and community leader who played an important role in the lives of many of the men of Notre Dame, as he often referred to us," recalled former congressman David Bonior, who was a 1963 graduate and attended his first dance there. "Those dances were renowned throughout the Detroit area because of the talent he was able to bring in. He had the top of the line in the music business."

The rules were few but final: no drinking, no fighting and no leaving before 10:30 p.m. without parental permission. He opened each dance with a prayer and closed with his signature line: "Thanks a million."

Recalling fond memories of the dances, the Rev. Bryson told a Free Press reporter in 1983, "The kids knew they could come here and have a good time. I tried as much as possible to give them a good environment where they could enjoy themselves for the evening with the proper supervision."

Born in Worcester, Mass., on Dec. 8, 1923 -- the oldest of eight children -- he was professed in the Society of Mary (Marist) Fathers in 1946. He taught briefly at what was then Cathedral High School in Detroit before going to Notre Dame.

The Rev. Bryson left Notre Dame in 1969 to become personal secretary to Msgr. Joseph Breitenbeck, newly named bishop of the Grand Rapids diocese.

Six years later, he returned to Notre Dame and tried unsuccessfully to revive the dances but realized that the times and tastes of teenagers had changed. The school closed in 2005.

Survivors include his brother, Paul, and sisters Mary Cashmon, Irene Herden, Joan Tetrault, Maureen Rawding and Virginia White.

A memorial mass will be held at 7 p.m. June 2 at Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy, 1300 Giddings Road, Pontiac.

To RSVP, go to www.ndpma.org .

Contact Joe Rossiter: 313-222-6594 or jrossiter@freepress.com

Michigan recall attempts target Gov. Snyder, a dozen other GOPs **366**

Detroit 4, Chicago 2: Miguel Cabrera's homer in 9th leads Tigers **323**

Obama: Automakers inspire in face of 'headwinds' **80**

Ralliers target Detroit's unemployment and decaying structures **78**

Jack Kevorkian sparked a debate on death **64**

ADVERTISEMENT