

Diocese Mourns the Passing of Bishop Emeritus Patrick R. Cooney

With great thanksgiving for his life and ministry, the Diocese of Gaylord announces that the Most Reverend Patrick R. Cooney, our beloved Bishop Emeritus, passed into eternal life this morning. Bishop Cooney was 78 years old.

Installed as the Third Bishop of the Diocese of Gaylord on January 28, 1990, Bishop Cooney served here until his retirement in 2009, leading the Catholic Church within the northern 21 counties of Michigan's Lower Peninsula for 20 years.

“Bishop Patrick Cooney was a great servant of the Church and a true father to the clergy, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Gaylord,” stated Bishop Bernard A. Hebda. “He will be remembered as a shepherd who loved his flock, admired his fellow priests, and selflessly poured himself out for the good of this local Church.



“His trust in Divine Providence and love of the Church’s liturgy will always inspire me,” Bishop Hebda added. “Wherever I go in the Diocese, there are men and women who can attest to his extraordinary kindness. He was a bishop of deep faith and a generous heart who freely used his God-given gifts for the good of the Church.”

Upon his retirement, Bishop Cooney moved to the Detroit area to be nearer to his family, but joyfully returned to Gaylord for special events. He joined all four bishops who had served the Diocese of Gaylord in a historic moment as the diocese celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2011. His most recent visits took place this June when he returned for the ordination of the diocese’s newest priest, Rev. Peter Wigton, and then in July when the entire Diocese of Gaylord was honored by Gaylord’s Alpenfest Committee for its impact on the local communities throughout the diocese.

“We were always so happy when Bishop Cooney was able to come back for special events in the life the diocese; we felt more complete with his presence,” Bishop Hebda added. “His twenty years of leadership in the diocese were a great blessing and he will surely be missed.”

Sadly, due to his failing health, Bishop Cooney was unable to be present for the rededication and blessing of the Diocesan Conference Center renamed the “Cooney Conference Center” in his honor on October 6. The Diocesan Pastoral Center, located right next to St. Mary Cathedral in Gaylord, was built in the Jubilee Year 2000 under Bishop Cooney’s direction. It was his vision to bring the Chancery offices to same grounds as St. Mary Cathedral so that they would stand together as the center of the diocese.

During the ceremony, Bishop Hebda noted Bishop Cooney's deep appreciation for the liturgical and pastoral renewal set in place by the Second Vatican Council. He said it seemed especially appropriate to be naming the Diocesan Conference Center in honor of Bishop Cooney as the Catholic Church marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Council and observance of a "Year of Faith."

"He worked so hard and planned so carefully this space so that it might be, along with the Cathedral, part of the heart of the whole diocese," Bishop Hebda said.

Bishop Cooney released three Pastoral Letters during his episcopate. The first, "An Agenda for the Church in Gaylord," issued in 1991, offered the priorities which would guide the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Gaylord under his leadership: to "Worship the Almighty," to "Cherish and Share His Word," and to "Co-Build the Kingdom."

The second Pastoral Letter, "The Sequence for the Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation of Children in the Diocese of Gaylord," released in January of 2001, restored the order of the Sacraments of Initiation to Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist.

The third Pastoral Letter, "Catechesis: The Primary Goal of the Church," stressed the importance of effective catechesis from 'womb to tomb' and set out a new structure for catechetical efforts in the Diocese of Gaylord which remains in place today. It was released in December, 2006.

Numerous other initiatives were undertaken during Bishop Cooney's tenure including three different diocesan Pastoral Assemblies and the convening of a Parish and Personnel Task Force which carried out an extensive three-year consultation process. He also instituted a seven-year plan for evangelization and increased use of broadcast media – including televising of the weekly Eucharistic liturgy from St. Mary Cathedral. Under his direction, a diocesan office was founded to focus on illuminating the social teachings of the Church which also led to a solidarity partnership with the Diocese of Matagalpa, Nicaragua. The diocesan Center for Catholic Studies, through which all of the workshops and trainings sponsored by the diocese are offered, was also established under Bishop Cooney's leadership. The Center provides opportunities for ongoing faith development for those seeking certification in catechetical and liturgical ministries, as well as for those who simply desire to enrich their faith life.

With a sound fiscal mind, Bishop Cooney was successful at keeping the diocesan budget in balance and he worked to establish the Northern Michigan Catholic Foundation, an endowment fund to help ensure the vitality and ministries of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Gaylord for generations to come.

More than half of the diocesan priests currently serving the Diocese of Gaylord were ordained by Bishop Cooney.

Throughout his life, Bishop Cooney sought to serve God to the best of his ability and placed his unwavering trust in Him. Upon his episcopal ordination, Bishop Cooney chose as his motto "Forever Faithful," a precept he lived even in his most challenging moments.

He was immensely proud of his Irish heritage and enjoyed trips to his homeland with his brother and sisters. Though he loved reading, walking, and rooting on his favorite football teams, he most enjoyed spending time with people, sharing a meal and informal conversation.

Bishop Cooney was the oldest of four children born to Michael and Elizabeth (Dowdall) Cooney, both now deceased. His brother, Michael, is a priest of the Archdiocese of Detroit, currently serving as Pastor of St. Peter Parish in Mt. Clemens. One sister, Sister Leontia Cooney, O.P., is a member of the Adrian Dominicans but retired from active ministry. His other sister, Mary A. Cooney, served as a teacher and retired from the Detroit Public School System in 2001.

Bishop Cooney was born in Detroit on March 10, 1934. He was educated at Saint Edward Elementary School and then attended Sacred Heart Seminary High School, graduating in 1952. He entered Sacred Heart Seminary College and was awarded his baccalaureate (B.A.) in 1956 with a major in philosophy. He next attended the Gregorian University in Rome and received an S.T.B. Degree (baccalaureate in sacred theology) in 1958 and an S.T.L. Degree (licentiate in theology) in 1960.

Bishop Cooney was ordained to the priesthood on December 20, 1959, by Bishop Martin J. O'Connor, then rector of the North American College in Rome.

Following his ordination and completion of theological studies in Rome, Bishop Cooney returned to Detroit and was the Assistant Pastor at Saint Catherine Parish from 1960 until 1962, when he was appointed Assistant Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Detroit. He remained Assistant Chancellor until 1969, when he was appointed director of the Department of Worship. He continued as Director until shortly after his ordination as a bishop. From 1977 to 1983 he was concurrently the Rector of the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Detroit.

In December, 1982, His Holiness Pope John Paul II named him to the episcopacy and he was ordained Titular Bishop of Hodelm and Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit on January 27, 1983, at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

While serving as Assistant Chancellor and Director of Worship, he was also Chaplain at Mercy College, Detroit, from 1967 to 1972. While Director of Worship, he pursued graduate work at the University of Notre Dame and received a Master of Arts Degree in liturgical research in May, 1973.

Bishop Cooney served as liaison to the Catholic Chaplains of Region VI (Michigan and Ohio) from 1987 to 1991. He was Chairman of the Church in the City Task Force in the Archdiocese of Detroit when it was established in December, 1983. As a member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Cooney served on a number of committees: Bishops' Committee on Liturgy, Subcommittee on the Use of Exclusive Language in Liturgy, Subcommittee of Bishops and Scholars, Chair of the Subcommittee on the Book of Blessings, Chair of the Subcommittee on Cremation and Other Funeral Questions, Committee on Laity, National Advisory Council, as Co-Chair of the Roman Catholic Reformed Church Dialog Committee and was elected to serve as a member of the Board of Directors of Catholic Relief

Services. He served terms on the Board of Directors of Notre Dame Liturgical Center, the Board of Governors of North American College and on the Board of Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit.

*May the Angels lead you into Paradise.
May the Martyrs come to welcome you
and take you to the Holy City,
the new and eternal Jerusalem*

Funeral Services will take place at St. Mary Cathedral in Gaylord. Funeral arrangements are:

Sunday, October 21:

2:00 pm Gathering/Visitation
4:00 pm Rosary
6:00 pm Vigil Service
9:00 pm Night Prayer

Monday, October 22

12:00 pm Funeral Mass