



By Fr. Tom Hurley
 Sunday, April 29, 2018

ROGER

I am mindful of the fact that the vast majority of you reading this column today are not familiar with our friend Roger. The smiling face you see on the front cover of this publication this week is the face of a man who embodied the best of what Old St. Patrick's Church is all about. To use an image I've used before: Roger was like the Wizard of Oz. He was the guy behind the curtain pulling all the levers and he did so with the abundance of what Dorothy's friends were seeking: brains, courage, and a huge heart! Let me give you a snapshot of Roger T. Hughes, the "soul" of Old St. Pat's.

Roger was born on the southside of Chicago and was a proud member of St. Ethelreda Church. When he was in 5th grade, he started "holding hands" with Roberta Gibbons and they would later go on to be married on August 18, 1962. They are the proud parents of 6 children and 16 grandchildren. After graduating from Mt. Carmel High School, Roger attended the Chicago Teacher's College for about a year and then left to begin working in the mail room of RH Donnelly. Shortly thereafter, Roger left the mailroom and began working as a salesman for RH Donnelly, selling ads in the Yellow pages to local businesses. Over the years, through hard work, fierce determination, natural abilities, and incredible people skills, Roger rose through the ranks of RH Donnelly and became the Assistant Vice President in 1979, Vice President in 1983, and Executive Vice President in 1988. When RH Donnelly entered into a joint venture with Ameritech Bell in 1989, Roger was named President and CEO of the newly formed company "DonTech" where he remained until becoming Chairman Emeritus of that company in 1994.

In the early days of his career as a salesman, Roger was mentored by a gentleman who worked for Illinois Bell, Jack Wall Sr., the father of my predecessor Fr. Jack Wall. Shortly after his retirement in 1994, knowing Roger's numerous skills with finance, human resources, and leadership, Roger received a phone call from Fr. Wall asking him if he could give 3 months (I always thought it was 2 weeks) to Old St. Patrick's to help form a business plan and bring some order to this emerging urban church. Roger agreed...and his 3 month commitment turned into 24 years!!!! Roger's early retirement from corporate life (at the age of 54) allowed him to pursue his passion for ministry and social justice. In addition to helping shape the mission of Old St. Patrick's Church, Roger also spent the last few decades working with numerous non-profit organizations, including United Cerebral Palsy (national organization committed to providing assistive technology for children and adults with disabilities), The CARA program (helping people struggling with homelessness transform their lives through employment), Horizons for Youth (dedicated to helping children in the inner city with education and mentoring opportunities), and The Gustafson Family Foundation (an organization dedicated to healthy development and early education for children in at-risk communities).

I've known Roger Hughes since I was 16 years old. His nephews and I went to Marist High School together and I would occasionally run into "Uncle Rog" at various parties and events throughout the years. When I came to Old St. Pat's in 2003 as the associate pastor, I never realized the incredible

impact Roger was making to help form and sustain Old St. Pat's. You never saw Roger's name in the bulletin and you never saw Roger standing on the altar or anywhere in the limelight. But I can tell you confidently that Old St. Patrick's Church would NOT be where it is today without the contributions of Roger T. Hughes.



Restoring Chicago's oldest church, building a new school (2004), securing property in downtown Chicago from Adams to Monroe Street, providing for the future parking needs of this church at the new facility of 625 Adams are just a few of the MAJOR accomplishments of Roger. One example I shared last week at the 9:30 of Roger's impact had to do with an angry email I received many years ago from a disgruntled neighbor who read in Crains that Old St. Pat's was contemplating a sale of our property at 625 Adams and therefore affecting the value of his condominium. Roger told me he wanted to handle the situation with this person and so he met with the man over lunch. They spoke for only 10 minutes about the sale of the property and for the next two hours Roger listened to this man's anger and hurt about being gay and Catholic and unwelcomed. Roger not only ministered to this man, he welcomed him to Old St. Pat's and as a result, we formed the LGBTQ outreach ministry (Gay+) that OSP has today.

Father Wall and I have both expressed: we don't know where we would be without Roger. In addition to some of the major business transactions, what really was at the heart of Roger's contributions was his incredible faith. He never had any formal theological education but he understood the Mission of the Gospel better than anyone. Roger affectionately called it "The Love Story." God's work in the world of incarnating Love, extending Mercy, giving a second chance, and building the Kingdom of Radical Hospitality was all part of the Love Story, and Roger lived it with total conviction. Roger gave 24 years of dedicated service to Old St. Pat's and he never took a pay check! Driving every day from Orland Park, Roger just loved the work of Church and he never lost his passion for dreaming of new ways to make the church more alive and welcoming. After a two year battle with cancer, Roger went home to the Lord on Wednesday April 18th.

Most people are lucky to have one dad. I was blessed to have 2. I learned more from Roger than any seminary course could have taught. His love and support of me, the staff (past and present), Fr. Wall, and the people of Old St. Pat's was a tremendous gift. We will miss him dearly but his influence and spirit will live on in this place and our mission.

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