

Father Patrick Diver, SDB

August 5, 1943 – August 6, 2011

Professed August 16, 1963

Ordained March 30, 1974

Father Patrick Diver, SDB (1943-2011)

After a long bout with cancer, Father Patrick Kevin Diver, SDB, died early in the morning of August 6, 2011, at Father Hudson House, a hospice in Elizabeth, N.J. The day before, he had celebrated his 68th birthday in his hospice room and as a gift received Anointing of the Sick from his director, Father Stephen Leake. He was a professed Salesian ten days short of 48 years and was a priest for over 37 years.

Father Thomas Dunne, provincial, said that in the final months of his nearly 48 years of consecrated life Father Pat offered himself fully to God's will and promise. Many others also witnessed that.

Father Pat was born in Boston on August 5, 1943, to Patrick and Mary Connolly Diver. The senior Patrick was a police detective and Mary a housewife. Within the month baby Patrick was baptized at Saint Margaret's Church in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood, the family's parish. He was confirmed there in 1955.

Father Pat's classmate Father Thomas Ruekert describes the Divers as "a lovely, working-class, very Irish family who were always welcoming to Father Pat's Salesian friends. It seems 'tallness' ran in the family. Not only was Father Pat tall, but so were his parents and two sisters. But the height of their hospitality was greater than their physical height. I recall eating corned beef and cabbage at Father Pat's family home in Boston and having picnics at his sister Maureen's home in Randolph. They welcomed not only me but other Salesians. They were especially fond of Father James O'Driscoll and Father Joseph Santa Bibiana, whose recent death caused the family great grief."

From his family Father Pat learned that card games, even fiercely competitive games, could be a terrific way to foster community. Father Ruekert, again: "Father Pat and his family members enjoyed playing cards, hearts usually. They would play it on the kitchen table or dining room table after a meal. Father Pat introduced it to the Salesians on retreats in Stony Point. He packed not only his stole, alb, and Liturgy of the Hours, but he made sure he would pack a deck of cards as he headed out the door to go on retreat. Father Santa Bibiana was usually his partner, and this dynamic duo would win most of the games."

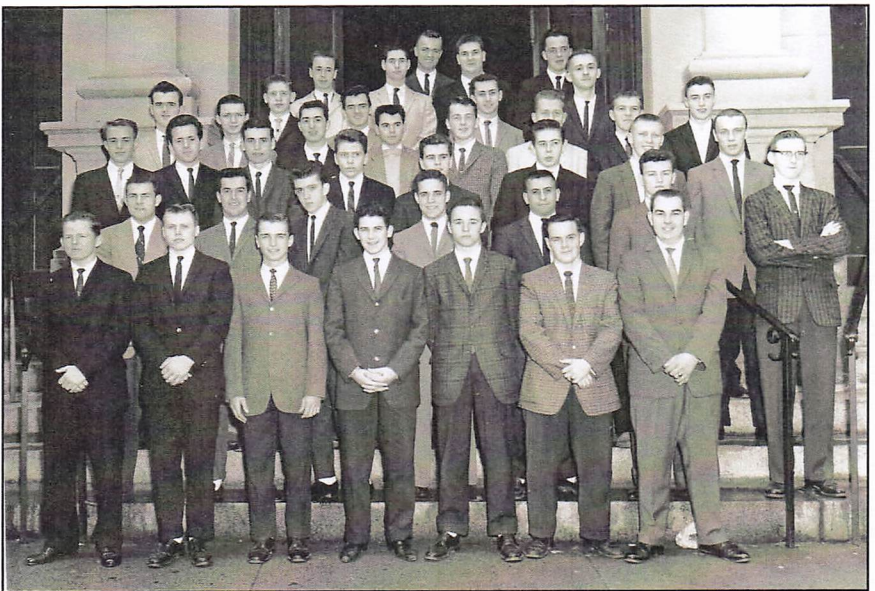
In high school at Don Bosco Technical High School in Boston

from 1957 to 1961, his favorite teacher was Brother Julius Bollati. Following his graduation in 1961, Pat enrolled in Don Bosco College Seminary in Newton, N.J., as a Son of Mary (post-high school candidate) in September of that year.

From the start, his friendliness was noted. Father George Harkins, at that time a young Canadian Salesian far from home at Newton, recalls: “My best memory of Father Pat Diver (back in my formation years...) was his polite and hearty greeting every time we met. This made me feel genuinely accepted and appreciated.”

Many years later, Father Jesse Montes of the California Province likewise experienced his hospitality: “When Pat Diver was pastor at Saint Anthony’s Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey, he was such a gracious host when my godchild and I were touring New York. We shared meals with the community. [We were] immediately given a key to the rectory. We spent time reminiscing old times at Newton. Just a wonderful host, asking for nothing in return. Great man!”

Father David Purdy of the San Francisco Province was a junior at Don Bosco College when Pat arrived. He remembers the new candidate and what his character forecast: “A tremendous Son of Mary back in 1962! His spirit of work and of being a powerful community

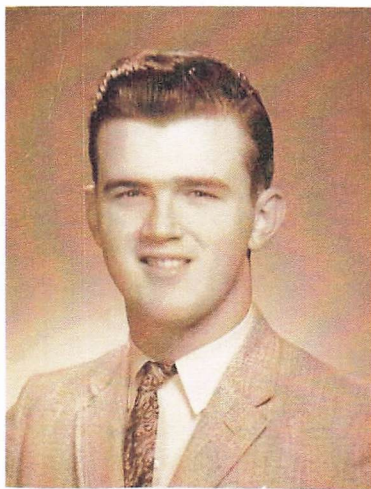


*Don Bosco Tech's Class of 1961.
Pat Diver is at the left end of the fourth row.*

man can be seen in the list of various assignments he took on.”

In August 1962 Pat and 71 other men entered Saint Joseph’s Novitiate in Newton. The 18 novices for the Western Province and 54 for the East made it largest class in the history of the two U.S. provinces. Their master was the veteran Father Attilio Giovannini. Pat and 48 others made their first profession of religious vows on August 16, 1963. They included the future Fathers Bruce Craig, John Itzaina, William Keane, Frank Kelly, Thomas Ruekert, and Christian Woerz and Brother John Rasor.

Father Keane, writes: “Pat was a classmate of mine. We were as-signed together only a few years, but our friendship lasted all of his Salesian years. He was fun to be with and always straight and honest. Handball and playing cards companion, he was Salesian-minded his whole life. His generosity and sense of humor never left him.”



Pat as a senior at Don Bosco Tech

“Straight and honest” is evident in Father Pat’s extensive, frank cor-respondence with his superiors, and vice versa, regarding sensitive personal and community matters, making his own views known, sometimes apologizing for things said, and always striving to be a faithful Salesian. Many of his discussions and letters were about assignments—aspirations, difficulties, successes, and frustrations.

Father Ruekert comments on Father Pat and his love for hand-

ball, including his competitive nature. He writes that the two of them “used to like to play handball on the back wall of the novitiate in Newton during recreation periods. Father Pat had a unique gift of slamming the ball just two inches from the bottom of the wall, which made it almost impossible for the opposition to retrieve. When this dynamic duo [Father Pat and Father Tom] went to Columbus, Ohio, for theology, they challenged Father Bill Keane and Father Ken McAlice to constant duels. There was always plenty of laughter and fun.”

Like all Salesian seminarians, after religious profession Brother Pat majored in philosophy at Don Bosco College. An average student, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in June 1967. He minored in classical languages.

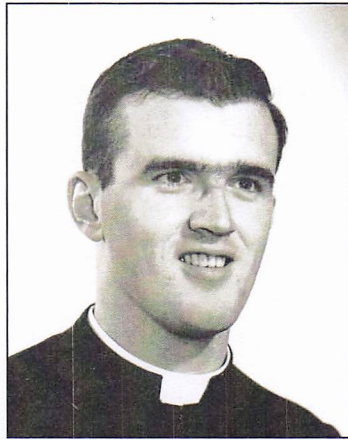
He volunteered for the foreign missions, specifically for the Philip-pines. With characteristic honesty, he informed his provincial, Father August Bosio, of both the favorable and less favorable opinions of the College superiors about his taking on such a mission.

His offer was accepted, and after his college graduation Brother Pat was sent to Don Bosco Academy in Pampanga, the Philippine Province’s high school seminary, where he taught from 1967 to 1970. The students greatly appreciated him as a teacher and friend. He made perpetual vows on May 24, 1969, at Canlubang, having been found by the council of the community to have “heartfelt piety, faithful Salesian spirit, good ecclesiastical spirit, good health, intelligence” and to be “a constant and responsible worker, good organizer with concern and initiative but a little touchy.” (It’s interesting that in 1969 they were still writing these forms in Italian.)

At the same time he undertook a master’s program in guidance and counseling at De La Salle College’s Graduate School of Education in Manila, completing his degree in May 1970. One of the papers that he presented for the degree was titled “The Counselor in the Salesian System of Education.”

Brother Pat returned to the U.S. in 1970 to study theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Worthington, Ohio, where he proved himself a more than able student, achieving a 3.5 GPA. He earned a master of arts in theology, *bene probatus*, from the Josephinum in June 1974.

Between 1971 and 1980, he became a veteran campmaster in Salesian summer camps in Goshen, N.Y., Tampa, Newton, and East Barrington, N.H.



Brother Pat during his years in Newton

Prior to his diaconal ordination, the council of the community noted his “generous personality, cooperative and reliable. His piety seems natural and manly. Apostolic and loyal to Salesian ideals.”

A similar evaluation came when he applied for the presbyterate: “cheerful personality, generous and self-sacrificing. Reliable with good academic performance. Good piety....” The council also noted his outspokenness about what he thought was right and his high standards. Those qualities remained with him, facilitating his work as a compassionate and effective counselor, teacher, and administrator, and sometimes frustrating him as a leader with high expectations of others—for which he took his share of responsibility, as is brought out in some of his aforementioned forthright correspondence with provincials.

Father Pat was ordained in Columbus on March 30, 1974. His first priestly assignment was as dean of students at Don Bosco College in Newton (1974-1976). A candidate for the Salesians who was in Newton at that time, already a priest, Father Anthony Mastroeni of the Paterson Diocese, recalls that Father Pat “helped me to get through that year in Newton by insisting that I play bridge and pinochle with him and [Father] Jeremiah [Reen] every night. At first I balked, but then looked forward to it. He was always so upbeat and transparent, and never took himself so seriously.”

Salesian Father John Nazzaro speaks of that same period: “My memories of Father Pat Diver began when I was newly professed in Newton. He was our dean of students and was newly or-

dained but seemed to have years of experience for the job. He was always fair, kind, and compassionate to a group of young men who were not the easiest to deal with in those days. Through the years he was a good friend and one you could always count on for a good word of encouragement and affirmation. Father Pat was a good Salesian who loved his earthly family as well as his Salesian family. He could minister in any responsibility: school administrator, pastor, mission procurator, or just plain Pat.”



Newly ordained Father Pat with his parents

Twenty-two years of high school apostolate followed his two years as dean at DBC. In the schools Father Pat served as guidance counselor at Saint Dominic Savio High School in East Boston (1976-1980), treasurer at Dom Savio (1980-1984), and director of the school and community (1989-1995); he was treasurer at Mary Help of Christians School in Tampa (1984-1988) and then principal there (1988-1989); he was guidance counselor at Don Bosco Technical High School in Paterson, N.J. (1995-1997). He later had another short stint (2003-2004) as guidance counselor at Savio Prep, the short-lived replacement for Dom Savio High in East Boston.

During his first assignment in East Boston he was certified in Massachusetts as a teacher of high school English and history and a school guidance counselor (1978). He'd also been certified in Ohio

as a theology teacher.

When Father Richard McCormick, provincial, nominated him to be director in East Boston in 1989, he wrote that Father Pat was “a sensitive and hard-working confrere; a good Salesian priest who has a real concern for young people and a true dedication to religious community.” He added that his “guidance skills and his wholesome priestly faith will enhance his ministry.”

Father Pat made a favorable lasting impression on the young men at Savio. “He worked in guidance and in teaching various subjects,” Father Ruekert observed. “He loved the kids, and they appreciated him. They knew that they came first, before any subject matter. He loved to kid around with them. He attended most of their sports events. He accompanied them well—he was one of the hometown boys.”

One Savio alumnus, C. David Surface, writes: “He was the most honest and caring priest I have ever known. His influence helped to shape my life both professionally and from a family perspective.... I will never forget him and how he made my days at Savio truly special.”

Other Savio alumni agree, for example three graduates of the

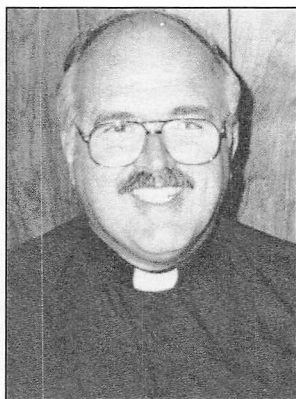


Rehearsing for graduation exercises at Mary Help of Christians School in Tampa in 1988, Father Pat shows the young men how to wear their mortarboards.

Class of 1977. Brian McEachern describes him as “a great teacher and a great guy.... We were blessed with having great role models like him.” Stephen DiPasquale remembers “him from taking his psychology course. He was a compassionate, caring man who took pride in his teachings, in Savio and the students who were there. He was always willing to listen to what you had to say and to offer sound advice, as needed. Exemplary individual.” John DiMille notes that “Father Pat was our junior and senior year guidance counselor. He provided great advice and also guided our class in the teachings of Saint John Bosco. He was a wonderful person, a great Salesian, and a great priest. He concelebrated my mother’s funeral. I always remember Father Pat walking the streets of East Boston with the late Father Caselli. He used to be in the stands with us cheering the Spartans to victory. He is still in my classmates’ fondest memories.... In fact, a few years ago Father Pat’s sisters were invited to attend our annual alumni memorial Mass, [and] they provided us with musical entertainment. Father Pat Diver was an influential part of our class and saw a group of young Spartans become a brotherhood.”

His attention and his sensitivity included everyone. Father Ruekert testifies of his period as the treasurer at Savio: “Father Pat did a stellar job.... He was very dedicated, especially to Friday night Bingo. The people loved him. His volunteer workers loved him. He would treat the workers to sandwiches after Bingo and build up bonds of friendship with them. He was exceptionally gracious to all the staff members: to Rose and Mary the cooks; to Mary the 80-year-old launderer; to his secretary, Mrs. Gibbons, to the other secretaries, to the maintenance workers, and to teachers. He seemed to connect so well with the ‘little guy,’ the blue-collar worker, the non-elite. That’s who Father Pat was, too: unpretentious, unsophisticated, down-to-earth, humble, and hard working.”

Father Pat’s capacity for friendship was far-reaching, including the families of co-workers and students. Father Dunne states, “His sense of and love of family extended to the school and parish communities—the families where he served.” Father Ruekert gives one specific example. When he and Brother Pat were students of theology in Columbus, one of their ministries was teaching catechism at Saint Augustine Parish. “The man in charge of the CCD program,” writes Father Ruekert, “was Frank McGarvey, who often invited them over to his home to visit with his wife Dianne and his six little daughters. The McGarvey house for these two Salesians was a home away from home. Years later Dianne was diagnosed with stage-4 cancer and given only three months to live. Frank wanted to have a



Father Pat, from a Dom Savio yearbook

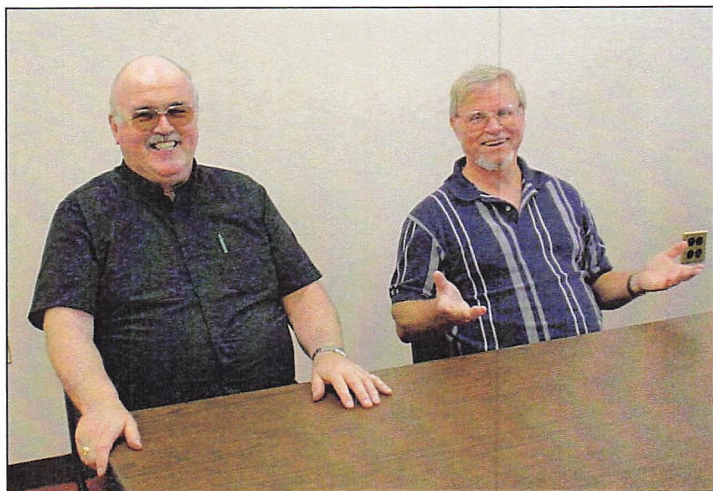
surprise Mass and party for her before the Lord called her. Father Pat and Father Tom flew out to Columbus together and celebrated Mass at Saint Augustine's on October 1, 2005. Dianne was so surprised to see them both at the altar. Father Pat treasured people and made many life-long friends such as the McGarveys."

When Father Ruekert informed the McGarveys in 2011 that Father Pat's cancer was terminal, Frank and three of his daughters drove from Columbus to visit him in Elizabeth.

When he was assigned to Don Bosco Tech in Paterson, his good friend Father Keane was the director. One of his "honest" dialogs ensued, as Father Keane recalls: "Pat's friendship with me cost him. I needed a vicar one year at Paterson, and he had been just assigned there. I thought, 'Oh, a former classmate—he'd be good choice.' After he got the letter of appointment, he mentioned to me he was looking to be free of any administrative positions. He didn't want to be in charge of anything. He told me this as I was about to leave for a trip to see my ailing sister in New Orleans. Well, I was gone for a number of days. By the time I got back, I think he resigned himself to his 'fate.' He had that generosity about him that said, 'Ask me, but don't expect me to smile.'

Father Keane continues: "When I became master of novices, he succumbed to being the preacher for the opening retreat for the novices. We had a week to talk and laugh about old times. His talks were right-on, and it was a good start for those novices."

Besides schools, Father Pat worked in parishes. He was pastor



*Father Pat with his friend Father John Grinsell
at a meeting of directors in May 2006*

of Mary Help of Christians Church in Manhattan for a year, and director of the Salesian community (1997-1998), associate pastor at Nativity Church in Washington, D.C. (2002), acting pastor of Saint Theresa's Church in Leeds, Ala. (2003), and pastor of Saint Anthony of Padua Church in Elizabeth, N.J., and director of the community there (2004-2010).

His directorship in Manhattan was brief because he was unexpectedly appointed director of Salesian Missions in New Rochelle in 1998 to 2002 with responsibility for coordinating a vast fundraising program in service to Salesian missionary activities all over the world. He was also director of the community staffing that office, "a mature community of men working with missionary hearts," according to the provincial, Father Patrick Angelucci. Making the appointment, Father Angelucci described him as "a solid Salesian, well respected in the province. He has excellent administrative talents and good common sense."

At Saint Anthony's in Elizabeth, he improved the spirit and the unity of the parish, which included various ethnic and linguistic groups. It was during his service there that he was found in 2007 to have colon cancer and went through a long treatment and recovery.

In the summer of 2010 Father Pat completed his pastorate and directorship in Elizabeth and was assigned once more to the formation of young Salesians as a very experienced and highly valued

staff member at the Don Bosco Residence in Orange, N.J. He brought to the community a special gift of camaraderie. Father John Langan, just ordained in 2020, recalls his prenovitiate year: “Father Pat used hang out with us playing card games or board games when we had time. He usually didn’t play but got to know us so well through watching us play! One thing I never understood was how a man could put so much butter on top of a chocolate chip cookie! I think part of the reason he came to the community was because he was sick, but at the same time he brought so much life to our community!”

Late in the spring of 2011 cancer returned in a very serious form. When treatment was unavailing, he entered hospice care. He told Father Dunne, “I knew the Lord would call me home one day—but I really didn’t think it would be so soon.” He added an apology: “I’m so sorry that I can’t fulfill the assignment that you gave me, to work with the guys in formation.” To that Father Dunne replied that his self-offering “was far greater than anything he could DO.”

That self-offering is exactly what impressed candidate Kyle Zinno: “There are a lot of good memories of Father Pat, but one poignant one that showed his holiness of life was in the spring of 2011 when I was taking him to a doctor’s appointment. I don’t remember all of the details of our conversation (I think was sharing with him some recent joys in my spiritual life and discernment), but at one point he told me he was offering up his sufferings (the cancer and its effects) for the house (the guys in formation). It may seem very simple, but it really had a profound impact on me. I realized that the many graces I experienced that year were, I believe, the fruits of that sacrificial offer-ing of his suffering. From what I remember of Father Pat that year, he did all he could to be with us guys in formation, and was a consistently cheerful presence, even in the midst of his suffering.”

Brother Gustavo Ramirez, one of the young Salesians at Orange, said of him: “Father Pat Diver was a great example of perseverance and love for the young. I will always remember him as the vital man who loved the young to the last minute of his life.”

Father Bill Keane offers a final remembrance: “One last favor he did for me: Pat was on his deathbed, and I was headed for my family visit that summer. I didn’t get a chance to visit him before I left. I got back, and he still was kicking. Bro. Sal [Sammarco] and I went to visit the next day. We had a good visit, and Pat had a chance to smile a couple of times. He died two days later. I miss him for the



Father Pat leading the buffet line at a cookout in New Rochelle, May 2006

card games and his ability to bring my foibles to my attention in a way that we both laughed. A true Salesian to the end.”

Father Pat is survived by his sisters Kathleen Tubman and Maureen Fitzgerald, both of the Boston area. His brother Joseph died in 2017.

Maureen noted her brother’s smarts: “When he came home to visit, he’d stay at Kathy’s in winter because she had a lovely, warm fireplace. In the hot summer, however, he’d stay with me because I have a swimming pool.”

Father Pat’s funeral was celebrated at Saint Anthony of Padua Church in Elizabeth on August 9, 2011, with Father Thomas Dunne presiding and Father Thomas Ruekert preaching. He was buried in the Diver family plot at Newton Cemetery, Newton, Mass., on August 10.

Father Michael Mendl, SDB
Archivist, Province of New Rochelle
July 11, 2020

We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrated us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young.

-- Salesian Constitutions, art. 3

Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The Salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good.

In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart.

-- Salesian Constitutions, art. 16

The Salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participation in the creative action of God and co-operating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

-- Salesian Constitutions, art. 18

