

"FATHER TOM" PASSES TO  
HIS ETERNAL REWARD.

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By: F. S. Hopkins  
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Last Saturday night, at Mercy Hospital, Parsons, Kansas, the Reverend Thomas A. McKernan, passed to his eternal reward.

For the past several years "Father Tom" as he was familiarly known by his many friends throughout Southeast Kansas, had been stationed as retired chaplain at Mercy Hospital, Parsons,.

Father McKernan was born June 16, 1881, in St. Louis. His father, Thomas McKernan, and his mother Mary Stanley, were both natives of Ireland but were married in St. Louis. His mother died when he was three years old and his father followed her into the other world six years later. Rev. B. J. McKernan, a cousin, then in charge of the parish at Winfield, Kansas was appointed guardian of the orphaned Thomas McKernan, Jr., brought him to Kansas and put him in St. Francis Institution at Osage Mission (now St. Paul) to continue his studies..

Upon the closing of St. Francis in 1891, Thomas McKernan went to Winfield, continued his studies in the parochial school and in 1896 he went to St. Benedict's College, Atchison, Kansas. After six years there he went to Kendrick Seminary in St. Louis.

Father Thomas McKernan was ordained priest in St. Louis, June 11, 1907, and said his first low mass in his mother's old church in St. Louis and the second in the Shrine of Perpetual Light in St. Louis. Only one Mass was said each year in this shrine, hence it was a very special privilege for this young priest to be chosen for the celebrant this year. He sang his first Solemn ~~Mass~~ High Mass in St. Mary's church, Ft. Scott, on his 26th birthday, June 16, 1907.

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In January of 1908 he was made pastor of Greenbush. In 1912 he was made pastor of St. Joseph's parish in Wichita, but was forced to resign because of poor health. After two years leave of absence he returned to the diocese and was made chaplain of St. Rose's Hospital in Great Bend. In January 1921 he became chaplain of Mercy Hospital, Parsons. He served in Parsons 33 years, retiring ~~in 1933~~ November 5, 1954.

OUR MEMORY OF "FATHER TOM" IS VERY  
VIVID AND DISTINCT.....

In 1937, in conjunction with ~~our~~ uncle, the late W. W. Graves, Father Thomas McKernan, issued his 120-page volume "The Poet Priest of Kansas". a book of poems dedicated to those times and friends of "Father Tom". This book is still available and each month, someone writes in and inquires "where can I obtain a copy of "The Poet Priest of Kansas". As a partner in the book publishing business with my late uncle, I still have available some of the many works published.

Naturally, ~~my~~ <sup>my</sup> most vivid memory of "Father Tom" stems back to that warm night in July 1951, as I lay in Mercy hospital, a victim of coronary thromb<sup>b</sup>osis. With two "light attacks", we thought, I was shuttled to Mercy hospital from my home in St. Paul, due to the fact that the Neosho river was rising rapidly, with threatened floods, and the closing of highways, plus the fact my local doctor, Dr. E. C. Bryan had stated that the place for a man in my condition was in a hospital.

I had two very restful days in the hospital and had been intently listening to the local reports of the flooding Neosho, with all highways closed. My ~~nurse~~ nurse had communicated with my wife in St. Paul by phone, and reported my ~~condition~~ <sup>condition</sup> good ~~condition~~ <sup>condition</sup>. It was on Saturday night, and during visiting hours in the evening, my mother and sister and brother-in-law had come out from Parsons a short visit. At nine, they left, with other hospital visitors. Around ten p.m. "like a bolt from the blue" another severe and near-fatal attack occurred.

I can recall, as though it was yesterday, my nurse, summoning all help on the floor, the very urgent oxygen tank, Dr. Miller from Parsons, but most of all....and may I say...best of all...Rev. Father Thomas McKernan, chaplain of Mercy hospital. I can hear him yet say "Son, I have come to help you..when I anoint a sick person...they improve." And, a couple of days later, when I had improved...he came into my room and said "Remember, what I told you" and I remarked "I sure do, Father".

Yes, my memories of Father Thomas McKernan will probably <sup>remain</sup> ~~remain~~ with me all the days I remain on this earth....because, he was certainly a comforting blessing, at a time, when I was quite sure....the end was near....and during my stay at the hospital, as I improved...his cheering words...that I would get well, were most comforting. He was a great physical, as well as spibitual help, in my time of need.

May his reward be Glorious and Eternal.

# 50 Years for 'Father Tom'

"Father Tom" observed his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the priesthood today at Mercy Hospital.

The Rev. Thomas A. McKernan, retired chaplain of the hospital, attended mass in the chapel in observance of the golden jubilee.

He was there in a wheel chair, having received a fractured hip from a fall in November. He has been a patient at the hospital since April, 1956.

Father McKernan was born June 16, 1881, in St. Louis. He was a grammar student at the old Osage Mission (now St. Paul) under the Jesuit order until 1890 when the school was closed.

## Ordained at St. Louis

He completed his elementary education in schools of Winfield and Fort Scott. In 1896 he enrolled at St. Benedict's College in Atchison. He entered the Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis in 1902.

He was ordained a priest there June 11, 1907 for the Wichita diocese by Cardinal John Glennon.

After his ordination, Father McKernan was assistant priest at the Cathedral Parish in Wichita for a short time. When the Chicago Church Extension Society put the St. Anthony Chapel car on the railroads, he was made its chaplain. He toured western Kansas with Bishop Hennessy.

In January of 1908 he was made pastor of Greenbush. In 1912 he was made the pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Wichita, but was forced to resign because of poor health.

## To Mercy in 1921

After a two years' leave of absence he returned to the diocese and was made chaplain of St. Rose's Hospital in Great Bend. In January of 1921 he became chaplain of Mercy Hospital here.

He served in Parsons 33 years, retiring Nov. 5, 1954.

Father McKernan is sometimes called "The Poet Priest of Kansas," for he published many of his poems in a volume titled "Musings."

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