

# Oldest diocesan priest was a pro-life champion

written by Arkansas Catholic Staff |



Father Thomas Keller, the oldest and longest-serving diocesan priest, died April 13. He was 91. A Little Rock native, Father Keller was the youngest of seven children born Jan. 13, 1933, to Walter and Isabelle Keller. He graduated from Catholic High School in Little Rock in 1950 and attended Villanova University in Pennsylvania before enrolling in St. John Home Mission Seminary. Bishop Albert Fletcher ordained Father Keller to the priesthood May 15, 1958.

Father Keller served parishes in Pine Bluff, De Queen, Fayetteville, Texarkana, Searcy, Newport, Mena, Jonesboro, Little Rock, Jacksonville, Fairfield Bay, Clinton, Carlisle and England.

Father Keller also provided spiritual guidance to members of the Arkansas Army National Guard in 1969. He was deployed to the Middle East during Operation Desert Storm. After many years of service with the National Guard, Father Keller retired with the rank of major.

Although he transitioned to being a senior priest on June 17, 2014, Father Keller continued to serve as the chaplain for the pro-life movement in the Diocese of Little Rock. He championed the unborn and the Church's teachings of the life and dignity of every person.

"What is more important than life?" he asked in an interview with *Arkansas Catholic* in 2018 for his 60th priestly anniversary. "Especially life in the faith. What is more important, nothing is more important than that. So how would we rate it? Well, I'd rate it pretty high as an important duty of us priests and lay people and everybody to protect life ... We can have life and be dead at the same time. But if we don't have life in the faith, we are dead."

Visitation will begin at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Little Rock at 5 p.m., followed by a vigil service and rosary at 7 p.m., Thursday, April 18. The funeral Mass will be held at the church at 11 a.m., Friday, April 19, with burial to follow in the Priests' Circle at Calvary Cemetery in Little Rock.