

Monsignor Timothy J. Murphy

March 2, 1940 - October 2, 2026

The Reverend Monsignor Timothy J. Murphy, a beloved diocesan priest who embodied Central Catholic High School for over fifty years, died peacefully October 2. Although many thought him to be ageless, he was 86. The cause of death was complications from dementia.

Monsignor Murphy dedicated his life to the Archdiocese of Portland and to Catholic secondary education. For many Portland Catholics, especially those in the large and far-flung Central Catholic family, he epitomized what it was to be a priest: faith-filled, humble, selfless, unassuming, and living with a true sense of Christian charity and service. At the same time, his gentle, low-key manner belied a lightning-quick sense of humor and a fiery competitive spirit. “Murph,” as he was known to generations of Central Catholic students and alums, could always make you laugh, but he was deadly serious when rooting for his Rams in any sport or endeavor. He bled cardinal and gold.

Central Catholic President Colin McGinty released the following statement about Monsignor Murphy’s passing: “Monsignor Murphy was a universally loved figure whose presence shaped generations of students, families, and staff at Central Catholic, and in the broader Archdiocese of Portland. His faith, his warmth, and his unwavering belief in the potential of every person who walked through our doors leave a legacy that will endure for generations to come.”

Timothy John Murphy was born in Portland on March 2, 1940. He was the third of four children of Gertrude (Keber) and Cornelius Murphy. He grew up in the longtime family home on Northeast Hazelfern Place in the Laurelhurst neighborhood, and attended All Saints School. He entered Central Catholic, about a mile from his house, as a freshman in the fall of 1954. At Central he was junior- and senior-class president, and excelled in basketball and baseball. His pass-first, defense-focused mentality in basketball earned him the nickname “Two-Point Tim, Terror of the Gym,” coined by longtime teacher and coach the Rev. Leland DeJardin. In baseball, he was a rangy centerfielder (threw left, batted right). Upon his graduation in 1958, he received the Holy Spirit Award, given annually to the outstanding leader in the Central Catholic senior class.

After graduating from Central Catholic, Monsignor attended Santa Clara for a year, playing on both the freshman basketball and baseball teams. He transferred to University of Portland, but left there after a year to enter St. Thomas Seminary in Kenmore, Wash. While training for the priesthood he earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy and a master’s degree in divinity/theology. (He later returned to University of Portland to earn a master’s in education.) He was ordained on May 20, 1967, at St. Mary’s Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Northwest Portland.

Once he became a priest, his working life revolved around, and continued to circle back to, Central Catholic. He was a teacher, counselor, and coach there from 1968 through 1983, a period that included the school's transition to coeducation in the fall of 1980. By the end of his tenure on the faculty he was the head of counseling and known for his somewhat dry but always entertaining sophomore Scripture class. He left Central in 1983 to become principal of Regis High School in Stayton, a position he held for seven school years. He returned to Central Catholic to serve as principal in 1990, then was named the school's first president in 1995. He became president emeritus in 2008. Central Catholic inducted Monsignor Murphy into its Hall of Fame in 2010.

Throughout his time at Central Catholic, Monsignor Murphy was a willing (or at least tolerant) participant in pranks, gags, stunts, fundraising campaigns, and other events that relied on his persona, his ability to make fun of himself, and the community's wholehearted embrace of him. Most famously, he jumped out of an airplane in 2009, at age 69, doing a tandem skydive on video to help raise money for the school's tuition-assistance program.

In the early 1980s, when MTV was in its infancy, Central Catholic students noted that Father Murphy—with his horn-rimmed glasses, close-cut black hair, and ectomorphic physique—bore a strong resemblance to Talking Heads lead singer David Byrne. The video of the band's song, "Once in a Lifetime," was getting heavy airplay then, and in Father's presence students would imitate Byrne's idiosyncratic dance moves and gestures from the video. In this situation, as in so many similar situations, Murph just went along with it, smirking almost imperceptibly and making a fanning motion in front of his face, as though all this silliness were giving him the vapors.

Signs, both large and small, of his importance to the Central Catholic community are everywhere. The most recent expansion of the school's campus created a 27,000-square-foot wing called the Monsignor Timothy Murphy Center, which opened in 2015. On a smaller scale, a hungry person can order a specialty sandwich called "The Monsignor Murphy" (it's similar to a Reuben) from the lunch menu at Laurelhurst Market, whose owners include a Central Catholic alum.

Parallel to his work at Central Catholic was Father Murphy's steady service to parishes throughout the archdiocese. Over the years he was in residence, assistant pastor, or pastor at eighteen parishes, most of them in greater Portland: Saints Charles, Therese, Catherine of Siena (Mill City), Christopher (Detroit, Ore.), John the Baptist (twice), Francis, Agatha, Patrick, John Fisher, and Rita, as well as Blessed Sacrament (twice), Holy Cross, Holy Family, Immaculate Conception (Stayton), Our Lady of the Lake, Sacred Heart, All Saints, and The Madeleine. He also served stints as the chaplain at the Marylhurst convent, Mt. St. Joseph residence, and St.

Mary of the Valley. In addition to his regular parish duties, every Sunday afternoon for decades Father Murphy, without fanfare, drove to all corners of the metro area to deliver Communion to friends, former students, and former parishioners who were unable to make it to Mass. In recognition of his long and distinguished service to the Church, both as a parish priest and an educator, the Vatican honored him with the title of Monsignor (Chaplain to His Holiness) in November 2007.

With his quirky, bone-dry humor and monotone delivery, his knack for self-deprecation, and his mastery of the double take and the deadpan look, Monsignor Murphy, when teaching or preaching, reminded some observers of Jack Benny or silent-film comedian Harold Lloyd. His sermons—studded with cryptic asides, obscure allusions, sports references, and inside jokes—were frequently memorable, sometimes comprehensible, and always brief.

While the priesthood clearly was Father Murphy's vocation, sports fandom was his favorite avocation. He loved the Oregon Ducks, Notre Dame, and Pacific Northwest teams the Blazers, Mariners, and Seahawks. But his heart belonged to the Rams, and he was a reliable and supportive presence at most major Central Catholic sporting contests, especially state-playoff games or matchups with archrival Jesuit. He was a quietly focused spectator, usually sitting unobtrusively in a corner of the gym or grandstand and deploying a small arsenal of encouraging but carefully contained gestures when the Rams did well: a golf clap, the tiniest of fist pumps, an index finger pointed (in an affirming rather than aggressive manner) towards a Ram athlete who executed a good play, maybe a faint upward twitch of the corners of his mouth if he really got carried away.

Monsignor remained physically active well into his 80s. He traveled extensively, hiked, and golfed, usually while wearing his signature bucket hat. His travels took him to Ireland, the Holy Land, Rome, Croatia, and Greece, among many destinations. As part of Central Catholic's service-learning program, Monsignor, by then in his 70s, accompanied Central Catholic students on two mission trips to Tijuana with the Los Embajadores program, and a service mission to the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in Montana. Monsignor loved to hike, but he was known for getting lost. This usually worked out OK for him, because he invariably ran into someone he knew on the trail, and these Good Samaritans would help him get back safely.

There was some providence involved in this, because in his ministry Monsignor Murphy was always there when others needed *him*: in a hospital ward, at a family celebration or rite of passage, in the most mundane and most sacred of times. Murph was just there. Through the years, he was a reassuring and calm, albeit rarely punctual, presence at thousands of Baptisms, First Holy Communions, Confirmations, weddings, and funeral Masses. As the University of Portland noted in its citation when awarding him its highest honor, the Christus Magister Medal, in May 2013: "It is also probably an inarguable fact that Tim Murphy has, in his...years as a

cheerful, witty, generous priest, baptized more children, celebrated the marriage of more couples, and celebrated the lives of more Catholics who have gone home to the Light than any other priest in Portland—a remarkable thing to say, but indicative of Tim’s conviction that a priest is a servant of the faithful, and available for any and all holy moments.”

Monsignor Murphy was preceded in death by his parents and his sisters, Jean Ann and Maureen. He is survived by his brother Neil (Karen) of Lake Oswego; sister-in-law Anci Murphy; niece Jeannie Done (Pat); nephews Steve, Kevin (Stefani), and Patrick (Lisa); seven grandnephews, one grandniece, two great-grandnephews, three great-grandnieces; several cousins; and countless friends.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Monsignor Murphy will be at 10 a.m. Friday, October 23, at the Chiles Center on the University of Portland campus. Interment will be at Mt. Calvary Catholic Cemetery.

A gathering for the Central Catholic community, “Celebrating a Legacy: Remembering Monsignor Timothy Murphy,” will take place at 1 p.m. Sunday, November 1, at Central Catholic High School.

Memorial gifts may be made to the Monsignor Timothy Murphy Endowment at [Central Catholic High School](#). For those who wish to help carry his light forward in a lasting way, Central Catholic has been in the process of preparing additional opportunities to honor his legacy, and invites you to contact Ellie Dir, Vice President of Advancement, at edir@centralcatholichigh.org or 503.230.1056.