

Reflections on Bishop McHugh

By: Patricia Mulrooney, Member, Board of Trustees, Nassau County Community

College

I am Patricia Mulrooney, a member of the Board of Trustees at Nassau Community College. I welcome all of you. We honor a man who gave his life to the Church. It was February, 1999 and the headline in the *Long Island Catholic* newspaper read: "The Diocese Welcomes Bishop McHugh". Less than two years, later the headline read: "Bishop McHugh is dead at 68" The news was all about Bishop McHugh. In that short period of time, a lot happened in our Diocese and in the life of our Bishop. He came, and we were overjoyed. He was installed, and we celebrated. He became ill, and we were saddened. He died, and we mourned. I would like to share with you some of my impressions and my memories of Bishop McHugh, the man and his ministry. Bishop McHugh was a great advocate of Catholic social sciences. He would be pleased to see the success of this endeavor. I am sure he is with us today in spirit.

His writing—including his weekly column in the diocesan newspaper (which he had prepared and submitted even the week before his death)--was always educational,

profound, and thought provoking. He was an intellectual whose work could be understood by all. The readings he chose for his installation Mass at St. Agnes Cathedral made reference to God's flock in the shepherds' care. He lived this ideal throughout his ministry. He was a true shepherd for Christ. He wrote and delivered a clear, concise, and unwavering message for his flock. He was a dedicated pro-life advocate who spoke out for the dignity and sacredness of every human being, from conception to natural death. It was a priority in his writing and in his life. The decline in vocations was of major concern to him and high on his list of priorities. He prayerfully pleaded for more vocations, more help, and more workers in the vineyard. He was pro-life, pro-vocations, pro-education, pro-poor and pro-mankind. He was all of these things - a quiet, unassuming person with a straightforward style and a will of steel behind that shy smile.

He was a priest of God, a man of great faith, a gift to our Diocese, and a shining star in the Crown of the Church. His sincerity was obvious to all who came in contact with him. His eyes met yours, he listened and heard, he was direct, thoughtful and reflective. He was a priest for all the people and a spokesperson for mankind. He came to our diocese an unknown to most of us. He is remembered as a great scholar, a champion

for justice, a soldier for humanity, a holy man, a giant in theological matters. Here was a leader, a priest who interpreted the Gospel told it like it was. He lived the Gospel every day of his life, up to and through the taking of his last breath. His stay was all too brief.

But, in that short time, he touched the lives of all who knew him. In the image and likeness of Christ's suffering, he endured a long and painful illness without complaint.

Although we were aware of his battle with cancer and we prayed for his recovery, the call was not ours. He was a very private person. Through the months before he died, we heard little of his devastating illness. His almost sudden death took us by storm. His pain had ceased. His journey ended. It was just before Christmas, and our Bishop had gone home to God.

The disappointment and sorrow of his passing overshadowed the Diocese last Christmas season. True to his calling and his living image here on earth, his last conscious act was the celebration of the Eucharist. Hours later, as his life's blood stilled and his life ebbed away, the drops of Consecrated wine which touched his lips were reminiscent of the drops offered to Christ to cool his thirst as he died on the Cross. His body is entombed at the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Huntington. What a

fitting resting place for a priest who worked so hard for vocations, and who had such a strong and faithful devotion to Mary and the Rosary. What a great ambassador we have watching over our Diocese, ready to greet us when we hear the call and end our journey here on earth.

Thank you for letting me share my memories of, Bishop James McHugh, who left such a profound impression on all of us. My admiration for his life, his faith and his courage will always have a place in my heart. Thank you Bishop McHugh! May God ever hold you in the hollow of His hand! And as for us: "We will not stand by your tomb and cry. You are not there, you did not die" Thank you for coming here today. By your presence, you have honored the memory of a great man. May God be with you all.