



Ernest Bernard Hillenmeyer Jr.

February 26, 1922 - April 3, 2014

During his 92 years, Rev. Mr. Ernest Bernard Hillenmeyer, Jr. lived by the motto his father instilled during his boyhood on their Lexington farm: “Be honest, and be of service to your community.” Mr. Hillenmeyer embodied that creed through the many decades and facets of his life, each guided by love of God, family and his community.

Mr. Hillenmeyer, former president of Parker Tobacco Company and leader in Catholic church and civic affairs, died April 3, 2014, at the age of 92 in Maysville, KY, where he raised seven children and lived for the past 68 years.

The World War II veteran helped establish Meadowview Regional Hospital in Maysville and the nearby Hospice of Hope, which provides end-of-life care in 13 Kentucky and Ohio counties and through which, as its first chaplain, he ministered to patients. In 1985, he was ordained a deacon in the Roman Catholic Church as part of the Diocese of Covington’s first class of men to enter the permanent diaconate and served his home parish at St. Patrick Church, Maysville, along with St. James Church in Brooksville, where he was pastoral associate from 1998 to 2002. Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, KY, where Mr. Hillenmeyer was the first layman to chair the board of trustees, awarded him an honorary doctorate in May 2013 for his lifetime of leadership and volunteerism.

“Deacon Ernie Hillenmeyer was a gentleman and a man of integrity,” said Sister Justina Franxman, OSB, his friend and spiritual director. “He loved God, his family and the Church. He was committed to his ministry and saw Jesus in the people to whom he ministered. Ernie loved life and lived it to the full.”

“Ernie” Hillenmeyer was born February 26, 1922, in Lexington, KY, to Ernest B. Hillenmeyer, Sr., and Mathilde Scott Hillenmeyer and grew up on his father’s farm. His passion for gardening and agriculture dates to his youth tending peach and potato crops with his dad, himself the son and grandson of nurserymen. He attended St. Paul’s School, Lexington Latin School, and graduated as valedictorian of the class of 1938 at Campion Jesuit High, a boarding school in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

He attended the University of Kentucky for three years, then graduated in 1942 from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY. He held a commission in the U.S. Naval Reserve for the next 10 years, and was discharged in 1952 as a lieutenant. Mr. Hillenmeyer spent 3½ years during WWII as a deck officer aboard liberty ships in the Merchant Marine, sailing with the Atlantic and Pacific fleets.

During the war, he met fellow Kentuckian Ellen Cochran Parker, a Maysville native whom he married in April 1945. His father-in-law, S. Alex Parker, Sr., hired Mr. Hillenmeyer into the family’s tobacco business in 1946 and the couple settled in Maysville, where their four children, Zoe, Theresa, Ernie and Cece, were born.

Following his first wife’s death in 1960, Mr. Hillenmeyer married Mary Agnes Farrell of Ludlow, KY, to whom he was introduced by his childhood friend, the late Msgr. John F. Murphy. Married in October 1961, the couple had three more children: Ellen, Katy and Paul.

He frequently traveled abroad for business and hosted international guests in the creek-side house he built in Aberdeen's Huntington Park, one of two contiguous subdivisions he helped to develop. Whether boating, pitching horseshoes, playing bridge or crosswords, betting horses at Keeneland or cheering on the Kentucky Wildcats, Mr. Hillenmeyer enjoyed recreating with family and friends and delighted in competition. In all his years teaching card games to his kids and grandkids, he never threw a hand. He took pride, too, in his vegetable and flower gardens, producing homegrown tomatoes and asparagus into his 90s.

Mr. Hillenmeyer began his long association with Thomas More College when in the mid 1950s he was invited to become a member of the Board of Overseers, to which he was elected chairman in 1960. This Board recommended the college's move from downtown Covington, KY, to Crestview Hills and the construction there of a new campus.

Along with education, Mr. Hillenmeyer worked to advance ecumenism, health care, and economic and human development.

As a member of the Limestone Ministerial Association, he led ministers and others to locally observe an annual week of prayer for Christian unity, now in its 42nd year. He chaired a fund-raising drive to build a new hospital to replace Maysville's outdated Hayswood Hospital. For 10 years, he chaired the Hayswood Foundation, launching its grant program which donated funds to support St. Patrick's School, the YMCA, and the Boys and Girls Club.

A founding member of the Council for Burley Tobacco, Mr. Hillenmeyer testified before Congress on behalf of tobacco trade associations, and formerly presided over the Burley Tobacco Dealers Association. He served two terms as council member and vice-mayor of Aberdeen, OH; was a local

district chairman for the Boy Scouts of America; was president of the Maysville Country Club; served as a director of the Maysville-Mason County Area Chamber of Commerce; once presided over Appalachian Industries in Vanceburg, KY, promoting employment and housing; and belonged to the American Legion, Mason County Extension Council, and the U.K. Alumni Association (as a life-time member).

During retirement he and his wife, Mary, routinely attended daily Mass, and prayer and scriptural reflection continued to nurture their deep bonds of affection and eagerness to share their faith with others.

“Ernie is a pillar – gentle and firm at the same time,” cousin Robert F. Houlihan, Jr., of Lexington said. “He’s loved and respected. And he was totally unafraid to die. You can’t live a bad life and be unafraid of death.”

Mr. Hillenmeyer was predeceased by his first wife, Ellen Parker Hillenmeyer, his son Ernest B. Hillenmeyer, III, and his elder sister, Eleanor Hillenmeyer Reichel. Along with his wife, Mary Farrell Hillenmeyer, he is survived by younger sister Mary Hillenmeyer Fiore of Kansas City, MO, plus six children, 11 grandchildren, beloved in-laws and many other relatives who were dear to him. He leaves daughter Zoe H. Gillespie and husband Joseph Gillespie of Las Vegas, NV; daughter Theresa H. Mattei and husband Dr. Michael Mattei of Louisville, KY; daughter-in-law Beth Hoovler Hillenmeyer of Richmond, IN; daughter Cecelia H. Denegre and husband Joseph Denegre of Philadelphia, PA; daughter Ellen Hillenmeyer and husband Mark Wesling of Cincinnati, OH; daughter Kathleen Hillenmeyer of Santa Rosa, CA; and son Paul Hillenmeyer and wife Mary Woodhead Hillenmeyer of Villa Hills, KY. He is also survived by grandchildren Elizabeth Gillespie, J.D., Ellen Gillespie, Dr. Nicholas Mattei and Nicholas’s wife Elizabeth (Dusing), Eric Mattei, Sara Hillenmeyer and Sara’s husband, Casey Marks, Zoe Hillenmeyer, Andrew Denegre, Lucy Denegre, Daniel Hillenmeyer, Stephen Hillenmeyer, and Luke von

Brauchitsch; and sisters-in-law Zorayda “Zoe” Parker Chamness of Aberdeen, and Elizabeth “Betsy” Buie Parker of Maysville.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 11 a.m. on Monday, April 7, 2014, at St. Patrick Church in Maysville, preceded by a visitation from 4:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. in the church, which will include a 7:30 p.m. vigil prayer service. Following the committal rite at St. Patrick Cemetery, friends and family are invited to gather for food and fellowship at the Limestone Center. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the John J. Brannen Foundation, c/o St. Patrick School, 318 Limestone Street, Maysville, KY 41056, or St. Patrick Church, 111 East Third Street, Maysville, KY 41056.