

Father Didier inspired convert to pray and seek reconciliation

Len Didier

I learned my life would never be the same after the death of my son, Father Darin Didier.

Father Darin died Sept. 6, 2005, and his funeral Mass was Sept. 10. On Sept. 12, my wife, Bonnie, my daughter, Darcy, and I faced a box 30-inches square, full of cards, half of them with stories on how my son had touched their lives.

My wife and daughter took a break from the thank you cards for lunch but I kept going until mid-afternoon when I realized it was a multi-day task.

I went into town for coffee. On the way in, I realized it was Divine Mercy Hour, which is when Father died — at 3:33 p.m., three weeks from his 33rd birthday. I went to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at St. Mary's Church in Alexandria, Minn., instead of having coffee. Little did I realize that this was going to mark a big change in my life.

Meeting in the chapel

When I got to the chapel, a man whom I did not know was sitting in the

front pew on the far side. So, I took the front pew on the near side. After about 20 minutes, he got up to leave and I asked him, "What brings you here?"

He looked at me with a confused look and said: "I am a recent convert to the faith and this summer I found out my lung cancer was terminal. I came to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel to pray and there was this young man there so in prayer I was compelled to talk to him, but he was so in prayer and so illuminated I did not disturb him."

He went on, "This past weekend [which was when we buried Father Darin] we went to Cooperstown, N.D., to an anniversary party on my wife's side of the family and I got talking to this priest. I told him about my recent conversion and about my terminal lung cancer and he [the priest, Father Richard Fineo] told me about this beautiful young priest, Father Darin Didier."

This man starts to tell me my son's story as told to him by Father Fineo. He was crying as he repeated what Father Fineo had told him.

Finally, I put my hand on his shoulder and said, "That is my son you are

Memorial Mass Sept. 8

The Third Annual Father Darin Didier Memorial Mass will be celebrated at 5:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 8, at St. Mary's Cemetery in Alexandria, Minn. In case of bad weather, it will be at St. Mary's Church at 6 p.m.

talking about."

An immediate connection

This man's name was Tom Halstead. Tom was a Vietnam veteran and had served as a gunner on a ship, which is what led to his terminal cancer. I, too, was a Vietnam veteran, so we hit it off, so to speak. After visiting awhile, I gave him one of Father Darin's funeral cards, which had a picture of him giving the homily at his first Mass.

Tom immediately said, "That's the young man that was in the chapel, that is the reason I came back, hoping to run into him."

Tom and I became friends over the next few days.

Tuesday of the following week, Tom and I were at my house visiting. During the conversation, it came up that Tom had never gone to confession. On hearing this I said, "Tom, you are facing certain death and this is something you have to do."

His reply; "I don't know how."

So I went into Father Darin's things, found a guide to confession and an examination of conscience for him to look over.

"I still don't understand how to do this," was Tom's response.

I then explained that the week we sent Father Darin off to be with the Lord, I had made a general confession of my whole life, which is what he should do.

So that he would understand what it was all about, I acted out for Tom how I had gone to confession to the priest two weeks earlier. When I got done telling Tom the sins of my life he did the same with me. The following Friday he went to Osakis and made his first confession.

Tom Halstead died of cancer November 2005.