

*Forever In  
Our Hearts*

*Pallbearers:*

Cliff Thomas  
Dave Thomas  
Luke Thomas

Scott Thomas  
Ron Reiher  
Fred Watkins



*Flower Bearers:*

Parishioners of Sacred Heart & St. Elizabeth



*Interment:*

**ELMWOOD CEMETERY**  
1200 Elmwood Ave. • Detroit, Michigan 48207



*Final Arrangements Entrusted To:*

**JAMES H. COLE HOME FOR FUNERALS**  
2624 W. Grand Blvd. | Detroit, MI 48208  
Phone: 313-873-0771 | Fax 313-972-4405  
[www.jameshcole.com](http://www.jameshcole.com)

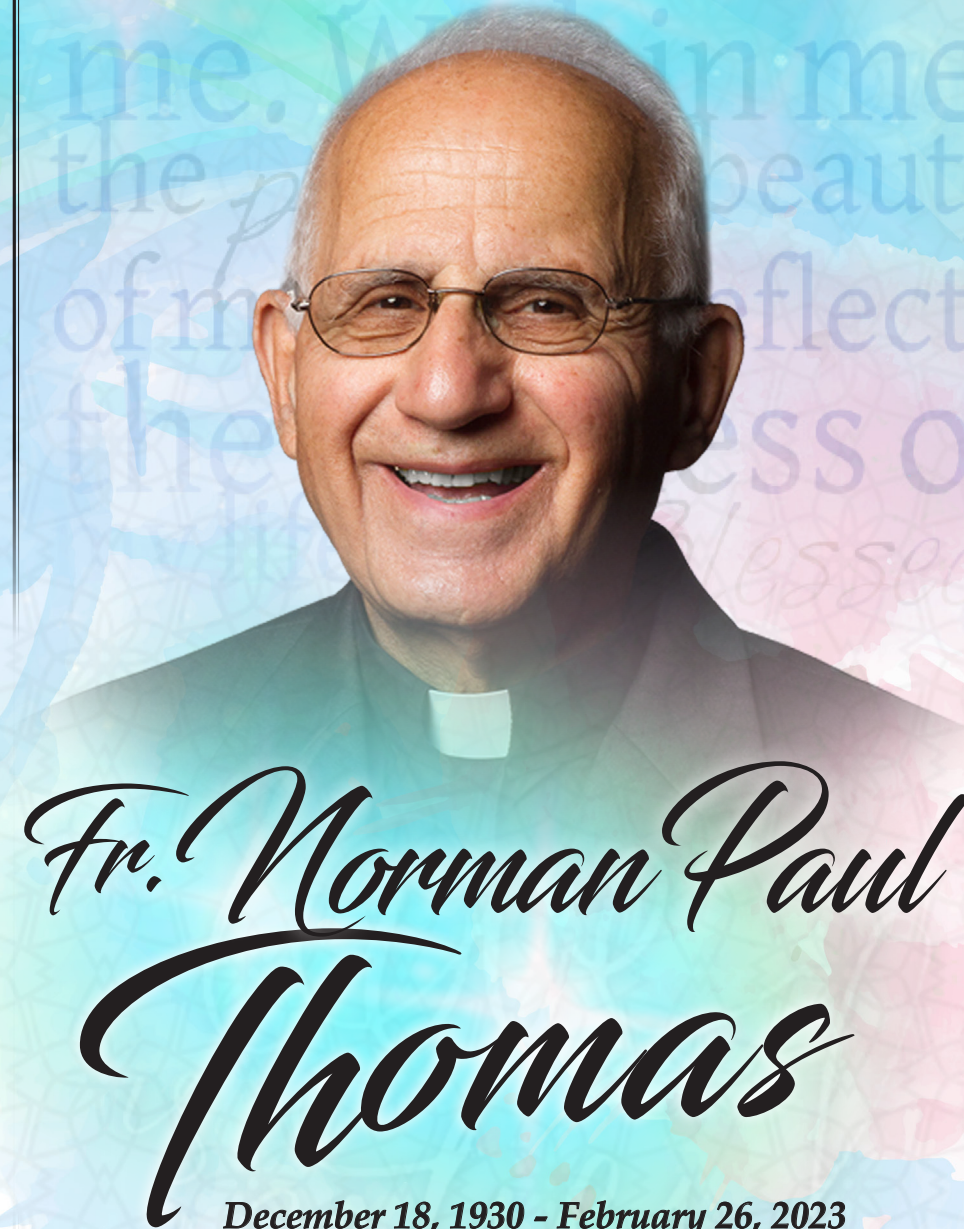


*With Gratitude :*

The family of the late Fr. Norman P. Thomas wishes to thank: Sr. Cathey DeSantis, Dr. Glazier, Fred Watkins, Roy Graham, Harriette Peterson, John Thorne, Lovette Jackson, Fr. Tim McCabe, Fr. Anthony Kote-Whita, Fr. Mark George, S.J. all of the Jesuit and Capuchin priests that have assisted him, Staff at Sacred Heart & St. Elizabeth, Staff at Beaumont Grosse Pointe, Parishioners, the Ministers, Ushers and all who have made Fr. Norm's life much easier and full all of these years. We love you and we appreciate you as much as he did. A more personal acknowledgement will be made at a later date.

*— The Family*

*— Celebrating the Life and Legacy of —*



*Fr. Norman Paul  
Thomas*

*December 18, 1930 - February 26, 2023*

SERVICE TO BE HELD

*Saturday, March 11, 2023*

FAMILY HOUR: 9:00 A.M.

MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL: 11:00 A.M.



**SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH**  
1000 ELIOT ST. • DETROIT, MI 48207

*— The Most Reverend Thomas J. Gumbleton, Celebrant —*  
*— Rev. Tyrone Robinson, Homilist —*

Layout/ design by:



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## *A time to be born...*

*Norman Paul Thomas* was born in Highland Park, Michigan on December 18, 1930, to Paul and Marie Thomas. Norm, as he was affectionately known by his family, was the second of four children. Proud of his Lebanese heritage and his family, he grew up in a family of love. As a child his family attended Madonna Parish in Detroit (now St. Moses the Black Parish). He began his formal education at Willard Elementary School in Highland Park but soon transferred to Madonna Catholic Grade School. He was a proud graduate of Detroit's Sacred Heart Seminary High School and College. He went on to graduate from St. John's Theological Seminary in Plymouth, Michigan and was ordained a priest in 1955. However, his hunger for knowledge did not end there; in 1965 he would earn a Master's Degree in Social Work from Wayne State University.

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*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness...*

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St. John Seminary's Class of '55 was unique, and some of the members of this class possessed a rebellious spirit. Hence, the name the "Bad Boys of '55" developed. This small yet powerful group of friends which included Fr. William Cunningham, Fr. Thomas Finnigan, Fr. Anthony Kosnick and Fr. Norman Thomas were inspired by the social change of the day and created their own avenues to make systemic impacts in the city of Detroit.

Throughout his life time of service as a priest, Fr. Thomas served in many capacities including associate pastorships in Wyandotte, Pontiac and Hazel Park. In 1965, he became the Director of the Urban Parish Apostolate for the Archdiocese of Detroit, which coordinated efforts of Central City Parishes. But Fr. Thomas would often say that he learned the most in 1968 when he became pastor of Sacred Heart, the remnant of Michigan's first black Catholic congregation. It was here that he learned about African American Spirituality, music, dance, and gesture. He wholeheartedly encouraged its use in liturgy, so that it became real in the lives of the people he ministered to.

An activist at heart, Fr. Thomas fought against racial and social injustice everywhere. He attended marches and sit-ins during the Civil Rights Movement. Shortly after the 1967 Uprising, a group of priests began gathering to envision how the Church could be part of the racial reckoning and healing needed to move Detroit forward. This group developed into the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance. It would be easy to say that Fr. Thomas' way was not always the popular way, but he was always a champion of the Church (the people). During the 1989 Church closings, the Alliance organized not only individuals from the 56 parishes slated to close but people from all over the archdiocese. It was during these years that he became known as the "People's Pastor." Through the Alliance's efforts, 20 parishes were saved. Soon Fr. Thomas led the Alliance to address moral and social issues including workers' rights, voting rights, economic opportunities, and affordable housing to name a few. He even picked up a former diocesan program created by Deacon Al McNeely, the Ministers of Service and expanded its vision to include a trained group of laity that would aid the priests in building and expanding parish ministries. Today there are more the 250 Ministers of Service and Faith serving in city parishes.



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*Serve the Lord with all your heart...*

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As unmatched as his commitment was to anyone who was in need, so also was his unprecedented 54 years of ministry at Sacred Heart Church. But in 2007, upon the passing of his long-time friend, Fr. John Markham, pastor of St. Elizabeth parish, Fr. Thomas' ministry grew yet again. serving St. Elizabeth Parish faithfully for 16 years, he was now the pastor of two dynamic parishes. St. Elizabeth was never considered an extension of Sacred Heart, but an extension of Fr. Thomas' love. Most importantly, he wanted both parishes to know that he was not just their pastor but also their beloved friend. He spent countless hours with the people of his parish families in celebration, in consolation, in consultation and in simply being. Fr. Thomas had a way of making people feel special. He had a phenomenal gift of recall. Whether one met him once or a hundred times, he always knew their names.

Fr. Thomas enjoyed many activities beyond the church as well. He was an avid hockey player, feared for his tenacious play. He enjoyed watching sports; even through eras of hopelessness, he cheered on Detroit's teams, especially the Tigers and Red Wings. He enjoyed music, most notably Tina Turner, liked going to the movies or reading a good book. His love for his family was unending. Though he lived a very busy life he always enjoyed seeing his family at church and at family gatherings.

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*May the work I've done speak for me...*

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Fr. Thomas' effect on Detroit was limitless. A champion of working people, black people and all God's people led him to work on numerous task forces, committees, and boards to create positive change in the lives of Detroiters. Fr. Thomas was proud of all his work including the expansion of the Charles H. Wright Museum and the Eastern Market. He was most energized by his continued work to eradicate the sin of racism in the Catholic Church. He understood that his parish had to be a catalyst of change because his members knew the evils of racism firsthand. Fr. Thomas' sermons always challenged and called everyone to find their voice against social injustices in view of the Gospel. He understood that all lives were a gift from God, but was keenly aware that black lives that were undervalued, underrepresented and under attack mattered. Fr. Thomas' unwavering support within the black community led him to share pulpits with some of Detroit's most prominent preachers.

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*I have finished the race and kept the faith...*

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On Sunday, February 26, 2023, the Lord called Fr. Norman Paul Thomas home, to be reunited with his parents, his brother Ray and his sister Polly. Although Fr. Thomas was loved by many, his memory will be especially cherished by his brother, Ronald Thomas; sisters-in-law Ruth and Bernie Thomas; nieces Carol Thomas, Maureen Thomas, Karen Yoder (Mark), Michelle Linden (Gary), Danielle Wilhelmsen (Tom), and Dana Sterner (Jeremy); nephews Dave Thomas (Lorrie), Cliff Thomas (Pina), Norman G. Thomas (Robin), Tom Lawrence (Veronica), Gary Mushro (Alicia) and Ron Reiher; numerous grand nephews and nieces, many great-grand nephews and nieces; a special god-daughter, Jamila Simpson (Michael) and a host of godchildren, friends and parishioners from Sacred Heart and St. Elizabeth parishes.

## Mass of Resurrection Celebrating the Life and Legacy of *Fr. Norman Paul Thomas*

### *Processional Hymn:*

Blessed Assurance ..... Congregation

### INTRODUCTORY RITES

Placing of the Pall..... Gary and Alicia Mushro  
Opening Prayer

### *Liturgy of the Word*

First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 ..... Karen Yoder

### Responsorial Psalm:

Psalm 23 ..... The Lord Is My Shepherd

### Second Reading:

2 Timothy 4:6-8 ..... Jonathon Reiher

### Lenten Gospel Acclimation

### Gospel Reading

John 21:15-19..... Deacon John Wright

Song ..... Music Ministry

Homily ..... Fr. Tyrone Robinson

Prayers of the Faithful ..... Robin Thomas  
& Charles Lee

### *Liturgy of the Eucharist*

### Offertory Procession (Family)

Song ..... Music Ministry

### Eucharistic Prayers

### The Lord's Prayer

Communion ..... Music Ministry

Remarks: ..... Tom Lawrence, nephew  
John J.F. Thorne

Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit

### Final Commendation

Recessional ...Goin Up Yonder ..... Music Ministry