

## **UPDATE: Former Catholic Charities head Rhomberg remembered for work**

**By Alicia Yager TH staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, March 12, 2014 6:45 pm**

He was a man who was not afraid to fight for an unpopular cause, taking on the Dubuque City Council and dozens of citizens in order to build a housing option for low-income seniors.

The Rev. Thomas Rhomberg, 86, a retired priest of the Archdiocese of Dubuque and former head of Catholic Charities, died today at Stonehill Care Center in Dubuque.

“Father Tom had a tremendous commitment, concern and love for people dealing with poverty and inequality of any kind,” said his younger brother Bill Rhomberg. “He believed in preaching and living the Gospel and helping people with basic needs.”

Tom Rhomberg, a born and raised Dubuquer, attended parochial schools and graduated from Loras College in 1948. Bill Rhomberg said his brother spent a brief time at the University of Iowa’s law school before deciding to enter the priesthood.

The Rev. Gene Kutsch, a retired priest of the archdiocese, was a high school classmate of Tom Rhomberg, and the two also were in the same seminary prior to being ordained.

“We were kindred spirits in a lot of ways,” Kutsch said. “We’ve been close friends ever since high school.”

After being ordained in 1953, Tom Rhomberg also spent a year teaching social studies at Loras Academy, with his brother as one of his students. Bill Rhomberg recalled that it was an interesting experience and that his brother was not afraid to chastise his behavior.

After receiving his master’s degree in social work in 1957, Tom Rhomberg spent 24 years at the helm of the Catholic Charities. Because of his community advocacy in that position, he was honored as a recipient of the TH Media First Citizen Award in 1974.

One of his most well-known accomplishments with Catholic Charities was the construction of Ecumenical Tower, a low-income housing option for seniors in Dubuque.

The proposal, brought to the city in 1972, was not a popular one, with several citizens giving harsh criticism and vocal protest. It took two years before city officials finally authorized construction of the building, which is still in service today.

“He often took stands that weren’t popular,” Kutsch said of his friend. “He was committed to doing what was right and followed the Gospel’s teachings.”

Rhomberg also was a big supporter of Dubuque Rescue Mission. In 2012, he donated a \$200,000 inheritance to the mission to help build transitional housing, with one of those homes named after

him.

Rick Mihm, director of the mission, said Rhomberg was a mentor for him. While he had many accomplishments to his name, he also was a very caring and fun person who loved to talk about cars and had a quick smile, Mihm said.

“He had that sparkle to him,” Mihm said. “Sometimes people think that clerics are a little stiff ... but you knew when you went up to him, he’s not a stern guy — he’s a very happy guy.”

Bill Rhomberg said his brother was passionate about cars and motorcycles, and he enjoyed flying small airplanes. He said Tom Rhomberg was the most outgoing of his siblings, joking that his brother went on a fair number of dates in high school.

“I feel blessed to have known him,” Bill Rhomberg said of his brother. “He’s with his Father, and the only kind of sorrow you have is a selfish sorrow because you miss him.”