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Rev. Paul Wickens; founded church with Latin Masses The Boston Globe

By Associated Press | July 13, 2004

WEST ORANGE, N.J. -- The Rev. Paul Wickens, founder of a church that departed from Vatican policies and celebrated traditional Latin Masses, died Thursday at Overlook Hospital in Summit. He was 74.

Father Wickens had been diagnosed with esophageal cancer earlier this year.

Father Wickens defied the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, returning to the traditional Latin Mass that was practiced before the changes ordered by the Second Vatican Council.

"He saw the church declining after Vatican II, a loss of faith by my people," his brother, Albert, told The Star-Ledger of Newark for Saturday's editions. "Certainly the young people were not being instructed properly. Priests were leaving, nuns were leaving. The church seemed to be in a free fall."

In February 1983, Father Wickens denounced the introduction of sex education in Catholic schools. The following month he was ordered reassigned to an out-of-the-way position, his brother said.

The archbishop suspended Father Wickens after he refused.

Then in 1994, Father Wickens began construction on the St. Anthony of Padua Chapel in West Orange. The church, which was completed two years later, celebrates Latin Masses and has about 900 members.

In a 1997 interview, a spokesman for then-Newark Archbishop Theodore McCarrick said Father Wickens's chapel was not a legitimate Roman Catholic entity, saying that he had no authorization to build the church, celebrate Mass, or hear confessions.

Still, membership has grown and the church's three Sunday Masses usually draw some 500 parishioners.

A spokesman for the archdiocese expressed sorrow following Father Wickens's death.

"It's doubly sad because there had been attempts to reconcile with Father Wickens but that reconciliation was never fulfilled," James Goodness told The Star-Ledger.

Father Wickens leaves four brothers and three sisters.

Church officials said temporary clergy will continue work at St. Anthony of Padua Chapel until a permanent priest can be found. ■

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