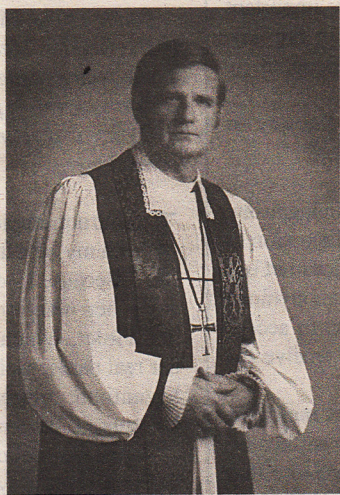


# Supporter of Human Rights Bishop McGehee Dies

BY CRYSTAL A. PROXMIRE AND JAN STEVENSON

The Rev. H. Coleman McGehee, 89, a retired bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan, died March 14 after a short illness. McGehee, of Bloomfield Hills, served with the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan from 1973 to 1990 and continued his activism even into retirement.



Bishop McGehee was a strong, progressive voice within the Episcopal Church, and an early advocate for both the ordination of women and inclusion of gays in church life.

"He was a man of great courage and faith. He was among the first to ordain women as deacons and priests and he bravely ordained gay people to the priesthood when it was a highly controversial thing to do," said Rev. Rod Reinhart, rector at St. Clement's Episcopal Church in Harvey, Ill. located just outside Chicago. "Bishop McGehee ordained me in 1984 and I was one of the very first openly gay

people to be ordained in the Episcopal Church."

Bishop McGehee's son, Alex, was active in the Gay Liberation Movement at Michigan State University in the early 1970s. Bishop McGehee wrote a letter of support to John Francis Cardinal Dearden, the archbishop of Detroit, in support of Brian McNaught during his 1974 hunger strike to protest treatment of gays and lesbians by the church. Bishop McGehee was celebrant and featured speaker at the 10th anniversary dinner for the Catholic and Episcopal LGBT group Dignity-Integrity/Flint, in 1986.

In 1977, Bishop McGehee ordained Rev. Meredith Hunt, the first female priest for the Diocese of Michigan after leading the charge nationwide to change Episcopal Church laws so women could be ordained. He was also a supporter of organized labor, and in 1995 picketed alongside Detroit News and Detroit Free Press employees who were on strike.

Bishop McGehee, along with now-retired Detroit Catholic Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Gumbleton and the late Rabbi Richard Hertz, founded the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights in 1980.

"His courage and his forward thinking faith have been a great inspiration to church people and even un-churched people all across America. I will deeply miss him and I will always look at him as being a great friend, a wise mentor and a powerful and life-giving leader of the church," said Reinhart.

"In addition to his decades of service to the Episcopal Church, the Bishop was an early supporter of LGBT equality and a long-time chair of our Advisory Board," said Equality Michigan's Development Coordinator Gregory Varnum. "He was a visionary and courageous leader whose personal convictions inspired those around him. Our condolences to his friends, family, and his fellow Episcopalians mourning this loss."

Bishop McGehee was born in Richmand, Va., and served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during World War II, then received a law degree from the University of Richmond. He served as deputy attorney general of the Commonwealth of Virginia before following a calling for faith. Prior to coming to Michigan, Bishop McGehee was rector of Immanuel-on-the-Hill Episcopal Church in Alexandria, Va., from 1960 to 1971, where he was the pastor to President Gerald R. Ford and Betty Ford.

Bishop McGehee is survived by his wife, June, their daughters, Lesley and Cary; sons Alexander, C. Harry and Donald; and four grandchildren.

A requiem Eucharist will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, 4800 Woodward, Detroit. Memorials may be made to the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights, 9200 Gratiot, Detroit 48213 and the Opportunity Resource Fund, 330 Marshall St., Ste. 105, Lansing, MI 48912.