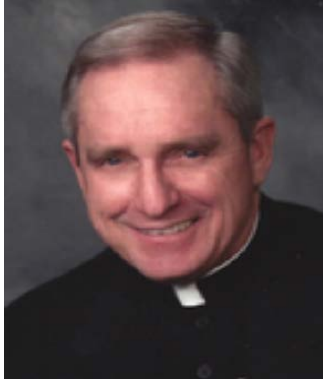


Former judge turned priest, Thomas Mescall, dies at 74 (December 9, 1947 - February 1, 2022)

BY OLLIE REED JR. / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER - Albuquerque Journal

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Thomas J. Mescall's vocations were many and varied. He was a husband, a father, a lawyer, a judge and a Catholic priest.

The Rev. John Carney, a retired Catholic priest who knew Mescall before and after his ordination into the priesthood, remembers his friend as smart, sometimes stubborn and steadfastly devout.

"He was hardheaded and very, very intelligent," Carney said of Mescall. "He was very Chicago Irish Catholic, steeped in the faith, and he carried his faith throughout his life."

Mescall died in Albuquerque on Feb. 1. He was 74.

Visitation begins at 4 p.m. Monday at St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center, 1815 Las Lomas NE, on the University of New Mexico campus. The rosary will be recited at the Newman Center at 6 p.m. Monday.

Archbishop John C. Wester will celebrate the funeral Mass at 11 a.m. Tuesday, also at the Newman Center. Burial will follow at Mount Calvary Cemetery, 1900 Edith NE.

Mescall was born in Chicago, the son and grandson of Chicago policemen. He went to St. Leo High School in Chicago and came to New Mexico to attend the

University of Albuquerque. After earning an undergraduate degree at Albuquerque, he got a law degree from John Marshall Law School in Chicago.

He returned to Albuquerque and practiced law here from 1973 to 2000, working as an attorney and serving as a municipal court, metropolitan court, district and probate judge.

Judith Nakamura, former chief justice of New Mexico, remembers Mescall appearing before her as an attorney when she was a Bernalillo County Metro Court judge.

“He was one of those attorneys you could take at his word,” she said. “He was an absolute zealot for his clients, committed and hard working.”

Mescall was married early in his career and had two children, both of whom followed him into the legal profession. Thomas J. Mescall II is an Albuquerque attorney. Regina Mescall Kramer started her legal profession in Albuquerque, working for a time as a prosecutor in the Bernalillo County District Attorney’s Office. She then moved to Chicago and was elected judge for the Cook County Circuit Court in November 2020.

Carney said Mescall was devoted to both his children and would call his son every day to pray with him on the phone.

“One of the greatest joys in his life was helping me win the judgeship,” Regina said of her father. “He was an interesting man, very spiritual, very Catholic.”

Both of his children were adults when Mescall started to seriously consider entering the priesthood.

Nakamura said she remembers Mescall being torn between the legal profession and the religious life. She said the priesthood actually seemed like a natural fit for him.

“He was a good, genuine person,” she said. “In many ways (the law and religious life) have similarities, helping people in need. You admire people like him who pursue what they really want to do.”

Mescall attended Sacred Heart School of Theology in Wisconsin and was ordained in 2004 at Mundelein Seminary in Illinois at the age of 56.

Thomas Mescall was an attorney and judge in Albuquerque from 1973 to 2000. He is pictured here with his son, Thomas, and his daughter, Regina. (Courtesy of Rev. John Carney)

Carney, like Mescall, came to the priesthood late. He was an infantry officer in the U.S. Army from 1967 to 1987 and served two tours in Vietnam. He retired as a lieutenant colonel and was ordained a priest when he was 44.

“He called me the colonel and I called him the judge,” Carney said.

Carney, a native of New York City, served as a priest in New Mexico. He was pastor of the Church of the Incarnation in Rio Rancho when he retired more than five years ago.

Mescall was assigned to the Archdiocese of Chicago and served as a priest in his native city until he retired in 2018. For a lot of those years, Mescall was parish administrator and then pastor of St. Adrian, a church struggling to survive in what Carney describes as a tough part of Chicago.

“St. Adrian is a parish in (Chicago’s) war zone,” Carney said. “The word on the street was that St. Adrian was going to go belly up. I think the people of St. Adrian’s attribute Tom’s presence there to the fact the church is still there.”

Carney said Mescall took many pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Estimates vary from more than a dozen to more than two dozen. Carney accompanied him on two of those trips, the most recent one in 2018.

He said Mescall would sign up to celebrate Mass at Jerusalem’s Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which, according to tradition, sits on the sites of Christ’s crucifixion and burial and resurrection.

“We’d be out on the streets at 6 a.m., when nothing else but cats and the Israeli army was up, going to say Mass there,” Carney said.

Mescall had homes in Albuquerque and Chicago. He had been in Albuquerque for the last couple of months and became ill about five weeks ago, suffering a series of mini strokes.

His two children were with him almost continuously in his final days. He died in hospice care.

“I had the wonderful blessing of being with him when he took his last breath,” Regina said. “I had been sleeping. I believe I must have been wakened by an angel, three minutes before he died.”

Survivors include his son, Thomas; his daughter, Regina, her husband, Peter Kramer, and their four children; and a brother, James Mescall.

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