Obituary - Mychal Judge

November 1, 2001 By Denny Lee and Andy Humm

Father Mychal Judge, OFM

1933-2001

Mychal Judge, 68, the Franciscan New York City fire department chaplain who died September 11 ministering to a fallen firefighter at the World Trade Center catastrophe, was a pioneer in AIDS ministry. When Cardinal O'Connor expelled Dignity, the gay Catholic organization, from the St. Francis Xavier church in 1987, Judge welcomed the group's AIDS ministry to his church, St. Francis of Assisi. In time, Judge made the ministry his parish's own for all people with AIDS regardless of faith -- just as he ministered to everyone from the powerful to the homeless.

At Judge's wake and funeral, people who had lost their partners to AIDS told of the profound lengths to which the priest went to comfort the dying and the bereaved. AIDS activist Brendan Fay said that when a Long Island priest refused to conduct a service for a man who had died of AIDS, Judge said a funeral mass in the home of the man's mother.

Judge -- an AA member and a gay man who was out to many of his friends -- was highly respected by the firemen he ministered to. He always tried to put himself on the side of the oppressed without incurring the wrath of the church hierarchy.

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