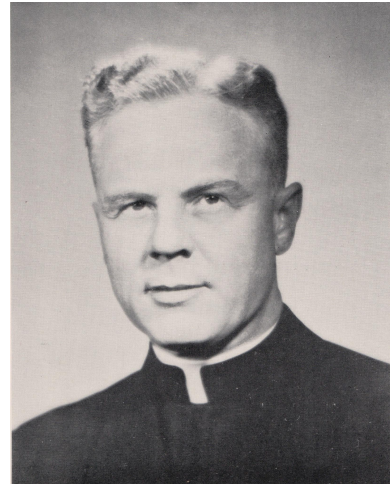


Very Reverend Hugh J. Deeny
Nominated by Joseph C. Fischer

"Bishop, that's a big order . . . I'll take it and with God's protection and your help we can do it." With that comment the first principal of Columbus High School, the Very Rev. Hugh J. Deeny, accepted the challenge to build a replacement for St. John's two-year junior high. From that meeting on Sunday evening, June 12, 1949, on through to the groundbreaking, the laying of the cornerstone and finally the dedication, Father Deeny never gave up the huge task of building a new school while still caring for a large parish, St. John's.



The official announcement of the establishment of Columbus High School was made on January 16, 1950, by His Excellency, the Most Reverend John P. Treacy, Bishop of La Crosse. The sponsoring of the project was left to Reverend Hugh J. Deeny, pastor at St. John the Baptist Parish. Following the first formal announcement of the proposed new school, planning pushed ahead, and on April 22, 1951, the ground was broken by Father Deeny for the structure. The cornerstone was laid on Aug. 18, 1951, by Bishop Treacy. Final dedication of the million-dollar building was made on Sept. 14, 1952, and the class of 1952 was able to hold its graduation ceremony in the newly constructed auditorium.

His interest in the school which he built with the assistance of ten area congregations, did not end when he "graduated" from the principal's job during the 1953 commencement exercises. It ended, rather, with his death, June 30, 1955, in an automobile accident near Milwaukee, which also claimed the life of E. M. Lee, local businessman.

The Most Rev. John P. Treacy, Bishop of La Crosse, at the funeral Mass read for Father Deeny, dedicated the auditorium in his memory. It is now known as the "Father Hugh J. Deeny Memorial Auditorium" in memory of the man who built and established Marshfield's Catholic high school.

Two days after Father Deeny's death, the editor of the Marshfield News-Herald penned the following tribute which appeared on the editorial page of the July 2, 1955 newspaper.

"A Tragic Loss

"Marshfield has suffered an irreparable loss in the untimely death of The Very Rev. Hugh J. Deeny in the unfortunate traffic accident at Milwaukee Thursday afternoon. The community was profoundly shocked by the news of the crash and stunned by the realization that so valuable and important a religious and educational and civic leader had come to his death.

“Few men, if any, have made a greater contribution to the community in little more than five short years than Father Deeny. His greatest work was, of course, with the Catholic community. Under his leadership the work of the three congregations was stimulated and coordinated both in the spiritual and educational fields. He was one of the founders and the first principal of Columbus High School. He labored prodigiously throughout his pastorate here. In his work, he had time to participate in civic affairs whenever called upon. And in his associations with the young people of his own faith or other faiths, he endeared himself to all who came to know him.

“One can only speculate what was in store for him had Father Deeny been spared to continue his religious labors, but there are those who long ago predicted he would go far in his church based on his accomplishments here. His organizing ability was evident in the results he accomplished. In church and school, his accomplishments will stand for many years as a monument to the highly productive five years of his pastorate here.

“Here is a man whose church will miss him sorely and whose community will mourn the passing of a fine citizen, the kind of man we can ill afford to lose. In this simple testimony of his worth, we believe we bespeak the overwhelming sentiment of all the people of Marshfield.”

Today, nearly 68 years later, those who knew Father Deeny during his time in Marshfield, whether as a pastor, teacher, principal, or fellow citizen, remember him fondly with high regard.