

Virgil Blum dies; started Catholic league

(from Milwaukee Sentinel)

Father Virgil C. Blum, 77, founder of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, died April 5 of liver cancer in Milwaukee, WI.

Blum is formerly from Defiance and was the son of John P. and Elizabeth Blum.

National religious and political leaders flooded the league's office with condolences.

"Father Blum was a person of strong principles who believed very much in defending the cause of those who were in any way mistreated or maligned, and especially those within the Catholic community," said Archbishop Rembert C. Weakland of the Milwaukee Archdiocese.

"We will all miss his forthright approach and his deep concern and involvement in social issues."

Blum, 77, a retired Marquette University professor, used the last days of his life to help raise funds for the league he founded in 1973.

In a farewell letter to league supporters recently, he wrote of his imminent death and asked for their continued financial contributions to the league.

"Father Blum made clear that the church had a crucial responsibility to be in the world, and to be a force in that world, including its polit-

ical dimensions," said Quentin L. Quade, executive vice president of Marquette University.

"His great creations in Citizens for Educational Freedom and the Catholic League perfectly reflected his integral view of a faith which must in part manifest itself in work for the common good.

"He made a difference; he left a mark."

Blum founded the Wisconsin chapter of the Citizens for Educational Freedom and served as the group's national president.

One of his major interests was a plan for federal and state governments to provide parents with vouchers that they could use to pay for their children's education in parochial and private schools. His campaign covered nearly 40 years.

He was successful in a campaign he launched in 1965 that resulted in the enactment of the Wisconsin College Tuition Grant Program, which included private colleges in its provisions.

The Catholic League, of which he was the only president, has headquarters in Milwaukee.

It developed into an active and vocal watchdog of Catholic rights. Blum equated the league's work with that of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League.

Shortly after Blum orga-

nized the league in 1973, it made national headlines by objecting to the prime-time television situation comedy "Maude" because of the way the show handled the abortion question.

Blum was born in Defiance. He entered the society of Jesus in 1934 and was ordained in St. Mary's, Kansas, in June 1947.

He came to Marquette in 1958 and taught American government, constitutional law and civil liberties, retiring as an emeritus professor of political science in 1978.

Marquette honored him by establishing the Virgil C. Blum Award in Political Science. In 1966 he received the school's Teaching Excellence Award.

Pope John Paul II invested Blum as a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in 1983.

Blum is survived by three sisters, Sister Roselle of Milwaukee; Mary Ann Wilwerding of Earling; and Dolores Kaufmann of Harlan; and five brothers, Edgar and Leander of Earling; Edwin of Fairfax, CA.; and Ermine and Reno of Omaha. He was preceded in death by two brothers, Father Victor Blum, S.J., from St. Louis and Verne Blum of Panama.