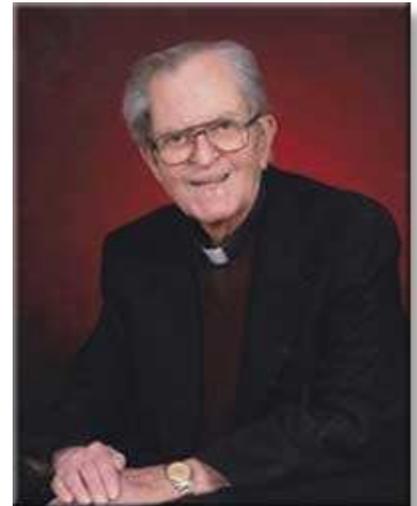


## A tribute to a priest colleague...

I am alone, in mourning as I write. Four hours ago I stood graveside of classmate **Leo Ephraim McFadden**. I start with the personal silent conversation I had with my old friend as salute guns fired off and a bugler played taps. My human friend Leo was priest and brigadier general military chaplain (retired). Winter and snow-burned grass make a cemetery an uninviting place.

Leo, I don't want to believe you are gone. I look around at the gray haired gathering and strangely expect you to drive up with smile on your face to tell us everything is ok and life will get better. I want to remember you as I knew you over the seventy years of friendship we enjoyed. I did not look inside the wooden pine box that you especially had made with instructions that nothing should cover its simplicity as you were waked at **St. Rose Church, Reno, Nevada**. We heard you loud and clear, the box was you and the way you lived life — so simple and powerful in service to all people. I am sorry to experience your life's end. I mourn as well a dying priesthood and church in which you served people so well. Nevada priest, you have served well!



**Monsignor Leo Ephraim McFadden.**

Photo from his Obituary website:

(See reference at the bottom)

Monsignor Leo McFadden was one of 62 young boys who entered the minor seminary called **St. Joseph's College, Mt. View, California** on September 5, 1942. We were 13 years old; among these innocent lads who hoped someday to become priests was now deceased **Msgr. Elwood Lavoy** (known to us as the Vegas kid). **Msgr. Charles Reghini** r.i.p. (known to us and especially Leo as Chasbo) would join us in 1943. Together the three pioneers of the Silver State would become the core of a native clergy working in a young diocese where the few other priests were Irish immigrants, aka The FBI. Only 16 of the original 62 made it to ordination. The seminary, commonly called the **Marine Corp of the Roman Catholic Church**, was a difficult path. The Nevada Three did get an educational break by spending the last four years of seminary in Rome. Charley, Elwood, and Leo came home to Nevada ready to become stalwart leaders, great priests who served the Nevada people well. I mourn the evolutionary passing of our youth, our days together in ministry, and a life-long friendship. Few priests of today will ever know the bond of our brotherhood.

Leo McFadden is a "**Menlo Man of '54**", a moniker tabbed on this band of brothers long after our ordinations. Leo, Charley, and Elwood spent the first 8 years of seminary with us until they were sent to Rome in 1950 for study and **ordination in 1953**. 30 others of us were ordained on June 11, 1954. When the **Menlo Men** meet annually we call out each

name of this brotherhood, an individual present answering "ADSUM" (I am here as on the day of his ordination) and the class answering "PRESENTE", a Spanish custom for those of the family not able to attend. Leo's name will now join the Presente list. Leo continues to be a **Menlo Man of '54**, now numbering seven living. We had hoped to gather in Reno in May, LeMac hosting and our health warranting. We are members of this proud body of valiant transition men who were ordained with both feet planted in a pre-Vatican Two church and a John the 23rd vision of priesthood and church in the modern world.

This writer wrote the following six years ago to the **Menlo Men of '54**:

Science tells me that one mellows having experienced a stroke; tears come when I see children harmed and people robbed of their bare necessities of life. I might wonder about the meaning of life, yet I take stock of the blessings that surround me, you guys being a big blessing in my life. We toughed out the years of seminary together and when separated in the isolation of ministry we knew we had life-long supportive friends, men of fine caliber dedicated to a common cause; chaos has not separated us and along with Paul the Apostle we can say that nothing has kept us from the love of God and people. I'm proud of my friendship with you and happy to be included in this band of brothers. (Leo with his annual Christmas/New Year's greeting letter was always so cordial and concerned for his clerical friends far and wide.)

The man had humor. In the last hours of his life, when told he looked good, Leo quipped back like Jack Benny, "its all in the make up". One more story, of many, that tells of his clerical/church humor: Leo knew who was phoning him and the conversation went as follows:



**Lemac** (answering slow): *"Yes, with whom am I speaking"*

**TMcM**: *"Yes, General, Monsignor, Sir, Reverend ... this is the Vatican calling, Office of the Inquisition..."*

**Lemac**: *"Ah yes, and your business?"*

**TMcM**: *"We have rumor that two Nevada priests celebrated their 50th anniversary Mass at home and our concern is whether the proper relic of saints was on the altar under the chalice."*

**Lemac** again in smooth Benny style: *"Ah yes, you see as I approached the altar I tripped and fell under the table. My esteemed classmate Msgr. Lavoy, an expert in canon law immediately deemed my bag of bones was sufficient to fulfill the requirement." ... a brief pause and then Lemac asks "Tom McMahan, how are you, and your wife and kids and grand children?"*

Leo the human with fine memory and always the gentle man of concern. What a friend to cherish.

Friends can disagree. and we did have serious dialogue at his home off McCarren Boulevard on the Truckee. Old priests have great concern for the present day church. Lemac became upset as TMcM in a Catholica commentary quoted the general speaking

about Bishop Dan Walsh's move from Vegas to Santa Rosa. We healed over the following months. And then Christmas came and went without Leo's so welcomed annual message. Retired Sacramento Bishop Frank Quinn questioned me as to the lack of the greeting.

And then one evening my phone rang and the familiar voice said: "Tom McMahan, the New Year has come and gone and we have not exchanged happy words" and, ever seriously, "Tom McMahan, have we any bad vibes between us?" And I responded "Leo, old friend, we have no such experience." The Nevada priest was at his best.

Two days later I phoned back only to get Leo's answering service. Leo would never receive my call as I am told he fell and never came home.

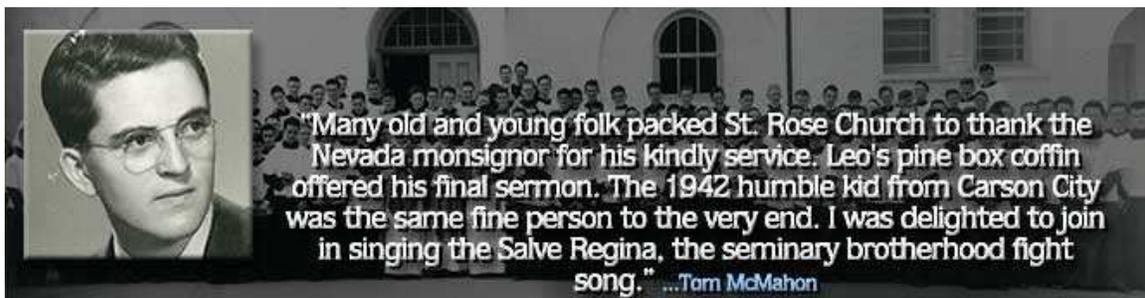
Many old and young folk packed **St. Rose Church** to thank the Nevada monsignor for his kindly service. Leo's pine box coffin offered his final sermon. The 1942 humble kid from Carson City was the same fine person to the very end. I was delighted to join in singing the **Salve Regina**, the seminary brotherhood fight song.

At the cemetery Leo's brotherhood of the Nevada Air Guard paid tribute. As taps played I smiled as I saw aged hands rise to gray haired foreheads and salute. Their friend and padre had flown his last flight. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I silently saluted many young American lads to whom I gave communion at Fort Ord as they departed for Vietnam, never to return.

On Ash Wednesday of 1961 I was privileged to stand five feet from **Pope John the 23rd** as he spoke about his forth-coming death. With humor John said his Creator would ask only one question when his life was over: "**John, did you enjoy the gift of life I gave you?**" and then shifting roles this human pope looked up, put his hands out in a playful gesture, and almost like a child answered his Maker "**I gave it a great try.**"

**Farewell Nevada priest! Every day of your priestly life you gave your all.**

**Tom**, written from the "Bear's Lair Two" – atop Donner Summit, Soda Springs, Ca.. Grateful to be able to salute my friend. 20 Feb 2013.



**Tom McMahan**, ordained in 1954 and now married, lives a very fulfilled life in San Jose and continues to contribute voraciously to several Catholic discussion lists in the States. He has been an enthusiastic supporter and encourager of the *Catholica* initiative from the very beginning.

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Obituary website:

<http://www.obitsforlife.com/obituary/656967/McFadden--Monsignor-Leo-Ephraim.php>