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Theology class examines the mystery of death and dying

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

At an age when most people would rather not think of the hereafter, 70-year old Rev. Ronald Ketteler is embracing it.

Ketteler, a Roman Catholic priest and chairman of Thomas More College's theology department, is conducting a two-night class called "Preparing for the End of Life: A Catholic Perspective on Death and Dying."

"The class is aimed at anyone who wants to be engaged with the spirituality and theology of death and dying from a Christian perspective," Ketteler said. "It's specifically a theological format because the religious perspective should be integrated into our human experience. With the mystery of death and dying we're looking at ultimate issues."

The classes, scheduled for Tuesday and Feb. 28, are divided into two sessions. The first is "The Theology and Spirituality of Death and Dying" followed by "The Ethics of Medical Decisions at the End of Life." The class is part of Thomas More's FurtherMore program that offers noncredit classes to the public.

"The first night I simply talk about the general theological religious insights into the mystery of our mortality and dying," Ketteler said. "I definitely talk about the sacraments and some of the parameters of how we comfort those who are dying."

In the second session, Ketteler will discuss some of the decision-making that must be made at the end of a life.

"We have a rich tradition on the ethics of medical care," Ketteler said.

While these issues are at the heart of the Christian faith, Ketteler has plenty of experience.

"I'm a theologian to begin with," Ketteler said. "Over the years - I've been ordained 46 years - I combine my pastoral ministry with also my academic background. I have worked over the years with hospitals, the Kentucky Medical Association and the Ohio Alzheimer's Association. I have a large spectrum where I've dealt with these issues over a large variety of groups."

People of all faiths and denominations are welcome.

"There certainly is a distinctive Catholic perspective, but there is a lot of common ground," Ketteler said.

When asked what death means spiritually, Ketteler said it is a mystery to him.

"We don't get any road maps," Ketteler said. "The metaphor I use is death is a sacrament of trust in God. Scriptural writers over the centuries have compared death to the analogy of birth - in death there is life. Love is more powerful than death."

The class costs \$25. Those interested can contact the college at 859-344-3333 or e-mail furthermore@thomasmore.edu.

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