



## Father Donald C. Willette

June 26, 1941 - May 25, 2023

Father Donald Corliss Willette entered eternal life on May 25, 2023.

Born June 26, 1941, in Lemmon, South Dakota, Father Willette spent his youth on family farms in North Dakota, Montana, and South Dakota before entering the seminary in 1958. Moved by the carnage of the Vietnam War, he left the seminary in 1967 to join the Air Force to serve in Vietnam. During his three tours, he worked as a ground radar operator; later, he worked for the Department of Defense in satellite surveillance and intelligence. He volunteered for hazardous duty and received two bronze star medals and multiple decorations for valor. After discharge, he moved to Estes Park where he enjoyed a career as a restaurateur and real estate agent.

After surviving a near fatal car crash while driving to Denver from Estes Park, he felt called back to seminary. At St. Thomas Seminary in Denver he joined four other Vietnam veterans and was ordained a priest on June 2, 1984. Father Willette continued to serve in the Reserves for 15 years, including as Chaplain at Buckley Air Force Base, and retired as a full Colonel.

“Father Don” was a beloved pastor and spiritual leader in the following parishes where he blessed countless lives: St. Thomas More, Centennial; St. Jude, Lakewood; St. Therese, Frederick; Guardian Angels, Mead; St. Louis, Louisville; Spirit of Peace, Longmont; and St. John XXIII, Fort Collins. He

often said his most important work was helping people through significant parts of their lives. Especially meaningful to him was his work as a chaplain of Catholic campus ministry to Colorado State University. After his retirement in 2011, he continued to celebrate the sacraments at many churches throughout the Front Range.

It was during his retirement that he approached CSU with his generous proposal. Through careful stewardship of his retirement funds and a “little bit of luck” in real estate, Father Willette provided nearly \$1 million toward an endowment to establish the Fr. Don Willette Chair of Catholic Studies. With great humility he said, “My dream was to create a program where people of all faiths will have a safe space to explore their relationship to God and one another.”

Father Willette was a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre; he led hundreds of people over the years on 33 pilgrimages to the Holy Lands.

Father was preceded in death by his father, Corliss Willette, mother, Marion Allen, and sister Mary Lou Baumhover. He is survived by his sister Marla Attwood of Pinewood Springs, Colorado.

Vigil service and Mass will be livestreamed at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCfTYqQ96sVNI3ED-UZFF0eA>

# Cemetery Details

## Black Hills National Cemetery

20901 Pleasant Valley Drive  
Sturgis, SD 57785

# Previous Events

## Visitation and Viewing

**MAY 30.** 5:00 PM (MT)

Goes Funeral Care & Crematory  
3665 Canal Drive  
Suite E  
Fort Collins, CO 80524  
(970) 482-2221  
info@goesfuneralcare.com  
<https://www.goesfuneralcare.com/>

*Visitation (Fr. Don lies in State) from 5 PM Tuesday until Noon Wednesday at Goes Funeral Care. You may come and pay your respects during this extended time and through the night at the funeral home. Please call before 5 PM Tuesday if you plan on coming during these evening hours so that we can accommodate you.*

## Visitation

**MAY 31.** 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM (MT)

St. Joseph Catholic Church  
300 W Mountain Ave  
Fort Collins, CO 80521  
<https://www.stjosephfc.org/>

## Vigil Service

MAY 31. 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM (MT)

St. Joseph Catholic Church  
300 W Mountain Ave  
Fort Collins, CO 80521  
<https://www.stjosephfc.org/>

## Mass of Christian Burial

JUN 1. 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM (MT)

St. Joseph Catholic Church  
300 W Mountain Ave  
Fort Collins, CO 80521  
<https://www.stjosephfc.org/>

*At the morning of Father Don's Mass, there will be no viewing.*

## Reception

JUN 1. 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM (MT)

Knights of Columbus Council 1214  
121 N Meldrum Street  
Fort Collins, CO 80521

## Interment

JUN 7. 11:30 AM (MT)

Black Hills National Cemetery  
20901 Pleasant Valley Drive  
Sturgis, SD 57785

# Tribute Wall



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



---

**Goes Funeral Care & Crematory** - June 10, 2023 at 02:48 PM

KG

“ I first met Fr. Don when he was pastor at SJ23 and I always loved seeing his scuffed-up hiking shoes poking out from beneath his alb. After he "retired," I always delighted seeing him filling in to celebrate Mass at Saint Joseph's, especially Christmas Midnight Masses. Knowing of his love for the Holy Land, I was especially grateful when he graciously responded to my request to attend an interfaith service at Beth Israel Synagogue in Greeley several years ago, offering a wonderful commentary on Deuteronomy 6:4-6. Truly, he lived the Gospel. Travel mercies, Fr. Don.

---

**Khris Gamer** - June 01, 2023 at 04:51 PM

GH

*What a joy to have known and served with Chaplain, Father Don. He was one of our two chaplains at the 154th Air Control Group on (at the time) Buckley Air National Guard Base. I remember that he returned to seminary for the Priesthood after his accident but was please to learn of his service as a radar operator in his "in between" years. Father Don always had a twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his face. He proclaimed the Gospel and loved us all.*

*"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'" Matthew 25:21 ESV*

*MSgt Greg Holm, COANG (RET)  
<https://bible.com/bible/59/mat.25.21.ESV>*

---

**Greg Holm** - June 02, 2023 at 02:12 PM

GD

*I just recently was sent the obituary for Father Don. A life of service in so many ways was his trademark. Father Don was the pastor at Saint Louis church in Louisville, Colorado, for many years. When my son started to attend the Saint Louis Catholic School, my relationship with Father Don intensified as he asked if I would be willing to provide leadership in the schools PTO. His relationship with my son grew as he served as an altar boy. He was a strong mentor for my son and the tie was so strong that my son sought Father Don out to marry him in Estes Park. I am so grateful that I was able to spend some time with him during those festivities. He had a remarkable life both in and out of the priesthood. What a blessing to the many lives that he touched. I am not surprised at his humble and, generous donation as God's work continues in helping those to explore their faith. Thank you Father Don for a life well spent as a good and faithful servant. May you bask in Our Lords Eternal Light.*

*Gail Dunning-Anderson*

---

**Gail Dunning** - May 30, 2025 at 12:35 AM

BR

“ I remember summer rides in the Porsche and youth retreats at STM. Late night coffee at St Louis and my sons Frist Eucharist. Wonderful Priest. Faithful and Caring. BOB R.

---

**Bob Rickard** - May 31, 2023 at 07:07 PM

CB

“ Always enjoyed Fr.Don from his arrival at J23. We hit it off both being Vietnam Vets, he retired from the USAF reserves and me, Regular Army, plus pretty much the same age. I used to volunteer at J23 on Fridays at the front desk plus served on Stewardship. Over the years I became impressed at Fr Don's gift for dealing with the infirmed, those suffering hardship and those about to cross over. When faced with those, he dropped everything and was laser focused. Many would have been uncomfortable dealing with death and suffering but if he was bothered, you would have never known. Personally he enriched my faith and brought me closer to our Lord and Savior. As one of my old sergeants used to say when witnessing outstanding duty "Fr. Don, ya dun good!"  
Chuck Ballenger

---

**Chuck Ballenger** - May 31, 2023 at 11:39 AM

CD

“ CINDY DEPLITCH lit a candle in memory of Donald Willette



---

**CINDY DEPLITCH** - May 31, 2023 at 04:01 AM

AS

“ *Andrea Shahmardian lit a candle in memory of Donald Willette*



---

**Andrea Shahmardian** - May 30, 2023 at 09:32 PM

JB

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



---

**Jane Bacon** - May 30, 2023 at 06:49 PM

PN

*Rest in Peace Father Don. Thank you for living your life to the fullest , sharing your deep love for God with your words and actions with joy. Be at Peace.*

---

**Peggy Nelson** - May 31, 2023 at 10:40 AM

FC

“ Dear Folks,  
Father Don was a Spiritual Father to Guardian Angels Mead during times of emotional upheaval.  
Having met him at an Equestrian Order event at the Cathedral in 2015, he was the first to welcome me to Mead in 2021!  
He has been a great help to me the past two years...always with Gusto, a Twinkle in his Eye, and a Good Word!  
I am grateful for his presence in my life.  
The MEADANGELS will be celebrating several Masses for the Repose of His Good Soul...  
Blessings, Father Ron Cattany

---

Father Ron Cattany - May 30, 2023 at 05:22 PM

OM

“ Although I never met Fr. Don Willette, he made it possible for many Augustine Institute Theology students to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land this past month. I cannot begin to put into words what a life-changing gift this pilgrimage was for me, and having witnessed the transformation in others, I know that Fr. Willette's gift impacted the hearts of everyone on the pilgrimage. We will all be forever grateful to him and keep him in our prayers.

---

Olivia Manocchio - May 30, 2023 at 04:02 PM

JB

“ My wife and I met Father when he came into the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre. He was a faithful priest and did so much for so many. We will miss his friendship. May he rest in peace. Jim Broski

---

Jim Broski - May 30, 2023 at 01:24 PM

SG

“ Stephanie Goes lit a candle in memory of Donald Willette



---

**Stephanie Goes** - May 30, 2023 at 01:03 PM

BW

“ Father Don was one of a kind. Adept at so many things! He had real life experiences before he became a priest, and so, he could relate to us commoners more easily than most priests. I spent many hours with him at J23 on pastoral council, retreats, building committee, UMAC, raising funds for, building, and dedicating the Narthax, etc. He's was the best of people. His homilies were applicable...not philosophical...all of those “oligies”. He knew how to save money and to make money. He gave a ton of money to CSU (as a priest)! I just hope CSU will use it to honor this wonderful, decent man (Rick, can you follow up on this???). He will be sorely missed, but will decidedly make a difference here from where he is now, I believe.  
Barb Wallner

---

**Barbara Wallner** - May 29, 2023 at 09:40 PM

VD

“ Father Don Willette was a well love priest in No. Colorado, I loved his Masses and homilies. Vickie D.

---

**Vickie J Danton** - May 29, 2023 at 04:22 PM

PL

“ *Father Don,  
What a blessing you were to us at John XXIII. A light as a breath of fresh air, a true depiction of what Christ called us to be. Your Christ-like manner was a model for all priests, to be yourself and follow with love. Because of your example you were asked by us to marry our son Christian and Nicole at St. Joseph's. Prophetic, I would like to think so.. Today as our model of Pentecost you speak to all peoples in doing God's work. I have so many memories of you really changing my life, leading me to work at the Alpha Center instead of starting a separate Church entity to help unwed mothers. It was a great experience for me. And lastly being blessed by you just days before your passing at the Centre Rehab. We did a full circle in our relationship. Continue to pray for us to live not by rigid rules as the Pharisees did but by love as Christ modeled and as you did.*

---

**PATRICIA A Lee** - May 28, 2023 at 11:49 AM

RL

“ *I always enjoyed sharing memories of Tan Son Nhut and Quant Tri with Don of the time he was an air traffic controller for the Air Force. My wife and I were lucky enough to have been with him having coffee at Starbucks two weeks before he passed.*

---

**Robert Edward Lee** - May 28, 2023 at 09:26 AM

CS

“ *Father Don brought me (a lost sheep) back to the fold. He has a very special place in my heart. God speed my dear friend.*

---

**Cynthia M. Sullivan** - May 27, 2023 at 07:51 PM