

All of us have some things we wish we didn't have to struggle with. For Fr. Schuster, it was AIDS, as many of you know. I've wanted to tell you this; I got tired of not being able to speak freely. But while Jerry was with us he forbade me to say anything to you publicly. I speak openly now only after talking with Jerry's family and friends who assured me it would be OK with Jerry and OK with them.

At first I was angry we had to keep this disease quiet, but I realize that persons with AIDS feel like people shame them for it. So the sick person has to fight not only the disease, but the fear of rejection. I'm disappointed Jerry never shared that struggle with you because I believe you would have accepted him and loved him in his anxiety. At the same time it's sobering to think that we're part of a society and a church that has laid such a blanket of shame upon persons with AIDS that this man, our friend, our priest could not be open with his own parish community. Within the next ten years every one of us will likely have a family member with this disease, so acceptance will grow more important.

It was hard on Jerry to be so young and so unable to serve. He wanted to be a good priest, to serve the church. He loved the liturgy, the Scriptures, and the spiritual life. He wanted to help people. He wanted to be a pastor someday. He only wanted what was good, but he couldn't live out his dreams.

Jerry told me he didn't want to become a cause. He didn't want to be remembered forever as "the priest with AIDS." We can honor him best tonight by remembering not just his disease, but his service and friendship. I invite any who wish to come forward now and share any memory you like, to help us remember Jerry the way he'd want to be remembered--as a faith-filled priest whose served the church.