

Monsignor Notes for Charles Nelke Memorial Mass

Charles “Chuck” Nelke was born on March 17, 1928 in Charleston, Arkansas. He was the 3rd child in a large family of 8 brothers and sisters, four of whom still survive him and join us today to celebrate their brother’s long life.

In the late 30’s, during the depression, he moved with his family to Stayton, Oregon. They ended up settling on a large property in West Salem, where the family built a dairy farm over the coming years.

Chuck attended Sacred Heart Academy where he met the love of his life, Lorraine Bickler, dating through their senior year. Chuck joined the Navy after high school in 1946, serving in San Diego and was stationed in the Far East. He proposed to Lorraine and upon his discharge from the Navy they married at St. Vincent de Paul’s, her parent’s parish at the time. They became members of St Joseph’s parish right after that, and where they both attended bi weekly Mass for the next 66 years.

Chuck worked on the farm, and said he always wanted to farm, not lay floors, but there wasn’t enough income to pay for all in the family to work the dairy farm. So he became an apprentice making \$1.05 an hour and then a journeyman counter and floor coverer, making \$3000 per year. As a skilled tradesman, he worked with his father at Elfstrom’s and then Capitol Floor Covering, later becoming a private contractor until his retirement.

He was a very responsible, hard-working, devout Catholic. He and Lorraine raised 7 children, building both of their homes inside and out in large part on his own skills. He also was a self-taught electrician, carpenter, and plumber. He finally was able to “farm” when he added chickens, livestock, and then berries and Christmas trees on their 2-1/2 acres next door to the Salem Golf Land on Center Street in east Salem.

When his wife, Lorraine died, just over 3 years ago, they were just ready to celebrate 66 years of marriage. Chuck continued to the best of his ability to be good Father to his kids, taking consolation in that he could be there” for them even though he always said to anyone who would listen that “He didn’t know why he was still here.” He insisted that it should have been him that went first. He

actually wasn't well, suffering from cancer, congestive heart failure and diabetes. But he continued to attend Mass, visiting his younger children in California and Arizona for the next 2 Christmases and holding open the homestead for them when they visited during the summer.

Just as he was ready to take that trip south for the holidays this year, he fell ill with a deadly bacterial infection, C-Diff. After a very tough week in ICU, with his kidneys failing, he received the Last Sacraments. He was able to say goodbye to his brother and sisters, and then with 3 of his of daughters at his side, he died peacefully on January 3rd. He was in his 90th year.