

## 2023 Hour For Peace NoCo Tribute to Father Don



The 2023 Hour For Peace NoCo is dedicated to our beloved Father Don Willette who, just short of his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday, found Eternal Peace May 25th and is now Home with the Prince of Peace. Father Don hosted the Fort Collins Hour For Peace at St. John XXIII from 2006 through 2011, and always graciously welcomed peacemakers from all faiths. He was also a Viet Nam Veteran and a Chaplain at Buckley Air Force Base.

Father Don retired from St. John XXIII in 2012, but continued to be active in the Fort Collins Interfaith community and in humanitarian endeavors. He certainly “walked the walk” and was a perfect example of following the teachings of the Prince of Peace and all the great Spiritual Masters. One of his favorite songs was “The Peace Song”, aka “Let There Be Peace On Earth, And Let It Begin With Me”. We are closing Unity’s live observance of the 2023 Hour For Peace with the song as a special tribute to him.

Obituary: <https://www.coloradoan.com/obituaries/fcc047806>

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

Born June 26, 1941, in Lemmon, South Dakota, Father Don 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 Father 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 Don was a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, and he led hundreds of people over the years on 33 pilgrimages to the Holy Lands.

Father Don 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.

His Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at 10:30 a.m., Thursday, June 1, at Saint Joseph's. Vigil service and Mass were livestreamed and are available at: [Funeral Mass for Rev. Donald "Don" C. Willette - YouTube](#)

Interment is at Black Hills National Cemetery, Sturgis, SD. Please visit Fr. Don's tribute page at [Father Donald C. Willette Obituary - Visitation & Funeral Information \(goesfuneralcare.com\)](#) to share memories and condolences.

His final prayer request: "Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. And may his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen."