

Many Throng Chapel For Joyful Requiem

“She came by raw pain to this happy ending.”

Hundreds of students, alumnae and friends thronged the Newton chapel on Patriot's Day to take part with the Religious of the Sacred Heart in the “happy ending” marked by the solemn requiem Mass for Librarian Emeritus Mother Mary Virginia Coleman.

Two of Newton's long-time chaplains — the Rev. W. Seavey Joyce, S.J., and the Rev. William J. Leonard, S.J. — joined three other priests who had known her for the concelebrated Mass

Both Fathers Joyce and Leonard had known Mother Coleman for most of the 18 years she spent at Newton College.

Mother Coleman died on April 17 after a year's illness. Her death

was the first among members of the Newton Community in the 21 years since the college opened.

At Newton since 1949, Mother Coleman, a native Virginian and convert to Catholicism, had almost single-handedly built the college library from a few scattered volumes to a vital, professional tool integral to the college's academic life.

She successfully hid the deficiencies inherent in converting a French chateau to library use, creating at Duchesne — as the building was known until 1957 — an atmosphere where scholarship could flourish despite the drawback of having to share the building for many years with student residents.

It was a popular place to live as well as work. And Mother Coleman contributed no small sum to the conviviality.

She had begun her career at Newton as a housemother at the "famous" St. Joe's, an off-campus dormitory near the Academy used for a brief time in the early days of the college.

Students in those early years enjoyed Mother Coleman's good humor and compassion in their daily lives. She carried the same qualities into her role as librarian, a role which year by year took more of her time.

She was a professional in the field and left that stamp — tempered by understanding and a genuine interest in the students as persons — on the library she built and left Newton as a legacy.

Mother Coleman had not entered the library from the time she first became ill last spring until she was wheeled into the new library for the dedication ceremony on March 5.

She liked what she saw.

That library, a true center of academic life at Newton, is Mother Coleman's legacy to the growing line of students she served for 18 years.

She left them another legacy as well — one she would have valued most — the sense of joy in belonging to a family which permeated her life and radiated at her funeral Mass.

The requiem Mass itself was a symbol of that sense of community Mother Coleman embodied.

Her bearers were faculty members she had known and worked with for many years — Dr. Anthony Nemethy, Dr. John Paul Fitzgibbon, Robert J. Curran and William Daniels. Mr. Daniels and Frank D. Maguire served the five celebrants on the altar.

Artist Norman Laliberte designed the vestment Father Joyce, as chief celebrant, wore and also designed the scarlet bell-fringed pall that covered the casket. Vietnamese senior Jeanne Tran executed it.

The Mass sung by the Newton Choir was translated by Theodore Marier, director of St. Paul's Choir School in Cambridge and a member of the Newton Advisory Board, who has had a long association with the college.

Religious of the Sacred Heart formed a honor guard the entire length of the chorch from their seats at the head of each pew. They came from Newton Academy and Portsmouth Academy as well as her own Newton community. Among them was President Emeritus Mother Eleanor Kenney of Newton Academy, for whom the library is named.

And at her own request organist Anthony Newman, whose performance at Newton Mother Coleman had heard only days before her death, played Bach's "Passacaglia," her favorite piece of music.

When the music stopped silence fell so suddenly the congregational could hear the rain falling outside and the bells on the pall tinkle as the casket bearing Mother Coleman's body moved down the aisle.

