

Date: 4/3/2024

To: Representative Ronald Ellis, Chairman, Kansas House Committee on Veterans & Military

From: Raymond Emil Kapaun, Nephew of Chaplain Father Emil Kapaun and spokesman for the Kapaun family in regards to Father Emil.

Thank you, Representative Ronald Ellis and members of the committee, for allowing me to provide this written testimony in support of SB 431.

I am Raymond Emil Kapaun, the nephew of Chaplain Father Emil Kapaun and I greatly appreciate this opportunity to discuss with you the Life and Merits of my Uncle.

I never personally met my Uncle. He died in that hellish prison camp in North Korea in 1951 and I was born in 1957. But I was so blessed to have a Grandmother, who through with tears in her eyes most of the time would tell me the stories of Father Emil.

Father Emil was a Priest, a Soldier, a Chaplain, a Hero, but more than anything else he was a Kansas native through and through. My grandmother would talk of Emil's love of the land. He would jump at any chance to work along side his Dad out in the fields on their meager farmstead. He never backed away from any chores or difficult struggles, as my Grandmother would say, he saw them as blessings.

But it was Father's Love for others that set him apart from everyone else. Even as a young boy in grade school, he would seek out and find the classmates that were struggling or that were getting picked on. He would befriend the ones who always seemed alone and help them have a better day. This trait only grew larger in him through his entire life.

When you talk with any of the POW's that were in that prison camp with Father they all say the same thing. He Always took care of others needs before he thought of himself. He would offer his own meager rations to a fellow POW even when he was starving himself. His self sacrifice saved so many lives in that camp and even to this day, with the few POW's that are still alive, when they talk of Father Emil they still get tears in their eyes.

I truly believe that Chaplain Father Emil Kapaun's story, legacy, and life is and can be a great inspiration to anyone who hears it, and even more so for his home state of Kansas. In a time where there is so much division and mistrust in the world, Father would be a Hope of Light. He was about uniting people. He was about not casting judgement on people. He was about forgiving people. But more than anything else he was about Loving people.

If I had to sum up Father's Life in one sentence, it would be how Captain Robert Burke, one of the POW's that was in the camp with Father described him in Father Tonne's book. **"This is how I remember the finest man I ever knew, the most outstanding priest I've ever seen, the hero of heroes, and to put it simply, the most unforgettable character I've ever met. That diamond**

**in the rough that we would all be proud to call Dad, the man we respect and admire and cherish in our hearts -- our beloved Father Kapaun”**

I would like to conclude by asking for the committee to support this private effort to collect funds to memorialize my Uncle and this great Kansan. The Kansan, the priest, the Hero and yes as far as I am concerned The Saint, who has finally come back Home to his Kansas Roots. To his Kansas Soil.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer this testimony. Thank you for your consideration.

Raymond Emil Kapaun

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