

Monsignor Sheridan

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gious icon, is the subject of a new documentary, "Radical Kindness: The Life of John Sheridan."

The idea for the film — now more than three years in the making — came to fruition not too long after Sheridan's Sept. 2010 death, said producer and OLM parishioner Birute Vileisis.

The longtime pastor died of heart failure at the age of 94 after complications suffered in an August 2010 car crash, leaving behind droves of mourners both inside and outside the Catholic Church.

Weeks after his death, an OLM group that met regularly after Sunday morning mass realized a commonality.

"It seemed that everyone at that particular Sunday Symposium had 'a Monsignor story' to share and the idea arose to 'do something' to commemorate his life," Vileisis said.

They first considered putting together a book of Monsignor writings and memories. But during subsequent meetings, a committee of parishioners realized a documentary would do Sheridan the best justice.

"We knew that Monsignor had worked with four Cardinals, that there were many Monsignor stories from the early '70s, during an important moment in L.A. history. We also recognized that he had a great gift for bringing many different people together, many of whom were formidable players in Los Angeles and the film industry... We realized from the start that we had a great story to tell and that it had legs," Vileisis recalled.

Getting production started was far from easy, though, as the group embarked on a year-long fundraising campaign and toiled over how to best portray Sheridan's life. Slowly, the puzzle pieces fell into place. Approximately \$35,000 in donations came in. Vileisis and fellow parishioner Paul Contino signed on as co-producers. John Culver was hired to direct. Malibu local and actor Martin Sheen agreed to narrate. Friends, family and parishioners shared fond memo-



Devon Meyers

Monsignor John Sheridan of Our Lady of Malibu Catholic Church gives the call to worship at the Malibu Community Thanksgiving Day Service in 2009.

ries through interviews and photographs.

Sheen was one of many locals who forged a special bond with Sheridan before his death. He reflected on their relationship after "Radical Kindness" premiered at a special event on July 17 in Calabasas.

"We used to talk a lot, Monsignor and I, about human

nature, about the brokenness of human nature. And I remember he talked about how beautiful our broken nature was; because it was the only way God could reach us. And I thought that made all the sense in the world," Sheen said at the premiere, which was attended by about 300 people.

Sheridan was the author of 14

books on faith and the church, a theological scholar, a religious broadcaster for national radio programs such as "Hour of Faith," an advocate for those facing death and an untiring champion of disenfranchised inner-city youth.

A native of County Longford, Ireland, Sheridan moved to Southern California after a bout of tuberculosis and overcoming a morphine addiction that his family credited with "giving him a life-long empathy for any kind of suffering."

The scope of Sheridan's years in serving the Los Angeles Catholic community was vast, encompassing four different archbishops, countless ecumenical articles and short stories, numerous diocesan appointments and community service directorships and innovative programs to help the disheartened faithful, such as one of spiritual renewal based on Alcoholics Anonymous' 12 steps.

Working on the film gave Vileisis a deeper understanding of Sheridan's legacy.

"The best reward is that this film of his life may inspire those who see it to follow in his footsteps and perhaps act more kindly, thereby ensuring that his legacy and his spirit of 'Radical Kindness' lives on," she said.

For Sheen, participating in the documentary provided a realization of Sheridan's impact on the community and the community's ability to honor its greatest contributors.

"He was reflected in all of us in this film — it is an extraordinary reflection of who we are as a community," Sheen said at the premiere. "I felt terribly moved and proud of all that was said about him and done for him. We were all reflecting each other through him, but it's really about us as well."

"Radical Kindness" will be available for \$25 on DVD in late August through the Our Lady of Malibu website, olmalibu.org, or by contacting the church at 310.456.2361. The film has a running time of 90 minutes.



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