

St. Cletus Parish

600 W. 55th St.
La Grange, IL 60525

Independence Day Mass

Thursday, July 4th, 2024.

PAUL DE RIVERA WILL RECEIVE 2024 SERVICE AWARD

By Jim Matthews

Long-time St. Cletus parishioner Paul De Rivera will receive the Fr. Charles G. Gallagher Service to Country and Church Award at the special 8:00 A.M. Mass at St. Cletus on Thursday, July 4th, 2024.

Paul was drafted into the army in 1967 and served during the war in Viet Nam. He grew up in Chicago, and got basic training at Ft. Leonard Wood in Missouri, and qualified for combat infantry training at Fort Polk, in Louisiana. Transferred to Ft. Rucker in Alabama, he qualified for army air traffic control, and finally on to Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi to learn air traffic control.

The stateside training led to his Viet Nam job, helping Army helicopters operate from a small landing strip, abandoned when French troops left their Indochina colony in 1954. Enemy troops attacked the field at night and got inside the defenses. Paul later was awarded a medal for turning the airstrip's radar from sky to ground during the firefight, so U.S. defenders could see and shoot the attackers.

Paul's two-year draft ended, and he rotated back to the USA as a Specialist Four for discharge and returned to his parents' home in Chicago. Later, he worked at Western Electric in Cicero, and worked 36 years with a human resources company which helped people connect with better jobs.

In 1990, Paul, with his wife and children, moved into the St. Cletus neighborhood. Usher Gus Nolan asked Paul to "pass the basket," and Paul later became a Monday money counter at St. Cletus. Today he's still a cheerful usher at 10:30 A.M. Mass and is currently vice president of the St. Cletus Holy Name Society. In years past, Paul drove his own van to pick up food for the St. Cletus Food Pantry which operated from the Rectory basement.

Once again, the July 4th Mass is exciting and patriotic. The vets sit in sections of the church with fellow members of their service branch, and a 35-piece band plays each

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service's song or hymn while a patriotic script is read as background. After Mass, the crowd and veterans visit outside the church while enjoying a snack and beverage.

Paul and friends will sit in the front row and see it all, as have other award winners in previous July 4th celebrations, which were started by Fr. Charles Gallagher, ex-army chaplain and paratrooper-padre, who always wore his complete uniform with bloused boots during his time as Pastor from 1971-1990.