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Paul J. McNamara, 74; attorney equally committed to law, faith

By **Bryan Marquard** | GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 25,
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To spend time with Paul J. McNamara was to know he loved all things Irish. He lived in Dublin for a year and, like his father, served as president of the Charitable Irish Society. He even held dual US and



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Paul McNamara.

Irish citizenship, and he made sure his children and grandchildren did, too.

Among lawyers in Boston, Mr. McNamara was known for holding another dual citizenship of sorts. A counselor in all senses of the word, he practiced law and practiced his faith, making them one and the same.

“Paul demonstrated to all of us how to live your faith within the practice of law and to be compassionate, whether it be toward your client, toward your opposing counsel, or the court,” said Maura Doyle, who is vice president of the Catholic Lawyers' Guild of the Archdiocese of Boston, an organization Mr. McNamara led as president.

“He called us all to a higher responsibility,” Doyle added. “He demonstrated to me, as a Catholic lawyer, how to live my life within the practice of law as a Catholic – not with a lot of bravado, but just by

example. His impact on the rest of the profession is profound. He didn't wear his faith on his sleeve, but he walked the talk.”

Mr. McNamara, who also had served on the board of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Boston, died of bladder cancer Saturday in his longtime home in the Newton part of Chestnut Hill, next to Boston College. He was 74 and, while in hospice care, stayed in the family room overlooking the campus he had strolled years before as a student.

A partner at the law firm Pabian & Russell, Mr. McNamara concentrated on estate planning and trust administration and also provided advice to nonprofits, an area to which he devoted considerable time during half a century as an attorney. Along with the Catholic Lawyers' Guild and the Charitable Irish Society, he served on the boards of several institutions including the Boston Institute for Arts Therapy, the Irish International Immigration Center, and the Irish Cultural Center.

Before joining Pabian & Russell, he was a partner at the firms Masterman, Culbert & Tully, Csaplar & Bok, and Looney & Grossman.

“Paul was a very resourceful lawyer in the sense that he found ways of achieving success and solving problems that others had not,” said Andrew Culbert, a longtime friend and former law partner. “I was always impressed, in coming into a discussion with Paul, with his particular slant on things. He always had a different approach that made you stop and pause and think.”

Through his work, Culbert said, Mr. McNamara “really sought to better the community that he served. He was a very gentle person, very articulate, and a highly-skilled lawyer. He was really a wonderful human being, and many, many people relied upon his services.”

Those who did included many who could offer him little, if any, financial compensation. Mr. McNamara saw practicing law “as a very noble profession, and the

reason he was doing it was to help people,” said his son Paul Jr. of Los Angeles. “He definitely took on a lot of people as clients just to help them. He loved that part of it.”

Born in Boston, Mr. McNamara was the second of three sons and grew up in Jamaica Plain. His father, Bernard McNamara, was a funeral director, and the family of his mother, the former Marion Cassidy, was in the funeral business, too.

His family had a vacation home on the water in Scituate, where “one of his earliest memories was the end of World War II and having to turn off the lights at night so no German subs off the coast could get a fix on the house,” his son said. “He absolutely loved growing up there.”

Mr. McNamara graduated from Boston College High School in 1958, his first step toward becoming a triple Eagle, as he added degrees from Boston College and Boston College Law School.

“He just filled the role of a Jesuit-trained guy in every way,” said Jack MacKinnon of Hingham, who met Mr. McNamara when they were high school freshmen. In later years, they served together on boards, including for Catholic Charities. “In all these things he was a very generous guy. He just was a giver, all the way down the track,” MacKinnon said.

Jim O’Connor of Wellesley, a friend since kindergarten, said Mr. McNamara “was the truest friend anyone could ever have.”

“He was a gentleman’s gentleman in every sense of the word, and he would do anything for anybody,” O’Connor added. “He had kind of a wry sense of humor and never was impolite to anybody. He just liked to be with people and cared a lot about people.”

Mr. McNamara received his bachelor’s degree from BC in 1962, majoring in government and history. “He was a big fan of American history,” his son said. “He was

constantly reading biographies of the founding fathers and the early presidents. That was probably a big part of his decision to go into the law, too.”

Mr. McNamara graduated from the law school in 1965 and was introduced by a friend to Mary Hallisey a few years later. They married in 1970.

“In his life the most important things were his family and religion, and all the things he was renowned for came after that,” MacKinnon said.

Mr. McNamara “loved to talk about his grandkids and he loved a good story,” his son said. At home or at one of the many organizations he helped run, Mr. McNamara “didn’t like to necessarily be the center of attention, but he liked to get people going,” his son added. “At a family dinner, he’d pick someone and say, ‘Tell me about so-and-so.’ That was one of his tricks. He’d put you on the spot, but it was all about getting you to show your best self.”

In addition to his wife and son, Mr. McNamara leaves a son, Bernard of Short Hills, N.J.; two brothers, John of Chestnut Hill and Robert of Norwell; and four grandchildren.

A funeral Mass will be said at 10 a.m. Wednesday in St. Ignatius of Loyola Church on the Boston College campus. Burial will be in Holyhood Cemetery in Brookline.

Among the professional and charitable groups to which Mr. McNamara belonged was the Boston Area Order of Malta, and some years ago he participated in the group's trip to Lourdes in France, where he assisted the ill who were making a pilgrimage to the shrine for prayer and healing. "He was a very holy guy in his own right," said MacKinnon, who was with him on the trip. "You knew he was real."

Because of that presence, Mr. McNamara "will be sorely missed," said Doyle, who is clerk of the state Supreme Judicial Court for Suffolk County. "He was a strong example to everyone, and his influence will

remain for a long, long time, there's no question. He was such a remarkable man. People like that only come across your path once in a while."

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