

A musical journey remembered

• Ralph Jordan, organist and choir director at St. Mary's for 67 years, dies at 80

BY JIM CARNEY
Beacon Journal religion writer

Ralph Jordan was only 13 years old when he first sat down at the Austin Organ inside St. Mary's Catholic Church on Christmas Day 1929 to play for the children's choir.

That was the beginning of a lifetime musical journey that took him through parts of eight decades as organist at the church.

Mr. Jordan died Aug. 21 at the age of 80 after a long illness. He was buried after a Mass at St. Mary's last Saturday.

His touch at the organ and his work as choir director over the years made Mr. Jordan a "pillar of St. Mary's," said his wife, Beatrice Jordan.

Mr. Jordan served as a part-time organist and choir director for about 67 years at the church he began attending at age 6.

"It won't be the same without him," church secretary Mary Dorka said.

Rev. John J. Hilkert said every-



Ralph Jordan

Mary's, said choir members used to refer to themselves as Mr. Jordan's "songbirds."

"Nobody will fill his shoes," she said.

Mr. Jordan's organ days began when Monsignor Joseph O'Keefe "called him to his office and Ralph didn't know what he did," his wife recalled.

O'Keefe was a stern man and to Jordan's surprise, he was asked if he wanted to learn to play the organ. She said her husband told O'Keefe he would love to but didn't think his parents could afford les-

sons. body in the congregation loved Jordan and his music. "Boy, was he good," Hilkert said.

Mary Leary, the current church organist and choir director at St.

O'Keefe told him the church organist, Marie Ahearn, would teach him. "She gave him lessons from then on," she said.

When Mrs. Jordan and her husband moved from Akron to Randolph Township years later, they had their new house built around the organ they owned so that the organ would fit in the house.

She said his favorite hymn to play was *Holy God We Praise Thy Name*.

She and her husband have three daughters, nine grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

Mrs. Jordan said she hopes organ music is always played in churches. "There is something about organ music. It is more soothing. It seems more religious."

Teresa Miller, Jordan's granddaughter, said that her grandfather played the organ at her wedding in July 1993 at the church.

"He was one of a kind," she said. "We just adored him."