BEAVERTON — Father Mell Stead, a retired Archdiocese of Portland priest known for his work with Portland's African American community in the 1960s, died Friday, Aug. 1 in his home at St. John Vianney Residence after dealing with various illnesses. He was 77.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be at 11 a.m., Thursday, Aug. 7 at Cathedral of Immaculate Conception in Portland, with burial following at Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

Father Stead was born May 28, 1930 in Kewanee, Ill, to Mell Stead Sr. and Alice Engels. After early education in Kewanee, his high school seminary education was at Sacred Heart Seminary in Donaldson, Ind., from 1944 to 1948. He then completed his college and seminary studies for the Archdiocese of Portland at Conception Seminary in Conception, Mo., for eight years until 1956. During that time, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Father Stead was ordained May 26, 1956 at Conception by Cardinal John Patrick Cody for the Archdiocese of Portland.

During his first assignment at Immaculate Heart, where he was eventually named pastor in 1962, Father Stead became a well-known advocate for the African American community in North Portland.

In 1970, he was made pastor at St. Mary Parish in Albany and finally pastor at Holy Family in 1981.

He served there until 1993, when he was appointed pastor of St. Augustine Parish in Lincoln City, a post he held until retirement in 2004. There, he was known for having helped raise funds to build a new parish hall.

Father Stead is survived by his sister, Alice Marie Hammons.