



the franciscans
Province of the Sacred Heart

(314)353-7470

**J. MICHAEL EWERT, OFM
1932 - 2015**

"Sister Death" had not touched the friars of the Sacred Heart Province in over four months until she made her presence known once again on the 12th of November. On that day, our confrere, J. Michael Ewert, OFM, died at the Loretto Home of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in Springfield, Illinois. Our brother John Sullivan, OFM, was with him when he died. He had been ill for the last several months.

J. Michael, son of Michael and Ruth (Willam) Ewert, was born on August 16, 1932, in Dubuque, Iowa, and was baptized Joseph Michael at St. Columbkille Parish. All who knew him called him by his middle name, Michael. He grew up with only one sibling, Mary Cullen, who preceded him in death. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why he joined the Franciscans – to experience living with many brothers.

After completing high school in Dubuque and beginning the formation process of the province, Michael was received into the first Order as a novice on July 4, 1952 by the provincial Fr. Eligius Weir, OFM. On the day of his solemn profession, July 5, 1956, he professed his vows to the new provincial, Fr. Pius Barth, OFM. His classmates called him, "little Mike" little but mighty.

Mike was ordained to the priesthood on June 24, 1959 in Teutopolis, Illinois by Bishop Henry Pinger, OFM. More than half of his 56 years as a friar priest was spent in pastoral ministry; first as an assistant and then as pastor in many of the parishes of the province. After ministering in three parishes as an associate, Mike served as a military chaplain in the U.S. Air Force from 1969-1975. He returned to the province to begin his service as a pastor in Quincy, New Lenox, Riverton, Cleveland, Ruston and Indianapolis until 1991. From 1991-1997 he accepted the position as the Executive Director of St. Francis Village in Crowley, Texas, followed by four more years as a pastor. From 2001 until the present, Mike continued to do what he loved the most – to offer sacramental ministry to the parishes in the Diocese of Springfield.

Mike served the province for many years on the FMU Board. He was a member of the Provincial Council from 1990-1993. Mike maintained friendships with people he had served during his 62 years as a friar. He was very proud of the years he served as chaplain of the Cleveland Browns Football Team. Twenty-five years after serving in that capacity he still kept in touch with many of the players and their families.

These are the facts regarding the life of our brother J. Michael Ewert, OFM. But how will he be remembered by his brothers, the friars of the Sacred Heart Province?

After speaking to several of his classmates, the ordination class of 1959, I share the following with you.

Mike was a good student and always punctual. He had a sense of humor and a great rapport with his fellow classmates. He wasn't afraid to talk about himself and to share his life with all of us. He believed in being responsible for his actions. When something needed to be done, Mike was right there to accomplish the task. He was quite the "athlete" for his size. He loved to golf. There was a sympathetic side to Mike, especially in his role as a pastoral minister, a ministry that fit him well. He was unselfish when it came to serving his parishioners and focused his attention on the sick and the elderly. When he preached, he was always prepared and his homilies always gave one food for thought.

Later in life, Mike continued to be an avid golfer and hunter. He enjoyed playing cards and spending time with parishioners and friends.

The funeral liturgy for our brother Michael took place 11 days after his death at St. Joseph Church in Springfield, Illinois. The friar community in Springfield decided to wait to celebrate his funeral Mass due to the Leadership Conference that was going on in St. Louis around the time of his death. Twenty friars were able to be in attendance as well as many family members, sisters from various religious communities and several diocesan priests, including the vicar general of the diocese. What a tribute to our brother.

Mike planned his entire funeral liturgy. Michael Jennrich, OFM, the Provincial Vicar presided and John Doctor, OFM, preached the homily. Mike chose the following readings: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; 1Corinthians 9:24-27; and Luke 19:1-10. By choosing these readings, Mike was giving us sort of a pastoral letter of his life. From the Book of Ecclesiastes, John pointed out that Mike realized that "there is a time for everything - a time to live and a time to die." Mike knew this - that we are called each day of our life to live it to the full. In the words of St. Paul, Mike wanted to say he had run the race and run it well. From the Gospel of Luke, John Doctor asked the question: "Do you and I have a desire in our hearts to get a glimpse of Jesus, then do what we need to do, as did Zacchaeus?" It is the Lord who seeks us out, often at times when we least expect. It was the Lord Jesus who sought out our brother Mike Ewert and challenged him to become his disciple. He answered the call and lived his life to the full as a faithful friar and priest.

Mike is survived by two nieces, Mrs. Jeanne Coogan and Mrs. Dianne Wickman, and one nephew, Dr. Joseph Cullen. We express our deepest sympathy to them and to all those who knew and loved him.

In his homily, John Doctor, OFM, read part of a prayer written by Michael Ewert, OFM. I would like to conclude this letter with his words:

“O divine giver of life, I praise and I thank you for the gift of a new day.
Please help me Lord of life always to remember that I am loved and that
I am never alone, especially today.”

Michael, may the Lord who is always with us bring you to the eternal banquet in heaven. May you rest in peace.

John Dombrowski, OFM

In your kindness, please consider making a donation in memory of
J. Michael Ewert, OFM, to the Development Office of the Franciscan
Province of the Sacred Heart.

Please send your charitable contribution to:
St. Anthony Friary
3140 Meramec Street
St. Louis, MO 63118-4399