

May 6, 2007

**Death Notice No. 11 (To all Unit Administrations):**



The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **EDWIN JOHNSON**, priest, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on April 25, 2007, in Los Angeles, California, in the 82<sup>nd</sup> year of his age and the 45<sup>th</sup> year of his religious profession.

Fr. Edwin was born on February 6, 1926, in San Marcos, Texas, to Allen Johnson and Belle Burlison Johnson. He attended Hall Elementary School in Bryan, Texas. As a child, he was nicknamed “Jinx,” and loved to climb trees and play with his cousins. He attended St. Peter Claver High School in San Antonio, Texas, where he was taught by the Sisters of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate. As a young African American growing up in the South, he experienced and triumphed over the effects of racism prevalent at the time. Fr. Edwin pursued a career in education and in 1948 began teaching at his alma mater, St. Peter Claver. He served as a junior and senior high school teacher and dormitory and high school counselor until 1961. While working at St. Peter Claver, he attended six years of evening and summer classes at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio and earned a bachelor’s degree in English. He went on to receive a master’s degree in education from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio in 1960. He also received a master’s degree in English from St. Mary’s University in 1966.

Fr. Edwin wrote that his desire to enter religious life was nurtured by his 14 years of association with the Holy Ghost Sisters at St. Peter Claver and the Marianist brothers at St. Mary’s University. He entered the novitiate for the Society of Mary in 1961 at Marynook in Galesville, Wisconsin. He professed first vows at Marynook in 1962 and perpetual vows in 1965 at Our Lady of the Pillar in St. Louis.

Fr. Edwin began his Marianist career in education in 1964 at Don Bosco High School in Milwaukee, where he was a teacher and yearbook and newspaper moderator. In 1966, he moved to St. Michael High School in Chicago where he taught English, was assistant principal and served as guidance director until 1970. He spent a year (1970-1971) in the English department at Assumption High School in East St. Louis, Illinois, before returning to St. Michael as principal from 1971 to 1978.

In 1978, Fr. Edwin was assigned to Junipero Serra High School in Gardena, California. He fell in love with the West Coast and stayed there for the remainder of his career. At Junipero Serra he served as a faculty member and principal until 1984. Fr. Edwin attended seminary at the Marianist Seminary in Toronto, Canada, from 1984 to 1986 and was ordained in 1986 at Queen of Apostles Church in San Jose, California.

After his ordination, he served as chaplain at Archbishop Riordan High School in San Francisco from 1986 to 1988. He spent the next two years as principal at Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose, California. In 1990, a sabbatical at Mount Angel Abbey and Seminary in St. Benedict, Oregon, took his career in a new direction. Fr. Edwin was offered and accepted a position to stay at Mount Angel Abbey as a spiritual director and academic dean. The experience was so powerful that he discerned for several years a religious commitment to the Benedictine monks.

In 1995, however, Fr. Edwin returned to Marianist community life in Cupertino, California. For the last 11 years, he served as chaplain at Chaminade College Preparatory in West Hills, and Chatsworth, California. “His selfless love for all of us has been the hallmark of his ministry and a lasting gift for our community. He will be greatly missed by all,” said Chaminade President Jim Adams.

His friend, Fr. David Schuyler, marveled at the way Fr. Edwin came to life when he was around the children at Chaminade. “Even in poor health, Edwin always had a reserve of energy for the kids,” said Fr. David. “It was incredible how he gathered people around him, communities of sisters, former students. Once you met Edwin, you would never forget him.”

Bro. Jim Dods, who spent time in West Hills with Fr. Edwin, characterized him as a truly generous man. “As a Marianist, I found his community celebrations of the Eucharist touching, sincere and joy-filled,” said Bro. Jim.

Fr. Edwin was loved by many and considered a surrogate father by some. “Edwin was such a dedicated, pastoral person,” said friend Fr. John Bolin. “He loved when people responded appreciatively to his ministry, and he was loved profoundly by those he ministered to.”

He enjoyed eating sweets, telling stories, laughing and being present for anyone in need. “Edwin had a phone book with innumerable names and numbers,” said friend Bro. Tony Pistone. “His phone was always ringing. It was an attachment to his body.”

Bro. Tony said Fr. Edwin had a way of making people feel special, especially the children he preached to weekly at Our Lady of the Valley parish in Canoga Park, California. “He praised them, told them how wonderful they were, and got them to smile. Then he asked them to turn around and smile at their wonderful teacher.”

According to Bro. Tony, Fr. Edwin was not afraid to show his emotions, especially at funerals, and also in his last weeks, when friends would visit him at the hospital after his heart attack.

A prayer service in his memory at Chaminade College Preparatory saluted Fr. Edwin and his love for sweets with a Baby Ruth candy bar for everyone in attendance.

May he rest in peace.