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Death Notice No. 32 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **MICHAEL BARBER**, priest of the Marianist Residence Community of San Antonio, Texas, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on November 17, 2014 in San Antonio, Texas, USA, at the age of 73 with 55 years of religious profession.

Fr. Mike began his ministry as a high school teacher. He later was ordained and served as a pastor in rural Mexico, where he was paralyzed as the result of a vehicle accident in 2009. Despite his disability, he remained steadfastly faithful and was an inspiration to those around him.

Michael Elliot Barber was born on October 15, 1941, in St. Louis, Missouri. He and his brother, Thomas, were the children of Daugherty and Ann (Pifer) Barber.

Fr. Mike attended St. Michael's grade school and Eugene Coyle High School, where he first encountered members of the Society of Mary. At age 15, he entered the postulancy at Maryhurst in Kirkwood, Missouri. He entered the novitiate at Marynook in Galesville, Wisconsin, and professed his first vows there one year later, on September 5, 1959.

A gifted student, Fr. Mike earned a bachelor's degree (summa cum laude) from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, in 1962, and began teaching at McBride High School in St. Louis that fall. He moved to St. Mary's High School, also in St. Louis, in 1964, and remained there as a teacher and coach through 1982. He received a master's degree in French from Saint Louis University in 1970.

"At St. Mary's, Fr. Mike was a true 'Renaissance Man,' said Principal Kevin Hacker. "If he was needed to teach a different subject or coach a different sport, he did so. One summer he learned to play the organ so that the brothers could have music for Mass and evening prayers. He had great self-discipline and an incredible work ethic," Hacker said.

From 1982 to 1984, Fr. Mike taught at Assumption High School in East St. Louis, Illinois. During the following year, he studied at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California.

Fr. Mike then spent a year in ministry at Holy Rosary Parish in San Antonio, Texas. In 1986, Fr. Mike asked to pursue ordination, with an eye toward possibly serving as a priest in Mexico. As a way of discerning this calling, he spent two years teaching in Mexico, first in Apaseo and then in Coatzacoalcos. He grew to love the country and its people.

In 1988, Fr. Mike entered the Beda Seminary in Rome, Italy. He completed his coursework in two years and was ordained on June 6, 1990, at Holy Rosary Parish.

Fr. Mike returned to Mexico, this time as a parish priest. He was pastor at San José Obrero in Veracruz for a year before returning to Coatzacoalcos, where he was pastor at Sagrado Corazón from 2000 – 2002.

In 2003, he packed his few belongings and answered a call to ministry in the remote Uxpanapa Valley. He served as pastor to a large parish scattered among 52 rural villages. He spent his time driving from village to village, celebrating two or three Masses per day. “It took more than two months to cover the whole parish,” Fr. Mike said in a 2013 interview for the Marianist *ALIVE* magazine.

On May 28, 2009, Fr. Mike fell asleep at the wheel while driving between villages after celebrating 8 a.m. Mass. His truck rolled over an embankment and down a steep ravine. The accident nearly severed his spinal cord, and by the time he was airlifted to the United States for neurosurgery nearly 48 hours later, it was clear that the damage was permanent. Fr. Mike was a quadriplegic.

“The first few years were tough,” said Paul Fanucchi, director of nursing at the Marianist Residence in San Antonio, where Fr. Mike was transferred upon leaving the hospital. But Fanucchi believed Fr. Mike’s deep faith helped him accept his new reality. “Most people fall into a deep depression after this type of injury. He didn’t do that. I’ve never known anyone like him,” Fanucchi said.

“This life of dependency is humbling,” said Fr. Mike in the *ALIVE* magazine interview in 2013. “It’s made me more open to others’ ideas – maybe even more open to God.”

Fr. Richard Loehrlein grew to be a dear friend of Fr. Mike’s during his final years. The two spent hours together, reading, talking and praying. Fr. Richard made it possible for Fr. Mike to concelebrate Mass in the community by printing out the prayers in a large font.

“I’ve never cried at the death of one of our brothers before. Michael was the first,” said Fr. Richard. “Michael did not regret his accident, nor the physical condition that left him paralyzed.” Fr. Richard recounted Fr. Mike’s active prayer life: “If it was early in the morning and the lights were not on when I entered his room, he was already praying the rosary. He prayed out loud, and I could hear him counting the *Hail Marys* of the decade,” Fr. Richard said. “My life was enriched by the times we enjoyed together.”

“When I feel down and absolutely useless, my faith helps me remember that by prayer and fasting and love, I can make my life useful,” said Fr. Mike in the *ALIVE* interview. “In the end, the only thing that matters is love, and love I can do.”

May he rest in peace.