

November 17, 2007

Death Notice No. 34 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of the United States of America, recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **MARTIN McMURTREY**, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on November 9, 2007 in San Antonio, Texas, in the 87th year of his age and the 69th year of his religious profession.

Bro. Martin or “Bro. Mac,” as he was affectionately called, was born in East St. Louis, Illinois, on April 16, 1921, to Martin and Alice (Coerver) McMurtrey. He attended St. Philip’s school in East St. Louis and was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Influenced by the Sisters and the many Marianist brothers who taught him at Central Catholic High School in East St. Louis, Bro. Mac entered the postulate of the Society of Mary at Maryhurst in Kirkwood, Missouri, after his junior year of high school. “I admired my high school teachers and wanted to be a brother like them,” he said.

Guidance from his favorite high school teacher, Bro. Andrew Cremer, and a summer he spent as a teenager reading with his brother, who was hospitalized with severe appendicitis, laid the groundwork for his future as a teacher and a writer.

After professing first vows in 1939, he spent the first year of the scholasticate at Maryhurst. In 1942, he earned a bachelor’s degree in English with a minor in mechanical drawing from the University of Dayton.

Bro. Mac began his nearly 60 years of teaching in 1942 at St. Michael’s High School in Chicago, where he taught math, religion and mechanical drawing. In 1943, he professed perpetual vows at Galesville, Wisconsin. Bro. Mac remained in Illinois for his next assignment (1945-49) at Cathedral High School in Belleville. Although he never played the game, Bro. Mac added football coach to his résumé at Cathedral and was very successful. During the summers, Bro. Mac attended Saint Louis University and in 1949 received a master’s degree in education.

In 1951, Bro. Mac found his true home—Central Catholic High School in San Antonio—where he taught some 6,000 students over a 49-year career at the school. At Central Catholic, he established himself as a much-loved English teacher and a published writer. Bro. Mac also taught engineering drafting and coached many winning football seasons. His creative writing course, taught from 1961 to 1994, produced several best-selling authors, including Whitely Stieber and Will Hobbs.

“He was the best teacher I ever had and, other than my parents, he was the most important influence in my life,” said former San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros, who was one of Bro. Mac’s literature students in 1962.

Former student Bro. Jim Burkholder, who also taught with Bro. Mac at Central Catholic, described him as a master English teacher who turned ordinary mortals into writers and poets. "He would not settle for anything less than the best you could do," said Bro. Jim.

Bro. Jerry Bommer remembers the selfless love Bro. Mac had for his students. "He was consistently concerned about others," said Bro. Jerry. "In this world of cynicism and looking out for "Number One," his integrity was a beacon of hope and direction in their lives."

Bro. Mac became an author in his own right, publishing 12 books (some with fellow Marianist Bro. Herbert Janson), including his first novel in 1976 "Loose to the Wilds," based on his youth in Illinois, followed 10 years later by "The Mariachi Bishop," a biography of Archbishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio. In 1998, he published his favorite book, "Out of the River's Mist," a collection of his works.

While at Central Catholic, Bro. Mac founded the Guardian Angels program which still exists today. The organization channels student collections of food, toys and clothing to underprivileged persons throughout the city.

His legacy also continues through a scholarship fund he created in 1975. Over the years, Bro. Mac raised over \$1 million and served over 3,000 needy students wanting to attend a Catholic school through the Bro. Martin McMurtrey Scholarship Fund. He used proceeds from his books and money from harvesting pecans and recycling aluminum cans to benefit the scholarship fund. "He set the example around Central Catholic in concern for the poor and marginalized," said Bro. Jim Burkholder.

For over 20 years (1970 to 1991), Bro. Mac also taught CCD classes at St. Agnes, a parish on San Antonio's west side serving underprivileged Hispanics.

In 2000, Bro. Mac retired from Central Catholic. Over 250 former students gathered to honor him during a program called "The Last English Class." He was presented with several honors, including an official certificate of appreciation from the City of San Antonio, the Hidalgo de San Antonio de Bejar award from Commissioners Court of Bexar County, and an official resolution from the State of Texas.

Until 2005, when illness forced him to stop, Bro. Mac organized "Alumni Round-ups" at spots across America where he briefed former students on events at Central Catholic. One student, Robert Trigilio, now an English teacher in Texas, was inspired by Bro. Mac to major in English at St. Mary's University and continue as an educator. "I do try to carry on the mission I learned from Bro. Mac: to develop in my pupils writing skills that would last a lifetime...what finer tribute can one pay a teacher than to carry on his noble work."

May he rest in peace.