

The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **RAYMOND MIDDENDORF**, priest, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on April 8, 2008, in Hollywood, Florida, in the 80<sup>th</sup> year of his age and the 62<sup>nd</sup> year of his religious profession.

Fr. Ray was born in Bromley, Kentucky, on January 7, 1929, the youngest of four boys of Fred and Rose (Lemker) Middendorf. His family lived on a small farm in rural Bromley, and he attended grade school at St. Boniface in Ludlow, Kentucky, where he was taught by the Sisters of Divine Providence. In addition to the Sisters, Fr. Ray had many religious influences in his family, including two older brothers who were priests, two aunts who were Sisters and several cousins, including Fr. Cy Middendorf, SM, who pursued religious life. Perhaps his greatest influence, however, was the spirit of his Marianist teachers at Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky.

At the end of his sophomore year of high school, he entered the postulate of the Society of Mary at Mount St. John in Dayton. Fr. Ray professed first vows in 1946 at Beacon, New York, and final vows in 1950 in Dayton. He received a bachelor's degree in education in 1949 from the University of Dayton and a master's degree in religious education in 1969 from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Fr. Ray began his career in 1949 as an English and history teacher, counselor and supervisor of youth activities at St. John's Home for Boys in Rockaway Park, New York. Called to be a priest, he left St. John's in 1953 for seminary studies in Fribourg, Switzerland. Fr. Ray was ordained in 1956 in Fribourg. After a year as an instructor of Mariology at Mount St. John in Dayton, Fr. Ray began what would become over 40 years of missionary service in Puerto Rico.

His first assignment in 1958 was at Colegio San José in Rio Piedras, where he served as chaplain, religion teacher and a member of the Archdiocesan Teacher's Apostolic Committee. In 1961, he was assigned to Colegio Ponceño de Varrones in Ponce, where he was chaplain and religion department head and teacher. He returned to Colegio San José in 1964 as chaplain and religion department head and teacher, and director of the Archdiocesan Teacher's Apostolic Committee.

Fr. Ray's career took a new direction in 1967 when he accepted a one-year assignment as secretary to Archbishop Luis Aponte Martinez of the Archdiocese of San Juan. In 1968, he returned to the States for a year to serve as chaplain and teach religion and Latin at Charlotte Catholic High School in North Carolina.

In 1969, Fr. Ray resumed his duties at Colegio San José. His ministry in Puerto Rico soon changed from academia to parish and mission work. In his early days as a pastor or "Pradrecito Ramón," as he was affectionately called, he reached his parishioners in the hills of Orocovis on horseback. Fr. Ray served people in Misión Noell, Parroquia Nino Jesus de Praga, Barrio Guineo and Villalba. Except for a six-year stint as a chaplain and counselor at St. John's Home in Rockaway Park (1974-1980), Fr. Ray served in parish ministry in Puerto Rico for almost 30 years.

As a missionary, Fr. Ray was deeply devoted to his parishioners and told them that his time and possessions were theirs. Every weekend he traveled to the 10 chapel barrios that comprised the large parish. He would celebrate four Masses on Saturday and four on Sunday and hear confessions before each Mass. During the week, he would navigate the mountain roads visiting parishioners, saying funeral Masses in homes, counseling, listening and giving blessings. “For me, everything’s relationship,” Fr. Ray said, “Relationship with God, with my parishioners, the sisters and priests I work with, those who do not attend church, and the superiors of my Marianist community.”

His visits and time spent driving each day became a form of prayer for Fr. Ray. He considered the beauty of the mountains and God’s work in nature a hymn. The situations he faced in the lives of the people were his psalms of gratitude, repentance, sorrow and enlightenment. He followed many of his parishioners from cradle to grave. According to Fr. Don Wallace, who lived with Fr. Ray in Puerto Rico, he was one of the most open-hearted men he has ever known. “He had a great love for the poor, needy and especially the sick of the parish,” said Fr. Don. “In his daily drives through the parish, he constantly stopped to check on the sick and those he hadn’t visited in awhile.”

Fr. Jose Angel Otaegui, SM, who worked with Fr. Ray in the mountain missions of Puerto Rico, described him as an exemplary priest, who, despite his own health problems, was always happy to attend to those in need. “It was for me a living testimony to the Marianist vocation bestowed upon the poor,” said Fr. Jose.

Fr. Ray was a talented photographer. He was the perfect priest for a wedding, because in addition to presiding, he would take the wedding photos. It was not uncommon to see a camera dangling from his chasuble or for him to stop the ceremony to snap a photo. After the ceremony, he would visit the families and present them with a small album or framed picture of the occasion.

In preparing homilies, Fr. Ray worked meticulously, with dictionary in hand, to craft his sentences. According to Fr. Don Wallace, the homilies would look like a road map with arrows and underlining. “The amusing thing was that he never seemed to get past the first two lines when delivering it,” said Fr. Don. His pastoral touch, however, is what Bro. Francisco González remembers most. “For more than 40 years he tried to preach in Spanish with a heavy accent, but people would love to attend his Masses, receive the sacraments, and above all, be greeted personally by him with a great smile and a kiss or warm handshake. He took the time to make them feel great.”

In addition to photography, Fr. Ray had other interests, including ballet, shopping (he was a renowned pack rat) and “cruise hopping.” In the pre-911 era, he would spend a free day at the San Juan pier and join the crowds boarding the cruise ships. He would always exit the ship before it departed. One time he missed the signal to depart and had to take a harbor boat back to the pier. His love for cruise ships eventually earned him a brief stint as a Carnival Cruise chaplain.

Fr. Ray didn't like details and tried to avoid paperwork and administrative tasks. He often said, "I hope there is nothing to fill out in heaven."

In 2005, due to failing health, Fr. Ray joined the Marianist community in Hollywood, Florida. While leaving his beloved Puerto Rico was difficult for Fr. Ray, he brought joy to his new community. "His openness and acceptance of God's people moved hearts and instilled hope. It was a blessing for me to learn and live with Ray," said Fr. Dan Doyle.

Fr. Ray's favorite scripture passage was from the prophet Micah: "*...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.*" It is an apt description of how Fr. Ray lived his life.

May he rest in peace.