



Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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October 19, 2020

Biography of Death Notice N. 29

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Rudy A. VELA**, priest, of the West Ligustrum Marianist Community in San Antonio, Texas, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 29, 2020, in San Antonio at the age of 68 with 48 years of religious profession.

Father Rudy was a beloved teacher, faculty member, university administrator, pastor, and advocate of intentional multicultural dialogue. Known for his warmth and good humor, he worked tirelessly to share – and invite others to participate in – what he called “a magnificent Marianist vocation.”

Rudy A. Vela, Jr. was born on January 9, 1952, in San Antonio, Texas. He was one of three children (brother, Raymundo and sister, Charlotte [Soria]) in the family of Rudy and Marianna (Almanza) Vela. Baptized in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and confirmed in St. Gabriel Parish, young Rudy attended Stafford Elementary School and Escobar Junior High where he received a scholarship to attend Central Catholic High School. While at Central, he was an active member of the student singing

group “His Brothers Children” which performed and entertained at various events along the Riverwalk. In his senior year Rudy served as Drum Major for the Central Catholic band.

Following high school, Rudy entered the Society of Mary in 1971 and professed first vows in 1972 at the Marynook Novitiate in Galesville, Wisconsin. From there, Rudy completed the Scholasticate at St. Mary’s University, earning a bachelor of arts in 1976 with a major in Spanish and a minor in Music Education.

For the next two years, he taught Spanish and Religion at Thomas More High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He professed perpetual vows on August 15, 1977 in San Antonio, Texas. Beginning in 1978, Brother Rudy served for three years in Peru – first teaching at a parish school in Lima, and then serving as Director of Recruitment and Vocation Ministry for the Marianist Province of Peru.

Called to the priesthood, Brother Rudy studied in Toronto, Canada, at the Marianist North American Seminary from 1981 to 1984, and was ordained on June 2, 1984 in San Antonio, Texas, by Archbishop Patrick Flores. Father Rudy then went to Fort Worth, Texas, where he served as teacher and chaplain at Nolan Catholic High School. In addition, he was named Parochial Vicar for Our Lady of the Assumption Parish in Fort Worth, and served as a consultant to the Office of Hispanic Affairs for the diocese.

In 1988, Father Rudy became Pastor of Holy Rosary Parish in San Antonio, Texas. Serving this community of 2,000 families in that role until 1995, he also continued his studies – earning a Master’s of Science in Administration from the University of Notre Dame in 1992. In mid-1995, he went on sabbatical to Rome, pursuing studies in social anthropology, inculturation and liturgy.

Building on this work, Father Rudy returned to San Antonio and entered new areas of ministry. He was named program director for the Mexican American Cultural Center, a role that fed his passion for enabling and empowering the Hispanic community. He also served the wider Church through participation on numerous boards, including the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops’ Commission on Certification and Accreditation and the U.S. Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians. His pioneering work contributed to bi-lingual liturgical planners published by Oregon Catholic Press, as well as to convention workshops hosted by the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.

In 2000, Father Rudy resumed studies, working toward the doctor of ministry degree he earned in 2003 from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois. He then returned to St. Mary's University, his alma mater, where he began teaching theology in 2003.

In 2009, Father Rudy moved into key administrative roles at St. Mary's University, becoming its second-ever Vice President for Mission, and the first to hold the title of Rector. Among his signature accomplishments, Father Rudy shepherded the renovation of the University's Assumption Chapel, and established an annual campus celebration honoring the founder of the Marianists, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade. Dr. Tom Mengler, president of St. Mary's University, characterized his contributions in this way: "I worked closely with Father Rudy during his final three years as Vice President and Rector. I came to know and admire a fun-loving man of warmth and humor with a passion for deepening St. Mary's Catholic Marianist mission."

For a time, Father Rudy was responsible for overseeing the Office of University Ministry and the Marianist Educational Associates (MEAs), and served as Director of the Study Abroad Program in Spain at the Universidad de Alcalá. When his contributions as an administrator concluded in 2015, Father Rudy continued serving as a faculty member at St. Mary's – well-known on campus, and well-loved.

Colleague and MEA Executive Director Jessica González Uhlig says, "Father Rudy was larger than life. As soon as he heard I was originally from Puerto Rico, we bonded over his love for the island, its people, the food, the beach, but more than anything the Marianist Brothers from Colegio San José. I had taught at Colegio and the Brothers were like my big brothers, so Rudy practically became one to me. I will never forget Rudy, and will carry him in my heart."

"From the moment I met Rudy, I knew from our conversations that he was totally in love with his Marianist vocation," says longtime friend Brother Jack Ventura. "Not only did Rudy have a wonderful ability to live out his Mexican-American culture within his Marianist vocation but he was also able to move among all different types of people being a witness of God's love for them."

"Life was a wonderful adventure for Rudy and he lived it to the full," recalls Father Ralph Siefert. "A wonderful generosity characterized so many of his interactions with

others. Rudy's personal spirituality and his love of teaching merged in his devotion to our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego and his desire to share their stories. He was dedicated to helping the church become more intentionally multicultural and genuinely inclusive. He was a blessing for many people!"

May he rest in peace.