



**Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie**  
*Via Latina 22, 00179 Roma*



**July 20, 2021**

### **Biography of Death Notice N. 18**

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **Gerald HAMMEL**, priest, of the Faustino Community in Lusaka, Zambia, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on July 10, 2021, in Lusaka at the age of 79 with 59 years of religious profession.

Father Gerry was a beloved pastor, missionary chaplain, spiritual director, campus minister, retreat master and cook. Beginning his life of service in the kitchen at several Marianist houses of formation, he would go on to feed the spirit of communities on three different continents – ever praying that Mary would help him “develop a gentle, loving care within me for my brothers, that I may care for them as she cared for our Lord, and as she cares for all of us in our mission.”

Gerald R. Hammel was born on May 3, 1942, in St. Louis, Missouri. He was one of three children in the family of Arthur and Bernadine (Gliedt) Hammel.

Baptized in 1942 at his home parish of St. Bernard in St. Louis, Gerry attended Annunciation Grade School in Webster Groves, Missouri. He first encountered the Marianists at Coyle High School in Kirkwood, Missouri, where he fondly recalled

Brother Al Kuntemeier encouraging him to consider joining the Society of Mary.

Gerry entered the novitiate at Galesville, Wisconsin, after graduating from high school in the summer of 1960. He professed first vows at Galesville in 1961 and perpetual vows on August 22, 1965, in St. Louis. During his scholasticate years, he studied at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas.

In 1964, Brother Gerry was asked to join the staff at Maryhurst in Kirkwood, Missouri – where he learned how to cook under the guidance of Brother Leo Slay. Brother Gerry continued in this ministry for the next 15 years, cooking for the Marianist communities at different houses of formation. In the early 1970s, he would also begin to discern a vocation to the priesthood – overcoming a natural shyness to ultimately embrace the Spirit's call to the priestly ministry.

In 1975, Brother Gerry entered the seminary at St. Basil's College in Toronto, Canada. He was ordained on June 10, 1978, at St. Peter Parish in Kirkwood. Following ordination, Father Gerry ministered retreat work at Galesville for a year before heading to India and Nepal for several years to help the Society of Mary launch a missionary presence there. He returned to St. Louis in 1982, serving first on the parish staff at Our Lady of the Pillar and later as campus minister and teacher at Chaminade Preparatory.

Father Gerry next joined the province's formation team in San Antonio, Texas, where he served for four years while also assisting at a local parish. In 1989, he was named pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in Helotes, Texas, and remained in that role for 17 years. Returning to St. Louis in 2006 for a sabbatical year, he became pastor at Our Lady of the Pillar.

In 2012, Father Gerry accepted the call to serve as chaplain at Matero Boys Secondary School in Lusaka, Zambia. In late 2016, he joined the Aspirancy House for the Eastern Africa Region – and quickly became a beloved member of the Faustino Community there.

Suffering from declining health and a profound hearing loss, Father Gerry still touched many hearts in his final 18 months. "What inspired me was that through it all, I never heard Gerry complain," says Brother Steve Grazulis. "Rather, he greeted everyone with an enthusiastic and friendly smile."

Recalling their time together at Our Lady of the Pillar Parish, Father Jim Tobin says,

“Father Gerry was a gift to the Society of Mary and the Church. He had a true pastoral sense of compassion, love and service, and reflected Our Blessed Mother’s warmth of hospitality. He loved people and was loved and respected in return. He had a wonderful sense of humor and joy that he shared with everyone. He was faithful to his Marianist vocation!”

Father Steven Wanyoike Mburu, Regional Superior of Eastern Africa, noted that one of Father Gerry’s favorite humorous sayings was, “If you can be good, make sure that you are not caught.” And it was an aspiration Father Gerry himself lived up to. “He did good deeds discreetly and never trumpeted them to anyone,” Father Steven says. “How grateful we are that he gave everything he had to our Region.”

Cherishing the memory of the last meal that Father Gerry prepared for the Faustino Community (on June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist), Brother Thomas Mwenenjawa wrote in tribute, “You were such a wonderful man, not one word can describe how saintly you were. Living with us, it was such a gift. You challenged me spiritually. You were my inspiration, my role model, my mentor, my confessor. You consoled me in hard times; your homilies were so powerful, touching and nourishing. We will always miss you.”

May he rest in peace.

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