



Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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November 9, 2023

Biography of Death Notice N. 19

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **Gerald Thomas Chinchar**, priest, of the Marianist Residence Community of San Antonio, Texas, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on October 28, 2023, in San Antonio, at the age of 80 with 61 years of religious profession.

Father Jerry was a beloved liturgist, campus minister, catechist, teacher, organist, and composer of liturgical music. Blessed with a knack for catching on to computer technologies, he became known in some circles as the “techno priest,” introducing university colleagues and students to early generations of internet connectedness. The “treasured work” of his life, though, was enhancing (and often presiding at) liturgical celebrations on campus and in community.

Gerald Thomas Chinchar was born on October 9, 1943, in Cleveland, Ohio. He

was one of five children (three sisters and one brother) in the family of Matthew and Anna (Vojtko) Chinchar. Baptized as an infant, he attended Holy Cross grade school in Euclid, Ohio, and he credited the prayer life of his parents and the example of the Ursuline Sisters at Holy Cross for planting the early seeds of his vocation. Jerry enrolled at St. Joseph High School in Cleveland, where he first met the Brothers. After graduating in 1961, he entered the novitiate at Marcy, New York, and professed first vows in 1962. He completed scholastic studies at the University of Dayton, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in French and theology in 1966. For the next six years, Brother Jerry taught French at Cathedral Latin High School in Cleveland. During that time, he professed final vows in 1967 at Dayton.

Encouraged by his brother Marianists, Brother Jerry began graduate studies in liturgy at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, earning a Master of Arts there in 1973. The following year, he served on the bishop's staff at the Diocese of Evansville, Indiana, supporting all of the prelate's liturgical activities. During the late 1970s, he pursued additional graduate studies in liturgy at the University of Notre Dame while also working as director of liturgy at a Cleveland-area parish. In 1978-79, he taught religion at Hackett High School in Kalamazoo, Michigan, before beginning seminary studies at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto.

Ordained on May 29, 1982, at Queen of Apostles Chapel in Dayton, Father Jerry honored his own father's Slovak heritage by receiving Holy Orders in both the Byzantine and Roman Catholic rites. He would go on to spend most of the years of his priestly ministry serving Marianist communities in Ohio and in campus ministry work at the University of Dayton.

A member of the Stonemill Road Marianist community for many years, Father Jerry developed and led the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) process and other catechetical programs for the members of the University of Dayton community. In addition, he called it a "joy and treasured work" to preside at countless weekday and Sunday liturgies through the decades while also providing other sacramental ministries to the university community. He served as campus ministry's "priest-on-call," a role in which he tended to emergency pastoral needs ranging from long-term illnesses to serious accidents and suicides.

Father Jerry earned a Doctor of Ministry in 1992 from United Theological Seminary in Dayton and published many articles focused on liturgy, liturgical music, and catechetical programs. With Gabe Huck, he co-authored *Liturgy With Style and Grace, Third Edition*, a manual released by Liturgy Training Publications in 1998. He served as a consultant for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) for more than 20 years. A particular delight of his ministry was working to enhance the liturgies at various Marianist gatherings. He often composed antiphonal music for these celebrations while serving as organist, cantor, and liturgy coordinator.

Software and computer skills became one of Father Jerry's favorite avocations. Self-taught in many software applications and platforms, he led and facilitated the computerization of UD's campus ministry office in the 1980s. A decade later, he began creating and supporting websites for UD campus ministry, for the worldwide Marianist family, and for the North American Academy of Liturgy, among other organizations. This computer-related work eventually earned him feature stories in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and the *Dayton Daily News*.

In recent years, a prolonged and debilitating struggle with Parkinson's disease meant Father Jerry had to leave his beloved Ohio and enter into assisted care at the Marianist Residence community in San Antonio. Even there, however, he continued to nurture the deep relationships he'd built with friends, family members, university colleagues, and other liturgists – both in his home state and around the world.

Father Jerry's family members remember him with great love and affection. His niece Annette Murray treasures how her Uncle Jerry "formed intentional, long-lasting connections." She recalls how her mother Anne, the eldest of the Chinchar siblings, "always introduced him as her 'baby brother'" – and how he had begged her to make his priestly vestments. "He wore them proudly," Annette says. "My mom, Anne, was his spirit, while their mother, Anna, was their rock." As an adult, Annette was pleased to count her uncle as a friend and confidant. "We talked on the phone often between family celebrations," she says. "I have eaten dinner at each community he lived in while at UD and relished this time with him. I know he is now at peace, and I am glad he is not suffering anymore. He will be sorely missed."

Renowned composer and liturgist Father Jan Michael Joncas first met Father

Jerry when both were graduate students at Notre Dame. “We formed a great bond in our summer studies then, both of us excited to share with our communities what we were learning about the post-Vatican II liturgical renewal and its pastoral implementation,” Father Mike says. “Jerry was especially creative in composing and leading music during his academic ministry and in his own Marianist communities. As he grew more frail, our conversations became less frequent – but I could always count on his goodwill and prayers for me. I pray that he has now joined the great choir of angels and saints as they sing God’s praise forever.”

Kathleen and Kevin Garnica count themselves among the many students whose lives were touched by Father Jerry’s RCIA ministry at UD. “He was instrumental in my family coming into the Church,” Kathleen says. “He had a genuine love for the Lord and expressed it best through liturgical music during Mass. He sang his heart out to the Lord, and we couldn’t help but join in. Over the years, we regularly hosted him for dinner, and Father Jerry always left us with either scripture text to reflect on, sacred music to listen to, or a funny YouTube video to watch. He left us far better than he found us.”

Former UD colleague Emily Strand admired Father Jerry’s many professional accomplishments as a liturgist but considered their personal connections an even greater treasure. “He was a dear friend to me and eventually to my little family of three, even becoming Godfather to our son Jude,” she says. “Jerry had a great sense of humor and was a big fan of the *Harry Potter* books. He once told a group of us fans that he wanted Harry’s Invisibility Cloak. We all thought that would be trouble because Jerry could be a bit of a trickster who liked to use his campus ministry master key to leave funny (or interesting or random) things on his colleagues’ desks.”

Marianist Father Ted Ley remembers being blessed by the opportunity to collaborate with Father Jerry on inter-province projects in liturgy and retreats before the Province of the United States was formed. “Jerry was one of the most genuinely pastoral priests I have ever known,” Father Ted says. “Friendship for him was absolute. What struck me about Jerry’s way of thinking was that innovation had no meaning to him unless it was restorative or a careful improvement. Above all, Jerry was just a great friend and confrère, always there for you, stellar company.”

Marianist Father Bertrand Buby remembers most fondly the abundant time he spent in community with Father Jerry. “He would use his French to invite you to share a drink,” Father Bert says. “He’d ask, ‘Care for *quelque chose*?’ by which he meant a glass of Scotch. And anyone could join in – he would never exclude a person who happened to be in the community room.”

Marianist Brother Michael O’Grady took courage from the attitude he often witnessed in Father Jerry. “In the midst of the significant limitations the disease put on him, he managed to have a good spirit,” Brother Mike says. “I enjoyed the wit he shared with me. I found him to be very playful.”

Writing on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of his first profession, Father Jerry said, “It is my hope that the efforts I have put into Marianist ministry across the years truly have been for the glory of the Most Holy Trinity, the honor of Mary and for the salvation of the world.”

May he rest in peace.