



Obituary Gerard Sullivan

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **Gerard A. (Jerry) Sullivan** of the Marianist Residence in San Antonio, Texas, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 3, 2024, in San Antonio at the age of 93 with 73 years of religious profession.

Brother Jerry was a beloved teacher, substance abuse counselor, pastoral associate, retreat leader, and prison chaplain, as well as a grateful friend of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). He thought of his life in the Society of Mary as “an incredible adventure,” once writing that “I get on my knees every night and thank Mary and God for the wonderful gift of my vocation.”

Gerard A. Sullivan was born on October 3, 1930, in St. Louis, Missouri. He was the eldest of three children in the family of Gerard C. and Loretta (Boyle) Sullivan. Baptized as an infant at All Saints Church, Jerry would later learn that, in that sacramental moment, the priest had dedicated him to the Blessed Virgin.

Growing up, Jerry attended several different parish grade schools as the family moved from one suburban community to another. He recalled

becoming an indifferent student early on, deciding (perhaps subconsciously) that school simply wasn't important. When the Sisters at Christ the King School tried to have him repeat fifth grade, his father transferred Jerry to public school. The switch didn't do much to improve Jerry's academic performance, so his father decided to send him and his brother to a Marianist high school, Chaminade College Preparatory, where he believed the brothers "would straighten us out."

Despite the fact that Jerry loved to read, he developed a pattern of failing one or two courses a year at Chaminade and then having to go to summer school for remedial work. This checkered performance in the classroom didn't go unnoticed by the brothers, so it took some convincing on the part of Brother Frank Klapp during Jerry's senior year that he be approved for novitiate after graduation.

Jerry entered the novitiate in August 1949 at Galesville, Wisconsin, and professed first vows there a year later. Brother Jerry then began scholastic studies at Maryhurst in Kirkwood, Missouri, before transferring to St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in social studies there in 1954. He professed perpetual vows at Galesville on July 14, 1956.

Even before earning an undergrad degree, Brother Jerry began teaching seventh- and eighth-graders at Marianist-sponsored schools in Texas. He then served on the faculty at McBride High School in St. Louis, Missouri, for two years. While making his perpetual vow retreat in the summer of 1956, Brother Jerry felt a strong call to take on "mission" work in Peru. That's

where he would spend most of the next 18 years teaching religion and English as a second language at schools in Lima, Callao, and Trujillo. During this period, he also took a year to complete work on a master's degree in business administration from St. Mary's University.

Upon returning to the United States in 1974, Brother Jerry taught at Assumption High School in East St. Louis, Illinois, for two years before shifting to retreat work at the Marianist Apostolic Center (now the Marianist Retreat and Conference Center, or MRCC) in suburban St. Louis. In 1980, he accepted an assignment to serve as a pastoral associate in Veracruz, Mexico. He continued in this ministry for three years but was doing work he didn't feel well prepared to do. Brother Jerry would later note that he also developed a drinking problem at this time—a condition that would shape the course of his ministry for many years to come.

Returning to the classroom in 1983, Brother Jerry taught at St. Thomas More High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, before entering an alcohol rehabilitation program in 1985. After two more years in the classroom, he enrolled in 1987 in a Minnesota-based chaplaincy training program with a focus on drug and alcohol rehabilitation. From there, he moved to California and served for several years as a prison chaplain, working for the Santa Clara County Department of Corrections. In the 1990s, Brother Jerry earned a certificate in drug/alcohol counseling from San José State University. He also worked in youth ministry—first at St. John's Boys Home in New York and then as part of the Youth Retreat Team at MRCC in the St. Louis area.

During his time in Missouri, Brother Jerry became active in Residents Encounter Christ, a ministry focused on offering retreats to incarcerated individuals. He noted that the 12-step spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) not only enhanced his own recovery but provided a whole new perspective on God and Mary that he was eager to share with others. In 2002, Brother Jerry joined the staff at the Marianist novitiate in Querétaro, Mexico, serving as a teacher and mentor. He returned to the United States in 2003 and took on a prison ministry position in Charlotte, North Carolina, before retiring from active ministry in 2007.

Marking the 70th anniversary of his first vows, Brother Jerry wrote in 2020, “I had no clue as an 18-year-old what the choice to be a Marianist would mean. It has been an incredible adventure, and I wouldn’t take any of it back—not even the pain of alcoholism. My whole Latin American experience changed my spirituality and personality. I learned Spanish and discovered a new sense of God and Mary from the Latin way of relating to God as a loving Savior who suffered. Every other experience—teaching, missions, prison ministry, illnesses, losses, all the remarkable folks in my life—they have all been learning opportunities that have made me who I am.”

Long-time friend Marie Gray says Brother Jerry had been her Anam Cara, or Irish soul-friend, for many years. She recalls “how grateful he was for Alcoholics Anonymous. He truly believed AA had saved his life and that it was the best spiritual exercise anywhere.” Many ministries were dear to his heart, she says, including youth retreats and young adult ministry in Peru. “But first was prison ministry, especially helping AA groups in prisons. He

had a real love for AA and continued to go to meetings until he could no longer walk.” Even physical diminishment did not dim the grateful attitude Brother Jerry displayed toward life during his final days at the Marianist Residence, she says. “When he was sitting in his wheelchair, unable to lift his arms because of his damaged and painful shoulders, having a difficult time breathing, sores all over his skin, no front bottom teeth, I would ask him how he was,” Marie says. “His response was telling: ‘I’m good, I have so much to be thankful for,’ he’d say. ‘They take such good care of me here.’ Jerry was just so reachable. He would talk to everyone, freely expressing his views. Although I rejoice that he is now in bliss, there is a hole in my heart.”

Marianist Father Quentin Hackenewerth reflects on the changes he’d seen in Brother Jerry through the decades. “When I first knew him, he was an alcoholic and not a very good example to imitate,” Father Quentin says. “Then he decided to give up alcohol and did so, but he also decided to grow in virtues.” In recent months, Father Quentin reunited with Brother Jerry at the Marianist Residence in San Antonio. “At the age of 92, he asked me to be his spiritual director. He was still serious about becoming more like Jesus for others. I’d always find Jerry in the chapel before lunch, praying the rosary in his wheelchair. As one of our staff members here once said, ‘Brother Jerry never gave up on anything good.’”

May he rest in peace.