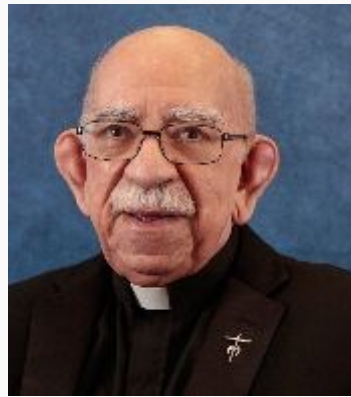




Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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December 2, 2025

Biography of Death Notice N. 23

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **José RAMIREZ**, priest, of the Maryland Avenue Community, St. Louis, (MO), USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on November 17, 2025, in San Antonio at the age of 88 with 69 years of religious profession.

Father José was a beloved teacher, high school and hospital chaplain, parish priest, spiritual director, and Worldwide Marriage Encounter retreat leader. Inspired by Mary's "yes" to become the mother of Jesus, and that of St. Joseph to become her spouse, he grew throughout his various ministries – and his life as a Marianist – to appreciate that "our God is a God of surprises."

José Ramirez was born on August 3, 1937, in Fort Worth, Texas. He was one of five children in the family of Andrés and Benita (Hernandez) Ramirez.

Baptized in 1937 at Holy Name Parish in Fort Worth, José attended the parish grade school before enrolling at Laneri High School in 1951. He first encountered the Marianists when Father Ralph Dyer preached the junior class retreat there in 1953. At one point during the retreat, José responded to Father Ralph's invitation to come and see him for more information about Marianist life. "And before I knew it, the Marianist recruiter was knocking on the door of my home," he would later write.

After graduating from Laneri, José entered the novitiate at Galesville, Wisconsin, in the summer of 1955. Traveling there by train from Fort Worth, he was invited to "overnight it" in the St. Louis area, where he remembered receiving a warm welcome from the Marianists living at Maryhurst in Kirkwood, Missouri. "For an 18-year-old Mexican boy who was still learning English, this was the continuation of a journey of faith for me in a 'strange new world,'" he said.

About a year later, in Galesville, Brother José professed first vows on September 8, 1956. He then headed south to begin scholastic studies at Maryhurst – a period that proved academically challenging. He remembered "barely passing" Latin, French, and educational psychology and "flunking out" in English, literature, and math, so he was expecting to be sent home. "But Someone up there liked me!" he said.

Approved to continue scholastic studies at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, Brother José earned a bachelor of arts in history in 1959. He spent the next six years in Texas classrooms, teaching first at St. Joseph School in Victoria, and then at Central Catholic in San Antonio. During this time, he also earned a master of arts in Latin and philosophy from Saint Louis University (St. Louis, Missouri). Called to the priesthood, Brother José entered the Marianist Seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1965. He was ordained there on March 22, 1969.

Following ordination, Father José served for 13 years as a teacher and chaplain at four different schools in Texas, Missouri, and Illinois. During this time, he also became active in the Worldwide Marriage Encounter movement. Experiencing his first Marriage Encounter weekend in 1974, he soon joined "presenter teams"

in the St. Louis area – helping to lead retreat weekends for married couples while also serving as a classroom teacher at local high schools.

In the early 1980s, he shifted full-time into leadership roles for the Marriage Encounter apostolate, work that proved spiritually fruitful for him: “Many married couples helped me to understand the blessings and challenges of their vocation,” he later wrote. “I count some of these married couples among my very best friends. Together with my Marianist Brothers, these ‘Encounter’ couples are very special, encouraging graces in my life.”

Father José entered a new phase of ministry in 1983, becoming a hospital chaplain at St. Anthony’s Medical Center in St. Louis. This work allowed him to experience “yet another dimension of life and ministering to persons with many and varying health needs,” he said. Then in 1988, he accepted a role as a traveling parochial vicar for the Diocese of Fort Worth. In this position, he was responsible for providing vacation, retreat, and sabbatical relief for the pastors of various parishes across the diocese.

Returning to the St. Louis area in 1991, Father José joined the staff at the Marianist Retreat and Conference Center in Eureka, Missouri. He served in the retreat ministry there for the next 25 years, before retiring to the Maryland Avenue Community (St. Louis) and then to the Marianist Residence Community in San Antonio.

Marianist Father Quentin Hackenewerth cherished Father José as a frequent dining companion at the Marianist Residence. “One day we talked about putting on too much weight, because the meals are so good,” Father Quentin smiles. “Father José asked his doctor what to do, who told him: ‘I have no pills for willpower.’ So José learned to use his willpower.”

Marianist Brother Joe Markel admired the artistic eyes through which Father José viewed his everyday surroundings. “José was a skilled photographer, capturing nature scenes and flowers on the Marycliff property,” Brother Joe recalls. “Many of his photos were turned into beautiful note cards.”

Ann Mueller had many opportunities to work alongside Father José in her role as Communications Specialist for the Marianist Province of the United States. “I knew Father José for over 30 years, and I will always remember his kindness and care for me,” she says. “When I was on the Board of the Marianist Retreat & Conference Center, we decided to hold our first trivia night, and Father José was

right there with us working to help the event be successful. He always had a smile on his face, offering genuine hospitality and a welcoming spirit to all he met. He embodied the Marianist mission, with arms open to whatever Mary and Jesus asked of him.”

Remembering their shared history, Marianist Father Jim Tobin says, “José and I have been friends ever since we first met in 1955 at Marynook. He was a loyal companion over the years. We made the journey together through formation, graduate studies, seminary, and community life. Our ministry paths took different routes, but it was always a joy to reconnect and share the memories and a lot of laughs through the years. His death came as a surprise, but as I come to accept it, I am grateful for his life, his friendship, and his fidelity to his Marianist vocation.”

Reflecting on the occasion of his 60th jubilee, Father José wrote a loving tribute to the life he had experienced as a religious: “One never knows where a ‘yes’ to God will take you. We know that God’s love does not come to us in a vacuum. It is incarnational, and God reaches us through others’ love and care for us. So, I am thankful for those persons who have, in many loving, challenging ways, encouraged and supported my vocation as a Marianist. They have believed in me and helped me keep growing and responding to my vocation as a priest in the Marianist family.”

May he rest in peace.
