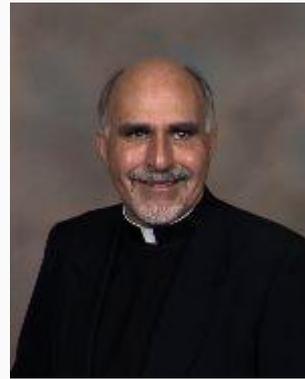




Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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August 30, 2021

Biography of Death Notice N. 20

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Ralph Anthony SIEFERT**, priest, of the Chaminade Community of St. Louis, Missouri, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 20, 2021, in St. Louis, at the age of 76 with 56 years of religious profession.

Father Ralph was a pillar of the school community at Chaminade College Preparatory in St. Louis, where he served as president for 33 years. He is credited with putting the school on firm financial footing and with building its reputation for excellence in academics. He will be remembered as a caring shepherd, a quick wit, a voracious reader and a gourmet cook.

Ralph Siefert was born on April 10, 1945, in Kansas City, Missouri, the only child of Albert and Vera (Grunz) Siefert. His parents divorced when he was quite young, and he moved with his mother across the state to St. Louis, where he attended public grade schools. His neighborhood and friends were deeply Catholic, and young Ralph chose to be baptized into the Church as an eighth-grader. He attended St. Mary's High School, where he was drawn to the example of his Marianist teachers.

Ralph entered the novitiate in Galesville, Wisconsin, in 1963, and professed first vows there a year later, on August 22, 1964. He earned a bachelor's degree in English at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, in 1968. He then returned to St. Louis, where he taught for a year at Chaminade College Preparatory. He professed perpetual vows on August 18, 1968, in St. Louis.

The next stop in Brother Ralph's early ministry was Pueblo, Colorado, where he taught for a year at Roncalli High School. In the autumn of 1969, he entered the Marianist North American Seminary in St. Louis. He earned a master's degree in moral and pastoral theology from Saint Louis University in 1973 and was ordained to the priesthood on May 12, 1973, in St. Louis. Through summer studies, he had also earned a master's degree in English from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, in 1971.

In the autumn of 1973, Father Ralph returned to his high school alma mater, St. Mary's, where he ministered as a teacher and chaplain for three years. Following that, Father Ralph was given time to pursue further studies. In 1979, he earned a doctoral degree in pastoral counseling from Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, Massachusetts.

Father Ralph was then called to serve at the North American Marianist Seminary, now in Toronto, Ontario. He was assistant rector for a year, and rector for the following two years (1980-1982). In late 1982, he returned to St. Louis to serve as the Provincial Assistant for Religious Life, a position he held until 1987.

With his intellect and leadership skills well recognized, Father Ralph made an impression on many of his brothers across the St. Louis Province. Brother Ed Violett said his conversations with Father Ralph were "good for the soul." "His ability to bluntly challenge and yet encourage was deeply rooted in his sharp intellect, self-awareness, and understanding of our transcendent call as persons and as Marianists," said Brother Ed.

According to Brother Jack Ventura, Father Ralph had a probing mind and was a "ferocious" reader, not only on educational topics, but also on theology and religious life. "He and I spent many hours visioning the future of the Society of Mary and how the Marianist Family might be more deliberate in witnessing our gift to the Church," said Brother Jack.

With an impressive career already to his credit, Father Ralph began in 1987 the role that would define the rest of his life. He was named president of Chaminade College Preparatory in St. Louis, an all-boys middle and high school founded in 1910.

Father Ralph quickly became a beloved figure at Chaminade. His approachable demeanor – as well as his open office door and generous candy bowl – endeared him to students. He was a spirited presence at school events, and greatly enjoyed meeting parents and connecting with alumni. Many called him the embodiment of the school's Latin motto, *Esto Vir*, which translates to “be a man.” At Chaminade, the meaning is deeper: be a *good* man, a faithful man, a respectful man, a kind man, a courageous man.

For 33 years at Chaminade, Father Ralph pursued what he once described as his passion: “To build the reign of God through Catholic, Marianist education.” He is credited with putting the school on firm financial footing and for helping secure a transformative donation of \$28 million to build the Skip Viragh Center for the Arts on campus. The center, opened in 2011, includes a 1,000-seat theater, art classrooms, music rehearsal rooms and an art gallery.

Among the artwork displayed at the center are photographs taken by Father Ralph. He took thousands of photos of school events and activities every year during his tenure. “I discovered that photographing students’ activities was a great way to connect with them,” Father Ralph once said in an interview. “It blossomed into an interest that served what I was trying to do in my ministry,” he said.

“My enduring image of Father Ralph is seeing him at a sporting event or concert, lugging around his camera with a lens the size of a bazooka, taking almost child-like joy in seeing his students display their talents,” wrote an alumnus on Chaminade’s Facebook page.

Under Father Ralph’s leadership, Chaminade was named a National Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2016. In 2017, Father Ralph received the “Lead. Learn. Proclaim. Award” from the National Catholic Educational Association.

He may be best remembered as a gentle pastor. His homilies incorporated ideas from current movies and culture to connect with teenage boys. He ministered as the spiritual director of every senior Kairos retreat over the years, demonstrating his joyful style of faith.

“He was also a great advocate for students who needed a second chance because he believed in their potential,” said Matt Daily, Chaminade’s director of Campus Ministry. Father Ralph did everything he could to keep struggling students on track and in the embrace of the school community, according to Matt. “He also treasured the opportunity to celebrate weddings and baptisms for alumni. It was his way of letting them know they would always have a place in the Chaminade Family and in his heart,” Matt said.

Father Ralph died the day after the start of the school year. The outpouring of love and sorrow on Chaminade’s social media was swift and voluminous. “He genuinely cared about every single student at Chaminade.” “We are blessed that our son had his example of leadership and faith.” “Father Ralph taught all us boys how to be gentlemen!” “He showed us the grace of God.” These are just a few of the hundreds of comments on Chaminade’s Facebook page.

“We are who we are as a school because of Fr. Ralph,” said Dr. Todd Guidry, Chaminade’s Executive Vice President. “Our strong academic program, extracurricular and faith-development programs, our financial stability, our world-class campus, our deep embrace of the Marianist Charism, and the loyalty of our faculty, staff, alumni and parents are all a direct result of Fr. Ralph’s leadership.”

May he rest in peace.