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Death Notice No. 34 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of the United States of America, recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **MICHAEL LISBETH**, priest of the Mercy Siena Gardens Marianist Community, Dayton, Ohio, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on December 25, 2012 in Dayton, Ohio, USA, at the age of 64 with 43 years of religious profession.

Fr. Mike Lisbeth was a teacher, counselor, social worker and formation director, described as a “. . . gentle man with a spiritual strength . . . who exuded holiness.”

Michael Lawrence Lisbeth was born to Lawrence and Mary (Hagen) Lisbeth on February 20, 1948, in Waukegan, Illinois. He had one older sister and two younger brothers. After graduating from Archbishop Alter High School in Kettering, Ohio, Mike said he began to consider religious life, and felt called to work with young people. “Yes, I am a ‘postcard brother,’” he wrote on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his ordination. He credits Brothers Don Neff and Tom Trager as his recruiters.

He professed first vows on August 15, 1969, at Chaminade Prep, Marcy, New York, the last vow group at Marcy. Bro. Mike’s perpetual vows were professed August 18, 1974, at Mount Saint John in Dayton. In a letter to Fr. Bill Behringer in 1974 seeking perpetual vows, Bro. Mike wrote: “Following high school, I became aware of the difference between *my* plans and *God’s* plans for my life. I began to open myself to God’s will for me, and experienced a call to serve God’s people through religious life.”

Fr. Mike began his ministry with the Marianists in 1973 as a religion teacher at St. Joseph High School in Cleveland. He earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Cleveland State University in 1975. After four years of teaching, he entered the seminary in the late 1970s at the University of St. Michael’s College in Toronto, Canada, and was ordained June 14, 1980, in Dayton at Queen of Apostles Chapel, Mount Saint John. His ordaining prelate was the Most Rev. Daniel Pilarczyk, archbishop emeritus of Cincinnati.

Throughout his ministry, Fr. Mike earned three master’s degrees: a master’s of divinity (M.Div.) from the University of St. Michael’s in 1980, and a year later, a master’s at the Institute for Formative Spirituality from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. More than 15 years later, in 1999, he received a master’s degree in social work from the University of Cincinnati, earning his certification as a licensed social worker (LSW) later that year.

His accomplishments in education are noteworthy due to a childhood disability that left him with only 10 percent of his vision, making him legally blind.

In a 1967 letter to Brother Don Neff from Fr. Lawrence Breslin of Archbishop Alter High School, Fr. Mike's alma mater, Fr. Breslin wrote: "Mike's ability to get along despite the weakness of his eyes is remarkable. While in high school he refused special materials designed for those with poor eyesight; he felt he had to compete in a world designed for normal eyesight, so he wanted no crutches. His handicap did not prove to be an academic or social handicap."

For most of the 1980s, Fr. Mike served at Chaminade Julianne Catholic High School in Dayton, Ohio, as a religion teacher and pastoral minister. During this time he also was a member of the Marianist Formation Team for the former Province of Cincinnati, serving as director of the second year novitiate and post novitiate formation. In the late 1980s until 1993, Fr. Mike was assistant director of novices at the Marianist novitiate, as well as specialist for spiritual development at Bergamo Renewal Center, both at Mount Saint John in Dayton.

In 1993 Fr. Mike returned to Toronto for a year as rector of the Marianist seminary. Following that he began studies for his master's in social work in Cincinnati and served there as a therapist, counselor, case manager and family development worker.

The ministries he served included the AMEND program, which addresses domestic violence, Joseph House, a residential treatment facility for homeless and mentally ill veterans, and Santa Maria Community Services, where Fr. Mike was a family development worker and coordinator of the Fatherhood Initiative. He lived in the "Over-the-Rhine" neighborhood in Cincinnati with other brothers as proponents of social justice. In addition to other works of peace and justice, the community sponsored "urban plunge" weekends for high school students.

"As a social worker, Mike cared for the underdog and those individuals who sought a conversion of heart," said Bro. David Betz. "He provided opportunities for people to start anew in their lives."

From 2004 to 2007, Fr. Mike lived in Cleveland, serving part time as director of aspirancy for the Province and part time as chaplain for Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School. In mid-2007, he began his ministry as director of novices for the Province at the novitiate in Dayton, which he completed in 2011.

Bill Raddell of the Religion Department at VASJ in Cleveland knew Fr. Mike since he was in college. "Mike was a caring individual, a person with a wry sense of humor, a conscientious priest and homilist, and someone who helped me grow in my own exercise of the Marianist charism," Bill said. "His death is a true loss for the Family of Mary."

Fr. Mike's health declined dramatically in the last year, and he moved to Mercy Siena Gardens in Dayton, a Marianist assisted living community. "I visited Mike at Mercy Siena many times over the past year," said longtime friend Bro. Jack Somerville. "Through it all he maintained a very positive and faith-filled attitude."

In a Christmas letter Fr. Mike sent out shortly before his death, he wrote, "This has been the year that my physical body 'rebelled against me.' In the wintry gloom of this shadowy darkness, there is also the whisper of mystery and the possibility of new life where we thought none was possible. In this holy season, may you grieve well when called to, and rejoice with exuberant joy in all the new life that will surprise you."

May he rest in peace.