

Jerry Wickenhauser

Alton | Sunday, February 4 2024

Father Jerry (Gerald) Wickenhauser, a Maryknoll Missionary Priest, was called home to his Lord and Savior with his family by his side on Sunday, February 4, 2024 at the age of 89 at OSF St. Anthony's Healthcare Center. He was born in Alton on November 16, 1934. Jerry was the son of Joseph Wickenhauser Sr. and Margaret (Dixon) Wickenhauser. He was raised on the family truck farm at the end of Aberdeen St. with 5 brothers, Joe Jr., Rich, Ed, Gene, and Jim. There was always plenty of chores to be done, and he said he never worked harder in his life than when he worked on the farm. He graduated from Marquette Catholic High School in 1952. After 2 years at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin he decided to study for the Catholic priesthood. Fr. Jerry began training for the priesthood with the Catholic Foreign Missionary Society of America (Maryknoll Fathers), based in Ossining, NY. Jerry was ordained to the missionary priesthood on June 9, 1962 at Maryknoll, NY, and said his first Mass at St. Ambrose Church in Godfrey. He later earned a master's degree from St. Louis University and furthered his studies in Christian Spirituality at the Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. He was immediately assigned to the Philippine Island of Mindano. There he worked as pastor in five different parishes during fifteen years, living among communities of fishermen and small farmers and learning to speak the Filipino Cebuano dialect. His fun-loving parishioners called him "Padre Wicky".



In 1986 Jerry was appointed Director of the Maryknoll Regional Office in Houston, Texas. His work covered the four states of Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. He fell in love with Texas. In 1993 he was recipient of the "Houston Peace Prize" for his promotion of justice and peace program in that city. Next, he was sent to the island of Borneo in Indonesia, where he studied Bahasa, the language of Indonesia, and began traveling the tropical rainforests to serve the Dayak Indigenous people who lived along the rivers in small villages. During his missionary work, loggers began

cutting down the forest as fast as they could. Unfortunately, the Dayaks were losing their homeland while the Indonesian military generals were profiting by exporting logs to Japan. Jerry sold them medicines at cost to treat malaria, leprosy and skin diseases. He shared his Christian faith by visiting the villages with sacraments of his church and helping the sick. His last assignment was joining the Maryknoll Mission Community in Brazil consisting of a group of American nuns, priests, and Catholic lay families working together as a missionary team. There he learned Portuguese and assisted two young Brazilian pastors in parish work on the outskirts of the megacity of San Paulo, population in excess of eleven million people. He found Brazilians much like Americans, open and friendly. Fr. Jerry got along well with Filipinos, Indonesian Dayaks, and Brazilians. They appreciated his sense of humor. And especially from the poor people of these countries, Jerry came to admire their strong faith in God and their daily struggle to survive. By the time Father Jerry had studied in Rome, and served in three foreign countries, he spoke 5 languages.

Fr. Jerry retired from overseas missionary work in 2004, at the age of 70 and returned to Godfrey to be with his family. He helped out in parishes in the area, wrote religious columns in The Telegraph and spent time with his many relatives and high school friends. Father Wickenhauser was grateful for his family and friends who continued to surround him with the love and support he needed to live a healthy and happy retirement. He reflected, "No priest can do this job...without plenty of love and understanding from friends, and a lot of care, forgiveness and encouragement from the heavenly Father. I am indeed blessed."

Father Wickenhauser resided at the Methodist Village (now Asbury Village) in Godfrey saying Saturday afternoon Mass in their chapel for the residents, visiting them while they were in the hospital and attending their funerals. He developed many friendships there over the years. Father Jerry, being ecumenical, often said, "Living at the Village made me 100% Catholic and 50% Methodist".

Fr. Jerry is survived by his brothers, Rich Wickenhauser of Godfrey, Jim (Linda) Wickenhauser of Godfrey as well as many cousins, nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, his brothers, Joe Jr., Ed, and Gene.

Visitation will be at St. Ambrose Church in Godfrey on Thursday, February 8, 2024 from 4:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 10, 2024 at St. Ambrose Catholic Church in Godfrey. Fr. Steve Janoski will officiate along with Fr. Brian Barrons from the Maryknoll Fathers.

Burial will follow at St. Patrick's Cemetery in Godfrey.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Maryknoll fathers, P.O. Box 302,
Maryknoll, NY 10545-0302

Gent Funeral Home is in charge of assisting with the arrangements. Online guestbook
and information may be found at www.gentfuneralhome.com.