

Father Mifsud: long gone from St. Louis, but never forgotten

## Father James Mifsud left Saint Louis 50 years ago but was never forgotten

Hawaii Catholic Herald



Marianist Father James Mifsud spent only five years at Saint Louis School and that was 50 years ago. But he left such a huge impression — as he did everywhere he served — that one Hawaii Catholic Herald reader wrote to say how disappointed he was the paper did not report his death on Sept. 29 in California.

It was said that 2,000 people attended his funeral at Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose, Calif. Among them were members of the Saint Louis Class of 1961, the year then-Brother Mifsud left the Kaimuki school for studies that led to his ordination.

Saint Louis was Father Mifsud's first assignment as a Marianist. He was a teacher and guidance counselor among other things. His former student Russell Gouveia called him a "life mentor."

He also coached basketball. His motto was, "We lead, others follow!"

When the beloved priest lay dying from advanced Parkinson's disease, another former Saint Louis student, Marianist Brother James Dods, in an e-mail request for prayers to the Saint Louis Ohana, called his former teacher and coach "a Maltese bundle of energy and enthusiasm for things 'Saint Louis!'"

Father Mifsud was born in San Francisco on Feb. 6, 1935. He encountered the Marianists in elementary and high school and joined them as a postulate in 1950. He took his first vows in 1953, and three years later graduated from St. Mary's College of California in Moraga. In 1956, following his graduation, he went to Saint Louis School.

He left Honolulu in 1961 for the Marianists' Regina Mundi Seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland. He was ordained in Switzerland on April 3, 1965.

Father Mifsud returned to the U.S. to work as a chaplain for three years at Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose. In 1968, he embarked on what he later called "13 years of challenge and joy," an assignment in Seoul, Korea.

In Korea, he raised funds to build a Marianist residence and helped put up a high school in Mokpo and a formation center in Seoul. He also taught night classes for disadvantaged students, formed Marianist lay communities and was eventually appointed district superior.

The priest returned to California and eventually started working as a parish priest. A popular homilist at Queen of Apostles parish in San Jose, some of his sermons may now be viewed on YouTube.

While at Queen of Apostles, he started the Ascent Program which helped former inmates and others find jobs. According to a story in the *San Jose Mercury News*, Father Mifsud helped 7,000 people find employment.

Marianist Father Jack Russi described his brother priest as "extremely prayerful, positive and compassionate" as well as "dynamic and competitive."

Father Mifsud was a diehard sports fan who had professional coaches as friends and was welcome in the 49ers' locker room. But he also spent hours in prison visiting inmates.

A man known for his motivational slogans, his most celebrated is "Never Give Up!" From signs to sermons to baseball caps, it was everywhere Father Mifsud was, including outside his Queen of Apostles Church, where the Father Jim Mifsud Community Center was recently dedicated.

He once explained those three words in a homily:

"Never give up on yourself. Never give up means giving God a break. Don't give up on God. If you do, he will never give up on you. Because in heaven, where he lives, 'Never give up' is plastered all over the place. People in heaven never give up on us down here."

Especially now that Father Mifsud is up there with them.

Father James Mifsud was 75 when he died. He was a professed Marianist religious for 57 years.