

J Richard LaPietra



Received the Breath of Life
New York City — 20 July 1932

Called to Accept the Marist Brotherhood
Tyngsboro, MA 26 July 1951

Married Barbara Weldele
Marist College Chapel
7 August 1976

Was Commended to God
10 February 2010
Vassar Brothers Hospital

Mass of Christian Burial
Marist College Chapel
16 February 2010 at 10:00 am

Burial
Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery
6 February 2010

Memo from President Dennis Murray

It is with the deepest regret that I inform you of the passing of one of the true giants in the history of Marist College. Dr. J. Richard LaPietra, professor emeritus and heritage professor, died on Wednesday at the age of 77 after a long illness, his beloved wife, Barbara, at his side.

Richard was a man of deep faith and strong intellect. He lived his faith daily and it infused every aspect of his life. He had a six-decade-long relationship with Marist College and impacted it in virtually every way. As a student, he literally helped build the Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Chapel. As a professor, he was a master teacher who served as an inspirational mentor and advisor to thousands of students of all ages. As academic dean, he provided leadership for our faculty and set a high standard for all to meet. But Richard was happiest when he was at the blackboard, chalk in hand, expanding and enlightening minds. To inaugurate a new Award for Teaching Excellence in 1990, the Marist Board of Trustees selected Richard as the honor's first recipient.

He transcended his role as professor and administrator to play an important role in the lives of his students. He and the late Andrew Molloy served as resident directors in the old dorms that were located in Donnelly Hall. Starting in the 1960s, he had a special relationship with adult students who first attended Marist in the evening division. Many of these men, and later, women, were indebted to Richard for helping them get their degrees while balancing their family, work, and civic responsibilities with the academic rigor for which Richard was known.

Richard considered himself a life-long learner. As he reflected on his distinguished teaching career, he said, "If you've been intellectually alive all your life and you've been busy doing useful things that absorbed your interest, those habits and that orientation do not change." That philosophy became manifest when he spent a sabbatical year in the mid-70s working at IBM to develop his understanding of the impact and value of computing to academics.

Although he retired in 2000, Richard continued to teach courses on a limited basis for two additional years. When their careers in the classroom ended, Richard and his colleague Gus Nolan founded the Retired Faculty Association, which has been socially and intellectually active for many years. Richard was named professor emeritus by the Marist Board of Trustees in 2002, and was named a Marist Heritage Professor in 2003 in recognition of his extraordinary tenure and leadership.

Richard truly enjoyed music and made it a part of the Marist culture. As a student, he was schooled in Gregorian chant and singing in harmony. He was instrumental in founding the College's music program and wrote the Marist Song. His voice was strong as a cantor at Mass, and Richard said no faculty party in the 60s was complete without a session around the piano singing familiar tunes.

Richard was also a great ambassador for Marist College in the community. He served on the board of Rehabilitation Programs of Dutchess County, including a term as president. He also served as a board member of New Hope Manor, Inc., including terms as board secretary and vice president. He was a member of the American Chemical Society and the Association of College Science Teachers. He also served as a consultant to the IBM Corporation's Technical Institutes. He traveled extensively through Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Middle East.

Joseph Richard LaPietra was born to Richard and Columbia Sannino LaPietra in New York City on July 20, 1932 and raised in The Bronx. He graduated from Mount St. Michael Academy in 1949 and joined the Marist Brothers. In 1954, he became the second summa cum laude graduate of what was then called Marian College, where he received a bachelor's degree in Spanish. He taught for several years at St. Helena High School in The Bronx while he took college-level courses in chemistry at Fordham University before earning a Ph.D. in chemistry, summa cum laude, in 1960 from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Upon graduation, he taught at The Catholic University for a year and for a semester at the Marist School in Kobe, Japan. He returned to Marist College in 1961, where he spent the remainder of his teaching career as professor of chemistry and chair of the Chemistry Department.

Through mutual friends, Richard met Barbara Weldele of Great Falls, Montana. They were married at the Marist College Chapel on August 7, 1976. They were devoted to each other and had a wonderful life together. In recent years, and as Richard became more infirm, he had no better caregiver than Barbara. Her strength, devotion, faith, wisdom, and courage were evident every moment they were together. Their bond was a model of love and fidelity worthy of emulation by all who knew them. In addition to Barbara, Richard is survived by his sister, Sister Cecilia LaPietra, O.P. of Sparkill; and a brother, Frank LaPietra, his wife, Donna, of Lee's Summit, Missouri, and their children, Richard, Joanne, and Amy, as well as several grandnieces and grandnephews. He will be fondly remembered by his many admirers, including fellow teachers, former students, and acquaintances who were constantly impressed with the humble manner of such an intelligent person and by his extraordinary concern for others. He will be tremendously missed.

Visitation will be held on Monday, February 15, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Timothy P. Doyle Funeral Home, 371 Hooker Avenue, Poughkeepsie. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated on Tuesday, February 16, at 10 a.m. at the Marist Chapel. Burial will follow at the Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Marist Brothers, c/o Brother Hugh Turley, FMS, CFRE, 4200 West 115th Street, Chicago, IL 60655-4306, or to the Myositis Association, 1737 King Street, Suite 600, Alexandria, VA 22314. Messages of condolence may be sent to Barbara LaPietra 36 Yates Boulevard Poughkeepsie, NY 12601.

Please remember Richard, Barbara, and their family and friends in your thoughts and prayers.

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