

(October 25, 1911 - February 14, 2000)

Brother Emile Michael (Mickey) Bernard fms passed away on February 14 at Baptist Hospital, Miami, Florida. Brother "Mickey", 88, had been convalescing from several heart attacks and related illnesses for many years. Brother was born Gerard Alderic Bernard, at St. Gervais, Quebec, Canada, in 1911. He entered Marist Brothers in Tyngsboro MA in 1925. In his many years of school ministry, administration, teaching or plant director, Mickey worked at Central Catholic HS in Lawrence, in Haverhill MA, in Haverstraw NY, and at Mount St. Michael, Bronx NY. During his more recent years, he was semi-retired at Esopus and then Champagnat Hall, Bronx, and the SW 136th St Community, Miami, FL. His Director, Brother Charles Filiatrault was with him at the time of death.

Brother Patrick McNamara offered a homily reflection at the Mass of Resurrection at St. Richard Church, Miami, on February 17.

Many local brothers and their friends attended the funeral. He was buried in the Spring in Esopus.

In his own words:

I was the 13th child of a family of 15 children, born in St. Gervais, Quebec, October 25, 1911. My father owned and operated a small flour mill in the outskirts of the village. The revenues from the mill and our farm were barely sufficient to feed and clothe the family. Consequently, my mother gladly and gratefully accepted used clothing and furniture from friends and neighbors. On Sundays we took turns to go to church. We looked forward to that buggy ride. Thanks to the cooperation of everyone we managed to pull through. When World War I broke out, one of my oldest brothers was drafted, so in 1920, my father sold everything and we bade farewell to our native land and wound up in Southbridge, U.S. I was 9. Most of my sisters were old enough to work and did find employment, whereas most of the boys were still of school age, and I attended St. Aloysius School, managed by the Sacred Heart Brothers.

Not knowing a word in English, and being small in stature (some called me Pee Wee) the Principal sent me to the 1st grade. The next year, I did both the 2nd and 3rd grades. And, then I skipped the 4th grade to the 5th. But, then, we moved to Nashua, NH, where a new Sacred Heart Brother mistakenly assigned me to the 3rd grade (there was no room in the upper classes, and my mother insisted that we would not go to public school.) I said to myself I have to make a momentous decision. Should I return and join the 3rd graders, mention nothing of this at home, have a ball the whole year or make a fuss and refuse to go to school? I chose the former. Naturally, I came out first at every marking period, and at the end of the year, I skipped 4th grade again, and by the end of the 5th grade, I was 14.

At that time, my mother had three teenage boys on her hands, and according to her, one or two of us were becoming a bit unruly. She went to the parish priest for advice. He told her to look into a new private school which had just opened in Tyngsboro, MA. My mother took me there. I found out that it was the Marist Brother Juniorate.

The following week, Brother Frederick Charles and Brother Aloysius came to the house and inquired whether I would be interested in becoming a Marist Brother. At 14, sports interested me much more than books. So I asked the brothers, "Do the boys play baseball? Do they skate and play hockey, and should I bring my golf sticks?" He said, "Yes." I decided I would give it a try.

I always had to struggle to make the grades, and if it hadn't been for sports, I doubt whether I would have stayed. Frankly, teaching never appealed to me, but the Brothers' life did. The example of many good and saintly men really inspired and encouraged me. I felt and was told that I could be useful and an asset to the Congregation, if not in the classroom, then in so many other jobs.

So, in 1929, I received the name of Brother Emile Michael. After completing Novitiate, Normal Training in Poughkeepsie, and my B.S. in Ed. from Fordham, I was assigned to teach at St. Anne's in Lawrence. Then, Mount St. Michael; then back to Central Catholic in Lawrence, from '41-to-'48. Then back to St. Anne's for a short term as Principal. Then, to St. Peter's in Haverstraw until 1956. Since I never cared too much about teaching, I gladly accepted the assignment of Maintenance and Procurator at the Mount for the next 18 years. I went back to CCHS to teach for 3 years Mechanical Drawing in 1974. And, then, in 1977 til the present, I've been in semi-retirement.

One story that must be remembered:

In February, 1943, while working at CCHS, Brother Tim Linus told me that he was recruiting a hockey team for Central. One Saturday, Brother Tim jubilantly mentioned that he had booked a practice game against Governor Dummer Academy, the private school Championship team. But, Tim also said, three of his best players were working that day to raise money for their tuition. "I'll be glad to play on your team", I told him as a joke. Well, later that day, in my room I found a jersey, shorts, stockings, hockey gloves and a note ... "Be ready to leave at 1 pm"

I shaved (being 33 years old) grabbed a bite and soon was ready. Brother Tim told the boys, "Call him (me) Mickey! Not "Brother" on the ice!" And, once the game began, two defense players charged me and sent me flying. I saw stars but resolved not to get trapped again. Soon, I scored. A student news reporter from Governor Dummer asked Brother Tim, "Who is that kid?" After several times, Brother Tim yelled back "Finn, Mickey Finn!" CCHS won that game 3-1. Mickey Finn scored twice!

Several persons have asked me whether or not I would choose this life over again. Surely, I would.

First, I've had the unique opportunity of meeting and living with many saintly and wonderful people.

Secondly, through the years, I've had the good fortune of coming into contact with many fine, loyal, and dedicated parents and students.

Thirdly, through the years, I feel that I did contribute to God's glory and been an asset to my congregation.

Finally, as far as my spiritual needs are concerned, I'm happy with the following quote: "Working for the Lord pays very little, but the Retirement Benefit are OUT OF THIS WORLD."

So, good-bye and thank you, Brother "Mickey Finn"! You have been an amazing gift to the Province. You are a wonderful example of perseverance and love for the Congregation. You have made us so proud to call you "Brother"! May the Lord continue to keep you an essential part of our Province family here on earth and in Heaven! May Heaven never have any time out periods, and we ask you, please score a few more goals for your Marist team still here.