

## Doing Big and Small Things with Great Love: The Living Legacy of Almost Centenarian, Fr. Richard A. Laurick, C.S.C.

It is a rainy gray day in Wisconsin, and I am enjoying the comfort of a warm, dry space with windows looking onto the campus surrounding Marquette University Law School from which I graduated many years ago. This is after having the privilege of earning an undergraduate degree from our dear University of Notre Dame. I am where I am today after life has brought me back to my home state to be closer to my senior parents who are needing extra assistance. This journey back in time has introduced many new experiences and throwback moments as I recall the young person I was back then, just starting adulthood and learning how to use the gifts God has given me and the skills afforded me by education at two wonderful Catholic Institutions. But this story isn't about me, it is about a dear person in my life who has so beautifully exemplified the call to serve the Lord in so many big and small and amazingly beautiful ways. That person is my uncle, Rev. Richard A. Laurick, C.S.C. who humbly walks the walk that Christ calls of us even as he is now approaching age 100.

I have been yearning for ways to properly honor this beloved family member, his pending milestone birthday, and his 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee as a priest in the Congregation of Holy Cross (Congregatio a Sancta Cruce). As such, I am memorializing his impact on others' lives. Interestingly, I am currently participating in an Archdiocese of Milwaukee program called Emmaus 90 which is using scriptural study and faith sharing to cultivate Eucharistic Missionaries. Emmaus 90 is part of the three-year Eucharistic Revival in the U.S. Catholic Church aimed to draw Catholics into a deeper experience of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. While I learn and grow through the process, I think a lot about one of its precepts which is to do small things with great love. If there were a mission statement/core purpose that I could ascribe to Fr. Dick Laurick, it is that; especially as he lives his life of purpose at the age of 99.

On one of our recent phone calls, we were discussing he and his baby sister (my mother) and he said that he wondered which of the two would go to the Lord first. Just those words demonstrated to me that my Uncle Dick not only knows what the plan is, but he receives it as a matter of fact or rather a matter of faith. The call to serve the Lord for 70 years is remarkable in and of itself and he is grateful for that. Life as he lives now is just accepting what caregivers may require of him no matter if it be his preference and joyfully engaging with others. He loves sharing cherished memories and wanting to know more about the person with whom he is visiting and to pray for them. Fr. Dick rarely leaves a conversation without ending in prayer or giving a much appreciated and heartfelt blessing.

For all his physical infirmities, Fr. Laurick's mind is still remarkably sharp. He loves knowing what is going on in the world and has a real passion for politics, never shying away from sharing his strong belief in the importance of the government's duty to enable social justice. Fr. Dick is a bit of a lone wolf amongst his brethren who even with strong faith and heart are less vocal in their political views than he. One of my favorite memories is when Fr. Dick injured his ankle twisting too quickly as he went to run down the hall for Sunday mass not wanting to miss the last seconds of a Sunday morning political talk show. God even knew he was torn between his passion for politics and love of God. Ironically that would be the start of losing his ability to walk, going from cane to rollator to walker and now a wheelchair. While he has expressed some displeasure with losing his independence, Fr. Laurick has always said that he understood it is his job to receive that which God asks. What a wonderful example of aging with true grace.

He has modeled and embodied so many attributes of Christ, I am wont to remember them all. Humble yet passionate (driven by the Holy Spirit) would probably be chief among them. I have long heard him say how proud he is of his fellow Holy Cross priests and brothers who have done such remarkable things in the Notre Dame community and throughout the world. My uncle's service was of a different kind. He developed the Catechetical Teachings for Lay People in the Archdiocese of Chicago post Vatican II. That work was instrumental in the foundation of faith formation for the laity as the church had to learn its faith anew. As it pivoted to worshiping in its own vernacular and engaging in a completely new dialogue with *In Persona Christi*, Fr. Laurick was on the cutting edge teaching the Catholic Church of the 60s what ways we the body of Christ could now grow in faith and community. "The Cutting Edge" was the title of the seminal newsletter he and the devoted members of the Office of Religious Education created and sent out to the Archdiocese to communicate all the changes being implemented. Uncle Dick's zeal for Catechetical Renewal even made him a force to be reckoned with as he butted up against church pastors and even Cardinal Cody striving to help the church evolve into this new era. The Emmaus 90 program on which I am journeying is but an outgrowth of what Fr. Laurick and those early post-Vatican II leaders gave us and how grateful for the inspiration it gives me in my personal faith journey.

In his later years, Fr. Laurick was the Catholic chaplain at Memorial Hospital in South Bend, Indiana, where he ministered to the sick and dying as well as saying mass in the ecumenical chapel. He had a devoted community who came to pray with him weekly as well as many nurses and doctors who had only a little time during their shift to be able to celebrate mass. Fr. Dick's devotion to this ministry was met with the same fortitude as his work in Catechetical Renewal. He devoted himself to preparing and giving homilies that might only be heard by a few always yet committed to sharing how God was speaking to us through scripture and how to use that message to be disciples in the world. Many stories were shared with me and our family about the individuals to whom he ministered. Whether it be a short visit in a hospital room to pray, sharing the Eucharist, or giving the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, he was being Christ in the most intimate and impactful level.

I am grateful to call Fr. Dick both family and personal spiritual director. While I am now in transition again in a new/old place to walk a different path with Christ, I learn and grow still from his example. Let us all honor the legacy of a priest who shows us that we as the body of Christ can serve God doing big and small things with great love in our daily lives.