

In Memoriam - Fr Michael Bruce Lefroy Austin SJ, R.I.P.

He was 19 days into his 85th year of life, and was in his 63rd year in the Society of Jesus and his 52nd year of priesthood.

Ort..... 6 Oct 1937 Loc. Diac. Heythrop College Oxfordshire Defunc.....25 Oct 2022
Loc. Nat..... Port Elizabeth (RSA) (England) Loc. Defunc.....Nazareth House, Johannesburg (RSA)
Ingr.9 Mar 1959 Ord..... 4 Jul 1970 by emeritus Archbishop
Loc. Ingr. Harlaxton (England) Thomas Roberts of Bombay, India Date of Funeral 29 Oct 2022
Mag. St Aidan's College, Grahamstown (RSA) Loc. Ord. . Farm Street Church, London (England) Place of Funeral: Holy Trinity, Johannesburg (RSA)
Stud.Rhodes, Heythrop, Regis, Wernersville Grad..... Spiritual Coadjutor Place of Burial: Cremated
Diac.21 Apr 1970 by Bishop Anthony Emery, Loc. Grad.....Holy Trinity, Johannesburg (RSA)
auxillary bishop of Birmingham, England. Dies 1 Jan 1980 Prov.....SAP



Michael Austin was born on 6th October 1937 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. He went to school at St Aidan's College, Grahamstown. After a year at Rhodes University studying Business Administration, and having gained some work in the commercial world, he joined the Society in Britain on 9th March 1959. Having joined the Society in the middle of the novitiate year, he was sent to Ireland for a six-month juniorate before starting Philosophy at Heythrop College in September 1961. He completed his philosophy studies in 1961 and returned to South Africa where he studied at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, and achieved a B.A., majoring in History, which was to be an abiding interest of his all his life.

He spent 1967 as a regent at St Aidan's College, Grahamstown. He had a good rapport with the students and was a gifted teacher. He has maintained pastoral contact with many of his past pupils and assisted them in the development of their faith. He assisted ably at the College which was going through the throes of closing after the Visitation of Fr Gordon George and with a cheerful attitude he was able to assist the rather discouraged community

who were continuing to run the college. He cared for the boarding schoolboys and ran the Sailing Club being one of the few Jesuits to enjoy the title of Commodore.

After theology at Heythrop College, he spent two years as one of the Chaplains to the University of London preparing himself to go out to South Africa. He pioneered the work of the Chaplaincy of the University of the Witwatersrand. Michael Austin spent four years in this work and laid the foundations for what today is a thriving university apostolate in the city of Johannesburg... While Chaplain he assisted at Holy Trinity Parish at the same time completing an STB, and in 1977 he went to Canada to read for his STL at Regis College and to complete his Tertianship. He spent 1978 studying Spiritual Theology at Wernersville. In 1979 he returned to South Africa to run Christian Concern and give retreats. Due to the shortage of men, he was appointed to Braamfontein as parish priest and university chaplain. It was a difficult time politically, and Michael Austin was often in the thick of student protests and attempted to assist the students struggling against Apartheid. In 1985 he prepared himself for a further period of study to initiate a programme of Adult Catholic Education in the Diocese of Johannesburg and started the Diocesan Institute of Theology of which he was the Director for 22 years. It should be appreciated that this was often an extra work after he became the Parish Priest at Our Lady of Lourdes, Rivonia, where he led the Eucharistic community for nearly a decade and at the same time completed a programme of building including a modern hall, classrooms and a presbytery. This was very much appreciated by the Bishop and his Diocesan priest successors.

Returning again to a teaching College he was able to take the place of Fr Bernard Brewer SJ, on his death, at the Marist Brothers' College of St David's. He completed some nine years at St David's while still running the Diocesan Institute of Theology where over the years he continued to train the deacons of the Diocese of Johannesburg. He is very well known in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg where he has contributed to the life of the church in many and varied ways. Not least were his many religious broadcasts among which it is said encouraged Nelson in prison.

It should be noticed too that he has written many articles on the faith in Church publications, not to mention the many letters of a somewhat polemical nature he has written to newspapers and periodicals in order to stimulate discussion and argument in a country where the Church seems to be somewhat less developed in the intellectual areas of its life.

Fr Austin had served the Society as a consultor to the Regional Superior for seven years. He has tended to live alone but came community gatherings. Like many South Africans joining the British Province he has had to make many cultural adaptations and has worked in a Region where the work and difficulties of the church are not much appreciated by the Province.

He was a very talented teacher and pastor. He did not suffer fools or foolishness gladly and was not slow to enter into an argument. He had contributed to the work of the Church in South Africa in many and varied ways and is appreciated by lay people and clerics alike. His health has been problematic in recent years and he had to undergo a number of knee operations, which he did with fortitude. He is a kind man, often helping out the younger men, as his health allowed, unobtrusively and with some bluster.

Following a brief stint in Barbados, he entered a new phase of his life when he became chaplain to St Mary's and continued to teach theology to adults. He spent some time living in the south of Johannesburg, and then retired to Auckland Park, where he continued various ministries, often preparing children of friends for confirmation or officiating at weddings and funerals. His health declined slowly over the years decreasing his mobility. In 2022 he became chaplain to the Sisters of Nazareth House, but very quickly his health declined. He was very kindly cared for by the Sisters of Nazareth House in Johannesburg until his death, where he soon passed away after a visit from his local superior.