The Rev. Raymond R. Fitzgerald, S.J., a Jesuit priest, mentor, educator and beloved friend to so many in the Jesuit High School community, died on Sept. 17, of complications from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. He was 58.

Fr. Fitzgerald served as president of Jesuit from 2011 to 2014, stepping down after being diagnosed with ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease.


“I am personally grateful to him because his leadership and insight have left a mark on me, countless others and Jesuit High School. Please remember him and his family in your prayers.”

Fr. Fitzgerald died at the St. Alphonsus Rodriguez Pavilion, part of St. Charles College in Grand Coteau, La., the Jesuit retreat center, college and infirmary, where he had been living since June of last year.

Fr. Fitzgerald was preceded in death by his father, Raymond R. Fitzgerald Sr. He is survived by his mother, Mary Fitzgerald, and his sister, Lucy Smedstad, both of Slidell.

A funeral Mass was celebrated on Sept. 24 at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Grand Coteau, with burial following at the Jesuit Cemetery at St. Charles College.

Fr. Raymond R. Fitzgerald Jr. was born in New Orleans on July 13, 1958, to Mary Fitzgerald, a professor at Loyola University, and Raymond Fitzgerald, a shipping accountant.

Growing up in the Broadmoor neighborhood, he was a parishioner of St. Matthias Catholic Church. After attending the New Orleans Academy for elementary school, in 1971 he enrolled at Jesuit High School, the beginning of a special relationship with new Blue Jays.

He touched our lives with grace, always reflecting the love of God.

By Donald Barrett
Editor-in-Chief

Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., was an amazing man and a servant of God. He always sought ways to help all those around him.


An Editorial
With this dedication, he left a profound mark not only on Jesuit High School but on each Blue Jay whose life he touched.

More than 40 years ago, Fr. Fitzgerald walked the halls of Jesuit as a student – an experience that allowed him to develop
Memories of a life well lived

Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., delivers his homily at the Mass of the Holy Spirit at the start of the 2013 school year.

During my freshman year studying Classics at the University of Notre Dame, I was recuperating from surgery at Children's Hospital when I got an unexpected visit from Fr. Fitzgerald, then the president of the Classics and Classics major himself. He was always loathing there in the shadiness of the priesthood meant for me. I cannot imagine the future, the kind of person he was. He was a good person, humble, kind-hearted, brilliant, with an incredible sense of humor.

I recently learned that Fr. Fitz had a particularly strong devotion to St. Robert Bellarmine, on whose feast he died. Bellarmine wrote a book called "The Art of Dying Well," in which he lists 10 precepts. The first is that in order to die well, one must live well. I can think of no man who lived well and became more perfected by the grace of God than Fr. Fitz. I can think of no man who died with more grace and trust in the Lord than Fr. Fitz.

To learn of his own condition would to make himself the center, and for this man of faith, that would be unthinkable. The least important person in the world for Raymond Fitzgerald was Raymond Fitzgerald. For him, love for and trust in God was the most important thing. That love for God drove him to be the great man for others that he was. And of those of us that were positively influenced by his presence in our life, we could not be more grateful.

Scott Delatte
Theology teacher, Class of 2006

These are two of the many memories I have of Fr. Fitzgerald. First, I have always found it amazing and humbling that I was actually Fr. Fitzgerald's boss when I was chairman of the Classics department, before he even became my boss as president of Jesuit High School. I had no business being his boss.

Recently, I heard that he once taught all of my classes for a week when I was a first-year teacher so that I could go on my honeymoon. I have always been indebted to him for this. I still remember what he said to me before I left: "Mitch, congratulations! Enjoy your honeymoon. The only promise I can make is that all students will know no less Latin upon your return than they do today.

When he left Jesuit in 2003, he wrote me this note: I don’t keep too many things, but I cherish this now and forever. It hangs in my classroom and it embodies Fr. Fitzgerald — humble, grateful and to the point.

Dear Mitch,

Just a few lines to thank you for all your support here and for leadership of our department. I hope you will consider coming to consult in these past years. I have been much helped by your leadership of the department that I have been able to offer my students. I still think of no man who lived well and became more perfected by the grace of God than Fr. Fitz. I can think of no man who died with more grace and trust in the Lord than Fr. Fitz.

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Scott Delatte
Theology teacher, Class of 2006
Fr. Fitzgerald a Jesuit for 36 years

Much of his life spent at Carrollton and Banks

Following ordination, he taught at Jesuit, and later served as rector of the Jesuit community here. During his tenure, he taught classes in Latin, Greek, English and theology, and served as the school’s chaplain.

In 2003, he returned to Jesuit College Prep in Dallas, serving as superior of that community, and later was appointed to serve as the assistant to the provincial, the head of the New Orleans Province of the Society of Jesus from 2007 to 2011.

In 2010, Fr. Fitzgerald was named the 15th president of Jesuit High School, assuming the post at the start of the 2011-12 academic year.

Among the major accomplishments of his time as president included the restoration of the Holy Name of Jesus Chapel and the creation of the strategic plan, that will enable the school to continue its mission for years to come.

Frequent in several languages, Fr. Fitzgerald was an avid reader, sometimes reading three books at once – each in a different language.

Friends also recalled his enjoyment of going out to dinner at many of the city’s great restaurants. He was also a movie fan. His sense of humor was evident even in referencing zombie films in his homilies.

Throughout his life, he was a man of God whose faith was strong and loving. As we look back upon his life, we remember the times that he made us laugh, think and appreciate all that God has given us.

We realize that he embodied the same characteristics that he instilled in his students, even into his final days.

At the morning assembly on Jan. 15, 2014, in which he announced his diagnosis and intention to step down as president, he spoke of that faith and quoted St. Ignatius’ Suscipe prayer:

“...the purpose of our being here is to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord. God gives us the means of doing this each day. Good or ill health doesn’t enter into it.” Fr. Fitzgerald said.

“With the witness of my life, I wish to assure that this is true. It is true because of the closing line of Ignatius’ prayer, Take and receive.”

“The prayer concludes with the line, ‘Give me only Your love and Your grace; that is enough.’ “It is true that God never fails to give us His love and His grace.”

As a member of the Class of 1976, Ray Fitzgerald was a leader with the Christian Life Community. He is shown here, second from left, with other members of the group’s executive committee and moderator, Fr. Joe Reising.

Ever a teacher, even when he returned to Jesuit to assume the post as president of the school, Fr. Fitzgerald also returned to the classroom. His theology course on the writings of C.S. Lewis was a popular elective.

For further memories of Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., through his years at Jesuit, view the photo galleries at www.jesuitnola.org

The Blue Jay

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What can you do to help in the fight against ALS?

The illness that claimed the life of Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., remains incurable. But advances in the development of treatments are being made.

You can help. The annual Walk to Defeat ALS will take place in Audubon Park on Oct. 22. Participation is free, and walkers raise money by signing up sponsors.

The J Squad, Jesuit’s walk team, is captained by science teacher Amy Tassin. It has a team goal of raising $7,500. To make a donation or to join the team, contact Tassin for more information.

You also can sign up directly at ALSA.org, and click on the “Get Involved” link. When you reach “New Orleans walk,” select “View all teams” and click on “J Squad.”

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord, leading to weakness and potentially paralyzed muscles. It first gained notoriety when it struck New York Yankee Lou Gehrig in 1939. It is the illness that now afflicts former New Orleans Saint Steve Gleason.

Approximately 3,600 people in the United States are diagnosed with ALS each year, an incidence rate of two per 100,000 people. It is estimated that as many as 30,000 Americans may have the disease at any given time.

For more information, visit ALSA.org or teamgleason.org.

In Memoriam

Ray Fitzgerald
Class of ’76

Fitzgerald
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of a lifelong connection.

At Carrollton and Banks, Ray Fitzgerald was a member of the National Honor Society as well as a National Merit Finalist. In his senior year, he was the copy editor of the Blue Jay Annual.

He also participated in many co-curriculars, including the Chess Club and Prep Quiz Bowl, both moderated by the then Mr. McGinn, who was on the faculty before his own ordination.

Also serving as his senior homeroom teacher, Mr. McGinn remembered the young Fitzgerald as “a quiet, friendly and studious student” during his time wearing the khaki uniform.

Following graduation from Jesuit as part of the Class of 1976, he attended Loyola University, earning undergradu-

te degrees in history and classics.

Upon leaving Loyola, he entered the Society of Jesus on Aug. 14, 1980.

After making his first vows, he continued his studies at St. Louis University, earning a master’s degree in history.

He completed his theological studies at the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass., in 1990, also attaining a master’s degree in religious education from Boston College in 1991.

During his formation as a Jesuit, he also taught at Jesuit College Preparatory in Dallas from 1984 to 1987.

Fr. Fitzgerald was ordained as a priest at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala., on June 8, 1991.

He pronounced his final vows on Dec. 8, 1999, here in the Chapel of the North American Martyrs.
On Jan. 15, 2014, a special morning assembly was held in the Traditions Courtyard. There, Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., announced to the student body that he had been diagnosed with ALS, known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. He was frank about the prognosis and expected course of the illness, and he revealed the courage and faith that he would display throughout the remainder of his life.

That deep trust in the love of God, which he expressed in the words we reprint here, continue to inspire us all.

Good morning, gentlemen. Yesterday I spoke with the faculty and staff and emailed your parents about my medical diagnosis of ALS.

This morning I would like to speak directly to you. The disease has both a short-term and a long-term reality. Looking at the long-term, let’s get the bad news out of the way first.

With no cure, ALS proceeds to greater loss of muscle functions. The good news is that cognitive functions remain. Moreover, the process takes its time, and the disease can move along in a gradual, not to say, steady pace.

I am currently doing what I can to slow it down via medication and physical therapy. That said, I would like to focus this morning on the short-term. My plan is to continue as president for the remainder of this school year and to remain at Jesuit beyond that as long as feasible.

I am certainly quite open, should anyone wish to, to talking about my condition. However, I do not consider ALS and its effects to be the sole, or even primary, topic of conversation we can have. There are a variety of other interesting and instructive items that we can chat about: New Orleans’ restaurants, the cares and feasting of zombies, and Greek verbs, to name but three.

At present, I am blessed to be able to do my duty today. For each day, God gives to each of us the opportunity to serve Him and the means of so doing. And therefore, my good brothers, this morning I desire to offer something to you and to ask something from you.

To you, I wish to offer my personal witness to two items from the spiritual arsenal of St. Ignatius: Principle and Foundation and the Suscipe prayer – the prayer “Take, Lord, receive.”

The purpose of our being here is to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord. God gives us the means of doing this each day. Good or ill health doesn’t enter into it. With the witness of my life, I wish to assure that this is true. It is true because of the closing line of Ignatius’ prayer, “Take and receive.” The prayer concludes with the line “give me only Your love and Your grace; that is enough.” It is true that God never fails to give us His love and His grace.

From you, I wish to ask three things:

The first is your help. You have the strength and energy that I will increasingly lack. Second, your prayers—something that we can always do for one another. The third is simply your being yourselves—yourselves both as you are and as God is forming you to be.

Harbor no doubts about how good you are and can be. Harbor no doubts about what a source of encouragement, joy, and consolation you are to me. God has given me, in my life, many blessings. Among the greatest of these is sharing these years with you.

Now, certainly, you can be entertaining, enlightening, and engaging; but beyond that, I have come to realize that I am privileged to be here at Jesuit at a time when I can stand in the halfway and find myself in the presence of saints. For, saints do walk among us in greater numbers than one might suspect. Sainthood is truly how good you are capable of becoming.

And so, the longer term future will be what it is. This day, each one of us has a task in becoming the person God calls us to be today. Let us now be about this task.

Following the address, in which Fr. Fitzgerald spoke with candor, grace and good humor, many of the deeply moved students greeted him, offering appreciative support and prayers.

Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald, S.J., addresses a morning assembly on Jan. 15, 2014, in which he announced his diagnosis of ALS, and his plans to step down as president of Jesuit High School.

‘Fr. Fitz’ always sought to understand his Blue Jays

Editorial

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Fr. Fitzgerald seemed to gravitate towards all of these students and sought to help them in the transition from their previous schools. As a teacher who believed in the importance of understanding his students, he took the time to learn the names of each Blue Jay – a task that he accomplished remarkably fast – and to get to know each personally. For many of those lucky enough to have met him, Fr. Fitzgerald often was the first person at Jesuit with which they established a relationship.

Fr. Fitz,” as he affectionately known, served as a figure for students to look up to, exemplifying wisdom, faith, love, and selflessness. Using his characteristic dry sense of humor, he prepared students for the challenges of the real world by sharing his advice on everything from their faith lives to preparations for the zombie apocalypse. Most importantly though, he exemplified every value he taught, even while in the midst of his battle with ALS.

The most striking aspects of his personality were his love and devotion to God. One of the most apparent indicators of the humble and gracious type of man that he had been was his response to simple question, “How are you?”

In his sincere appreciation for the gift of life, he would, despite his affliction, still respond with “better than I deserve.” While Fr. Fitzgerald was still in residence at Jesuit, his colleague and caretaker, Fr. John Brown, S.J., said he only saw him cry once over the course of his battle.

The tears, however, were not driven by pain or self-pity. Through his sense of hope and faith, he was overwhelmed by the thought of the vast pleasure of God’s love that awaited him in heaven after death.

While we mourn his passing, all who loved him and were inspired by his life can find some solace and comfort in knowing that Fr. Raymond Fitzgerald is now free to enjoy the sheer happiness from an eternity with God that he had once only envisioned.

May he rest in peace.