



MORE NEWS

Saint Thomas More Parish, Cherry Hill, NJ

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A Tribute to George Andrew Erickson—September 27, 1941—November 19, 2007



For eighteen years of his life, George Andrew Erickson volunteered his services to St. Thomas More Parish as its Music Ministry Coordinator. For all of these years, George worked diligently with the choir, whose membership consisted of anyone who wished to join. George refused no one. It was not his nature to do so.

For all of these years, George encouraged inclusion. New voices, new musical instruments, new groups were welcomed into George's circle of musicians, and into his huge heart.

With George's passing, we experience a hole—in our hearts, in our parish, and in our music ministry.

George was total charity. A mean bone never invaded his body. He was forever optimistic—in health as well as in sickness. George never gave in. In the end, George gave over—to his God, whom he loved so dearly.

Carolyn, George's wife, lost her best friend. Kristy and Keith, George's young adult children, lost a father and a role model.

At George's funeral Mass, Kristy and Keith expressed their great love for their father by delivering eulogies in his honor. The contents of both eulogies are like nothing you have ever heard.

In tribute to George, we print here the eulogies of Kristy and Keith Erickson. May George's soul rest in eternal peace. Thank you, George for the legacy of love, kindness, compassion, and generosity you have left to St. Thomas More Parish.

Kristy's Eulogy

On behalf of Mom, Keith, Uncle Bob, and myself, I'd like to thank you sincerely for coming today to join in this celebration of Dad's earthly life and entrance into eternal life. What better way to celebrate his death than the way he celebrated life – with family and friends, in church, surrounded by the people and things he loved. We deeply appreciate everyone's many expressions of sympathy and prayers, Monsignor's moving and appropriate homily, readings, as well as the music lead by the St. Thomas More Music Ministry. He was always saying how important it was to not only sing or play the music that was written but to feel it and sing with your heart. You all did that today, and I must say, I know Dad is enjoying your music up in heaven as much as we enjoyed it here.

This is strange. Dad was always the one to be up here reflecting on the lives of others. I guess Dad passed that torch onto my brother and me today. Hopefully, we will be able to make him proud. I must say, it was pretty difficult to come up with something to say here today because Dad's life was a living Eulogy, a true statement of praise for a believing, caring, committed, devoted husband, father, brother, uncle, co-worker, and friend. To add anything to what we just celebrated and to what each of us know of him would be superfluous. (how's that for a dad word?)

Dad touched each of us in his own way. We are all gathered here today because of that. I can't even begin to express how all of you feel. Instead, I can only share my thoughts which in no means can fully describe the type of man my father was. I would love to share with all of you

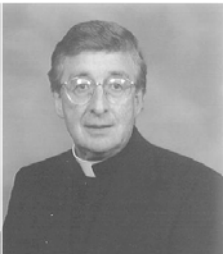
everything about my father; however, that would take years and Monsignor keeps reminding me that I have a time limit here. Apparently, my brother and I cannot speak longer than he, and Keith still has some words to say. Permit me, however, to share with you one aspect of my Dad.

Dad had this devotion to helping others. One way he did that was in his amazing ability to volunteer for anything and everything that was important to him. He didn't just volunteer; he gave his whole heart and soul to whatever he was doing. There is no way that I can mention all of the places where he generously gave his time, but I would like to mention one that is as important to me as it was to him. Music.

Dad invested so much of his time into making music such an integral part of Mass. It was so important to him to make sure that the music selections related to the Gospel and Reading for the week. His goal for music was to make sure everyone was involved, young or old. And we all know how Dad wanted everyone to join in the music, making sure everyone always felt welcomed. In fact, one of my favorite sayings he had was when someone would approach him to audition for the choir. He would typically ask the person if they had a pulse. Of course, the answer to that is yes. He would then say congratulations; you just passed your audition. Welcome to the choir.

Christmas Eve was by far his favorite mass to prepare for which is probably why it was my favorite. We would start preparing in June of that year. My family all put in so much time helping him get the music together to share with the choir.

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From the Pastor...

POSITIVE PARENTING

I just read in a journal that 95% of the inmates in a local medium security prison reported that they experienced lots of fighting and lots of hostility when they were growing up in their homes. The confusion and isolation they felt was so painful.

Tragically, they said that their parents had no skills for parenting. They had no problem-solving and no conflict-resolution skills. Tragically, their parents were not equipped for positive parenting.

Often, these parents were neglected as children. They were mistreated as children. They were bullied as children. They grew up where screaming fits were the primary mode of communication. There were unreasonable demands. There were vicious put downs. There were other bad behaviors. The pain and the bad memories keep flooding back.

These parents were not skilled for the challenging vocation of parenting in our fast-moving society. They failed in the challenge of modeling positive and good behavior for their children.

These parents did not understand that raising a healthy child is not a trial-and-error process. They did not understand that when we raise a child, we are raising the future. There was no private time for conversation.

We each owe our existence to our parents. They make an unknown amount of sacrifices for us. At the same time, we will never fully appreciate their sacrifices on our behalf.

The dilemma we have with parenting seems to be related to the fact that prospective parents don't have to pass a mental-health test to procreate. And parents with difficult personalities come in many different shapes and sizes.

Some parents are "helicopter parents" who are always hovering over their children. These are anxious and over-protective parents. Others neglect their children's needs out of their own selfishness or their own mild depression.

Some parents are seething with anger, unhappiness and jealousy. Some just lash out at their children with physical or verbal abuse. Unfortunately, many of these parents come across to outsiders as involved and loving. And this can be an added stressor on the children.

Unfortunately, many children have no independent confirmation that something is wrong with the way they are being raised. They do not know what the normal family is like. They don't know that family units are people who really treat you like family.

Sometimes, children decide to distance themselves from their parents. Then, to the outside world, this may look callous. But if a parent has really destroyed a child's life, it can be the healthiest thing to do. The child does it for survival and for health reasons.

Evidence-based psychology would say that parents need to learn how to avoid getting angry and how to avoid getting out of control. They need to learn how to use gentle but firm words to calm a child down.

Parents often lack a template with which to raise healthy children. They are without self-respect and without parenting skills. But they can learn to be better parents.

Parents need to know how to distract children when they are throwing tantrums. They need to teach them constructive ways to have their needs met.

Childhood is such a critical period in every person's life. It is a time when children learn basic interpersonal skills. It is a time when they learn problem-solving skills. It is a time when they learn self-control skills.

Childhood is a time when children learn to postpone gratification. It is a time when they learn to have their needs met in a supportive and constructive environment.

Children do not need parents who ravage their self-respect. They do not deserve environments of emotional scarcity. They do not need angry and out-of-control parents where the child does not know what is going to happen from one day to the next.

Unknowingly, angry parents and emotionally deprived parents deeply scar and hurt their children. They can leave an indelible negative imprint on the souls of their children.

The tragic truth is that no child can change a parent. All a son or daughter can do is to change how they react to them. Becoming angry with a parent will push you back into the old, unbalanced parent-child dynamic.

The most you can do is to cultivate empathy for your parents. It helps to view them objectively. If dad is verbally abusive, think about what might have made him that way. If mom seems forever in need of affirmation, think about what might have made her that way. If mom is overly demanding, think about what might have made her that way.

The real question we need to ask ourselves is were our parents as children neglected, or were they mistreated in any way. Did they grow up in a household that was sterile of emotional support and nurturance.

Kristy Erickson's Eulogy, cont'd

It never failed that Christmas came faster than expected; so we had to do some last minute prep. Do you have any idea how many Christmas Eves Dad, Mom, Keith and myself spent in church, preparing for the midnight mass? We set up the microphones and speakers, made sure there was enough room for all of the many talented voices and instrumentalists that joined us, created, ran off and folded the programs, and at one point in time (hold up program) drew holly on each and every one of the programs. All I can say is thank goodness for clipart. I am not quite sure how Christmas will be the same. M. Morgan, let us know if you have programs that need to be run off on Christmas Eve.

I would like to share something with the choir that I happened to find this past week. My father wrote this a few years ago for the parish stewardship. He said, "The interaction that I have enjoyed with the members of the Choir has not only broadened and deepened my own appreciation for the beautiful musical tradition of the Church but also allowed me to experience and admire the depth of Christian witnesses that these individuals exhibit week after week

Keith Erickson's Eulogy

In our family, there was primarily one person who did all of the speaking at funerals, weddings, graduations, what have you. I think you can all guess who that person might be. Well, today, he gets a bit of a vacation. Instead, my sister and I have attempted to take all the many things he taught us and, hopefully, create in our own voice something as powerful and almost magical just as he so often did. We looked over the many speeches he'd written on big 5x8 index cards and tried to capture his grace, his emotion, and his gentleness. Kristy did a fine job of that, and ideally I will, too. So in preparation for our celebration today, I considered several avenues: a chronological recount of high points (we'd be here forever if I did that), a categorical narrative of the many areas of his life through the years (equally as magnitudinous). I finally settled on approaching this in the same way that dad approached his life: focus on the present and look to the future.

I have been blessed with 25 years of unceasing love from a father, a mentor, and a friend. Always the teacher, dad illustrated what it really means to live a Christian life in the best way possible; he did it himself, funneling all aspects of his life through God in some way. I remember he told me once about a course he took in Catholic school. The professor gave a deceptively simple final assignment: "Why Christian?" The following year, it resurfaced as "Why Catholic?" In this instance, typical urban legend answers such as "Why not?" would not suffice. It was instead expected that the students write volumes on those questions. I ask that again this afternoon, "Why Christian? Why Catholic?" Though many of us are gathered here from all walks of life, all races, all creeds, all religions, today, we are all celebrating one of the fundamental tenants of the Catholic church. We believe wholeheartedly; it is our faith that Christ died for us and rose from the dead so that we may have eternal life everlasting. The second reading expounded on this concept that death from our earthly lives is our beginning into eternal life, and we live each day, knowing that we are that much closer to being brought home to live with God. We look forward into the future; we don't dwell on past losses or hardships. We move forward and take where we are in the present into the future, seeking to make each day an exemplification of God's will.

as we've sung, argued, laughed, and even, at times, cried. We've encouraged and supported one another in the journey of faith we take as individuals and as a family."

I count myself doubly blessed. He was my father; he was my friend. As I touched upon earlier, each of us here today related to him differently over the years, and we each have a unique opportunity to take something of what made him so important and lovable to us and make it a part of ourselves as we leave here in a few moments~~ a sort of passing of the torch, so to speak. The liturgy we've celebrated gives us the broad picture of what believing Christians can achieve in life and death. Dad showed us the specifics of how he did it with his loving nature, understated style, and quiet grace. Our faith tells us, dad, you're now where we all one day hope to be, but our hearts tell us it is too soon - we selfishly wanted you with us longer. God had his own plan though...He needed someone who truly can let Jesus be the music that makes a joyful tune in our hearts; He needed a new choir director to direct the choirs of angels! Show them how its done, dad. I love you.

That's what I think of when I think of my father. Dad lived in the present, but he lived for the future and for God and for his family. He never looked back on any failures, any missed opportunities, anything that was slightly unpleasant. His past led him to his present, of course, but he continued straight on into the future, always ready for the next thing. In fact, as we were gathering things for today's ceremonies, I found a stack of music for 2008 already earmarked for various people. In that light, it is important that we reflect, not on who he was, but on who he **is**.

And who is George Erickson? (And you'd better not call him Mr. Erickson!) He is a lover of music, a lover of his ministry, a lover of his family. He is one who loves people in all their forms and all their faults. He loves bringing happiness to those around him, whether they know it or not. He loves laughter and humor and a good Irish joke. He loves the church, the parish, and the community. He is a lover of books and of newspapers, church bulletins and a good crossword puzzle. He loves organizing events, and helping people, and helping people organize events. He is a lover of chocolate, the New York Yankees, The Carpenters, and Stephen King. He loves our youth, and loves guiding us through life's challenges. He loves his wife. He loves his children. He loves his brother and sister and parents. As the common thread through it all, *he loves*. He loves each and every one of you, all of us together and everything that we do, and everything that we have the potential to do. That's who he is.

I want to share a thought I had last night. I could, of course, tell countless stories and fun anecdotes, but we'll have to save that for the partying that will ensue shortly. Instead, this is something that might leave you with a little hope, something to do, even a "homework assignment," if you will. During the Lenten season, it is customary to refrain from a common vice for the duration of the solemn period. My dad and I often remarked about how much better it would be to instead permanently change something about yourself, forever. In much the same way, we grieve for a time about the loss of a loved one, but what if we instead changed something about ourselves that was in some way connected with that person? I offer to all of you the opportunity to change something about yourself so that you too may connect to my father.

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**St. Thomas More Parish
Mission Statement**

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Keith's Eulogy, cont'd

Whatever attribute you liked most about him and similarly lacked in yourself, work towards following the example he continually set for all of us.

With that, I'd like to close with some selected verses from something that my dad always loved. Cardinal Newman gave a series of lectures in Ireland in 1852, one of which is entitled The Definition of a Gentleman. We found that my dad used this at the memorial service of a dear friend of our family, and he quite skillfully wove the verses throughout the service. What we realized in reviewing that service was that so much of what he said about others applied directly to himself. And so I leave you with this:

It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain. He is mainly occupied in merely removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed action of those about him; and he concurs with their movements rather than takes the initiative himself. The true gentleman, in like manner, carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast — all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make every one at his ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful toward the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards

against unseasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation and never wearisome. He makes light of favors while he does them and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort; he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best. He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp saying for arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out. From a long-sighted prudence, he observes the maxim of the ancient sage, that we should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend. He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults; he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned on philosophical principles; he submits to pain because it is inevitable, to bereavement because it is irreparable, and to death because it is his destiny.



My father, my dad, George Erickson, forever a gentleman, forever love.