

# Remembrance of Joseph Koterski, SJ (November 28, 1953–August 9, 2021).

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Father Koterski will be sorely missed by all of us. He had been a UFFL member since 1991, our *Life and Learning* editor since 1992, a member of the Board of Directors since 1993; Treasurer 1997-2006; a member of the Advisory Board for our Long Island chapter since 2001 and Secretary since 2006. Decades of service made him a pillar of our organization.

Who can forget his gentleness, his wise counsel, his helpfulness, his laughing good cheer at our fellowship receptions, and his prayerful Masses so beautifully sung at our conventions? Personally, I'm convinced that those Masses offered for our organization and all our members regardless of their creed helped fuel our ability to fight the culture of death through our classes, our conversations, and our scholarship: there can be no victory without God and prayer.

Father Koterski was a true scholar, so deserving of UFFL's 2016 Rupert & Timothy Smith Award for Distinguished Contributions to Pro-Life Scholarship. Fr. Koterski has been our *Life and Learning* editor, written or edited eight books, 110 articles, 60 encyclopedia entries, 121 book reviews, 3 book translations, 53 published homilies and spiritual reflections, and 3 audio/video courses for The Great Courses—formerly The Teaching Company—Aristotle's Ethics; Natural Law Ethics, and Biblical Wisdom Literature). He was a member of Fordham University's Philosophy Department for twenty-nine years, where he lived in a freshman dorm and directed at least twenty-four doctoral students. He was brilliant yet humble;

generous with his time yet prolific—as shown by a video by Jesuits in Conversation.

In addition to teaching at Fordham University, Fr. Koterski frequently offered classes in seminaries and religious houses across the New York area. He had a special concern for women religious, and served the Missionaries of Charity and the Sisters of Life with particular care, as Kathryn Jean Lopez relates in *America Magazine*.

At his funeral, he was described as tireless in ministry, a practitioner of heroic virtue, a man who loved life and built his life on the sacrifice of the Mass; on books, with a special love of those by Shakespeare, Dante, Aristotle, and Aquinas; and on the unique friendship with God and all His children made possible through his priesthood. Fordham University's obituary reports that when questioned, in 2015, by Sean Salai, S.J. from *America Magazine*, about “what he wanted people to take away from his life and work,” he said: “A greater love for God, a greater desire for union with Jesus Christ, a greater respect for the teachings of the church and a greater ability to reason in a sound way as a grateful response to God's gift to us of the power of reasoning.”

We, at the University Faculty of Life, can add that the decades he spent on scholarly writing and publishing, editing our journal, and serving as Secretary reveal a generous and brilliant heart intent on advancing the cause of life through reasoned argument. As such, he exemplifies the best of UFFL and reminds us to love life and its Author by joyfully dedicating our own academic lives to its service.

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## In Memoriam: Rev. Joseph W. Koterski, SJ (1953-2021)

*Richard S. Myers\**

**F**ATHER JOSEPH W. KOTERSKI, SJ, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1953. He died on August 9, 2021, at the age of 67 after suffering a heart attack while preaching a retreat.

Father Koterski was a learned and holy priest. He was a brilliant scholar and teacher. In fact, in the remembrances of him, the word "brilliant" occurs frequently. Tellingly, the other word that is used with great frequency to describe him is "humility."

He gave generously and tirelessly to many apostolates. He will be remembered by his many friends and admirers for his keen intellect and clarity of thought. More importantly, he will be remembered for his holiness and humility and for his selfless devotion to the Catholic Church and to the pro-life cause.

Joe Koterski graduated summa cum laude from Xavier University. He was elected to Alpha Sigma Nu, the Jesuit honor society, and served as president of the Xavier chapter. At St. Louis University, he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and earned a M.A. and a Ph.D. in philosophy. He entered the Society of Jesus on August 15, 1984. He later earned a M.Div. and a S.T.L. from the Weston School of Theology. He was ordained in 1992 and took his final vows on July 31, 2001, the feast of St. Ignatius.

He taught philosophy at Fordham University from 1992 until his death in 2021. He edited the *International Philosophical Quarterly* and the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*.

He helped establish University Faculty for Life (UFFL) and was a mainstay of the organization for decades. He was a member of UFFL's Board for nearly thirty years, and he served as its Treasurer and Secretary. He held the organization together during challenging times. He edited *Life and*

*Learning*, UFFL's annual scholarly volume, for thirty years. In 2016, he was a recipient of UFFL's Smith Award for distinguished contributions to pro-life scholarship.

Father Koterski served as a member of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars for nearly forty years and was its president for six years. He was a member of many other professional organizations and boards (including service on the Board of Advisors of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists). He provided sound judgment and wise counsel to all these organizations.

He was a prolific scholar. His work was characterized by great erudition and clarity. He published *Introduction to Medieval Philosophy: Basic Concepts* (2009). He co-edited numerous books, including four supplemental volumes of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. He wrote over a hundred scholarly articles and hundreds of shorter articles, encyclopedia entries, and book reviews. He wrote on a diverse range of topics, including medieval philosophy, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, natural law, moral theology, Dante, Shakespeare, and spirituality.

He was a faithful priest. He celebrated Mass with great reverence and love; his preaching was marked by eloquence and profound insights. He led innumerable retreats and provided spiritual direction to countless souls. He was a beloved spiritual advisor to the Sisters of Life and to the Missionaries of Charity.

Father Joseph Koterski was a prodigious worker. I had the great privilege of serving alongside him for many years in University Faculty for Life. All of us in UFFL wonder how we will get along without his indispensable contributions to our efforts. It is a testimony to his important role in wide-ranging activities that members of many other organizations feel the same way.

He will be sorely missed.

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## In Memoriam: Father Joseph Koterski, SJ (1953-2021), Witness to Life

*Father John Conley, SJ*

When Father Joe Koterski died suddenly in August 2021, many of his colleagues wrote tributes to his extraordinary service as a teacher, scholar, preacher, editor, and spiritual director. Everyone emphasized his immensely hard work and his incomparable generosity. Years ago, I wrote the citation for Joe when he received the Teacher of the Year award at Fordham. I said, “He is the first to open his door at 7 AM and he is the last to close the door of his dorm room or office near midnight. No one is turned away.”

As we gather for our annual University Faculty for Life conference, I would like to give a tribute to Father Joe as a committed member of the pro-life movement and as a personal friend. He served us for decades as a board member of UFFL and as the indefatigable editor of our Life and Learning series of scholarly papers.

I first met Father Joe in 1992, when he joined the Fordham Philosophy Department as an Assistant Professor. I had been a department member since 1988.

We quickly become good friends, often praying the divine office and the rosary, together—and often forming alliances in the thousand battles we face in academe, especially in schools with a thinning Catholic identity.

As our friendship deepened, we shared how we had been called into the pro-life movement. Joe had moved into the movement by intellectual conviction, becoming an activist with the rescue movement during his graduate studies in St. Louis. My own pro-life convictions also matured by logical argument during my undergrad days, but I always think that the deeper source of my pro-life convictions was my work as a counselor at a day camp for children with mental disabilities during my high school and college summers. The culture of death in the form of abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia always comes for people with disabilities first. At the end of a long day—Father Joe and I lived in the same residential college for freshmen

at Fordham—we would often ask each other what we had done for “the great cause” that day. Between us, there was no need to translate the term “the great cause.”

We also discussed the price we had to pay as pro-life writers and activists before we entered the Jesuits. Joe had been involved with pro-life nonviolent civil disobedience in St. Louis. Several friends bitterly criticized him and withdrew their friendship over this. For Joe, it was especially painful to see the local Catholic bishop denounce the nonviolent protests. By nature, Joe was inclined to respect authority; this rejection by the bishop cut deeply. I shared with Joe my own experience as an undergrad journalist and editor at Penn. When I wrote my first article criticizing abortion, I faced an angrier opposition than anything I had experienced before. Two teachers I deeply admired expressed their astonishment that I could have written something so benighted and no longer spoke with me. A friend tipped me off that most of the other editors of the newspaper had met in private to discuss whether to dismiss me as editor-in-chief because of my article. The crisis passed but I had tasted the disdain reserved for the pro-life advocate in the groves of academe.

As soon as Joe arrived at Fordham, he invited me to become a member of UFFL. At first, I demurred. I told him that I found pro-life groups rather dull. He said, “UFFL is really exciting. Wait ‘til you meet the Cassidys!” So, I attended my first UFFL conference at Yale in 1993 and had a great time at the party run by the Cassidys.

I was well aware of Joe’s hard work as a UFFL board member and the editor of our annual proceedings. We would spend the occasional weekend proofreading the papers for the new annual edition. But I came to realize that Joe’s most important work was hidden behind the scenes. He was a respected spiritual director and counselor. At UFFL meetings Joe would often meet privately with someone who sought his advice. Part of his mission—a very priestly mission—was to provide spiritual counsel and consolation to pro-life activists. We all know how easily the culture of death and the venom of our opponents can overwhelm us. An especially important part of this spiritual pro-life ministry was his work as chaplain to the Sisters of Life, the religious order founded in New York City in 1991. In a thousand quiet ways he

fostered courage and prudence in the resistance we must conduct against our culture on behalf of human life.

During our time together as Jesuits, we continued to pay the price for our support for the pro-life cause. In 1993 I shared with Joe the draft of an article I was writing for the *National Jesuit News*. Entitled “The Silence of the Society,” I pointed out how in recent years, the national offices of the American Jesuits (formally, the Society of Jesus) had released social-justice statements on immigration, capital punishment, health care, and a myriad of other issues. But they had said nothing on abortion. I criticized this silence as a serious moral omission. After I had read my draft aloud to Joe, I asked him what I should change. He said, “Nothing. It’s perfect.” I told him that I thought I could get into trouble for such criticism. He said, “Yes, you will get into trouble. But it will be good for you. Besides, John, you can talk all your critics to death.” When the article was published, it did cause controversy. Some Jesuits accused me of a lack of loyalty to the order. But other Jesuits wrote or called to express their quiet support. In 2003 the national office of the American Jesuits released a pro-life manifesto *Standing for the Unborn*. I cannot help but think that the persistent witness of pro-life Jesuits—men like Joe and dear Father King at Georgetown—had pushed our order beyond complacency on the issue.

In 2012, Joe and I attended the conference of UFFL at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. One night we went out to dinner. Joe wanted a beer. Now, finding a beer in Provo, Utah is quite the challenge. There was a long wait list at several restaurants serving alcohol. We finally found a Benihana and a cold Sapporo. I knew that Joe had applied for promotion to full professor. I was no longer at Fordham; I had transferred to Loyola Maryland. I told him over dinner that I had heard through the grapevine that he had been turned down for the promotion. He said he was angry when he heard the news but after a week, he had accepted it. I told him I was still disturbed by it. Joe said the promotion committee had found a problem in his scholarly profile. I said that was baffling. Joe had published a fine monograph on medieval philosophy, many edited books—I had worked with Joe as a co-editor of two volumes on John Paul II—and more than a hundred articles in scholarly journals and collections and hundreds more in more popular venues. Although I was not privy to the committee’s deliberations, I suspected that his religious and political views, perhaps

especially his stalwart commitment to the pro-life cause, may have been a factor in the decision. That evening in Provo I witnessed Joe's humility. He quietly accepted this professional disappointment because he was devoted to a greater truth.

When I told Joe in 2006 that I was being transferred from Fordham to Loyola, his first question was, "Does that mean you won't be going to UFFL?" I replied, "Joe, I was a committed pro-lifer long before I met you. UFFL is a beloved scholarly home, and we all need the moral support it gives." At the time I found his question odd. But now I think it was telling. It showed how deeply the pro-life cause and UFFL itself lived in Father Joe's heart.

May we all accept the contradictions that come to us in virtue of simply being a pro-life scholar. May Father Koterski guide us in accepting this opposition with grace and in courageously defending the great cause of human life with hope.

God bless you all.



## Fr. Koterski's Remembrances of Joseph Scheidler (September 7, 1927–January 18, 2021) and Raymond Dennehy (August 31, 1934–April 19, 2021).

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We need to remember in prayer our leaders, and two of great significance died this year, very different people. Let me speak first of Joseph Scheidler and then of Ray Dennehy.

I never met Joseph Scheidler. He was certainly decisive; he passed away in the year 2021, born 1927. He was someone who left a career in public relations to become a full-time pro-life activist. He had very decisive brand of on the street direct action and it met with great resistance. And so, he and his wife, Ann, decided to found what was called the Pro-Life Action League in 1980. A columnist Patrick Buchanan called him “The Green Beret of the pro-life movement.” He wrote a book on that subject which many of us have read called *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion* first published in 1985, updated since.

He was also the subject of lawsuits...because he was so very effective. He fought them and fought them and fought them in the courts and was eventually sustained twice in the Supreme Court and they were made to pay his own court costs. He was a very important leader for the direct action movement.

Secondly, I would like to mention a friend of mine, someone whom I really cherish as a friend, Ray Dennehy, who spent his life fighting for life. April 19, 2021, he died at age 86. For some fifty years, he was a philosophy professor, a debater, a writer, a crusader, and he regularly debated on college campuses. He fought an unrelenting battle against abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide; and so, he was also met with extreme opposition by Planned

Parenthood, the Hemlock Society, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization for Women.

He had a strong sense of the need for reasoned argument on this. So, I say that though he was in the same movement, he was quite different from the direct action people. He wanted to do it in the classroom and in the debate hall. And he did it in particular there in San Francisco. He taught at the University of San Francisco for so long that he would engage in debate. He would frequently receive invitations to debate abortion on the stage and just speak to young people. Very interestingly--as a sign of the real importance of that use of real strong argumentation in the public forum--for 50 semesters running, the University of California Berkely offered him the stage. He was very, very well-known for this. Even to the end of his life, he spent his days writing books, had a strong sense of the importance of the angels, and wrote about them. [These books include *A Philosopher Reflects on the Rosary* (2021); *A Theory of Political Liberty* (2019); *Christian Married Love* (2018); *Jacques Maritain's Philosophy of Action* (2017); *Soldier Boy: The War Between Michael and Lucifer* (2008); and *Anti-Abortionist At Large: How to Argue Abortion Intelligently and Live to Tell About It* (2006).] Dennehy won our 2013 Smith Award for Distinguished Scholarship. He also founded United for Life in Santa Clara and United for Life in San Francisco.

He had four children and twelve grandchildren. Maybe I'll finish with a quotation from him: "I think at times we don't even see the plan that God has for us. For me, it's been to fight for life." And he said that he would do this as a mission that he would carry out "until I reached room temperature." He had a great wit.

So please join me in praying for just a minute. Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let your perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls find light for eternity with God. Amen.