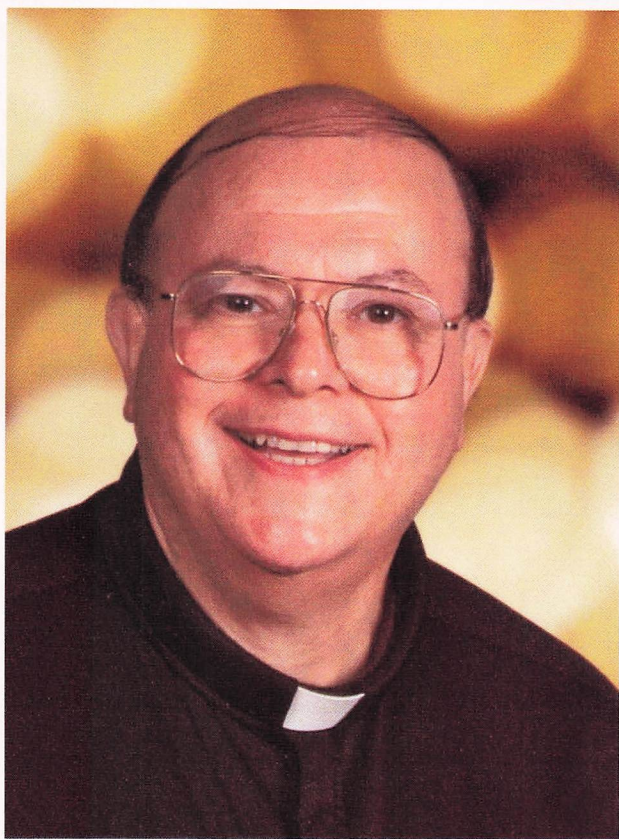


**"The Salesian radiates joy and is  
able to educate to a Christian  
and festive way of life."  
(Constitution #17)**



**Father James Marra  
Salesian of Don Bosco**

August 15, 2016  
Assumption of Our Lady

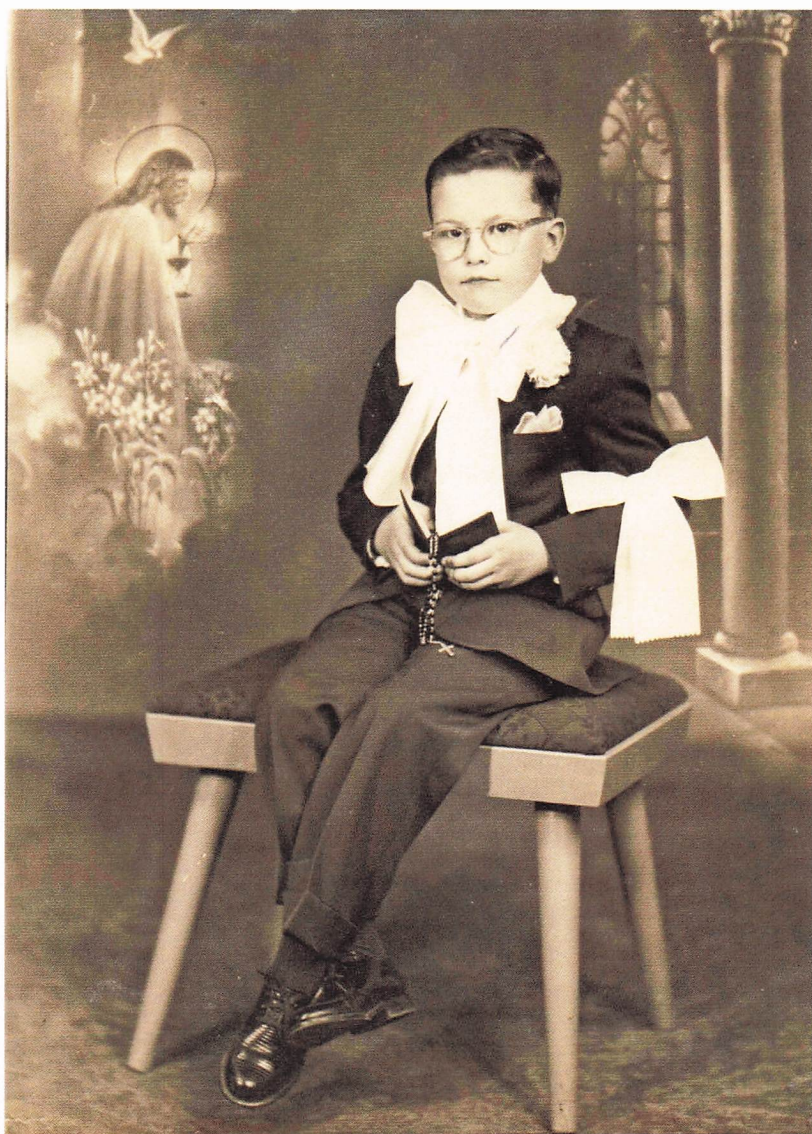
Dear Confreres,

Early in the morning of April 6, 2016, in the emergency room of Hackensack University Medical Center, our brother

### **Father James Marra, SDB**

departed this earth and set forth to the home of the Father. A little more than an hour prior, he had been standing in his room at the Oradell Health Care Center when he experienced without warning a severe heart attack and slumped to the floor. Nurses worked on him until emergency medical services arrived. The technicians continued to treat him as he was rushed to the hospital, but cardiac arrest occurred, his heart ceased to pump, consciousness was lost and Father Jim died in the emergency room at 1 AM.

Fr. Jim Heuser and Fr. Abraham Feliciano arrived at the hospital shortly after his close friend Luis Ruiz had arrived. Together they recited prayers immediately following a death, entrusting Father Jim to the mercy of God and to the care of Mary as he journeyed home. He was 63 years of age, a Salesian for 41 years and an ordained priest for 32 years.



**Fr. Jim's First Holy Communion picture.**

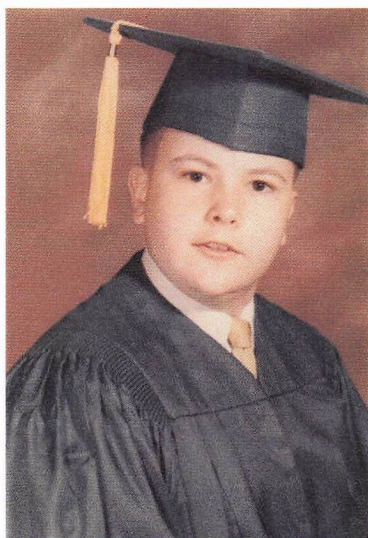


## EARLY LIFE IN BROOKLYN

James Robert Marra was born at Sister Elizabeth Memorial Hospital (now Lutheran Medical Center) in Brooklyn, New York on June 28, 1952 to Vincent and Catherine (Fay) Marra. His father was a longshoreman working on the docks of Bush Terminal in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn. His mother was a homemaker. Married in 1947, suffering was no stranger to their young family, as they tragically lost two children, a daughter Gertrude, who died as an infant due to heart disease, and a son James (Dippy), who died in a fire. Another daughter, Louise, was born prior to Jimmy, while two brothers, Frankie and Vincent Jr., were born after.

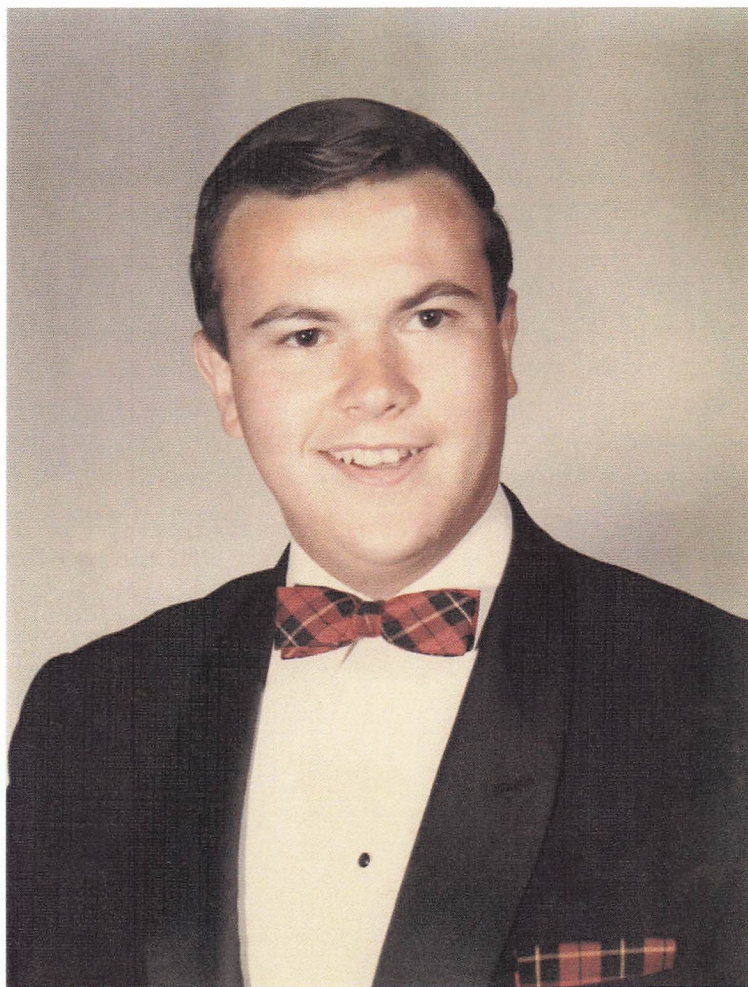
Jimmy was baptized at the imposing St. Michael's Church, famed for its domed tower which, until the year 2000, made it the second tallest building in Brooklyn. Often referred to as Brooklyn's own "Sacr -Coeur", the church not only dominated the skyline but the lives of families in the neighborhood, including the Marra family. Jimmy attended the parish elementary school, through which he was prepared for and received the Sacraments of First Penance, First Eucharist and Confirmation.

**Fr. Jim at his graduation  
from St. Michael's  
Grammar School in  
1966.**





In 1966, Jimmy entered St. Augustine High School for boys in the Park Slope area of Brooklyn, administered by the De La Salle Christian Brothers. In 1969, the school was closed and merged with Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, also a boys' school in the Lasallian tradition. A year later, in 1970, Jimmy was awarded his high school diploma.



**Fr. Jim's high school graduation photo.**

Jimmy was proud of his Brooklyn roots, and growing up there certainly shaped his personality with traits that served him well over the years. He had street smarts, a certain gut instinct and common sense that translated to the business world incredibly well. Related to that, he had an intuitive ability to read people, and his gift for assessing people helped to make him a leader. He knew his way around personalities and situations and how to get things done. Raised in a neighborhood with so many people, and all *kinds* of people at that, made Jimmy open and warm with others, and genuinely accepting of diversity. Perhaps therein lies the origin of his very pastoral heart that so many people experienced over the years.

Brooklyn also made him quite naturally a Democrat! Following graduation from high school, Jimmy attended Hunter College in Manhattan for one semester. He took a course in English, a course in Math, and a course in History entitled "American Political Institutions." The latter led him to get involved in local politics with the Brooklyn Democratic Party and to work on the re-election campaign of Hugh Carey to the US House of Representatives. Carey was a Catholic and the first Brooklyn congressman to oppose the Vietnam War. [Jimmy was delighted that in 1974, and again in 1978, Carey was elected governor of New York State, and that in 2012 the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel was officially renamed the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel.]

**Br. Jim greeting  
Governor Hugh  
Carey at his  
inauguration in  
Albany on  
January 1, 1975.**





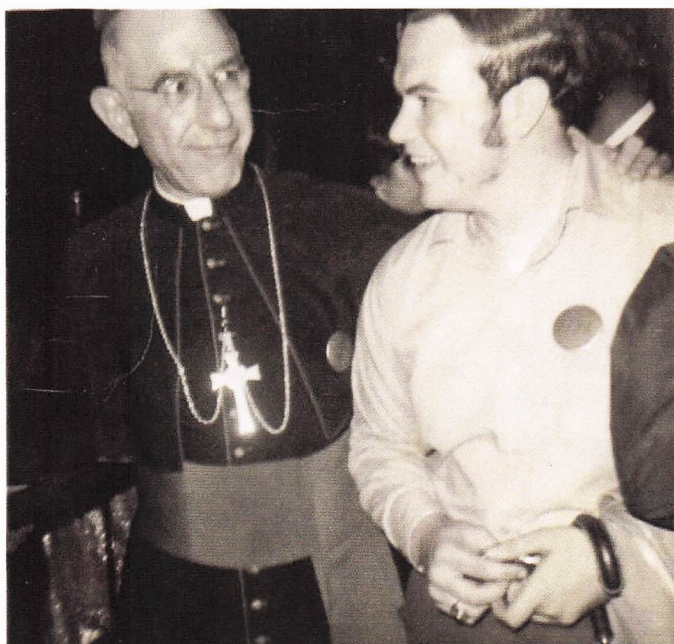
Jimmy was deeply influenced by his family and childhood friends. Wherever he went, in a sense he took them with him. His memories of family would later on become material for his homilies or parish bulletin letters: his mother's meatballs, her entertaining her children with Candy Land and Operation board games, her helping a neighbor in need; his father's taking him kiting and crabbing, and watching the Yankee game on television with him. On a deeper level, he embodied his parents' courage in the face of difficulties and their sensitive and affectionate hearts. Through the years, Jimmy also remained in contact with some Brooklyn friends, including Mike Salerno. They had played baseball together in beautiful Sunset Park, with its breathtaking vista of the Manhattan skyline and New York Harbor. Jimmy umpired while Mike played catcher; they had frequent contact over the years.



**Fr. Jim with his parents, sister Louise,  
and brothers Frankie and Vinnie.**



Jimmy also came away from Brooklyn with an apostolic Catholic faith. In a borough known for its churches and bars, it appears he spent more time in the churches! In his late teens, he founded the Sunset Park Youth Association (SPYA) out of nearby St. Agatha's Church to help neighborhood children. On one level it offered the young a program of sports, games and outings. But on another level it offered more. Staff members were all trained to recognize in children signs of depression, anxiety and other emotional and mental distress. They were then referred to agencies that could provide them help. As Jimmy began to sense a call from God to serve Him as a priest, he learned of the figure of Don Bosco and the Salesian mission to the young. No doubt, it was the needs he discovered in the youth of the neighborhood, and the meaning he found in working with them, that led him to apply to Don Bosco College Seminary, which he entered in the fall of 1972.



**Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn visits SPYA.**

## SALESIAN INITIAL FORMATION

Jimmy lived his Son of Mary Year [1972-1973] in Newton, New Jersey under the gentle guidance of Fr. Frank Klauder. Among his classmates was John Nazzaro, a kid from East Boston, who would become his best friend. He then began the Novitiate Year in Ipswich, Massachusetts with Fr. Ted Ciampi as his Novice Master. In the summer of 1974, he applied for religious profession writing, *"After learning and living the Salesian lifestyle for almost a year, I find myself happy and hopeful that God is calling me to serve Him by serving His young ones, especially poor and abandoned boys."* He and his novitiate companions traveled down from Ipswich to Newton, where they made their first profession as Salesians on September 1, 1974 in the chapel of Don Bosco College.

Brother Jim continued his college seminary studies in Newton, which he completed three years later in 1977 with a B.A. degree in philosophy.



**Br. Jim as a theology student preparing Thanksgiving dinner for the community with Br. Steve Schenck and Br. John Nazzaro.**





**Br. Jim and his good friend Br. John Nazzaro outside a summer camp cabin in Newton.**

He was stronger with the humanities, while finding math and science courses, and even more so Latin, quite difficult. It will surprise no one to learn that he did well with an independent study course entitled "Modern Broadway Dramas"! An unapologetic New Yorker, he was a Broadway aficionado all his life.

During his years in Newton, Brother Jim also worked with the young, both teaching catechism classes in local parishes and working in the Boys' Club on the seminary grounds. During the summers, he worked in the resident or day camps, early on given administrative responsibilities because of his organizing capabilities.

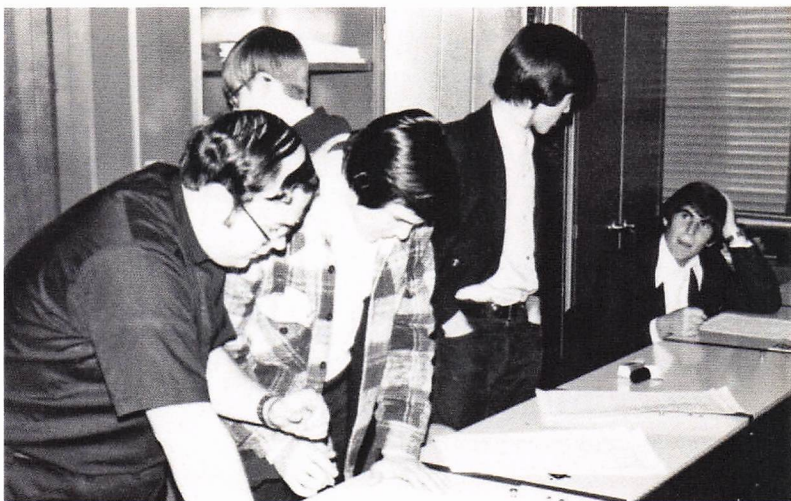




**Br. Jim with campers at horseback riding at Camp Echo Bay in 1979.**

For practical training, Brother Jim was assigned as teacher and assistant first at Salesian Junior Seminary in Goshen, New York for one year and then at Don Bosco Prep High School in Ramsey, New Jersey for another year. While at Ramsey, he also took courses at St. Peter's College in Jersey City and obtained teacher certification in English from the State of New Jersey. Brother Jim was highly effective as a teacher, both creative and fun. He maintained relationships with some of the students from those years for the rest of his life. In the summers, he was the Program Director at Camp Echo Bay in New Rochelle.

In the fall of 1979, Brother Jim moved to the Salesian Center in Columbus, Ohio and began his theological studies at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Worthington.



**Br. Jim working with the Yearbook Club at Salesian Junior Seminary in Goshen in 1978.**



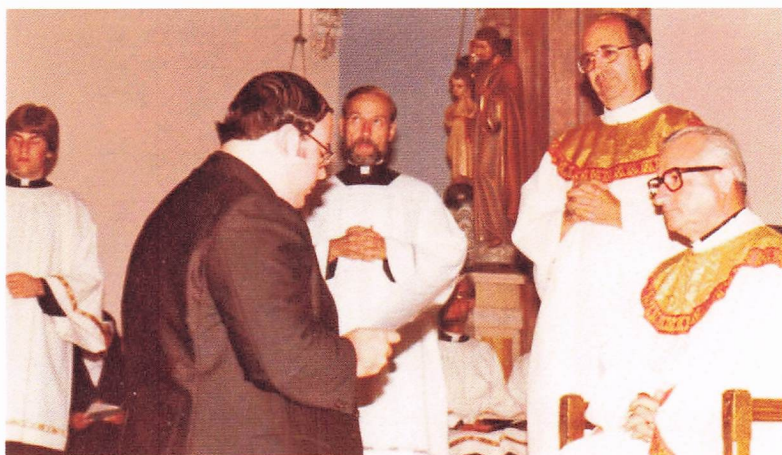
**Br. Jim on his way to teach class at Don Bosco Prep in Ramsey in 1979.**





**Br. Jim with his theology classmates (l. to r.) Br. John Nazzaro, Br. Bill Bucciferro, Br. Eugene Walter and Br. Tom Connery.**

A year later, on September 14, 1980, he made his perpetual profession as a Salesian in the presence of Very Rev. Egidio Viganò, Rector Major and the 7th Successor of Don Bosco, who was visiting the province. At the time he wrote, *"It is my deepest prayer that I persevere as a good Salesian all my life long."*



**Br. Jim making his Perpetual Profession in 1980 as a Salesian before V. Rev. Egidio Viganò, Rector Major, with Fr. Dominic DeBlase, provincial, as witness.**

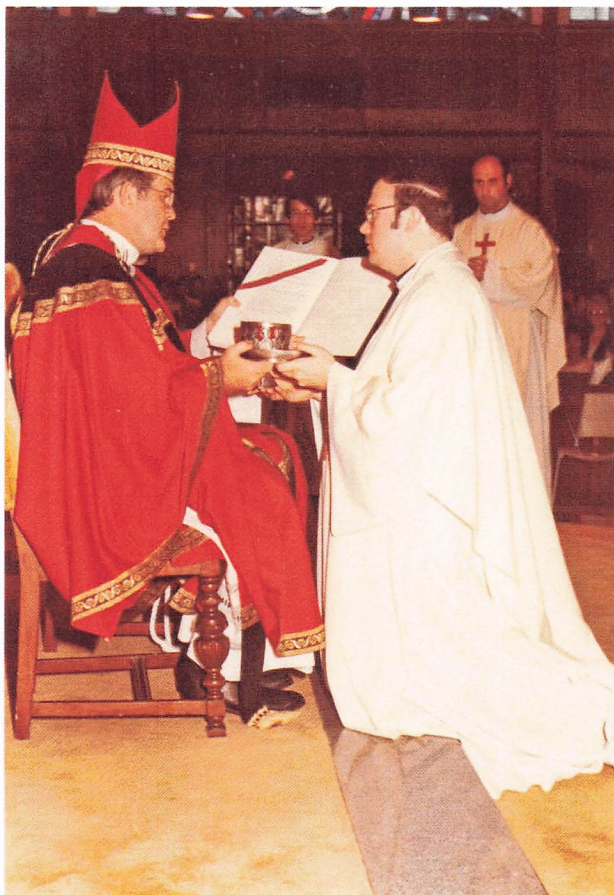


While engaged in theological studies, Brother Jim served as a chaplain at Columbus Developmental Center ministering to the disabled, many of whom had severe and profound challenges. He also counseled seventh and eighth graders at St. Cecilia's School in West Columbus. He was ordained a deacon on May 22, 1982 by Bishop Edward Herrmann, 9th Bishop of Columbus. From 1982 – 1983, he served as a deacon at St. Leo's Parish on the south side of Columbus, counseling in the school and moderating the youth group.



**Br. Jim and friends at Columbus Developmental Center in 1980.**

In 1983, Brother Jim was awarded by the Josephinum two degrees, a Master of Divinity Degree and a Master of Arts Degree in Moral Theology, *summa cum laude*. His thesis was entitled "Pillars of Bosconian Spirituality" and explored various components of Don Bosco's spirituality which the "Giant of Sanctity" presented to his followers and to the young as a pathway to holiness.

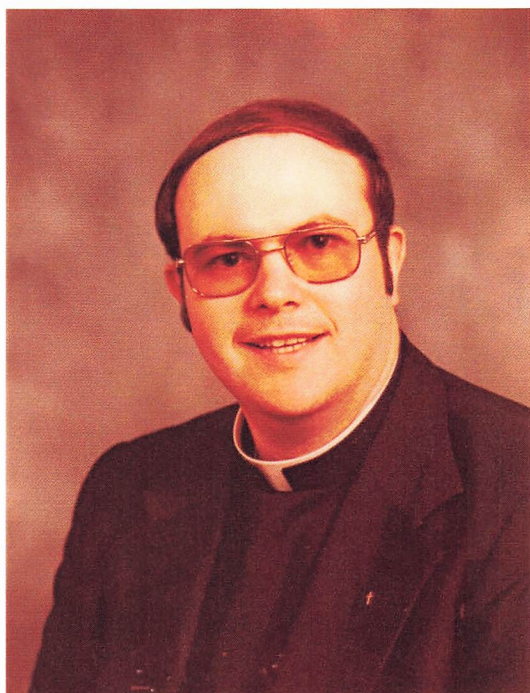


**Fr. Jim  
receiving  
the chalice  
and paten  
from  
Bishop  
James  
Griffin at  
his priestly  
ordination  
in 1983.**

Bishop James Griffin, the 10th Bishop of Columbus, ordained Brother Jim to the priesthood on May 21, 1983. His memorial card pictured Jesus with the children on one side and, on the reverse, the words, *"And Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.'"* (Matthew 19:14) A framed needlepoint given to him by a friend on that occasion presciently summed up what would characterize the style of his priesthood: *"Called to listen to the needs of others even when they remain unspoken."* On the 12th of June, Father Jim celebrated a joyful Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Michael's Church in Brooklyn, surrounded by his family and numerous neighborhood friends.



**Fr. Jim's Ordination  
photo.**



**Fr. Jim gives his  
mother, Catherine,  
communion at his  
First Mass at St.  
Michael's Church  
in Brooklyn.**





**Fr. Jim with his ordination classmates along with Fr. Joseph Occhio, director, and Fr. Dominic DeBlase, provincial.**

## **DON BOSCO TECH IN PATERSON**

Father Jim was assigned to Salesian High School in New Rochelle for his first year of priesthood [1983-1984]. There he had no administrative responsibilities, serving as a teacher and assistant and learning through much pastoral experience what it meant to be a Salesian priest among the young.

However, in the summer of 1984, Father Jim was sent to the College of Business Administration at the University of Notre Dame for a course entitled "The Role of the Treasurer in the Religious Community", after which he moved to Don Bosco Technical High School in Paterson as Financial Administrator. He would be there ten years, from 1984-1994, and have an enormously positive impact.



Father Jim served as the steward of finances for both the school and the Salesian Community. His natural business acumen led him to ensure that spending was prudent, waste was diminished, systems of accountability were implemented, vendor relationships were fostered, facilities were well maintained, capital improvements were accomplished, a Hall of Fame was instituted, fundraising was improved, donors were acknowledged and the needs of confreres were met. And no one could put on a colorful and exciting Bingo night like he did!

Father Jim was also concerned about improving the school's curriculum. He launched a campaign to build a \$65,000 Computer Center, housing 35 new computers and a library of software, so that all students could take a 4-year basic course in computer language, operating and programming. He engaged local businesses to sponsor the drive.



**Fr. Jim and Fr. Steve Schenck (in sombrero) with Don Bosco Tech students at Sea World in 1985.**

And yet, while burdened with so many administrative concerns, Father Jim remained a youth minister and Salesian pastor at heart. He taught theology to the entire freshman class. He organized regular camping trips, outings to Broadway shows, Yankee baseball games and World Wrestling Foundation events, and an annual trip to Disney World in Florida. He readily and regularly imparted the Lord's mercy to the young in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And he worked untiringly to ensure that no student who wanted to be at Don Bosco Tech would leave for lack of finances.

The students were largely immigrant and poor. But in Father Jim they had a friend, and they knew themselves as welcomed, valued and loved. By his manner and his actions, he was an administrator who was first a Salesian, *"a sign and bearer of God's love."* (C.2)



**Fr. Jim at his induction into the Don Bosco Tech Hall of Fame in 1994 with Michael Salerno, Timothy Wagner '88 and Luis Ruiz '94.**



## **SALESIAN MISSIONS IN NEW ROCHELLE**

From 1994–1996, Father Jim was in residence at Don Bosco High School in Ramsey, New Jersey. His hard work over ten years at Don Bosco Tech had taken a toll on his health, and a lighter assignment was warranted. He was appointed the Moderator of the Provincial Chapter held at Kings College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania during the summer of 1995. His good organizational talents and his yearlong leadership of the planning committee ensured an open and fruitful chapter in which Salesians and lay people from around the province reflected on their collaboration and sharing in Don Bosco's mission and spirituality.

Father Jim was also designated by Fr. Timothy Ploch, provincial, to be the successor of Fr. Edward Cappelletti as Procurator of the Salesian Mission Office. Fr. Cappelletti served as such for 37 years. Although his tenure as Procurator of Salesian Missions was brief [1996–1998], Father Jim left his mark. The business aspect of the organization continued steadily, raising significant funds in support of nearly 30,000 missionaries assisting poor youth and their families around the world. But the pastoral aspect of the organization grew, as Father Jim worked on generating our typical Salesian family spirit among the staff.

He made time for everyone, approachable and easy to talk with as he was. He circulated among the departments, praising and encouraging everyone. He instituted a monthly gathering to celebrate staff birthdays and acknowledge their contributions. And he organized occasional outings for them as well. "He made coming into work fun," remarked one worker. When he left the work after two years, a long line of people stretched down the hall, colleagues who wished to personally say goodbye and thank him for all that he had done for them.

## CORPUS CHRISTI PARISH IN PORT CHESTER

In 1998, Fr. Patrick Angelucci, provincial, asked Father Jim to serve as the pastor of Corpus Christi Parish located in the Washington Park section of Port Chester, New York. It was a wise choice, as once more the administrative and pastoral gifts of Father Jim furthered the Salesian mission.

Father Jim gives us a clue to his approach to serving the parish in an article he wrote for *Catholic New York* in June 2000. Entitled "Am I A Builder?" he stated:

*"This Sunday when we celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, we are reminded of the great gift that we have in our Church. For we have the real presence of Jesus, the Body of Christ.*

*Every Sunday we come together around God's altar as we receive the Body of Christ. And Jesus builds us up! He strengthens our torn will, he heals our troubled spirit, he brings peace to our hectic world. Jesus builds us up!*

*And since we are a symbol of the unity of the Body of Christ, it follows that we too must strive to "build up" others: in our homes, at our work, in our schools, with everyone we meet. So let us ask ourselves: "Am I a builder of the Body of Christ?"*

Father Jim saw the parish of Corpus Christi first and foremost as the Body of Christ. He worked energetically at creating a family spirit that helped form one community of faith among the parishioners. And then he challenged that community to go out and notice and meet the human need that was around them.





**Grotto of Mary, Help of Christians built by Father Jim at Corpus Christi Parish with statue of St. Joseph behind it.**



**Statue of St. Joseph at Grotto of Mary, Help of Christians.**

He gave attention to the Sunday liturgies. His homilies were always down to earth, employing vivid examples from daily life and his family experience, and recounting stories that connected to the people on an emotional level and made God real for them. He was a master at creatively making God's word understandable to the young, and in so doing he reached parishioners of all ages.

Father Jim also grasped the importance of popular devotion in the faith lives of people. He launched a *Body and Soul Campaign* to build a beautiful grotto of Mary Help of Christians in a garden-like setting on the side of the church, with a statue of St. Joseph behind it. He set up a side room of the church as a Salesian Room, with photos and relics of various Salesian Saints and Blesseds, and racks that held booklets recounting their lives for the taking.

Father Jim maintained the strong tradition at Corpus Christi Parish of holding the young at the center of parish life. Corpus Christi School had around 500 youngsters in Grades Pre-K through 8 in a recently expanded school building when he arrived. Administered by the Salesian Sisters, Father Jim worked with them to provide regular sacramental offerings to the students and to foster the Salesian spirit among the faculty and staff. He also pushed forward the development of a Teen Center and its outreach to public school and high school youth in the neighborhood.

In the year 2000, Corpus Christi marked the 75th anniversary of its establishment as a parish by Patrick Cardinal Hayes. Father Jim worked with a committee to plan the celebration of this parish milestone involving all constituencies.



Under the motto "*Remembering Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Believing in Our Future*", numerous initiatives took place that inspired gratitude, joy and hope.

On February 1, 2000, the Honorable Nita Lowey paid tribute to Corpus Christi Church in the House of Representatives of the US Congress in Washington. Among her remarks, she stated: "*Corpus Christi Church has had the good fortune to be guided by a number of exceptionally gifted spiritual leaders. Father Peter Mayerhofer, Father Alphonse Volonte, and Father Peter Rinaldi, among others, contributed mightily to Corpus Christi's growth. That tradition of dedication and vision is well-served by today's pastor, Father Jim Marra.*"

The administrative gifts of Father Jim also benefited the parish. During his tenure, finances were stabilized, a mortgage of \$450,000 and an additional parish debt of \$300,000 were paid off, and several capital improvement projects were accomplished. Each summer, a carnival was held to benefit the school and the parish. Hundreds would show up over the course of a week each August to enjoy the live music, rides, carnival and casino games, and food and drink options like pizza frita, mozzarepa and piña coladas. It was a beloved opportunity for Port Chester residents, whether or not they were parishioners, to gather together for an evening of fun and community.

On September 11, 2001, the terrorist attack on the United States took place, with the greatest number of casualties occurring at the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. A morgue was set up at Ground Zero, and mortuary chaplains were sought for a ministry of presence, prayer and blessing over the next couple of months. Father Jim Marra volunteered to serve, along with Father John Nazzaro, who was director of Salesian High School at the time.

Together they traveled down to the site and ministered in 10-hour shifts to those engaged in recovering remains of the victims as well as to their families who came to identify them. While he considered it a privilege to help at a disaster area considered holy ground, Father Jim also remarked that it was the closest he came to encountering pure evil. The experience moved him to tears.

In 2004, Father Jim was blessed to take his Mom and Dad, and his Uncle Dom and Aunt Jo, to Italy. They were able to visit the town of Angri, where his paternal parents were born, and the Marra family is remembered as teachers and poets. They also attended a papal audience in Rome, where Father Jim arranged that his parents were brought up to kneel before Saint John Paul II and receive a special blessing. It was a moving and memorable moment for them all.



**Mr. and Mrs. Marra being blessed by Saint John Paul II.**



## ILLNESS

Over the course of his nine years as pastor of Corpus Christi, the health of Father Jim declined. Indeed, health challenges had already made themselves known in the years prior. Conditions related to the heart had been diagnosed at St. Joseph's Hospital in Paterson in the 1980's, when Father Jim was working at Don Bosco Tech. He had occasions of severe chest pain and had to be hospitalized several times. Other conditions related to obesity also had appeared: diabetes, high blood pressure and occasional bouts with cellulitis. He completed a cardiac rehabilitation program and did lose some weight. Yet Father Jim found it a tremendous challenge to continue to exercise and to lose more weight.

While at Corpus Christi Parish, neuropathy set in. Nerves were damaged due to high blood sugar levels, resulting in numbness and significant nerve pain. Various opioid medications were prescribed, and Father Jim was significantly impaired. Sciatica, caused by a narrowing of the spinal cord in the lower back, was then diagnosed. At times, hospitalizations were required at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx. In one particularly difficult period in early 2007, Father Jim was transferred to Mount Sinai Beth Israel Pain Management Center in Manhattan, where he nearly died. It was discovered that the opioids had been absorbed and stored in his fatty tissue and, unawares, he had been overmedicated. Doctors were able to bring him back and detox him, but it was a harrowing experience for him.

Following this incident, it was determined that Father Jim could not continue to serve as pastor of Corpus Christi Parish. He moved to the home of his parents, now living in Sayreville, New Jersey, for several months of complete rest.

## **DON BOSCO PREP IN RAMSEY**

In the fall of 2007, Father Jim moved to Don Bosco Prep High School in Ramsey, New Jersey and took up the role of Director of Advancement. He was well suited to oversee the development team there, while the position also gave him the opportunity to take the time he needed to care for his health needs. The personnel in the office immediately took to his open and caring personality while at the same time learning from his fundraising wisdom. He challenged them to raise the bar, and they responded: annual fund income and fundraising profits increased.



**Fr. Jim working with Alumni Director Rich Wisniewski at Don Bosco Prep's Office of Advancement in 2008.**

A year later, with gradually improving health, Father Jim was asked to step into the role of Director of Finance of the school as well.



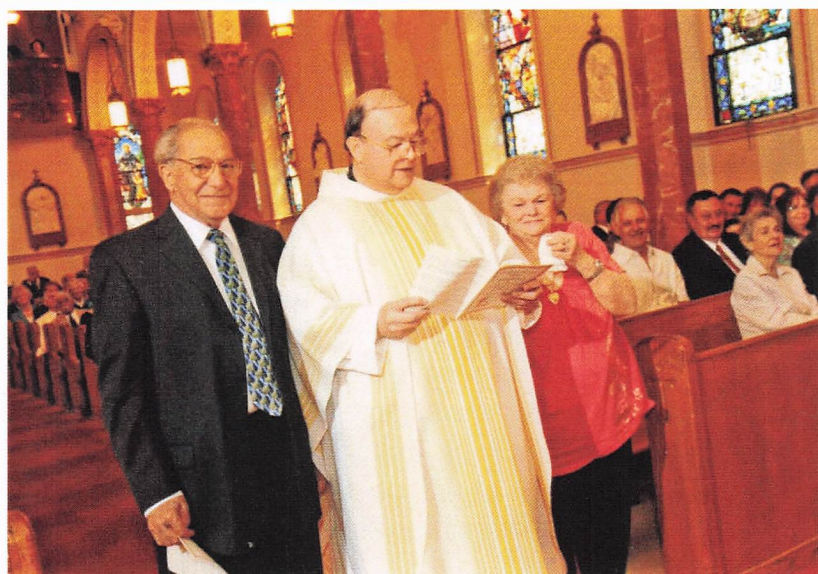
A need for the restructuring of that area was evident, and, together with Fr. Jack Janko who took up the role of Facilities Director, a complete overhaul of the school's fiscal operations was accomplished over the next three years.

Working together with Carmen Perez and Susan Arsi, responsible fiscal protocols were put in place, yearly operating budgets were balanced, the school began to operate decisively in the black, annual audits were done and some needed campus improvements were seen to. Debt was erased, savings begun, and a foundation was laid for the future growth of the school. Two important capital projects were undertaken: the renovation of the school chapel, and the renovation of the school's athletic fields.

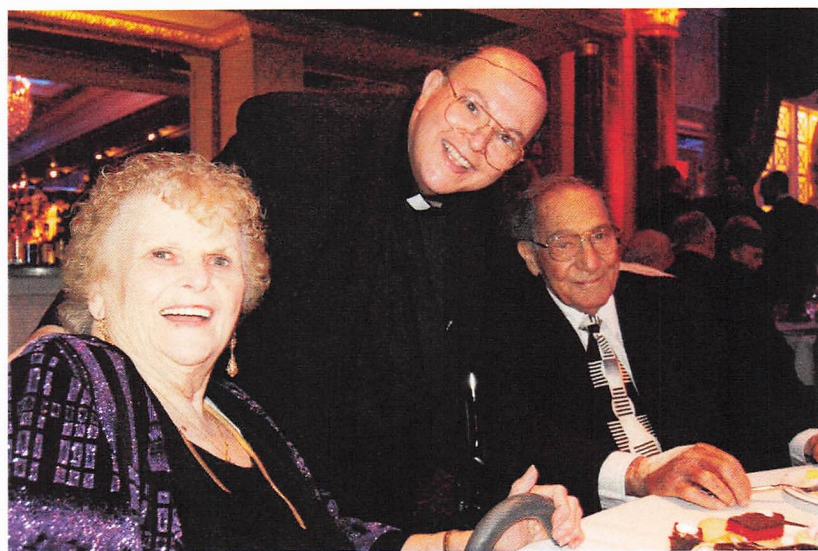
Father Jim once again manifested a particular concern for students and families in financial need. He instituted an annual drive, *We Have A Student*, which anonymously profiled 10 or so boys with difficult family situations and appealed to the compassion of donors for assistance. He responsibly saw to awarding financial aid and donor scholarships, and no student was turned away from enrolling due to funding challenges.

With the 2015 Centennial Year of the school's founding on the horizon, Father Jim initiated a "wish list" of capital improvement projects which laid the groundwork for the launching of a capital campaign as well as the establishment of an endowment for the school.

Within the Salesian Community, Father Jim was a real confrere. He was sought out by some of his brothers for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He showed a real solicitude for those confreres who were aged and sick, seeking to ensure they were cared for as well as valued. Perhaps it was his own experience of illness that made him particularly compassionate with the brokenness of others



**With his parents at his side, Fr. Jim renews his commitment to the priestly service at the celebration of his 25th anniversary of ordination.**



**Fr. Jim with his Mom and Dad in 2012 at the President's Gala for Don Bosco Prep.**

## SUFFERING AND DARKNESS

Unfortunately, as the years went on, Father Jim's health declined further. The sciatic pain due to protruded discs in his spinal cord was deemed intractable. His pain began to intensify, and periods without pain were quite rare. Gradually he had to let go of the oversight of the Office of Advancement and eventually of the Finance Office as well.

Father Jim's family suffered two tragedies during these years. In October of 2012, Hurricane Sandy struck the Eastern seaboard with a vengeance. The neighborhood of his parents in Sayreville, New Jersey was ravaged by flood waters. Thankfully his Mom and Dad had been evacuated, but much damage was done to their home. Father Jim supported and helped them as much as he could, while regretting that his health condition limited him from doing more.

A year-and-a-half later, on March 19, 2014, Father Jim's father, Vincent Marra, passed away at the age of 87. Father Jim was blessed to be present with his Dad when he died, helping him with prayer and the sacraments to let go in faith. Yet Father Jim's health condition enabled him to be at only one day of the wake. His nerve pain flared up with such intensity that he could not be present for the second day of the wake, or celebrate his Dad's funeral mass on the day following. This compounded his sorrow and grief.

Numerous were his hospitalizations in Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, and they began to lengthen in duration, sometimes months at a time. He had two surgeries on his back, but neither of them proved effective. Nor did epidural injections or the insertion of a spinal stimulator give lasting relief.



His reliance on various opioid pain medications thus steadily grew. Unfortunately, it became a situation then of diminishing returns. Escalated doses of opioids prescribed by the doctors to numb pain increased Father Jim's disability, with no good clear end in sight. He became physically dependent on them, resulting in negative endocrine effects and the gradual weakening of his heart.

In addition, inflammatory skin disease occurred on his lower legs. At times wounds developed which required palliative care. And occasionally blood clots formed in the veins of his legs, calling for even further treatment. Movement became quite difficult, and the abandonment of a cane and use of a walker became essential.

It was a genuine dark night for Father Jim. He lamented that the students of Don Bosco Prep did not really know him. He yearned to get well and resume a presence among his Salesian brothers and work for the young. He wondered what God wanted from him, seeking to hear his voice in the darkness. He frequently offered up his pain and sufferings for the mission, for community and province needs, and for others who asked for his prayers. But it was difficult, as no way forward without pain ever realistically presented itself.

Over the years, his Salesian brothers accompanied him with affection and help. But Father Jim relied greatly on the assistance of Luis Ruiz, whom he had gotten to know at Don Bosco Tech in Paterson and who remained over the years a devoted friend and then caregiver. He was ever present to Father Jim, who trusted him greatly, and he was solicitous for any need.

In the summer of 2015, Father Jim fell from the bed in his room and sustained a trauma to his neck.



**Fr. Jim celebrates mass on the occasion of his 25th anniversary of ordination as a priest in 2008.**

The result was an injury to his cervical spinal cord, resulting in loss of motion in his legs and weakness in his arms and hands. This was yet another great suffering for him and a further diminishment of his mobility.

A series of hospitalizations and stays at various nursing facilities followed. Father Jim went to Montefiore Hospital and then to St. Patrick's Home for the Aged and Infirm in the Bronx. There the medical staff and the Carmelite Sisters helped him greatly over several months, daily therapy got him stronger and more mobile, and his spirits improved. He returned to the Salesian Community in Ramsey, but alas his stay was brief.

Wounds soon developed on his legs, and Father Jim went to Hackensack University Medical Center, then to Care One at Ridgewood, then back to Hackensack University Medical Center and then to Oradell Health Care Center. It was there that his fatal heart attack occurred that brought years of significant pain and suffering to an end. No longer a prisoner of his body, he was at last set free.

## SALESIAN ATTRIBUTES

Allow me to highlight some aspects of Father Jim's life that are typically Salesian and worthy of our own imitation.

First, I mention his active concern for **promoting Salesian vocations**. Constitution 6 indicates that Salesians "*pay special attention to apostolic vocations*." Like Don Bosco, Father Jim considered an ecclesial vocation to be a real treasure for the church.

While a temporarily professed brother in the college-seminary in Newton, he formed a Vocation Club, organizing and exhorting his companions to work for new vocations to Salesian life. He began initiatives of prayer and outreach to this effect ... and even had a song composed, "Dare to Be Different", an anthem to be sung with Broadway flair!

Father Jim himself proposed the idea of becoming a Salesian to a young member of the Boys' Club from Sparta, Eric Wyckoff—who today serves as a Salesian priest in Jerusalem. And while working at Don Bosco Tech, he inspired a Salesian vocation in a student from Paterson, Abraham Feliciano, continuing to offer him spiritual direction when Abe was in college in Manhattan. He too is a Salesian priest today thanks to the efforts of Father Jim.

While at Don Bosco Prep, Father Jim instituted and promoted the "Don Bosco Scholarship", a two year grant for any graduate or alumnus who enters the Salesian formation program. The thought of encouraging young men to "stay with Don Bosco" was ever on his mind.





**Fr. Jim with his student Fr. Abraham Feliciano DBT '92 on the weekend of his priestly ordination in 2006 along with Fr. Jay Horan.**

Second, I mention Father Jim's **great kindness**. Constitution 15 indicates that *"the Salesian is open and cordial, ready to make the first approach and to welcome others with unfailing kindness, respect and patience."* In all of his assignments, Father Jim showed a wonderfully gentle approach to both the young and adults. He always listened to what others had to say and was very understanding. People found him easy to confide in because of his non-judgmental manner, and many would go to him with their personal struggles.

Father Jim was cordial and hospitable to guests. He was brotherly with his confreres, always supportive and encouraging. During his periods of confinement in medical facilities, he befriended other patients, reassuring them and praying with them. And he had a particular compassion for the young who were "underdogs", the poor and most abandoned.

Third, I mention Father Jim's **sense of fun**. Constitution 17 indicates that the Salesian "*is always cheerful. He radiates this joy and is able to educate to a Christian and festive way of life.*" Father Jim enjoyed what life offered, always grateful to God for everything. And he loved to share joyful experiences with others, from something as simple as a Beefsteak Dinner to something more elaborate like a summer trip to Arizona.

Over the years, he organized numerous hikes for others, where they would find him waiting in a cabin in the woods at journey's end with an Italian meal, complete with imported soppressata and provolone! And his presence made all manner of gatherings fun because of his cheerfulness, his hearty laugh, his sense of humor. He could readily break out into a Kate Smith-like rendition of *God Bless America* or a Liza Minnelli-like version of *New York, New York*!



**Fr. Jim the hiker in 1979.**

Even in later years, when in moments of intense pain, Father Jim made the effort to be cheerful with visitors and with the nursing staff. And he regularly expressed gratitude for all that was done for him. He had a very thankful heart.

Finally, I mention Father Jim's **relationship with Mary**. Constitution 92 indicates that the Salesian develops "*a strong filial devotion to her.*" Father Jim always had a close bond with his mother Catherine. They would speak on the phone daily, and he always felt strengthened by her warm and deep affection. Thus it was easy for him to develop a similar relationship with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

He turned to her in prayer so often. He spoke to her of the needs of others and of his own concerns. He entrusted to her various projects he undertook in his different assignments. He always had a rosary near at hand for the praying. And he visited some of her shrines to express his filial love.

Interestingly, Father Jim never got to visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but he developed a strong attachment to her. He read books about her apparitions, he hung her image by his room, and he took comfort in her words to Juan Diego, "*Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that the thing that disturbs you, the thing that afflicts you, is nothing. Do not let your countenance, your heart be disturbed. Do not fear this sickness ... nor anything that is sharp or hurtful. Am I not here, I, who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more? Let nothing else worry you, disturb you.*"



## CONCLUSION

On Sunday, April 10, the remains of Father Jim were received by the Salesian Community, Father Jim's Mom, siblings and other family members at 1:30 PM and carried to the Mary Help of Christians Chapel. An afternoon wake and rosary, and an evening wake and vigil service followed, with numerous confreres, Salesian sisters, school colleagues, alumni and friends present. Father Abraham Feliciano offered a heartfelt homily at the wake service, highlighting his experience as a student of Father Jim at Don Bosco Tech.

On Monday, April 11, the remains of Father Jim were carried by students to the school gymnasium, where the 10 AM Funeral Mass was presided over by Fr. Steven Shafran, provincial. Over 1,000 people were present as the student body and faculty gratefully remembered and prayed for their friend, with numerous Salesians, family members and friends joining them. Father John Nazzaro preached with affection, recounting anecdotes from their close friendship over the years. A brief luncheon followed the Mass, and then Father Jim's remains were transported to the Salesian Cemetery in Goshen, New York and there interred among the graves of his brothers in the province.

There is a photo of a young Jimmy Marra clinging onto a tree in a park in Brooklyn, while his mother and a brother look on. Throughout his Salesian life, and most especially in times of pain and suffering, Father Jim clung to Jesus, whom he believed to be the revealer of a merciful Father. Please join our Salesian Community now in praying that Jesus has not let our brother Jim go, but rather has clung to him through his death and carried him to the Father's home.



**A tree grows in Brooklyn.....and young Jimmy climbed it,  
while his mother and brother looked on!**

And as we thank God for the goodness of Father Jim's life, let us implore God that new and faithful Salesian vocations may arise in our age.

Cordially,

*Father James Heuser, SDB*

Father James Heuser, SDB  
Director

**DATA FOR THE NECROLOGY**

**Fr. James R. Marra, SDB**

**Birth: June 28, 1952 in Brooklyn, New York**

**Religious Profession: September 1, 1974 in Newton,  
New Jersey**

**Priestly Ordination: May 21, 1983 in Columbus, Ohio**

**Death: April 6, 2016 in Hackensack, New Jersey  
at age 63, a Salesian for 41 years  
and a priest for 32 years.**