

News

'Dynamic' missionary priest drowns in Philippines

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[Print Page](#)

St. Andrew Parish in Upper Arlington has lost a son of the parish, who devoted his life to service.

The Rev. Steve Baumbusch drowned on Thursday, Oct. 28, on Lubang Island in the Philippines after becoming caught in a rip tide while swimming.

"This is a devastating shock to all of us," said the Rev. Ken Mazur, regional superior of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions.

"I can't believe the amount of e-mails I've received from people with so many stories of how he touched their lives."

Born in 1956, the youngest of four children to Upper Arlington residents William and Barbara Baumbusch, Steve Baumbusch wanted to be a priest all his life.

He attended St. Andrew School in UA and Saints Peter and Paul Seminary High School in Newark. It was in seminary where he learned about PIME.

"When I first became interested in the priesthood, I didn't even know what a missionary was," Baumbusch wrote in "My Story" in December 2001 in Time World magazine.

"It was through my association with PIME, in high school, that my missionary vocation began. Then once I entered college, I had a definite turn toward the missionary life."

Baumbusch was ordained in 1983 and spent 15 years in various capacities: teacher and dean at Saints Peter and Paul Seminary, PIME regional superior in Detroit -- when he started the Mexico mission -- and formation director for PIME's college seminarians in Detroit.

"When I finally did get my mission assignment, I was filled with joy," Baumbusch wrote.

"Even though you love what you are doing and meet great people and worked for the kingdom and the mission, when the time comes to go, that's the high point."

In 1998, Baumbusch received his permanent mission: the Philippines.

During his service, Baumbusch frequently wrote letters to his parents, and his mother would share them with the St. Andrew community, maintaining a bond between Baumbusch and his hometown.

The St. Andrew congregation took up annual mission appeals to direct funds to the construction of Baumbusch's church in Columbio, his first Filipino post. Every three years, he returned to Columbus for a three-month vacation.

In 2008, his 25th anniversary mass celebration was held at St. Andrew to commemorate his time as a priest.

Baumbusch was serving as rector of the PIME Theologate in Tagaytay City, about 37 miles south of Manila, when he died. He received that assignment last year.

"I'll miss the parish work," he wrote in PIME Spotlight in June 2009, "but I truly believe that the preparation of future missionary priests is a priority well worth the effort."

To prepare for the assignment, he studied at the Josephinum Seminary in north Columbus for nine months. When he finished there, he viewed returning to the Philippines as going home.

"After 10 years of missionary service in the mountains of Mindanao and the urban setting of Manila, the Philippines really does feel like home to me," he wrote.

Mazur and Baumbusch attended the Saints Peter and Paul Seminary together in 1970 and became friends. They studied and worked together for many years.



The Rev. Steve Baumbusch's recent mission work was taking place in the Philippines.

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"He was just very giving," Mazur said.

"He always tried to look for the good in people."

The Rev. Michael Watson, pastor of St. Andrew Parish, said Baumbusch was a man of character: engaging, affable and spiritual.

"He could draw people into divinity through his humanity," Watson said.

"Steve was just a great, down-to-earth guy ... He loved being a priest."

Laura Fisher, a parishioner at St. Andrew, said Baumbusch was a dynamic priest who taught with words and actions.

"His whole life was a gift to us because he was such an inspiration," Fisher said.

"When he spoke, it just resonated in your soul."

Funeral plans presently are incomplete as Baumbusch's body is being shipped back to the United States. The tentative plan is hold a funeral service at St. Andrew Church sometime next week, but that has not been finalized.

A funeral service is expected to occur in the Philippines on Friday.

"Your life will have meaning and fulfillment the more you are willing to give of yourself," Baumbusch wrote on the Roman Catholic Diocese of Columbus website on Oct. 24.

"You can make a real difference in the world."

"His whole life was a gift to us because he was such an inspiration. When he spoke, it just resonated in your soul."

--*Laura Fisher*

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