

Michael James Hugh Mortimer ofs – Professed 8th July 1956 -- Bedford Fraternity

I first met Michael when we were both at Rushmoor Preparatory School, Bedford, in 1945/6, where we became friends. He was then an Anglican. He went on to Bedford School whilst I went to the Catholic Ratcliffe College, near Leicester. Since leaving school, we have both lived somewhat parallel lives. We both worked in our parents' tobacconist shops in Bedford, in a friendly and co-operative spirit. We were both enlisted to do National Service, both sent to Germany in 1954, he as cook in the Royal Air Force and I as a Royal Signals morse code operator. After our National Service, we both returned to our Fathers' businesses. Michael was a daily communicant at St. Paul's Anglican church Bedford and gradually felt the pull to Rome. He started attending Mass at Holy Child & St. Joseph church, Bedford, where I was baptised and confirmed and later married. He started having instructions and caught the eye of one Lawrence Maple, father of Father Francis Maple, OFM Cap, who writes a column in The Universe. Lawrence Maple approached Michael, telling him that as he was becoming a Catholic, he ought to join what was then called the Third Order of St. Francis. Michael started attending the monthly meetings and started formation **while still an Anglican!** He was received into the Catholic Church just a few hours before being professed into the Third Order, on July 8th 1956! This unorthodoxy may raise a few eyebrows, but he has remained a very faithful member for **sixty years!** I, also, was approached by Lawrence Maple, but a little later. I was not received until October 1958 and Professed in 1959.

Our parallel lives have continued somewhat since then. We both offered ourselves for the priesthood, he as a secular and I as a Salesian, but God wanted us as members of the laity. Michael got married ahead of me, but I am Godfather to Michael's firstborn, Kevin, and he is Godfather to our firstborn, Bernadette. We both felt called to become teachers and both approached the same principal of Bedford College of education almost at the same time, unknown to each other until I mentioned my interview to Michael! We both had to do further studies at Mander College of Higher Education in Bedford, and we both decided to study English literature and geography. After one term, Michael pulled out because, as he said, he could not see himself in front of a class of 45 children! He returned to his father's business, which he inherited on his father's death, and I started my teaching career in September 1971. I had a heart attack in 1985 and he a few years later. Over the years we have paralleled each other in the fraternity, each having served several times as President/Minister, treasurer, Formation, vice-Minister and I as secretary. We are both currently serving on the East Anglian Regional Council. One of our great joys is for him to taxi me home on a Tuesday morning after Mass and we have breakfast together and then pray Morning Prayer together, my wife sometimes joining us if she is home on time from swimming.

I will just finish by telling you that we procured a Papal Blessing for Michael, which was presented to him on his anniversary, July 8th 2016, after Mass, by Father Jonathan Hill, his parish priest, in the presence of several of his Franciscan tertiary brothers and sisters! Praise the Lord for calling Michael with His grace and sustaining his faith through the years!



I am sure I have left out some things, but I feel I have written too much already!

Michael Simmonds, ofs