

Brother Franklin Pao, SM

Born: January 30, 1935 - First Profession: August 15, 1955

Died: October 12, 2007 - Funeral Service: November 9-10, 2007

Brother Franklin Pao had prepared his own funeral service. The program cover featured several photos, many in Hawaiian garb. Friday afternoon, November 9, just before 5 p.m. I went down to the Mystical Rose Oratory and was amazed at the crowd that had already gathered there to pay their respects to this well known and loved Brother. I found a place in chapel before his body was brought in for viewing. Although Brother Franklin had died on October 12, the mortuary had preserved the remains well. At his request, the coffin was tilted "so that I could watch the dancers!" Then came a series of formal visits and chants beginning with a short prayer service by Hale O Na Ali'I followed by the Royal Order of Kamehameha I Service and Halau Remembrances.

The wake was one of the most meaningful Hawaiian productions I have ever seen. Although I didn't understand the words, the gestures spoke powerfully of thanksgiving for Brother Franklin's life and anguish at his departure. A translation, or even an introduction to the various events would have been helpful, but I settled for simply imagining what was going on! I knew from previous celebrations that the opening chants were really extended prayers to an all powerful and loving God. And the wails were unmistakable lamentations! Men and women had various capes and togas of many colors. Red and gold dominated, but there was also a bright orange and deep green – along with black and white in startling simplicity.

Particularly fascinating was a group of elderly Hawaiian women dressed in long black dresses and wearing the traditional flat hats. I remembered seeing women dressed like that come to mass at Saint Anthony's. There was an abundance of leis, especially the noble lei of green leaves. Each group placed leis or other gifts on the coffin that gradually obstructed Brother Franklin's view. Drummers accompanied many of the chants and hula dances, but there was a small orchestra in the organ-choir section of the chapel. What was evident was that Brother Franklin had had a great impact on many by his sensitive and helpful style. Some of the singers and dancers were elderly, but no less energetic than their youthful companions. Throughout the evening there was an honor guard at the coffin, changed regularly and with flair.

Alongside the coffin was a single Hawaiian guard standing tall and erect in his Hawaiian garb and holding his spear. He was absolutely impassive, even when one of the chanters was wailing passionately a few inches away from his face. One of the groups was a faculty-student group from Saint Louis school where Brother Franklin had worked for many years. A few minutes later a trio of Saint Louis School administrators arrived. Another group featured barefoot young men in white shirts – some with grass skirts over their slacks. Many of the men were covered with tattoos! Hawaiian artifacts decorated the sanctuary. Maybe because I didn't understand the words I studied faces more attentively than usual. Many were grief stricken, some were more composed. The elderly seemed more at ease with the reality of death. Some approached the coffin to speak to Brother Franklin and found consolation in conversing with him as though he were still alive.

Both on Friday and Saturday the ceremonies were solemn and unhurried. The funeral was a spectacle, but it was also a sincere tribute to a most remarkable man. In contrast to the beatification in Rome, however, there were comparatively few cameras. Outside the chapel there was an abundance of food and drink – and lots of informal sharing. Towards the end of the evening the legendary John Lake arrived. He had been wheelchair bound for some time, but wanted to pay his respects to his most noted disciple. John Lake has been a great promoter of Hawaiian culture for many years. At the cemetery I thanked him for inspiring and sustaining Franklin. John is dying of cancer but insisted on being present for the wake, the Mass and the burial.

Two of our youngest Marianists, Brother Dennis Bautista, who is teaching at Saint Mary's University in San Antonio, and Brandon Alana who is making his novitiate year in Dayton, had come back to Hawaii for this special funeral. And then the haunting farewell: Aloha Oe!

On Saturday morning we drove across the island to Saint Anthony's Church in Kailua for the Mass of Christian Burial. Father Ken Templin presided and gave an inspiring homily. Among the visitors there were four of us from the Provincial Council: Brother Ed Brink, Father Joe Lackner, Brother Jack Ventura and I represented the Province. At the beginning of the mass Brother Jack read a letter of sympathy and solidarity from Brother Stephen Glodek and Father James Fitz, Provincial and Assistant Provincial. There was a strong delegation from Maui: Father Roland Bunda and Brother Jim Vorndran from Saint Anthony's parish; Father Jim Orsini from Saint Anthony Junior-Senior High School, and Brother Frank Gomes and his brother Johnny from Makawao. At

the cemetery I was privileged to preside at the last farewell. I incorporated a reflective praying of the first glorious mystery with Hawaiian chants and prayers. A family luau followed.

The funeral highlighted
Brother Franklin's life and ministry remarkably well,
emphasizing his special contribution to the Church and to the SM
in his expression of Hawaiian culture.
At the cemetery I made this reflection
to help us remember and celebrate
Brother Franklin's ministry in California earlier in his Marianist life:

We now come to the final farewell.
But it is not the final act in Brother Franklin's life, or in ours.
For Franklin, this day of death and burial
is the first day of the rest of his life:
life is changed, not ended, by death.
We thank God for Franklin,
for his great joy in life and in making life joyful for others.
We thank God for the grace to be here today
As we look back with gratitude we also look forward with hope
-hope that because Franklin believed in Christ
he will live forever;
-hope that as we believe in Christ,
we, too, will share in the resurrection.

Many are with us in spirit...
I am especially mindful of our fellow-Brothers
throughout the world who have thanked God
for giving Brother Franklin life and faith
and calling him to the Society of Mary
where he served generously for more than fifty years.
I want to remember in particular two of Franklin's friends:
First, Father Leonard Fee
who selected Brother Franklin as his personal secretary
because of his skills and loyalty.
And when Father Fee was struck down by a disabling stroke,
Brother Franklin continued to serve him faithfully.
Secondly, Ms. Vicky Tolman, our first nurse.
Brother Franklin collaborated with her

as the first Director of Villa Saint Joseph in Cupertino, California.
Their mission was to care for
our sick and elderly brothers and priests until death.
In planning his own funeral, Brother Franklin was certainly inspired
by the memory of these two exceptional friends
who, like him, believed that by death,
life is changed, not taken away.

In that spirit, let us pray the first Glorious Mystery.

ST