



Obituary

Dr. Julian Randolph Pleasants, a long time Notre Dame researcher, scientist and professor, died at 7:30 p.m. at the Sanctuary of Holy Cross on September 17, 2010. He was a founding member of Little Flower Church, where he led the singing for many years. He and his wife, Mary Jane, raised seven children in a faith community of families on a small farm in Granger. Julian was born in Palmetto, Florida on May 1, 1918, and barely survived the great flu epidemic of the time. His family moved to Norfolk, Va., where his father, Alban Brooke Pleasants was the City Engineer. He first attended a division of William and Mary College in Norfolk. He left home in 1937 to study at Notre Dame. Always an outstanding student, he graduated in 1939 with a degree in chemistry. He lived frugally in a dorm attic at Notre Dame, and sent home money to his mother, Mary Josephine Mathias Pleasants, as his father had passed away in 1936. Julian also had two brothers who died at an early age. After graduation, his interests turned to further study of his faith. He became involved with the Catholic Worker Movement, and eventually in 1941 co-managed with Nory Merdzinski a 'House of Hospitality' for men out of work during the Depression, feeding them leftover food from the Notre Dame cafeteria, and other donated food they cooked at the house. He continued to run the house during the first part of the war, dealing with homeless men with a variety of problems, using little more than faith and kindness.

Meanwhile he was studying for a master's degree in theology, where he met Gene Geissler, Willis Nutting, Joe Bagiackas, and other Catholic activists, who intensely studied and discussed the role of religion in the world. He became interested in the Catholic Rural Life Movement, which led to his meeting with Mary Jane Brady in Green Bay, WI, where she was the editor of Life and Home Magazine. They corresponded and met from time to time, including a trip to Grailville, Ohio where Mary Jane was living her commitment to rural life on a farm. In January, 1948, when he asked her to marry him, she said yes but they had to wait six months until her brother, John Brady, SJ, was ordained. They were married on June 23, 1948 in Boulder, Colorado. Mary Jane, his partner in life whom he loved and adored, preceded him in death on November 26, 2004. A group of friends from the masters program, plus Fred Govern and Burnie Bauer came together to divide up an eighty acre farm. Thanks to Gene Geissler, who had grown up on a farm and was a jack of all trades, and the mutual help they gave each other, the families built their own houses, and raised cows and chickens and big gardens to feed their ever growing families. The Pleasants started building in 1949, using leftover materials from dismantled World War II barracks, and continued adding to the house over the years. Julian's mother, Jo (Gram) lived with the family there until her death in 1963. In 1944 Julian began working at LOBUND, a germ free research center at Notre Dame, and continued his association with germ free research throughout the rest of his working life. In the 1960s, he went back to school, and in 1966 received his PhD from Notre Dame in microbiology. He continued his research, but also added teaching to his work load. Beginning with his college years, Julian was passionate about social justice. While a student, he was involved with a group trying to convince the administration that the white students were ready for the admission of black students to the school. A positive precedent was set, and the gates were opened wider when the war brought students of all races to the campus. He continued to believe that people of faith had a duty to push for justice, and championed causes like the peace movement during the Vietnam War, and advocacy for the mentally retarded. He published articles in Catholic magazines like Commonweal, showing how science and religion complement each other. He supported respect and understanding among races and religions. Later in life he took an interest in the process of restorative justice as a way to heal both criminals and their victims.

Service Summary

Visitation: 05:00 PM to 07:00 PM,

Fri Sep 24, 2010

Visitation: 09:00 AM to 10:00 AM,

Sat Sep 25, 2010

Funeral Service: 10:00 AM Sat Sep 25, 2010

Funeral Home Address

Hickey Chapel

17131 Cleveland Rd.

South Bend, IN 46635

Tel: (574) 289-1000

Though the above recitation may make him sound overly serious, he really wasn't. He took special pleasure in putting his own words to music for special occasions, like birthdays and baptisms, usually including in the lyrics some horrendous puns for which he was famous. He loved to sing, and had a powerful voice that needed no amplification. He was unfailingly positive and optimistic, and always had time to answer a homework question, usually giving a more complete answer than was necessarily warranted. As a matter of principle, he believed in his ability to fix whatever needed fixing around the house, saying: a man made it and a man should be able to fix it. Later in life, he had the opportunity to travel around the world for his work. He was an expert in raising germ free rats and mice, and worked on perfecting a chemically defined diet to help them thrive in a germ free environment. This made them especially useful for research. Julian lived a long and productive life, according to principles inspired by his faith and love for his family, even when it was not easy to do so. Survivors include three daughters, Martha (John) Harper of Granger, Mary Anne (Joe) Lowndes of Madison, WI and Maddie Pleasants of Granger, IN; four sons, John (Barbara) Pleasants of Ames, IA, Peter (Margaret) Pleasants of Providence, RI, Jim (Jaynie) Pleasants of Seattle, WA, Mike (Deb) Pleasants of St. Paul, MN, and 17 grandchildren. He will be missed. A Mass of Christian burial will be held at 10:00 a.m. Saturday, September 25, 2010 at Little Flower Catholic Church, 54191 Ironwood Road, South Bend, IN 46635. Burial will follow at St. Joseph Valley Memorial Park, Granger, IN. Friends may visit with the family from 5-7 p.m. on Friday at the church where a vigil service will take place after visitation and one hour before the mass. Contributions in memory of Dr. Julian R. Pleasants may be made to the Logan Center, 2505 East Jefferson Blvd., South Bend, IN 46615 or to Little Flower Catholic Church. On line condolences may be made through www.palmerfuneralhomes.com. Palmer Funeral Homes - Hickey Chapel is assisting the family with arrangements.