

Brother Michael FSC

(Eamon Bourne)

1918 - 2008

Michael, as he was known by the Brothers, and Eamon to his family wrote a memoir of his early childhood with an opening sentence that encapsulates Michael's sense of humour. He wrote, 'A monument has been erected on the place where I was born, a petrol pump.'

Eamon was proud of his Welsh roots and never lost the lilt that marked him out as being born in the Valleys. However, his upbringing was very much within an Irish Catholic family, steeped in the faith. His father, Robert, came from Cork to work in the coal mines and his mother, Ellen, although born in Wales was of Irish extraction. So, Michael was born into a family that very much kept the faith, saying the rosary together each night, attending weekday masses and, as a family, going to Saturday morning confessions. It was in this atmosphere that the foundations of Eamon's faith were firmly laid.

He was the fourth child to be born, with two elder brothers, Michael and Francis and an elder sister, Mary. Eamon said that his mum wanted him to be named Aelred, in memory of a parish priest, but when his dad went to the church to have him baptised he could not remember this strange name and so chose his own, Robert for his son. It was the young Robert himself who asked to be called Eamon and since then his family have always called him Eamon.

For young children their elder siblings are important role models, and that was very true for Michael. His elder brothers attended Mass each day as altar boys, and both, when they reached twelve, went to the Brothers Juniorate on Guernsey. So you can understand that when Brother Firm, the Brothers Recruiter,

came on his annual visit to the Bourne family to tell them about Michael and Francis' progress in Guernsey, that the young Eamon asked to go to join the Brothers. Eamon had to wait until he was twelve years old before he could enter the Juniorate and at the instigation of Brother Firm, Eamon persuaded one of his friends, Frank DeLacey, also to join the Brothers, but as a missionary and therefore to enter the international Juniorate at Lembecq-lez-Hal, in Belgium. However, as they got nearer the time to leave home, Frank said that he would not go to Lembecq unless Eamon goes with him; what Eamon described as 'a dilemma'.



It was on 17 July, 1930, that Eamon and Frank, both aged twelve, left Wales for Lembecq, Eamon leaving behind mum and dad, his elder sister Mary, and his two younger sisters, Betty and Eileen. Today, Eileen is the only surviving sibling; and we are very pleased that she is here today with us.

Eamon's dad and granddad were sceptical about him staying in Belgium, and gave him two weeks before he would be asking to come home, but Eamon saw it as an adventure, an adventure which he enjoyed. For the next four years he remained in Belgium, his only contact with his family was by letter. His education was in French, and this was the beginning of his linguistic abilities. In 1934 he became a novice, and it was during that time that Frank, his friend, went back to Wales.

In 1935 he made his first vows and was given the name Thomas Michael, but he quickly dropped the name Thomas and is known throughout the world as Brother Michael.

In 1938, at the age of twenty, Michael was waiting in Marseilles for the boat to Colombo, where he was to begin his teaching career, when he received a telegram from the formidable Athanase-Emile, then an Assistant, telling Michael to meet him at the bustling port of Le Havre, a journey of some 600 miles. When he reached Le Havre, Athanase-Emile informed him that he was going to Peru. Michael pointed out that he did not know any Spanish and was told that he had plenty of time on the boat to learn.

The linguist Michael quickly became fluent in Spanish, and taught in several schools and became head teacher at La Salle College, Cuzco. His first teaching post was at La Salle College, Arequipa, where another pupil of Lembecq was also sent. He was José Sorolla and naturally they became very good friends. When José fell in love and decided to leave the Brothers, Michael helped his good friend to get a job. Their friendship remained strong and supportive and so Michael was the natural choice to be the godfather of José's first child and subsequent children. For the first time since the age of twelve, Michael experienced the strong bonds of family life, and, separated by distance from his own family, the Sorolla family became his second family, and to this day he has the honour to be affectionately called 'godfather' by the Sorolla family.

Brother Bernardo Pronino, from Argentina, now takes up the story of Michael's life.

'I first met Michael in 1950 in Arequipa, Southern Peru. He immediately made an impression on me because of his temperament: full of kindness, joy, openness and wisdom. We formed a strong and deep friendship through letters and latter emails that neither time nor distance could weaken. In 1958, when Michael had completed twenty work-filled years in gospel orientated work in Peru, the Superior decided that it was time for him to return to his native land. However, Brother Fabriciano, the Assistant, succeeded in retaining Michael for another year, to help out in a school in Argentina. This one year turned out to be 15 hard working but happy years, as Michael always

described them in his letters. He involved himself one hundred percent in the education and evangelical mission in four important secondary schools, being the Headteacher in three of them, including the prestigious, La Salle College in Buenos Aires.

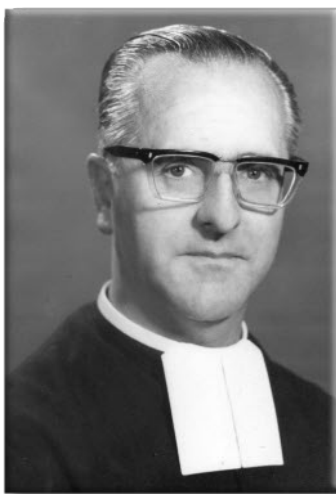
Michael was endowed with noteworthy human and evangelical qualities which enabled him to give service and to conduct himself with wisdom, kindness and firmness towards both great and small, to managers and to teachers, to families and former students. All were proud to be his friends. He was always able

to work out the needs of those who came into contact with him. He was the life and soul of happiness on outings, trips, and camping expeditions.'

At the end of 1973, after 35 years in Latin America, he finally returned to these Isles where he was able to comfort and be with his younger sister Peg before her early death. He joined the Blackheath Community where, for one year, he very successfully taught Spanish to those pupils who were expected to fail the Spanish O'Level. During this time he applied for qualified teacher's status so that he could

be employed in Blackheath, but the Department of Education and Science would not recognise his qualifications and so he moved to Cardiff, where he was able to teach in the prep school, since it was a private school. He stayed in Cardiff for four years, where, according to a fellow Community member, Philip Smith, 'he was well loved by the pupils, staff and parents'.

In 1979, at the age of 61, he was asked to go to Rome, to be a translator for those attending the CIL courses, i.e. special courses run by our Mother House for the Brothers. This involved spending many hours in a booth instantaneously translating from Spanish into English and visa-versa. Paul McAuley, himself now teaching in Peru, was a fellow translator with Michael for four years. He says that what he most remembers of Michael was 'his sense of humour, and despite his bouts of high blood pressure and related ills, he was a tremendously positive man.'



Peru, circa 1953

Michael's ability with languages, quickly caught the eye of the José Pablo, the Superior General, and in 1981 Michael became Pablo's private secretary. Pablo worked Michael very hard, which Michael took in his stride, with the aid of a few cigarettes. For health reasons Michael returned to Great Britain in 1985 and joined the Clayton Court Community. He was now 67, and you would have thought that the story from now on would be about his retirement years, but one year latter, a good friend of Michael's, John Johnston was elected Superior General and John asked Michael if he would return to Rome as his secretary, which he did.

The time working for John was a very enjoyable time for Michael. Joe Hendron, who was a General Councillor in Rome at the time, recalls that John held him in high regard and the two of them got on well together and they remained life-long friends. Michael's proficiency in languages, his computer skills and his genial and cheerful disposition made him an ideal choice for the job. He enjoyed the contacts whether by phone, email, letter, or fax that came his way. Michael was a great raconteur and was at ease with all-comers. He could entertain them with a fund of stories, in any of the Institutes' languages, and the stories never lost anything in the retelling. He was proud of his vocation and proud of the Institute.

In 1995, at the age of 77, Michael finally retired to Cardiff, and two years later when that Community closed, he moved to Beulah Hill in London. His last move was in 2000 when he came here to St. Helens. He was very much a 'universal man' keeping in close contact, mainly by email or MSN, with all the friends he made during his time abroad. His family was very important to him, and he kept in close contact with them, as he did all his life. He used the opportunity of going on retreat in Ireland to spend a few extra days visiting family in Northern Ireland, and he enjoyed the visits from Eileen and Katrina from Merthyr, and his niece Mary-Jo from Germany, who would dearly love to be here today. During those 'retirement years' his

health gradually declined, and he was always grateful for what he called 'the fantastic care' he received here from the staff of St. John's House and the companionship from the Brothers with whom he lived.

Michael died, on the 19 February 2008, with his sister Eileen by his side, and surrounded by the Brothers and staff of St. John's House.

I would like to end this eulogy by again quoting his friend of 58 years, Brother Bernardo from Buenos Aires, who said of Michael:

'He was always faithful to his personal prayer life and to community prayers. It can easily be seen that, like Abraham, he lived in the loving presence of God. He took an active part in liturgical celebrations; and he used to sing with joy and enthusiasm with his resonant tenor voice.

Michael was a good man, like the Jesus of the Gospels. Because of this he always gave of his love. Because of this he knew how to listen to and to understand others, with patience and kindness and

because of this everybody used to seek his friendly and brotherly words.

May his frequently recalled memory be for us and for all his family and friends, an encouragement and a guide to God our Father, whom Michael now hopes to meet in His fullness.'

May he rest in peace, amen.

Brother Michael Curran FSC
Director of St. Helens Community

Read at Br. Michael Bourne's funeral,
29 February 2008.



Michael & John Johnston meet the Pope.