



## Brother James Gavin, OFM Cap.

June 8, 1932 - August 1, 2021

Brother James Gavin, OFM Cap.

Brother James Gavin, OFM Cap., of Stranooden, County Monaghan, Ireland, passed gently into eternal life in the early hours of Sunday, August 1, 2021.

Brother James was born on June 8, 1932, the seventh of eleven children born to Joseph and Catherine (Clerkin) Gavin, who worked a ten-acre farm to provide a living for their family. Such was life at that time that James, not unlike his siblings, received the bare minimum of education - grade school only - before leaving school in 1946 to help manage the family farm.

Beginning in 1954 he became quite literally a "journeyman laborer", working variously as a farm hand, cabinet maker and furniture repairman as he began to think of leaving Ireland for North America. On a Monday evening in March, 1956 he boarded a ship in Belfast headed for Birmingham, England where he would spend a year working as a toolmaker and making friends before finally flying to Canada in June, 1957.

It was while working for the Canadian National Railway that James chanced to meet Father Raymond Cadwallader, a native of Braddock, PA and professor at Duquesne University, striking up a friendship that led him at long last to come to Pittsburgh and eventually to the Capuchin friars. James stayed with Father Cadwallader while he found work as a janitor at Mercy Hospital, and

then as a technician at Buckley Dental Laboratory in downtown Pittsburgh. For several years James was tutored in American life and history by his priestly friend and patron, who instilled in him a desire to learn and to read that remained with him for the rest of his life. He became a U.S. Citizen on September 17th, 1965.

From his earliest years, James treasured his Catholic faith with an Irish passion, rich and deep. He seldom missed an opportunity to attend Mass and receive communion, often spending hours in the Catholic churches he found along the way as he journeyed to America. He would tell with some pride of how he "took the pledge" to abstain from alcohol at the tender age of 8 - not too early at all according to James' pious sensibilities. Even as a young lay man his life was filled with moments and experiences of divine providence, and so it must have seemed to him when Father Cadwallader, a Third Order Franciscan of the St. Augustine Fraternity in Lawrenceville, introduced him to Father Angelus Shaughnessy, OFM Cap., in 1959, beginning a process of discernment that would lead to his making application to the Capuchin Friars of the Province of St. Augustine in 1962.

As a somewhat "older" candidate at that time (30 years of age) his application process was somewhat extended, but time revealed both James' determination and the authenticity of his vocation. Inquiries made on his behalf revealed a deeply prayerful man of strong faith, modesty, dependability and charity.

He was invested with the Capuchin habit on February 21, 1964 as Brother Louis, the religious name that he bore faithfully until the friars were allowed to return to their baptismal names in 1968. He professed the gospel counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience on February 22, 1965, vows which he would treasure and observe devotedly for the rest of his life.

Brother James posed a bit of a puzzle to his superiors as far as placing him in an apostolate: he was obviously a diligent worker but little in his curriculum vitae matched up with the more regular array of tasks that the brothers engaged in from day to day. He was undereducated, often difficult to understand with his rapid and accented speech, but was energetic and dependable. He did poorly in aptitude testing due to his lack of familiarity with U.S. testing methods and procedures that most high-school students would routinely complete. "Stock clerk" and "truck mechanic" showed up as areas of promise, but the results were unreliable because the instructions had been misunderstood by him. As a result, Brother James was initially engaged in the work of "fraternal service" which could - and did - include all sorts of domestic chores in friary kitchens, laundries, and grounds. His earliest assignments kept him in the Pittsburgh area at St. Mary Monastery in Herman and St. Augustine Friary in the Lawrenceville neighborhood before being assigned to assist in maintenance of the novitiate property in Annapolis, MD.

In 1974 Brother James was assigned to St. Cecilia Parish in Rochester, PA as a pastoral assistant and began an evangelizing ministry that would largely define the rest of his life's work. With the exception of a four-year stint at Capuchin College in Washington, DC from 1983-87, he held assignments that would routinely bring him into contact with believers and non-believers alike from differing cultures, social classes, races and traditions in Whitesville, WV, Baltimore and Philadelphia. To each and all Brother James became an ambassador of good will; a herald of the Gospel and the Catholic faith.

Despite his meager formal education, Brother James was a grand master of the human experience: neither age, nor race, nor social standing nor religious affiliation could present an insurmountable barrier to his engaging personality and genuine interest. He was quick to extend welcome and offer assistance, especially to visitors. He knew what it was to be a "pilgrim and stranger," and

to benefit from the kindness of others. His compassionate heart was readily at the service of those who were suffering or struggling: A man of deep feelings, he was able to appreciate the difficulties that people had to wrestle with from day to day, while his prayerful demeanor and deeply spiritual nature provided consolation and valued counsel to troubled souls he encountered. He was a regular recipient of cards, notes and letters expressing pleasure, relief and gratitude at having met him or been the recipient of his efforts and prayers on their behalf. He was a faithful correspondent who could find himself overwhelmed during the holiday season with cards and letters, his responses often running into the summer months.

His years of service at St. Cecilia Parish in Rochester, PA, from 1974 until 1981 earned him recognition from the Father James Reed Council of the Knights of Columbus as "Man of the Year" in 1985. In July, 2002, Brother James was presented with the "National Brotherhood Award" at the 31st Religious Brothers Conference in Cambridge, MA. Of his ten years serving at St. John the Evangelist parish in Center City Philadelphia (1993-2013) a friar once remarked: "The Province makes very few ideal assignments, but this was one of them." The parish saw him as their "ambassador to the world," known and loved by virtually all who met him.

Brother James was unflinchingly proud of his Irish heritage and often signed a letter or message as "Brother James of Stranooden," or "of Ireland". He kept abreast of international matters with enthusiasm and was always quick to share news from abroad with the friars, both individually and at the friary table during meals

From the day of his profession, James valued above all else fidelity to his religious vows and to his life of prayer, and he pursued these relentlessly. He was a truly humble friar, but he was hardly meek: He had little patience with friars who were slack in their prayer life or anyone who showed disrespect to the Mass or the Church. Few, if any, of the young men who entered Capuchin

formation during his time escaped without hearing James admonish them: "If you don't pray, you don't stay!" He was ever aware of his own human weaknesses and sins and placed great value upon the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especially when he found it difficult to reconcile his own emotions with perceived slights or wrongdoing by others. Especially in his later years he was much concerned about making amends with family members and anyone whom he feared he may have offended, devoting much effort to peacemaking in his relationships.

Even though he was a man of strong opinions and feelings, he worked diligently to maintain his humility and not take himself too seriously. He was full of light-hearted quips and scripture quotes that could soften a harsh judgement or sharp remark by others. His Irish wit and warm brogue provided a balm to many hurts and fears and gained him rapport with rich and poor alike. Like St. Francis, he was willing to be a "fool for Christ" and spared little of himself in order to strengthen the faith, hope and love of others for God.

His long labors eventually took their toll on his health, and in 2013 he returned to Pittsburgh and to well-earned rest and healing of various ailments. His health slowly failing, he moved to Vincentian Home in Pittsburgh's North Hills where he remained until his death. He was seldom short of visitors and well-wishers, and continued to cultivate good relationships for the rest of his days. At about 2:15 on the morning of August 1st, Brother James greeted Sister Death peacefully, his many good works having gone before him.

He was predeceased by siblings Edward, Patrick, John, James and Thomas. He is survived by brothers Joseph of Devon, England and Eugene of Stranooden, Ireland, and sisters Mary Gavin of Victoria, Australia, Susan (Ennis) of Manchester, England and Kathleen McGarry of County Kildare, Ireland.

Friars will receive the body of Brother James at St. Augustine Friary, 221 36th Street, Pittsburgh, on Sunday afternoon, August 8th. Visitation will be held in the friary chapel beginning at 7 PM. A Vigil Service will be conducted beginning at 8 PM.

The Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 10 AM on Monday, August 9th at St. Augustine Church, 220 37th Street, Pittsburgh. Interment will be in the Friars plot of St. Augustine Cemetery immediately following the funeral liturgy.

Contributions in memory of Brother James may be made to the Capuchin Friars, 220 37th Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15201. PROFESSIONAL SERVICES BY D'ALESSANDRO FUNERAL HOME and CREMATORY LTD., LAWRENCEVILLE  
[www.dalessandroltd.com](http://www.dalessandroltd.com).

# Cemetery Details

## St. Augustine Cemetery

# Previous Events

## Visitation

AUG 8. 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Augustine Church  
225 37th St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15201

## Service

AUG 8. 8:00 PM - 9:00 PM (ET)

St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Augustine Church  
225 37th St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15201

## Mass

AUG 9. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Pio of Pietrelcina, St. Augustine Church  
225 37th St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15201

# Tribute Wall



“ *Brother James Gavin, OFM Cap.*

January 13, 2023 at 04:43 PM



“ *A wonderful man with a big heart. We will remember you always and the time we enjoyed today. God bless you Uncle James. Love Margaret and Michelle x x*



**Margaret Gavin** - August 07, 2021 at 02:38 PM

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*Brother James became my friend, and our family prayerful support, beginning in about 1984. Brother James directed the efforts at DC Village where I was a volunteer. He gave of himself tirelessly and with cheerful enthusiasm.*

*I met Fr. James Gavin, also a Capuchin, in NYC at St. John's Church. I asked him to bless rosaries for a friend, Brother James Gavin. Father Gavin said, "I was in Philadelphia, not dressed as a priest. I am from the New York Province. I saw a friar in conversation on a Philadelphia street and I had to introduce myself due to the impression he had made. I thought I would be meeting the kindest person of my life. He extended his hand to me and said, "Please to meet you. I am James Gavin." Imagine the shock that I felt, hearing a name I shared with him." Father Gavin went to his great reward ahead of Brother James. Many of us had a wonderful and kind friend in Brother James, our intercessor now in Heaven.*

*A quote of his was, "Those who sling mud, lose ground." I asked him if it was original. He said no, that he thought he got it from a PA politician.*

*What an amazing person and holy man. God gave us a great friend in Br. James Gavin.*

*When he was about 8 years of age, he borrowed a book about Fatima from the pastor. He read the book cover-to-cover to his Aunt Mary who did not read or write. His holy aspirations began at an early age. (He did return the book promptly as he was asked to do.) There are so many memories of God's dear and faithful servant and cherished friend.*

*Chris O'Brien of VA and PA*

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**Chris O'Brien** - September 12, 2021 at 02:17 PM