

2007

Aquinas Institute Hall of Fame Rev. J. Michael Wesley, CSB Class of 1957

Michael Wesley was born on June 11, 1940, in Rochester, New York, one of two sons of John Casimir Wesley and Mary Martha Tucker. He completed his elementary education in Blessed Sacrament Parish School and was awarded a four-year scholarship to Villanova High School, which he gratefully declined in order to enter The Aquinas Institute in September 1953 as a 13-year old freshman.

As a freshman at Aquinas, he won a trip to Texas for being high salesman in the school's magazine drive. He competed in the Mission Bouts. He earned a varsity letter in Cheerleading. He graduated in June 1957, fourth in his class of 267 with an average of 93 percent and a permanent member of the St. Thomas Club. Fr. Wesley's younger brother, Bill, graduated from Aquinas in 1969.

After graduation from Aquinas, he attended Villanova University. In 1961 he graduated, valedictorian of his class, with a B.A. degree, having compiled a four-year average of 95 percent. While at Villanova he was listed in Who's Who in American Students in 1961. He was editor of the school newspaper, The Linx, for two years. His senior year he won the Spanish Language Award.

During his years at Villanova he developed his life-long love of track and field. He was at Villanova at the same time as Olympic Pole Vault Gold Medalist Don Bragg and Sprinter Frank Budd, known at the time, as the World's Fastest Human. The track coach was Jim "Jumbo" Elliott who is still considered one of the best track coaches ever.

After college he answered the call to the priesthood, entering St. Basil's Novitiate in Pontiac, Michigan in August 1961 and was professed on August 15, 1962. Following his first profession he taught for one year with the first group of scholastics to be appointed to Andrean High School, Gary, Indiana. In 1963 he moved to The Aquinas Institute and there taught for two years. In 1965 he began his theological studies. The first year was taken at the Grand Seminaire de Saint-Sulpice in Paris, France. The remaining three years of theology were taken at St. Basil's Seminary, Toronto, Ontario. On December 14, 1968 he was ordained to the priesthood in Sacred Heart Cathedral in Rochester. In 1969 he was granted the S.T.B. degree from the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto.

That same year Father Wesley was appointed to The Aquinas Institute where he remained for the next eleven years. During this period of time he taught Theology, Latin, French, Mathematics and Typing. He demonstrated the true spirit of the Aquinas philosophy in the classroom and on the athletic field. He accepted any track and field coaching assignment where he was needed, including a brief stint as acting Athletic Director. He was the backbone of the track and field program, for the most part working with the younger athletes. He had a knack for giving each young athlete a nickname that was personal to each individual. He showed utmost patience in his tutoring the slow learner and coaching the less gifted. He had a talent for bringing out the best in others. Numerous former athletes of Fr. Wesley are still competing years later partly based on his ability to instill his love for running.

He was a driving force behind the fledgling indoor track program and was an integral force behind the success of the Aquinas Relays where he served as Meet Director for many years. Under his direction the Aquinas Relays became a premier event attracting teams from throughout New York State and such track powers as Brooklyn Tech of New York City. With his enthusiasm, he was able to attract numerous eager volunteers to help set up and man the various events throughout the day. He made every volunteer feel that they were an important part of the Relays and it could not function without them.

Michael Wesley's love of track and field was not just limited to events involving Aquinas. He had a long and distinguished career as a track and field official. As a result, he was inducted into the New York State Track Officials Hall of Fame. Also, he, and a few others key individuals, were instrumental in convincing Section V officials to allow the Catholic schools to participate in Sectional events and championship tournaments.

During 1974 he began to experience spells of varying duration. He commenced a series of tests, which eventually revealed a brain tumor. In September 1978 he underwent surgery, which was followed by extensive radiation treatment. In January 1979 he returned to the classroom on a part-time basis, having accepted his condition with a limited amount of anxiety. With determination he continued his teaching duties during 1979-1980 on a modified schedule and was also able to continue as the Chairman of the Aquinas Relays.

His intense loyalty to Aquinas caused him no little disappointment when he learned that he would not be able to attend the opening football game of the school year. It was only the second such opener he missed since he was seven years old. He could not understand why everyone was making "such a big thing over a little tumor." In 1980, he died after a long and courageous fight.

His memory is kept alive to this day by members of the track and field community. Each year the Fr. Wesley Award is given to Fastest Junior High School runner at the McQuaid Invitational. Also, the Fr. Wesley Award is given to the Outstanding Male Athlete of the Indoor Sectionals. At Aquinas, the Fr. Wesley Award is given each year to the Scholar-Athlete. In 2002, he was inducted into the first class of the Section V Track and Field Hall of Fame as a Coach. He was the first track coach to be honored this way.

Seeing Fr. Wesley inducted in the Hall of Fame will provide emotional support for those who miss him and his spirit. His lively spirit, his generosity to others and his overall love of life will never be forgotten. In honor of his contribution as a student, teacher, priest and coach we induct J. Michael Wesley, CSB to the Aquinas Hall of fame on the 28th day of April 2007.

