

Msgr. Ed Ryle,  
A Good Friend to Many

In 1961, 10 priests joined 30 lay associates to begin their social work studies at Catholic University in Washington, DC. That was the beginning of forty five years of friendship which continued to include several of those classmates and has extended well beyond them as the years passed. I will always be grateful to the Lord for Ed as I know many others will be as well. He was a real gift to people who knew him well and to countless of thousands of others who are the beneficiaries of his years of informed, low keyed but passionate advocacy as well as his skillful administrative leadership. Not the least of those who felt his presence were those who experienced him as a thoughtful and compassionate priest.

His scope of influence was truly national while the venues from which he exercised his various talents were many; Tucson, Phoenix, Washington, and Scranton among them. Additionally his considerable knowledge and understanding were sought by many colleagues throughout the country not the least of whom were us at Fordham and the Milbank Memorial Fund. In all these places and activities there was always a twofold legacy; outcomes that would not have occurred without his engagement and an ever growing circle of friends whom he valued and in turn who valued him.

His knowledge was encyclopedic. I always envied his ability to come up with the exact reference apposite to a specific area of inquiry and often enough the chapter and page where it could be found.

As we remember and celebrate Ed there are many descriptors that come to mind. However accurate they are individually and collectively they can not adequately encompass the person; humble, self effacing, bright, playful, thoughtful, loyal, a would be golfer and tennis buff (if he only could bring himself to get to the course or court) and above all, in the words of John Gardner, he was neither an unloving critic nor an uncritical lover of the Church that he served so well.

Ed's advocacy was, if not unique, unusual in two very important ways; how well informed it always would be and how civilly it was exercised. I wonder if many realize how thoroughly he delved into policy issues not only in Arizona but in Washington. In all of his forty five years in public life he played a singular role with Catholic Charities USA , formerly National Conference of Catholic Charities, as he did with the Arizona Catholic Conference in analyzing public policy and especially its impact on the poor. A fundamental option for the poor was central to thinking and action. The tribute that the folk of the Arizona community gave him on the occasion of his "retirement" was evidence of his ability to be a passionate advocate and at the same time a respectful colleague of those with whom he disagreed. The encomium heard frequently that evening was "he was the conscience of the Arizona state government."

His leadership as Dean of the School of Social Work at Marywood University in Scranton was critical in that school's development and its deserved position as a leader in social work education.

In preparing this reflection I examined the listings for the Dioceses of Tucson and Phoenix in the Official Catholic Directory and marveled at the array of human service and leadership activities listed there. I recall my early visits to the then one diocese and recall the modest number that then existed. While Ed would blush (as he did from time to time) were I to credit all these to his stewardship, however I do feel it accurate to say the number would not be so rich and extensive were it not for his commitment and skill. What Ed would affirm with enthusiasm is that he was fortunate to have been surrounded by such wonderful people both professional and lay. Of course they would say in return would say, "he brought us together."

It was fitting that Ed's recent health problems and his death were lovingly and skillfully attended to by the staff of a hospital and a health system in which he was so invested.

I am grateful that on November 17, Ed and I solved all the problems of Church and State over a good steak and a couple of martinis on the occasion of me giving a talk in Phoenix; along with a prayer, a good way to have said good bye whether we knew it or not.

This brief reflection is a labor of love, a love that is inclusive of all us touched by Ed. He was special to each and all of us.

May he rest in peace.

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A friend among many friends  
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I number of descriptors come to mind

Birth of baby  
Ethics class  
Lucius Laueran  
Ernie's

Catholic Charities  
    Foundation  
    Social Service  
Dean Marywood

National office

Intellectual acumen  
    In services of the poor and life

Advocate role model civility and decency

Church  
    Continuing revelation

Quiet, humble

Friend

Laugh