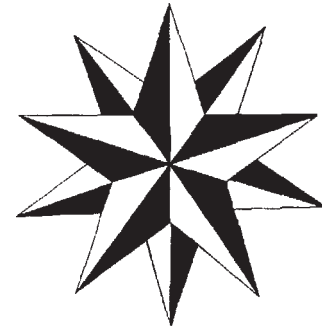


A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF

**Brother Alphonsus Abeyta, F.S.C.
(Primo)
1908 - 1998**



OF THE LIFE

SIGNUM FIDEI

Tour Of Duty

- 1925 - Las Vegas, New Mexico (Scholasticate)
- 1927 - New Iberia, Louisiana (St. Peter's College)
- 1931 - Covington, Louisiana (St. Paul's College)
- 1938 - Second Novitiate in Rome, Italy
- 1939 - Las Vegas, New Mexico (Juniorate teacher)
- 1940 - Denver, Colorado (Mullen Home for Boys)
- 1943 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School)
- 1945 - Covington, Louisiana (St. Paul's College)
- 1950 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School)
- 1951 - El Paso, Texas -- In 1954 became Director-Principal
at Cathedral High School
- 1957 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School)
- 1967 - Denver, Colorado (Mullen High School)
- 1974 - Sabbatical
- 1975 - El Paso, Texas (Cathedral High School)
- 1978 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High
School)
- 1981 - Semi-retired at St. Michael's High School
- 1998 - Died July 22

Brother Alphonsus (Primo) Abeyta
1908 - 1998

Walter Brueggeman, in his book on the prophets entitled: "Hopeful Imagination," suggests that "a sense of call in our time is profoundly countercultural, and notes that "the ideology of our time is that we can live 'an uncalled life,' one not referred to any purpose beyond one's self."

What are we to think of a twelve year old boy who hears a call and leaves home to become a Christian Brother? Such is the story of Brother Alphonsus Abeyta. For seventy-eight years he called the Christian Brothers his family, and lived a life of purpose that reached out to others. He saw his "calling" as an answer to his mother's prayer and it served as a source of encouragement to him as he lived the religious life.

Brother Alphonsus passed away on July 22, 1998, at St. Vincent's Hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was born on April 24, 1908, in Parkview, New Mexico. He was the son of State Senator Enrigue Abeyta and Josefa Yturriaga. He had seven siblings, three brothers and four sisters. Two sisters, Elinia Cantu and Anita Ulibarri survive him.

In his memoirs, Brother Alphonsus gives us a glimpse of his childhood:

"Four days after my birthday I was baptized at St. Joseph's Church in Parkview, New Mexico, and given the name Jose Maria Abeyta. For both father and mother religious instruction was a priority and the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father and the Hail Mary were learned at early infancy. We lived right across the street from the Church so attendance at Mass, even on a daily basis, was easy."

It was while serving Mass that he saw, kneeling in the sanctuary,

the man who would play an important role in his religious vocation. He writes:

"A stocky, venerable, happy looking individual walked into the sanctuary and knelt on a predieu at the side of the altar. He wore a black robe and a white rabat. After Mass he introduced himself as a Christian Brother looking for young men and boys to join his Institute. He asked me if I knew the Brothers. I responded by telling him that my father had been educated by the Brothers at St. Michael's in Santa Fe and that I had been to Santa Fe when my oldest brother was a boarder there. Tony Martinez, who was serving Mass with me, that day, said he had heard about the Brothers but this was the first time he had met one. After this short conversation, Brother Abadir Joseph asked us if we wanted to join the Brothers. Both of us having answered in the affirmative, Brother Joseph asked us where we lived and before noon he visited both families. Having found out that both families were willing to let us join, Brother then looked around a few days and found another recruit in Samuel Martinez.

Before returning to Santa Fe, Brother Joseph visited our families once again to let them know that he would be back in November, thus giving us time to think it over and to get ready to join the Junior Novices at Sacred Heart Training College, at Las Vegas, N.M.

My good mother had always expressed the desire that at least one in the family should join the priesthood or the religious life. Her prayers seemed to have been answered. My father was delighted with Brother's visit for he never forgot the wonderful teachers who taught him at St. Michael's, especially the renowned educator, Brother Botulph.

As promised, Brother Joseph returned to Park View, November 9, 1920. He was very happy to find out that three of us youngsters had decided to accom-

pany him to Las Vegas, N.M. to enter the Junior Novitiate. With the blessing of our parents, on November 11 we boarded the train to Antonito, Colorado, where we would spend the night. From there we went to Santa Fe. The Chili Line, as the narrow guage line was nicknamed, took a day to make it from Antonito to Santa Fe. On our arrival at the Capital City we were taken by the school bus to St. Michael's High School. Here we joined four other aspirants whom we accompanied to Las Vegas. In Santa Fe we had two hours and were given supper before we boarded the Santa Fe Train to Las Vegas. We arrived at Las Vegas around 1:30 in the morning in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. The Junior Novitiate was about ten blocks away from the railroad station. Brother Joseph told us that there was a shortcut but since the Gallinas river could be frozen it was better to walk across the bridge and the plaza. The snow was coming down and the streets were slippery and in spite of a few falls we all made it to our final destination."

Notice the last two words of his travels to the Juniorate. Brother Alphonsus uses the expression, "final destination." Those who are convinced of their vocation use such words; they seem to know where they belong. If you were to ask Michaelangelo where he came up with the breathtaking images for the Sistine Chapel and he replied, "God gave them to me," would you doubt him for a minute? Brother Alphonsus could say the same about his vocation: "God gave it to me!" Brother's memoirs give the strong impression that he never looked back. He said: "There was no time for homesickness for we started school immediately."

Brother Alphonsus spent four years in the Junior Novitiate. In 1921 the New Orleans - Santa Fe District was established and a Novitiate was started. He became a postulant in June of 1924. On August 14, 1924, he and three companions were invested with the religious habit of the Christian Brothers. He wrote:

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"My good father knowing that this would be a happy day for me did not want to make it a sad one. My good mother died in giving birth to a baby brother on August 12 and so I was notified on August 15. Her prayers had been heard and fidelity to mother's wish to have a religious in the family has been a source of encouragement all my lifetime."



On August 15, 1925, Brother Alphonsus made his first profession of Vows. His father wrote him:

"My dear son, Brother Alphonsus Benedict, I suppose, by this time, you have made your first vows as a Christian Brother, and you know by this time how to shun evil; let us now see how to do good." He who aspires to the religious state, ought besides avoiding evil, to practice virtue. Above all, approach the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, every week, if practicable; for in these you will find all the strength necessary for fighting valiantly. Frequent communion keeps alive and greatly increases the desire of consecrating one's self to God."

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His Scholasticate began immediately. Brother Neon Tremoliere, Director of Student Brothers, welcomed the new group to the Scholasticate. About his time as a Student Brother, Brother wrote:

“My two years as Student Brother passed rapidly due to the excellent professors and the busy schedule we had to follow from morning to night. To break the daily routine, a daily recreation after meals and manual labor were more than welcomed. Once a month we enjoyed a hiking picnic to either the Canon del Rio, Agua Sarca, Trout Springs, in the Gallinas River, etc. Our substantial menu for these long hikes consisted of beans, salad, potatoes, rice, peanut butter and jelly and rolls. We took turns in carrying the pails or bags containing the food. Our director as a rule carried some candy and cookies which he gave to some poor kids he saw along the way. These goodies, sent to us by our parents, we were told to sacrifice for the needy, a good way to learn detachment.”

Brother Alphonsus began his teaching career in 1927 at St. Peter’s College in New Iberia. He made Final Profession of Vows on July 17, 1933. He received a B.A. in English in 1935 from Manhattan College and an M.A. in Education from the University of Denver in 1942. In 1938-39 he made the second Novitiate in Rome. He describes the experience as: “A year of Asceticism.” In 1946 he received an M.A. in Spanish from Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico. He served as Director - Principal of Cathedral High School in El Paso, Texas from 1954 - 1957. His teaching ministry covered a period of 43 years.

The most important purpose of any life is how God uses a person to communicate Himself. God will use any device, any tool, any means to communicate with us. How did God use Brother Alphonsus?

Brother Benedict Westrick of the College of Santa Fe Community gives us a good answer to the above question in some excerpts from the eulogy at the rosary for Brother on July 26, 1998:

"The defining characteristic of Brother Alphonsus was that he was a very outgoing person. He talked to everyone who came along, and was never at a loss for words. And, the important thing about that quality was that whether you argued with him or not, you ended the conversation by being his friend.

I’m sure that those of you who knew Brother Alphonsus were amused frequently by his wonderful sense of humor. Those who lived with him for any length of time could not miss his frequent jokes and funny stories, which he always seemed to telegraph by that little smile which curled one corner of his mouth.

Possibly one of the most visible qualities which Brother Alphonsus displayed was a limitless enthusiasm for his work. We probably now would call it 'Tough Love' in the modern jargon; but with him it was Zeal for the work to which he had dedicated his life. He was a teacher, and as such wanted to help his students to improve their lives. And, he was willing to do the work which was required to accomplish this. If there was any frustration in his life it was when he failed to reach some of his students and get them to do work necessary to reach the goals he thought they were capable of attaining. Like every teacher, Brother Alphonsus complained when that happened; but he rejoiced just as vehemently when something helped to turn the situation around, and bring success to his boys. I’m sure some of you in the chapel this afternoon, experienced the verbal dressing down you got when you were loafing, and the exhilarating compliments when you finally decided to get down to work. His many friends from St. Paul’s in Covington, Louisiana, to those in Denver at Mullen, and, of course, those here in Santa Fe, can, I’m sure, give instances of this zeal which Brother exhibited so well.

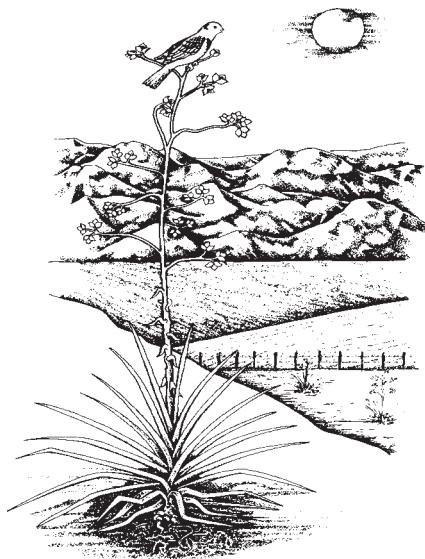
But this quality was not just in the classroom.

Brother also brought it to all the many projects which he directed for the good of the school. His organization of the 1959 centenary celebration of the founding of St. Michael's High School comes to mind. No doubt most of the people here will remember the extraordinary program he prepared for that occasion."

In a letter to Brother Samuel Martinez, Director of the St. Michael's Community in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Brother Clarence Fioke, Visitor, gives still another characteristic of Brother Alphonsus:

"He was always up to giving advice, whether I needed it or not."

Quite often, when a person didn't heed his advice, Brother Alphonsus would refer to him as a "damn fool." He didn't use this expression in a malicious, or condemnatory way. It was his way of expressing concern about a person, or a situation. Often, whenever a conversation about Brother Alphonsus would come up among his confreres, the expression: "damn fool" is used; it became a term of endearment.



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Still, another characteristic of Brother Alphonsus was his love of nature and God's creatures. Brother Luke Olivas, of the St. Michael's Community in Santa Fe, N.M., gives the following remembrance:

"At home Brother Alphonsus, a year or so ago, cultivated a beautiful bed of wild flowers of every type and hue. And years before, he had filled the same flower bed with giant and healthy mums which seemed to please the many passers-by along our alley road. Four catalpas, now robust trees, and three young apricot trees tell of his interest and love for the beauty they display in our backyard -- a pleasant sight for all our Brothers to enjoy while taking in the evening breeze. His interest in nature was so much in keeping with his happy spirit and pride as a happy religious person."

Brother Samuel Martinez remembers:

"Brother Alphonsus loved flowers and birds. Every morning he would be outside with left-over bread feeding the birds."

Brother Alphonsus spent the last twenty-years of his life at St. Michael's High School Community in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Brother Edward DeReyna recalls:

"He kept up his interest in the school by taking care of the mail, by doing odd jobs, and by attending many games and activities. He would notify someone when things needed repair in the school or community; or try to do it himself. He was blessed with good health for most of his life. At the end, when he was sick, he did not accept it well."

On April 24, 1998, Brother Alphonsus celebrated his ninetieth birthday. Brother Samuel Martinez recalls:

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“One of the greatest desires of Brother was to reach the age of 90. It was like a new life was given him. We celebrated his birthday with the Brothers of the area. He spoke, telling all present that one should be active and alive. One of his activities was to travel. Shortly after his birthday he went to New Orleans, Louisiana, to visit Christian Brothers School and the activities they had there. He met many of his former students and they entertained him royally. Soon after we find him in Reno, Nevada, celebrating with his family. It is told that over 250 people were present to celebrate with Brother Alphonsus. The last place he visited was his hometown. It was there that the people at Church celebrated with Brother as a native son.”

On the morning of July 22, 1998, Brother Alphonsus seemed to be a little disoriented. While on a shopping trip to a local food store he fell and hit his head. He was taken to St. Vincent’s Hospital in Santa Fe, N.M., where he passed away in late afternoon that same day.

Father James Cronin celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial on July 27, 1998. He said:

“‘A time to be born -- a time to die’. Brother Alphonsus lived 32,850 days and as a Christian Brother 28,375 days. I knew Brother for the past ten years. He made a great impression on me and as the song goes, ‘To Be Alive.’ Brother truly knew how to live! He enjoyed a good time, horse races, slot machines, and trips. His age never stopped him!”

Brother was laid to rest in the Brothers plot in Rosario Cemetery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

By: Brother Louis Welker, FSC
Director of De La Salle - Christian Brothers
Lafayette, LA

By: Mr. Joe E. James