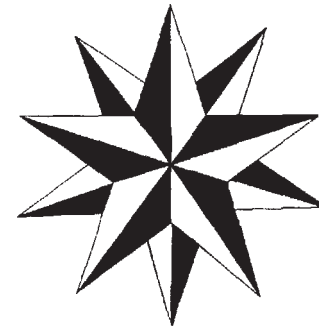


**A SHORT ACCOUNT  
OF THE LIFE  
OF**

**Brother August Raphael Bodin, F.S.C.  
(Richard Berchmans)  
1925 - 1997**



**SIGNUM FIDEI**

## Tour Of Duty

- 1944 - Lake Charles, LA (Landry Memorial High School)
- 1945 - Las Vegas, New Mexico (Scholasticate)
- 1947 - New Iberia, LA (St. Peter's College)
- 1952 - Lafayette, LA (De La Salle Juniorate)
- 1956 - Rome, Italy (Second Novitiate)
- 1957 - El Paso, TX (Cathedral High School) - Director and Principal
- 1960 - Lafayette, LA (De La Salle) - Director General
- 1962 - Metairie, LA (Rummel High School) - Director and Principal
- 1964 - Lafayette, LA (Visitor of New Orleans-Santa Fe District)
- 1969 - Santa Fe, NM (St. Michael's High School) - Director and Principal
- 1973 - San Francisco, CA (University studies)
- 1974 - Santa Fe, New Mexico (St. Michael's High School) - Director and Principal
- 1977 - Metairie, LA (Rummel High School)
- 1981 - Lafayette, LA (Visitor of the New Orleans-Santa Fe District)
- 1987 - Ondo, Nigeria (Missionary work)
- 1997 - Died in Ondo on June 13, 1997

The message began with the words:

**It is with a heavy heart, ...**

Words such as those can only mean bad news. So the message continued: "It is with a heavy heart that I inform you of the sudden and tragic death of Brother Raphael Bodin, FSC, Sector of Nigeria, Lwanga District of Africa. Brother Raphael was found dead in his room on the weekend of June 14-15, 1997. His death is the result of foul play. Raphael, age 72, a missionary from the District of New Orleans and Santa Fe, USA, has been in Nigeria for several years serving in various capacities."

The news and circumstances concerning Brother Raphael's death weighs heavily on the hearts of his family members, friends, former students and confreres. In a real sense, all of us have wounded hearts that are in need of healing through forgiveness. Someone unknown has taken from us one, who as a true son of St. John Baptist De La Salle, had touched our hearts. In his meditations for "Pentecost Sunday" our Holy Founder tells the Brothers and their associates: "You are engaged in a ministry wherein you are obliged to touch hearts." This obligation to "touch hearts" was one that Brother Raphael took seriously because he was a man who took the words of St. De La Salle to heart: "make yourself responsive to whatever He asks of you." Let us look at Brother Raphael's life, his response to God, and most of all his heart.



Richard Berchmans Bodin was born in Franklin, Louisiana on March 31, 1997, the son of the late Edward John Bodin and Agnes Ibert, also deceased. He was baptized in the Church of the Assumption in Franklin, Louisiana on April 6, 1925. He came from a large family, one of four girls and five boys. He is survived by his sister, Sr. Mary Hilary Bodin, Mrs. Emmadel Hay, two brothers, Mr. Hugh Bodin and Mr. Roland Bodin. He was preceded in death by his sister Evelyn Agnes Bodin and three brothers, Edward Louis Bodin, Monsignor George Bodin and Raymond Charles Bodin.

His sister Mrs. Emmadel Hay gives the following remembrance of his early years and schooling:

**As a young child Brother Raphael was a normal, energetic young one. His school years started at St. John Academy, staffed by the Marianites of the Holy Cross and in the third grade he entered Hanson Memorial where the Christian Brothers taught.**

**In 1937 he left home to finish his studies at De La Salle Normal in Lafayette, LA. He graduated as valedictorian of his class. I remember well that when our Daddy died in 1936 Brother Raphael was only 11 years old and when he wanted to go to De La Salle Mama got him all ready - new clothes, shoes, etc. but he came in from May devotions and Mama could see he was worried about something. He informed her that Brother said he had to wait another year so he guessed they would have to return the shoes. Mama told him he could keep them. After the year passed and he hadn't mentioned leaving we all thought he had given up the idea. But, as soon as school was out he told Mama to get him packed. Mama was worried about him being on the second or third floor of the building because he was given to having nightmares and would run to Mama. She said, "He's going to fall down those stairs and break his neck." He informed me in later years that he didn't have any nightmares after he left home. After he left to enter the Brotherhood he was never to spend another night at home for years. It was the policy of the community to keep the boys at the school and the only time he was at home would be to spend a day while the boys were at the skating rink at Hanson.**

As mentioned, Brother Raphael entered the Juniorate in 1937. Brother Eugene Biederman remembers him as:

" the leader of our group."

On concluding his Juniorate studies he was named Valedictorian of the class. In the address at his high school graduation he made the following remarks: "When we entered the Juniorate, we began to see commencement in another light. It appeared as a step forward, a beginning of the Novitiate, that blessed year for which we longed with all our hearts."

On August 14, 1941 he received the habit of the Christian Brothers and was given the name Brother August Raphael.

On August 15, 1942 Brother Raphael made first vows and then journeyed to Las Vegas, New Mexico to pursue college studies. He was a member of the last graduating class of the old scholasticate, Sacred Heart College. A bachelor's degree in social sciences was presented to him in August of 1947. Always wanting to be of service to his community he put his heart into learning as many trades as possible during his formative years.

Teaching began for him at Landry Memorial High in Lake Charles, LA in 1944. A transfer to St. Peter's of New Iberia occurred in 1947, where he remained for five years.

On June 3, 1950 he made final profession of vows in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In 1952 Brother Raphael was assigned to De La Salle Normal School (Juniorate) in Lafayette, LA, as a faculty member and sophomore sponsor. The junior novices saw him as a rather unique person who was a plumber, electrician, mechanic, poultry man, photographer and teacher all wrapped in one. While on the faculty

of the Juniorate he taught mostly history and science. He preferred no particular subject and is quoted in the Juniorate newspaper saying: "I teach the students, not the subject. They are always extremely interesting."

On August 4, 1956, Brother Raphael sailed from New York Harbor en route to Rome on the Liberte to begin the Second Novitiate. In those days, when a Brother was sent to the Second Novitiate it usually meant that he was destined for some type of leadership position. While in Rome he took courses in Asceticism, Sacred Theology, and Institute History.

In August of 1957 Brother began a three year term as Director and Principal of Cathedral High School in El Paso, Texas. The year 1960 brought him to De La Salle Christian Brothers in Lafayette, LA. in the position of Director General. He held that position for two years and during that time was engaged in many activities to improve the appearance of the property. In addition to being a Director, Principal, and Director General, during the summer months, he pursued an M.A. degree in School Administration, at New Mexico State University, Las Vegas, New Mexico.

On March 16, 1962 Brother Raphael was named as first Brother Director-Principal of Archbishop Rummel High School in Metairie, LA. Brother John Fairfax, who was Assistant Principal of the school, gives the following remembrance:

**I think what I will always associate with him was his unruffled nature. He had great composure and patience and gentleness, and he was a very intelligent person. He never let the difficulties of daily life or any problems that arise as a school administrator and then later as Provincial ruffle him.**

Brother John recalled that Brother Raphael was highly organized and assigned him to write the first student handbook for Rummel students:

**I recall very distinctly setting about the task so that when the students came for the first day of school, they would know exactly what was expected of them.**

In the book the Wizard of Oz, the scarecrow and the tin woodman engaged in the following dialogue:

**'I don't know enough,' replied the Scarecrow cheerfully.**

**'My head is stuffed with straw, you know, and that is why I am going to Oz to ask him for some brains.'**

**'Oh, I see,' said the Tin Woodman.**

**'But after all, brains are not the best things in the world.'**

**'Have you any?' inquired the Scarecrow.**

**'No, my head is quite empty,' answered the Woodman,**

**'but once I had brains, and a heart also; so, having tried them both, I should much rather have a heart.'**

"The next five years would be rather tumultuous for Brother Raphael; he would need a great deal of heart to weather the storm. August 15, 1964, he was appointed Provincial of the New Orleans-Santa Fe Province by the then Superior General, Brother Nicet Joseph. When he became Provincial there were 299 Brothers in the Province with vows, 12 novices and 16 junior novices. The Second Vatican Council was in full swing and a spirit of change permeated the Church.

(5)

Brother Leo Harvey gives the following remembrance of the appointment of Brother Raphael as Provincial:

**One of the stories that has circulated, for many of those who knew Brother Raphael, had to do with his first appointment as Visitor. He had just completed two years of his first three year term as founding Principal and Director of Archbishop Rummel High School in Metairie when he received notice of his appointment as Visitor of the NOSF District. He is reported of having replied to Brother Superior: 'Your communication has been missent to me. I am sure you intended to appointment someone else as Visitor.' The reply was: 'There was no mistake. You are the new Visitor.'**

During his five years in office many changes occurred, e.g., a new Rule for the Brothers, a new Superior General, a new way of dressing, a new form of common prayer, and not so many new faces entering the Brotherhood. One of the things that really pained his heart was the number of Brothers who withdrew from the congregation. By the time his term came to an end the number of Brothers in the Province had decreased dramatically. He had to make heart-rending decisions that involved closing schools, withdrawing the Brothers from other schools, and even closing the Junior Novitiate. He took all of these unpleasant experiences in stride and never lost his sense of balance. Brother Raphael put his trust in the Lord during these trying years. He lived what is found in the book of Proverbs:

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And do not rely on your own insight.  
In all your ways acknowledge him, and  
he will make straight your paths."**

**(Proverbs 3:5-6)**

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In June of 1969, Brother Raphael resigned as Provincial at the first District Chapter in order that the Brothers of the Province could, for the first time, elect (vote of recommendation made to the Superior General) a Provincial.

The years from 1969-77 found Brother Raphael back in the classroom, studying in California, Principal at St. Michael's in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and teacher and Director at Rummel High School . From 1981 - 1987 he served again as Provincial of the New Orleans-Santa Fe Province. Even before his term was up as Provincial he was already willing to go to Africa as a missionary. Brother John Johnston, Superior General gives the following remembrance after hearing of Brother Raphael's death:

**I found myself that evening recalling every detail of the conversation Raphael had with me during the General Chapter of 1986, immediately after my election. He expressed his desire to go to Nigeria when he finished his term as Visitor in 1987. I was delighted with his offer - and was subsequently delighted with the marvelous contribution he made on many different levels.**

At the end of the District Chapter of 1987, Brother Raphael received from his successor an obedience to go to Nigeria, Africa. Those present will probably never forget Brother Raphael kneeling and then kissing the hand of the Provincial when receiving his obedience.

The next ten years were spent in Nigeria, working primarily with young aspirants to the Brotherhood to prepare them for the postulancy in Rongai and the Novitiate in Nairobi. In Nigeria, he served in many capacities, i.e., Director General in Ondo, Sub-Director of Postulants teaching Church History, Bursar of the Sector, a member of the Sub-District Council and was currently serving as Secretary of the Sector Council.

In April, 1996 Brother Raphael returned to the United States for a visit and medical check-ups. It was discovered that he had prostate problems. Study of the tissue after surgery showed cancer. He left the following account of his medical experience:

**When I had surgery for prostate problems on May 6, Doctor Vildibill informed me that I had cancer cells in the tissue removed and that I would have to return for further tests and treatment in three months. So when I flew back to Nigeria on June 11, I knew it would only be for a few months.**

During his short stay in Nigeria before returning to the United States, Brother Raphael was kept quite busy. He wrote:

**The purpose of my returning to Nigeria was to complete some of the work I had started - get the financial statements for the year completed (1995-1996) and recover from the initial surgery. The three months turned out to be quite busy and unfortunately I did not achieve all I hoped I would do. As far as teaching was concerned, I was able to complete the course in Church History to the pre-novices of the Salesians and our own postulants - a rush course since we finished on July 18th after 18 hours of lectures.**

On Saturday, September 28, 1996 Brother Raphael returned to De La Salle Christian Brothers in Lafayette.

On Monday, September 30, he set up his doctor appointment with Dr. Vildibill and then set out for Franklin, LA. to attend the funeral of his cousin Ambrose Bodin. After further conversation with his doctor, it was decided that the best way to deal with his

cancer was a complete prostatectomy which took place on November 5th. All that remained now was a recuperation period before returning to Nigeria. Brother Raphael was very anxious to return to his ministry in Africa. In his homily at Brother Raphael's memorial service, Brother Clarence Fioke, Visitor, made the following remarks:

**In his view, Nigeria was where God wanted him to be. He couldn't wait for the doctors in Lafayette to give him the green light from prostate surgery so he could return to his work in Ondo. He understood the risks of laboring so far from home, but God's will was more important to him than life itself.**

After surgery and two months of recovery, he was feeling so well that he wanted to return to Nigeria before getting his doctor's clearance. He complained: "I wanted to return to Nigeria but Brother Visitor and Brother Director both said NO! Wait until you get the doctor's O.K."

Finally, on February 12, 1997 Brother received the green light to return to Nigeria, and on February 15, 1997 he made a quick exit! While walking out of the door at De La Salle Christian Brothers he handed Brother Louis Welker, Director, an envelope. In it Brother Raphael expressed gratitude to the Brothers of the Community for the care given him and wrote:

**I hope I never hear the word cancer again!**

Back in Nigeria, Brother Raphael was busy as usual with teaching, account keeping, secretarial work, a great deal of correspondence and many liturgical celebrations. For the most part his life in Nigeria was a serene one. All that came to an end sometime in the early morning hours of June 14th. Someone entered his room, suffocated him, and took the money out of the safe that he kept in his bedroom.

As the news about his death circulated around the world, condolences and remembrances began to arrive from Brothers, friends and relatives. Again, quoting Brother Clarence Fioke at the memorial service:

**Some comments written by others who knew him help in a small way to make some sense of his death. I will quote a few:**

Brother John Johnston, Superior General:

**Raphael's contribution to the development of the Nigeria sector was outstanding. He was deeply appreciated. He manifested great generosity in going to Nigeria ten years ago as well as in returning after his surgery. My sympathy to the members of his family and to all of you. You can be proud of him. May he rest in peace--and intercede for us.**

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Brother Luke Salm:

**What courage he showed to return to Nigeria when he knew better than anyone the unsettled social and political situation in that poor country where indeed "the need is greatest!" Now he has reaped the martyr's reward and surely enjoys the experience of the living presence of the Lord for whom he gave his life. In that there is reason to rejoice.**

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Brother Gerard Rummery:

**The manner of his passing was tragic but I am sure that in Raphael's own mind it was the risk which he was willing to run. Many another person would have taken his prostate cancer scare**

**as justification for returning to his own District. But Raphael's conversion was unchanging and there is something magnificent about him actually giving his life in the Nigeria that he had adopted.**

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Brother Dominic Ehrmantraut, Visitor of the Lwanga District of Africa wrote:

**I had the opportunity to meet following the funeral with the Brothers and Postulants to reflect on the experiences of the last week and to share some stories related to their relationship with Brother Raphael.**

**Upon concluding our time together it was clear to me that Brother Raphael was an integral part of the life of the Sector of Nigeria and indeed touched the hearts of many of the Brothers and Postulants in the Sector.**

**Raphael was a Brother of the Christian Schools filled to the brim with Faith and Zeal the two characteristics of our Institute in which vowed members throughout life strive to live. Raphael was a shining example to all of us in his dedication and commitment to the vocation as a Brother of the Christian Schools and his commitment to apostolic life.**

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Brother Joseph Hendron, Visitor of the District of England, sent the following condolences:

**His death is a big loss to the Lwanga District and the Nigerian Sector, and particularly to Formation. His example alone was an inspiration to the young men; but he had a lot to offer them in his teaching too. He had a great love for the Institute world-wide and for its traditions and mission and spirit. He had a great love too for the people among whom he worked, and was delighted when he was allowed by his doctor to return to Nigeria and work for the people there and for the spread of the Institute. To have volunteered for this mission after he had 'retired' spoke eloquently for his generosity and faith. He contributed so much in the few years that he spent in Nigeria. He had become a much loved figure and key person in the sub-District and in the Formation program.**

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Mrs. Zannie Garcia (friend):

**My major sense of Brother Raphael was his gentleness, kindness and wisdom. He was so unique and so special. He was always so thoughtful and so wise. I count it one of my blessings to have known him. For me, he will never be dead. He will be in a special place in my heart.**

Dr. J. W. Vildibill, Brother Raphael's surgeon, wrote:

**I share the sorrow of all who knew Brother Raphael Bodin and know that I was privileged to have been a part of his life for a short time. He was a brilliant, perceptive man with an unmatched depth of faith.**

Brother Raphael's funeral took place in Ondo on June 26th at 10:30 a.m. It was his request that should he die in Africa that he be buried there. Over a thousand people attended his funeral and burial. Bishop Alonge of Ondo gave permission for Brother Raphael to be buried in the Brothers' compound. Hopefully, his grave will be a source of inspiration for the Brothers, Postulants, and students.

Just before Brother Raphael's casket was lowered into the ground, Brother Dominic Erhmantraut said to the assembled crowd:

**Your presence here today shows that Brother Raphael touched many hearts in many different ways.**

In Lafayette, LA a memorial service was held on July 5th at 11:00 a.m. Once again the crowd was large. In fact, it was the largest funeral ever held at De La Salle - Christian Brothers. Ten priests concelebrated the Mass along with the main celebrant Fr. Luis Dutra. Following the Mass a long procession took place to the Christian Brothers Cemetery. Each priest and Brother Raphael's surviving brothers and sisters carried palm branches. The palm branches symbolized the victory over death through martyrdom.

The Most Reverend Sam G. Jacobs, Bishop of Alexandria, wrote the following:

**Brother Raphael follows a long list of martyrs, both from your Community and from missionaries to Africa. But, as the blood of the martyrs of the first century was the seed of the faith, so I pray that Brother's death will be the seed of faith for decades to come.**

In the cemetery a headstone was blessed to serve as a constant reminder of his life and work. At the conclusion of the prayers in the cemetery the palm branches were placed in front of the headstone. The Brothers sang the "Honneur a Toi" and the "Salve Regina." Following the services a reception was held.

Who was Brother Raphael Bodin? He was a religious, a member of a family, a teacher, a missionary, a leader, a holy man; all of which, in fact, lead him to touch hearts throughout his spiritual journey.



At the close of the Memorial Liturgy, Brother Raphael's sister, Mrs. Emmadel Hay read a beautiful meditation piece by Randol Rohr. She prefaced the reading with the words:

**I believe had he been given the chance to say some last words that he would have chosen the following words:**

## **Last Farewell**

**A Time Will Come When My Life Will  
Cease**

**But When The Time Comes I Ask That You  
Remember These Things:**

**Bury My body, But Don't Bury My Beliefs.**

**Bury My Heart, But Don't Bury My Love.**

**Bury My Eyes But Not My Vision.**

**Bury My Feet But Not The Path Of My Life.**

**Bury My Hands, But Don't Bury My Diligent  
Efforts**

**Bury My Shoulders But Not the Concerns I Carried.**

**Bury My Voice But Not My Message.  
Bury My Mind, Don't Bury My Dreams.**

**Bury Me, Don't Bury My Life.**

**If You Must Bury Something,  
Let It Be My Faults And My Weaknesses,**

**My Mistakes And Shortcomings,  
Let It Be My Limitations and Sinfulness.**

**But Let My Life Continue On  
In Each And Everyone Of You**

The words that stand out in the above reading are:

**Bury my heart, but don't bury my love.**

To Brother Raphael we could say:

**The words of a popular song read: "Don't  
stop when you fall apart; there's more room  
in a broken heart." (Carlye Simon)**

**Our hearts are broken, but time will heal  
the pain.**

**We'll miss your smile, kindness, sense of  
humor, dedication, prayerfulness, and love  
for Jesus.**

**May your good and gentle soul rest in peace!**

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

