



Fr. David Kevin O'Rourke O.P.

July 16, 1933 - July 16, 2025

Fr. David Kevin O'Rourke, OP

July 16, 1933 - July 16, 2025

Fr. David O'Rourke celebrated his last Mass at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church in Point

Richmond on his 92 nd birthday and died in his sleep later that day. Thus ended the very full and productive life of a devoted Dominican friar and priest.

Hugh Dillon O'Rourke, an immigrant from County Kerry, Ireland, and his wife, Pauline Alice

(Woods) O'Rourke, welcomed their youngest son to their home in Lyndhurst, NJ. He grew

up in a family that prized education and that encouraged a life of service. After graduating from

Yale in 1955, the young David traveled to France for further study. He entered the Dominican

novitiate in Kentfield, CA, in 1957 and made profession in the Order of Friars Preachers the following year.

After his ordination in 1962, Fr. David was sent to Washington, DC, to complete a Licentiate in

Sacred Theology. He then studied as a NIMH Fellow at the Division of Family Study in the

University of Pennsylvania Medical School, where he earned a certificate in marriage counseling, and clinical membership in the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. His interests included counseling, the sacraments of marriage and holy orders, as well as linguistics.

He was a gifted watercolor artist.

Fr. David's published works include four volumes in the Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and

Semiotics series, including, *Demons by Definition: Social Idealism, Religious Nationalism*, and

the Demonizing of Dissent, published in 1998. He also wrote books on the first year of

priesthood, *the Holy Land at the time of Christ*, the process of conversion, the effect of British

and Spanish colonial policies and practices on contemporary American family life, and the

development and acceptance of slavery in the U.S. He also published many articles on marriage

and annulments, family life, sacramental practice, and priestly ministry.

In his over sixty years of priesthood, he was a lector at the Dominican School of Philosophy &

Theology, Berkeley, and eventually the director of its pastoral theology program. He was the

pastor at St. Mary Magdalene Church, Berkeley, and St. Dominic Church, Benicia, and served as

prior of the Berkeley Priory. He was instrumental in establishing the Catholic Marriage

Encounter program in the state of California in the early 1970s and later worked as the editor of

the National Pastoral Life Center's Church magazine. He regularly wrote

catechetical articles for the Catholic News Service's Faith Alive series. He served for several decades as a defender of the marriage bond in the marriage tribunal of the Diocese of Oakland and finally spent the last twenty years of his life serving the parishioners at Our Lady of Mercy, Point Richmond.

At the age of sixty-six, he sent a letter to his major superior proposing to become a missionary in Lithuania, whose Catholic communities were slowly reviving after fifty years of communist suppression. That began an exciting, unexpected new chapter in his life. Fr. David utilized his thirty-five years of experience in marriage and family life to set up model, parish-based family support and marriage preparation programs in Vilnius and around the country. He taught a course in family therapy at Vilnius University. Because the KGB headquarters in Vilnius were directly across from the ancient Dominican priory where he lived, he began to explore the trauma of systematic terror endured by the people he met, and heard the stories of their friends, colleagues and family who disappeared in the night. This led to the Tatra Project (www.tatraproject.org), a documentary educational resource about life under Soviet occupation

featuring first-person interviews. With fellow Dominican and film maker Fr. Kenneth Gumbert,

he wrote and produced a documentary film about the Lithuanian resistance to Soviet occupation

from 1939-1991 titled, Red Terror on the Amber Coast, which was released in 2008 and was

shown on PBS stations in the U.S. and on Lithuanian national television.

A letter from a parishioner captures Fr. David's legacy. She wrote, "his example meant to me that

it was possible to be (or try to be) a faithful Roman Catholic and an intellectually self-respecting,

well-educated, young professional."

A vigil will be held at the chapel of the St. Dominic Catholic Church, 475 E. I St., Benicia, CA,

on Monday, July 28 at 7:30 PM. A funeral Mass will be held at the same location Tuesday, July

29, at 10:30 AM. Burial will follow at St. Dominic's cemetery in Benicia. A memorial fund has

been established to honor Fr. David. Gifts will support the education of Fr. David's Dominican

brothers still in formation. Please donate online at <https://opwest.org/frdavidorourke>

Cemetery Details

St. Dominic's Cemetery

Hillcrest Avenue & East 5th Street
Benicia, CA 94510

Previous Events

Vigil

JUL 28. 7:30 PM - 8:30 PM (PT)

St Dominic's Catholic Church
475 E I St
Benicia, CA 94510
(707) 747-7220

Funeral Mass

JUL 29. 10:30 AM - 11:30 AM (PT)

St. Dominic's Church
475 East I Street
Benicia, CA

Tribute Wall

MK

“ I met Father David my first summer of three spent at Brotherhood, USA, a program sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. He patiently answered all my questions about Catholicism and befriended me in such a kind way. After my three summers ended, I visited him in Berkeley and continued a friendship with him. When email came into being, I followed him and we emailed on occasion to one another. When I got married, I brought my husband to meet him. He was a very large part of my formative life to work for equality, equity, understanding, and kindness in the world. I became a high school teacher and used my knowledge from Brotherhood USA to establish the values that I would use my whole life. He was a very important person to me, and I'm sorry he's gone. I will miss him.

Marcia Kern - April 18 at 01:23 PM

MO

“ Margaret and Paula ODrain purchased the Enduring Grace for the family of Fr. David Kevin O'Rourke O.P..



Margaret and Paula ODrain - July 26, 2025 at 06:16 PM