

**Obituary of Rev. Peter F. O'Brien, S.J.**  
**by Rev. Peter Schineller, S.J.**

Rev. Peter F. O'Brien, S.J., 74, died on May 3, 2015, at Murray-Weigel Hall, Bronx, NY.

The son of Peter and Martha (McGregor) O'Brien, he was born on August 23, 1940, in Teaneck, NJ.

A Jesuit for nearly 57 years, Fr. O'Brien entered the Society of Jesus at the Novitiate of St. Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie, NY, on July 30, 1958. That same year, he graduated from Xavier High School in Manhattan.

Following his novitiate and juniorate studies in Poughkeepsie, he began the study of Philosophy at Loyola Seminary, Shrub Oak, NY (1962-65). After obtaining the Licentiate in Philosophy, he received the Master of Arts degree in English from Fordham University in 1968. For Regency, he taught Latin, English, and Religion at Fordham Prep.

In preparation for the priesthood, he studied Theology at Woodstock College, first in Maryland and then in New York City (1968-72). He was ordained on June 12, 1971, at the Fordham University Church, and served as a priest for almost 44 years. His first assignment as a priest was at St. Ignatius Loyola Church (Manhattan), where he assisted the pastor from 1972-77.

A major development in his ministry occurred in the 1960s, when Fr. O'Brien first came to know Mary Lou Williams, the great jazz composer and musician. Ms. Williams had become a Catholic, with the guidance of Fr. Anthony Woods, S.J., in 1956. In a unique assignment for a Jesuit priest, Fr. O'Brien became her personal manager, assisting Ms. Williams in arranging shows in jazz clubs and on college campuses. At Duke University, he also co-taught (1977-81) with her a course in the History of Jazz. For almost two decades, he advised her in, among other things, the composition of three Jazz Masses.

In 1982, the year after Ms. Williams's death, Fr. Peter O'Brien returned to New York, where he resided at the West Side Jesuit Community and assisted in Campus Ministry at Fordham University's Lincoln Center campus. As Executive Director of the Mary Lou Williams Foundation, which was founded by Ms. Williams in 1980, Fr. O'Brien was able to make her musical genius, as well as her deep Catholic faith, known to countless individuals. Through his work with the Williams Foundation, he was also able to provide assistance to many musicians who suffered from drug and alcohol addiction.

After serving for several years in various ministries and chaplaincies in Minneapolis, MN, Fr. O'Brien worked as a member of the retreat team at Christ the King Retreat House, Syracuse, NY (1991-94) and then at St. Ignatius Retreat House, Manhasset, NY (1994-99).

In 1999, returning to his New Jersey roots, Fr. O'Brien assisted in pastoral ministry at St. Peter's Prep, Jersey City. He also assisted at nearby Resurrection Parish until 2004, when he accepted an assignment at St. Peter's University (then St. Peter's College) as an Adjunct Professor of English. He continued as Executive Director of the Mary Lou Williams Foundation and as a pastoral associate at St. Aedan's Church (affiliated with St. Peter's University) until poor health led him to the Jesuit infirmary in the Bronx, Murray-Weigel Hall, early in 2015.

The Wake will be at St. Aedan's (800 Bergen Avenue, Jersey City), May 6, 2015, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., and on May 7<sup>th</sup> from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. The Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 7:30 p.m., at St. Aedan's, on May 7<sup>th</sup>, with burial following at the Jesuit Cemetery, Auriesville, NY.

Notes of condolence may be sent to Fr. O'Brien's brother, Patrick O'Brien (662 Pascack Road, Paramus, NJ 07652).

