



LOS ANGELES FIREMEN'S RELIEF ASSOCIATION



All LAFRA Grapevine Magazine

[HOME](#)[MEDICAL](#)[RELIEF BENEFITS](#)[TEN BELLS](#)[RETIREMENT CORNER](#)[CALENDAR](#)[GRAPEVINE](#)[DONATE](#)[ABOUT US](#)

Father Christian Van Liefde

May 25, 2023 — [11 Comments](#)

The Department is saddened to announce the death of long-time LAFD Chaplain, Father Christian Van Liefde.

“Father Chris,” as he was fondly known, was unique in that his work with the LAFD was strictly voluntary. He was appointed to the LAFD as Chaplain on October 23, 1980. His last parish as a Pastor was Saint Genevieve Catholic Church, in Panorama City. For decades, Father Chris dedicated his time helping with The Spark of Love Toys for Needy Children program. Many will remember Father Chris stopping at fire stations throughout the city, picking up toys, and delivering them to Toy Central.



Details about the [Memorial Service](#)

Father Chris died on Friday, May 19, 2023, after celebrating with 11 of his classmates his 50-year reunion of being ordained as a Catholic Priest. Father Chris is survived by his 97-year-old mother, Jeanne; his two sisters, Theresa and Nicole; his three brothers, John, Anthony, and Paul; and his eleven nieces and nephews.

Father Chris will truly be missed.

Funeral services are pending. Additional information will be published once it becomes available.

Filed Under: [Death Notices & Funerals](#)

Comments



Allen N. Norman says

May 25, 2023 at 7:53 pm

Another giant in the LAFD has left us: Father Chris. A gentleman who was always there for the Department and it's members. He was a pastor, a friend, and a deeply spiritual light in some of the darker days of the LAFD. Many of our members who are no longer with us spent their final days with FatherChris at their sides. Father Chris brought comfort and peace to those members and their families in the most difficult of times.

His dedication to the toy program continues to be unparalleled in the history of the Department. He was a treasured guest at the dinner table during his many visits to fire stations. I fondly

remember his visits to 11's during my assignment there. You are always in our hearts.

[Reply](#)



Chaplain George Negrete says

[May 25, 2023 at 10:34 pm](#)

By the time I became a Chaplain, Father Chris had been serving our members for many years. As far a ministry goes, Chris was a natural. He had a look, a voice and a presence. He was able to make a cold room warm and he had words to calm anyone. I remember in New York at "Ground Zero", he met a man on the perimeter of the "pile". This man's son was buried somewhere in the rubble. Fr. Chris put his hand on him, asked if he would like him to offer a prayer.....and then he did. In that moment it was exactly the best thing to say, it was exactly what the dad wanted and all that he needed. That was Fr. Chris! From his years of experience he had keen insight into the fire department culture. He knew our language and traditions. Definitely one of a kind. We were better for having him and he will be sorely missed. My condolences to all his family. May God bless his dear mother Jeanne his, sisters, brothers, nieces and nephews.

[Reply](#)



Jim Polzer says

[May 27, 2023 at 6:51 pm](#)

Father Chris, God bless you. You have been an inspiration to me for many years. Thank you for your spiritual wisdom you shared with me. I'll see you some day in paradise. 🙏

Reply



Debbie Brown says

June 2, 2023 at 1:01 pm

Father Chris, the LAFD was truly a better place with your guiding wisdom, spirituality and support. You helped navigate my husband Paul and me through the grief of losing our first born son, Ryan. You continued to support us as we were blessed with our daughter Alexandra and our son Scott, by Baptizing them and always being there for spiritual guidance. May you find everlasting peace.

Reply



Edgar Garcia says

June 2, 2023 at 8:51 pm

Saddened to hear the news when father Chris passed. I have known father Chris since I was a young explorer during the toy program. Not only making an impact in me as I grew within the fire department but seeing the impact he made on other people in and out of the fire department. He was a great person with an amazing heart as well. Always knew how to light up a room, gave great

advice when needed and even when you just needed to talk he was there to listen. May he rest in peace and he will be missed at the toy program as well as in the fire department.

[Reply](#)



Roberta A. Arroyo says

[June 8, 2023 at 8:52 pm](#)

Fr. Chris was our Pastor at St. Hilary in Pico Rivera. During the early years of our marriage, while raising 5 children and navigating through a family illness, he was so caring and attentive to our family. I once asked him if he could write a letter for me, verifying that I was a parishioner with limited means, so that I could pick up a washer machine at St. Vincent's de Paul. He said, 'no problem, I'll have it for you tomorrow'. When I opened the letter, it said "I couldn't let you get a used washer with your 5 little ones. Buy a new one." He included a check for 500.00. He said "Don't worry it's not church funds" He knew me well. He had a generous heart and my family will always be grateful for his love, attentiveness, and spiritual guidance. My condolences to the fire department, which he dearly loved. He gave my son a plastic fire hat. My son called him "God".

[Reply](#)



Alan R. Cowen says

[June 11, 2023 at 8:26 pm](#)

Father Chris will be remembered as a Chaplain and close friend of the LAFD, and a personal friend to me. We had many heartfelt discussions concerning many subjects of which I still ponder today, despite the fact that I have been retired for 25 years. I learned much from this giant of a man and continue to have deep respect for him throughout the years. He was a beacon of hope for many people and he has gone from our time to eternity. I send my thoughts and prayers to his family across the miles.

Reply



Judy Riveros says

July 13, 2023 at 6:03 pm

Father Chris was our family's good personal friend. Our family even changed parishes when we found out he was appointed pastor at St. Hilary Church in Pico Rivera, which then became our Church! Baptized our first born at just a few weeks of age the night before her surgery and was there to give the "last rites" to our youngest when she suffered a massive stroke, and was to undergo surgery the following morning.... as principal of St. Genevieve High School, he had all the students pray together for her at the hour she was to undergo her brain surgery. Fr. Chris always made it a point to send us his love when he would see our son Matt at the F.S. while collecting those toys during Christmas time. Thankful we were soooooo blessed to know such a God-loving and caring person. Will always remember him quoting to me : "The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother" (Fr. Theodore Hesburgh).
(by Fr. Theodore Hesburgh)

[Reply](#)

Michelle Lay-Fouts says

[September 4, 2023 at 6:49 pm](#)

Fr. Chris was a long time friend of our family from his deaconate days at St. Gen's days and we attended his ordination. He even came to Alaska to visit a couple times after we moved in 1975. We are so saddened to hear of his passing. He was a wonderful man and priest. The entire Lay family extends our deepest sympathies to his family.

[Reply](#)

Katie Warner Cartier says

[January 16, 2024 at 12:59 pm](#)

I just saw this about father Chris that he had passed away. I have been trying to get a hold of him for years. He was one of my best friends. He was so awesome to me and my family for years. He was like a big brother to all of us. I even met his mom and dad, his sister, Nicole and his brother Paul, I went to his parents house to visit and I even went on a camping trip with some of us to Arizona. I'll never forget the fun times and the awesome priest he was he married me and he baptized my kids and also was the godfather to one of my kids I am just so upset about his passing. I've been trying to get a hold of him for many years. He was the best of the best had the most awesome parents the most awesome family and always always was such a person they

cared about everybody. I am just so upset about his passing. I've been trying to get a hold of him for many years. He was the best of the best had the most awesome parents the most awesome family and always always was such an person they cared about everybody. I met him when I was in sixth grade when he first started at holy family Catholic Church in Glendale. God bless you father Chris I will always have special memories of you. Thank you for always being such a wonderful friend. Say hi to mom and dad up there and heaven God bless your family. I know they were your number one in your life Besides God, I love you I love your family may you rest in peace

[Reply](#)



Nicole says

[January 26, 2024 at 9:29 am](#)

1/26/24

Katie, I've just now read this, I'm so sorry you weren't able to see him for so long. This is his sister Nicky, I know how much you meant to him, he loved you. He was not the same after being pulled away from his life! It was the greatest injustice I've ever seen, he did NOT deserve what happened to him. He was the best example of a priest and the most decent person! He was the best brother anyone could ask for...I miss him so much! Thank you for your message and thoughts, it was beautiful to read and to know how much he's missed. Mom just turned 98 and is doing amazing. Chris was living with her so it's been an adjustment living alone, but she's holding up great. She's got a big photo from the funeral in her living room where she can see him all the time 😊

[Reply](#)