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## Remembrance of a Friend

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## Remembrance of a Friend

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

I do not propose that my authorship of this reflection on my friend Michael places me in some sort of place of privilege among those who were fortunate enough to cross paths with him at some point in their academic, artistic or faith journeys. No, this is not a case of one who knew him better rising above others. In fact, it may be the opposite: I suspect that my commentary on our friendship might be indistinguishable from the observations of others. That seems a fitting epitaph for one who made you feel as if you were his only friend in the world. We know that this is not the case. C.S. Lewis notes in his work *The Four Loves*, that when it comes to friendship "two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth..." (p. 61). This was how I knew Michael Costanzo, the CEO and chief creative officer of a massive network of friendship.

# Water Lilies



2010

Michael Costanzo

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## *Remembrance of a Friend*

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I actually first met Fr. Costanzo as a boy. I grew up in East Rochester and at the Church of St. Jerome; the parish was then staffed by the late Fr. Anthony Calimeri and later by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Fr. Costanzo was, as he so often was, “around.” These were the days when there was still Mass said in Italian at the parish and, of course, who better than Michael to preside? My interaction with

him at the time was minute, only to be remembered later when I was his student here at the College. Our recollection of those days in the early to mid-1980's was foggy and limited to trading back and forth the names of other people from East Rochester whom we mutually knew.

It was here at St. John Fisher where the "opera" my wife and I call our friendship with Michael began and flourished. I took his course "Love in the New Testament." Little did I know that this course was less about its "cute" title and more an in-depth exploration of the various ways the concept of love and its various words and metaphors are manifested in the New Testament. He had me hooked. I was no scholar of scripture at that point (nor at this) in my life, but he almost made the words jump out of books and come to life.

Thought I will be honest. Sometimes back then I had a hard time understanding him because of his accent. I frequently gave him playful jabs about his accent saying that he's been here in the States so long that he should have a nice "Rochester Rah" by now. It was through this language barrier, however, that I started to pop into his office to ask clarifying questions, to learn more about a topic, and to help rekindle my own faith which, at that time, was smoldering.

Two things happened in those visits. First, it was where I fell in love with theology and ministry. More importantly, I was introduced to espresso. I suppose some of you reading this just laughed out loud at that previous statement, but it's very true. Through the sharing of coffee and the ongoing conversations, I see and understand now that Michael was acting completely *in persona Christi* to me. He was personifying the type of incarnational Gospel hospitality that Jesus himself demonstrated and demanded. This is no easy task, mind you, and many churches today sit and scratch their heads in wonder, "How can we reach the lost?" My answer was and continues to be, "Get a little Italian guy and an espresso machine."

My wife, Jodi Rowland Schott (Class of '04), also experienced this same type of relationship with him as a work-study student in his office, through the work she did with *Verbum*, and through her own conversion experience when she entered the church at the Easter Vigil in her senior year. It was Fr. Costanzo, of course, who then drove Jodi around from store to store searching for a graduation present for me, which was--yes--an espresso machine!

As the years flew by, Michael was never far away--an email, a phone call, or a short drive away. He was there on the altar on June 2, 2007 to co-preside at our wedding. He was there in February of 2012 to baptize our first child. He was there to stop by the house and bless our second, and then our third child, as we are sure he did for so many of you who are reading these fond words. He supported us in our graduate studies. He supported me and prayed for our family as we entered formation for the permanent diaconate program. As you can guess, he was there when he needed "something small" written for this publication. He was never far away.

That is until he became ill. He did not show it nor did he ask for space, but there was a distance there when I arrived back at Fisher to work in the Office of Campus Ministry. I eagerly popped over to the office, had an espresso, and he told me he was going to be out for some time for "something minor, Jonathan, no need to worry about it." That was that. We still chit-chatted for several weeks—mainly as he told me what I needed to do in my job--and then, he was gone.

I am not, nor is my wife and family, overly sad about that. It would be very easy to look in hindsight and say "I should have done this" or "We should have had him over to the house more" but in the end, the friendship was good. It was very good. It was, as Pope Francis notes in *Amoris laetitia*: "...in general, times of illness enable...bonds to grow stronger" (no. 277.) To go back and recall something from that first course I first had with Michael, our relationship was one of *storge* love: an affectionate love that slowly develops from friendship.

To those reading this, I hope your friendship with Michael was as personal and life-giving as mine and my family's was. We believe, as children of God, that death is only the end of earthly life, and in that brief time we have to be physically present to one another, we have a limited opportunity to bring our families and friendships to fulfillment using the best of our abilities. Michael did so much of that for me, for my wife, and for our family. It is with these memories and in this joy that I pray my friend Michael has been delivered into the Father's hands.

*Jonathan Schott MA  
Class of 2002  
Office of Campus Ministry*

