

THE BEACON MARCH 2026

Remembering Father Jerry Kaywell



On February 23, 2026, a sudden silence fell over our parish and our council. Father Jerome “Jerry” Kaywell, our pastor and our Brother Knight, passed away at the age of 72. While the Diocese of Venice lost a dedicated priest of 34 years, we in Council 8074 lost a chaplain who truly saw the best in us. Whenever he stood at the pulpit, he did not just see a congregation. He looked out and saw what he called the “Saints of Punta Gorda.”

Father Jerry’s journey to the altar was anything but ordinary. Growing up in West Palm Beach, he was a child prodigy who began composing music at just five years old. At 18, he left home to follow a spiritual tug that led him to St. Fidelis Seminary

in Pennsylvania to join the Capuchin Franciscans. While his path eventually took a detour into the professional music world of Los Angeles, those early years of prayer stayed with him. In California, he reached heights most musicians only dream of by becoming a successful composer for film and television. In 1986, he reached the pinnacle of the industry when he won a Grammy Award as a keyboardist for the album *Let My People Go* by The Winans.

Even with a Grammy on his shelf, God was calling him back. After a grueling battle with stage 4 lymphatic cancer, a trial that refocused his entire life, he returned to the seminary for good. He was ordained on October 25, 1991, and he often said that his life was about “God and music, in that order.”

Father Jerry came to Sacred Heart in 2004, arriving just in time to face one of the greatest challenges in the history of our parish. Hurricane Charley devastated the church shortly after he took over, but he refused to let the community lose hope. He used his old industry connections to host concerts and festivals that did much more than just rebuild our walls. Those efforts were so successful that they helped the parish pay off the mortgage entirely by 2008.

He was a man who led by inspiration rather than a script. He once shared a personal secret that he never prepared formal notes before a homily. Instead, he would simply pray and trust the Holy Spirit to guide his tongue on the spot. This is why his words always felt so personal to those in the pews. He was not reading a speech to a crowd, but rather talking to his friends. He made it a point to truly know us, walking through the parish to learn the names and stories of the people he served.

For over 30 years, Father Jerry was a proud member of the Knights of Columbus. As a 4th Degree Knight and our Chaplain, he was our greatest advocate. Because of his constant encouragement from the altar, our council achieved incredible milestones.

We were able to donate over \$110,000 to local charities in a single year and fund five ultrasound units for pregnancy centers. One of his final joys was seeing our council vote to change our name from Ponce de Leon Council 8074 to Sacred Heart Council 8074. He was deeply moved to see the Knights and the parish finally aligned under one name. Though he did not live to see the change fully completed, we carry out this transition now as a tribute to his vision of unity.

There is a detail about Father Jerry that reveals the humble heart beneath the famous musician. On the bottom of his chalice is an inscription that he did not share widely, but he showed it to those of us who were close to him. It reads: "To love and be loved. To serve and be served." Those words were the quiet engine behind everything he did for us. He allowed himself to be loved by the "Saints of Punta Gorda" just as much as he loved us. He was a man who had seen the bright lights of Hollywood, yet he found his greatest light right here in our Council and our Church.

Rest in peace, Father Jerry. You have finished the race, and you have kept the faith.

Written by Daniel Constance



