

**Fr. Robert J. Ronald, S.J.**

Fr. Robert J. Ronald (China Province, originally from CFN) died January 2, 2009 in Taipei, Taiwan at the age of 76. He was a Jesuit for 58 years and a priest for 43 years.

Bob was born in Martinez, Calif., on October 1, 1932. He attended Bellarmine College Prep, graduating in 1950. Influenced by one of his freshmen teachers, Mr. Albert Klaeser, S.J., soon to be assigned to China. Bob applied to the Society and was accepted into the novitiate on August 14, 1950. He had a strong desire for the missions and petitioned the Provincial to be sent on several occasions: "Even before I went to Bellarmine I felt attracted to the missions and that desire has remained with me in varying degrees since then." His wish was granted and at the completion of his philosophy course at Mount St. Michaels in 1957, he followed in the footsteps of his former teacher to Asia. (Klaeser was later to become Bob's superior in Taiwan.)

While in Hsinchu, Bob was stricken with polio in September 1958. He received a further setback when, while being prepped for orthopedic surgery, he suffered cardiac arrest and had to be cut open for doctors to resuscitate his heart. He made a slow and painful recovery, and returned to the U.S. for therapy at Warm Springs, Georgia. After two periods of strenuous therapy, he made a remarkable recovery and was assigned to Bellarmine Prep to teach public speaking and debate for a semester. All remarked on his constant good cheer and indomitable spirit. His attitude was reflected in his statement: "I am healthy. More healthy than before polio even, just limited in local motion, that's all." He was determined to go back to China and was able to resume his languages studies in Taiwan in 1961. Theology studies were made in Baguio City, Philippines, 1962-66, and Bob was ordained a priest on May 9, 1965

Bob returned to the States in 1968 and worked on a M.S. degree in Rehabilitation Counseling at the University of Arizona. He interned at hospitals in Phoenix and was able to get around in a van specially equipped with hand controls and a lift gate. He returned to Taiwan in December 1971 and took up a post as a consultant at the Veteran's Hospital near Taipei, a position he held until he retired in January 2002. At the same time, he organized and led his own organization, Operation De-Handicap, to provide follow-up vocational counseling and referral services for the disabled. In addition to working with individuals, Bob produced manuals for those working with the handicapped and their families, taught classes and workshops, and gave presentations at international conferences on rehabilitation throughout the world. The organization's philosophy stressed helping persons to help themselves and assume the ultimate responsibility for their own rehabilitation. The role of the family in the rehabilitation program was also stressed.

In 1974, Bob suffered major injuries in a head-on collision and remained in critical condition for some time. He was able to resume his work, but a year later, an infection set in and his left leg was amputated above the knee. Still, Bob remained undaunted, continued his work and was able to visit foundations and benefactors to support his organization, including a 13,000 mile van trip around the U.S. lecturing and raising

RECEIVED FEB 11 2009

money. He continued his writing, counseling, and teaching. His books went through many revisions and printings and were distributed gratis. Over the years the focus of Operation De-Handicap has shifted from those recovering from polio to those coping with other disabilities, especially muscular dystrophy. Bob also devised a computerized pictorial vocational interest inventory test for use with the retarded and those with limited literacy.

Over the years Bob has been recognized as a national authority on rehabilitation in Taiwan and has received government and private awards for his work. His work has been instrumental in bringing those with handicaps into the mainstream of society throughout Asia and will continue to do so in the future through the capable hands of Bob's associates. He was well aware of the apostolic dimensions of his work. "Though I seldom have the occasion... to explicitly introduce God or the Church, my identity as a priest and as a Jesuit is nearly universally known and my motives respected."

Bob will be remembered as well for his deep spirituality and persistence in adversity; he saw his physical setbacks as opportunities for service to others. In recent years, as his conditioned worsened, he required the services of a full-time personal assistant to take care of his needs. His positive outlook and determination, however, remained constant. May he rest in peace.

Additional info for Bob's obituary:

In 2003, Bob retired from more than 30 years of service at Taiwan's Veterans' Hospital and joined Kuangchi Program Service. There, he wrote and corrected English scripts for KPS productions. During his final years, he became a prolific writer of editorials, poems, and fables for the Jesuit monthly *Renlai*. Many of his writings can be found on the publication's electronic website [www.erenlai.com](http://www.erenlai.com). *Renlai* plans to collect, edit and publish them in book form.

Bob's kind and joyful disposition, his positive outlook, and deeply human spirituality made him an excellent spiritual director for a substantial number of Jesuits and lay people. Bob's care provider of the last seven years claims that Bob changed his life through his kindness and patient companionship, always reaffirming and encouraging, never scolding, criticizing or complaining.