

## CYO: ADIEU PHIL MATRALE



FOR YOUTH

We dedicate this Newsletter  
in memory of our beloved  
Youth Minister

**Phil Matrale**

who was taken from us  
too soon on

**November 21, 2020.**

BY YOUTH

THROUGH YOUTH

What is love? Anyone who has sat on the floors of the lower church of St. Michael's every Tuesday night during their high school years would know that the simple answer to that question is God. "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (John, 4:16). Not only did Phil answer and explain this to every member of CYO over the years, but he lived it every day he walked this Earth through his generosity, kindness, and passion. He was a man who lived in love, lived in God, and God in him.

Phil was born on June 21, 1960 in Orange, NJ. He grew up in the Township of Union where he attended St. Michael's Grammar School and Union High School before graduating from Rutgers University. Continuing his education, he pursued and obtained a post baccalaureate certification in Adolescent Counseling from Seton Hall University. After graduating, he briefly worked for Xerox and Seton Hall before returning to St. Michael's to begin his true calling and God's work. In 1992, he married the love of his life, Dorothy Dittermer, at a beautiful mass at St. Michael's Church surrounded by their loved ones. Shortly after, the newlyweds moved to Old Bridge in 1993 and raised a family that consists of their three lovely daughters, Lauren (25), Julie Anne (22), and Carissa (17). The family became active parishioners of St. Ambrose Church, where Phil volunteered selflessly over the years for whatever was needed, whether it was a book fair, the carnival, or just paintings on the wall.

Phil felt his first true calling to help others in high school as a parishioner of St. Michael's.

He became involved in Union County CYO and the Search and Crossroads programs. However, it was not until after completing his education that he found the job that God had called him to do at St. Michael's in 1986 as the Youth Ministry Director. It was then that he would begin his life's work of building a youth organization that would have such a long-lasting profound impact on the community for decades to come. What had started as a part-time job with a group of less than 20 teenagers, would then blossom into a full-time ministry of its own that has touched the lives of thousands since.

Through his hard work and dedication, he grew the organization each year adding new initiatives and projects over time, which in turn drew



hundreds of kids not only from Union, but from the surrounding towns as well. Eventually, this would culminate in merging with Holy Spirit Youth Ministry to become St. Michael's/Holy Spirit CYO Youth Ministry, giving way to the town having one unified Catholic Youth Organization.

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On top of all this, he also became the religious education teacher at St. Michael's Grammar School and Confirmation Coordinator allowing him to build CYO into the Confirmation process, confirming thousands of young people into the Catholic faith. Phil was honored for his efforts and achievements throughout the course of his life. In 1990, he was named as "Union's Man of the Year" by UNICO, receiving the honor again 15 years later in 2005. The Township of Union officially declared April 29<sup>th</sup> as "Phil Matrале Day" on their township calendar in his honor soon after. He was also the 2013 recipient of the Blessed John Paul II Award from the Archdiocese of Newark for his years of work and dedication to the youth of the community.



On any given Tuesday night, Phil always created a safe and welcoming environment where teenagers congregated to share and learn about faith. At the beginning of every meeting, Phil without fail could be found roaming the room and talking with everyone he came across, always with a big smile. After a few minutes, students would be called to pick up their mats before sitting to hear the announcements and praying for their intentions in the prayer box. Phil would next move into the activity for the night, which typically consisted of a discussion on a topic and its relation to faith. On occasion, the meeting would be expanded to include guest speakers such as CYO Alumnus, motivational speakers, and the highly anticipated annual visit from CYO favorite Justin Fatica from the Hard As Nails Ministry. Other times, he would run icebreakers, such as CYO classic, "Get On the Bus, Get Off the Bus," or a small group activity such as measuring one's "Spiritual Temperature" to highlight the topic of the evening. Slideshow nights were also something to look forward to in anticipation.

Phil would work for hours cobbling together pictures, creating colorful slides, and adding a music playlist to focus on all the great work and memories teens were making from practicing their faith. They would show Service Projects, which included making 200+ peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the homeless, Thanksgiving and Easter food drives, visiting and helping individuals from the quadriplegic center, playing bingo with the elderly from the South Mountain nursing home, and watching special needs children from the ARC.

Annual events such as Vacation Bible School, Festival of Lights, Stations of the Cross, Charity Basketball & Volleyball Games, Italian Feast, the Christmas Dance, Ski Trip, Virginia Beach, Six Flags, and Medieval Times were also featured. However, no CYO experience was ever truly complete unless one attended the annual teen retreat. As Phil would always say, "It's the greatest event we do all year and the reason everyone loves to come back." This magically themed weekend consisted of teens, young adults, and parents alike coming together to form unforgettable bonds with each other and listen and learn from the heartfelt speeches crafted and delivered by the speech-givers from the senior class. Whether it was through reading a sentimental polanca letter, resonating with a speech, or singing "Big House" at the top of your lungs, love and light was felt everywhere and was the main highlight of any CYO year. Phil and his team would work tirelessly year after year to make sure that every teen got the best experience possible. Besides hosting weekly meetings, service projects, and events,





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Phil was a mentor, confidant, advocate, and father figure to many. He always loved to have people stop by and talk during the week, and his door was always open to everyone. From the students of St. Michael's Grammar School, to CYO members, all the way to CYO alumni and their families. He was there for everyone at any time. To him, there was nothing a little chat over coffee or a funny picture of Snoopy and the Charlie Brown gang couldn't fix, which he was always famous for sending out on every birthday and holiday. As much as Phil was a fan of Peanuts, Superman could also be found scattered throughout his office. As an avid comic collector he eventually, and fittingly, became affectionately known as our Superman because he was truly able to do it all.



While he selflessly dedicated much of his time and energy to CYO, the center of his universe was always his family. At home, he was an amazing husband and father. He put his family above all else and they adored him. There was never a moment where they weren't on his mind as he always talked so lovingly about them. For many years, he was the "Class Dad," beloved by parents, teachers and students alike. As his daughters got older and entered Bishop Ahr High School, he would also volunteer there doing odd jobs and running the football kitchen, as well as always helping out at his daughters' dance studio.

Dance recitals were seldomly missed, and there were many over the years. There was nothing he wouldn't do for his girls, his family and his friends. On his off time, Phil loved the time he got to go on vacation with his family in the summers, especially

**PHIL,  
YOU DESERVE  
ALL OF THE  
BEST!**



**TO US,  
YOU'RE  
"THE MAN OF  
THE CENTURY!"  
THANKS FOR  
EVERY THING!**

**ALL OUR LOVE  
ST. MICHAEL'S  
CYO/YOUTH MINISTRY**

to Walt Disney World and Aruba. Those trips with his family were his heaven on earth. Phil leaves behind a legacy of love, light and faith. His mark on the world will be felt for generations and his spirit will continue to live through the thousands of lives that he has touched. The world is truly a better place because he was in it. His CYO family will forever miss him, but will never forget all of the wonderful memories and

life lessons. May his beautiful soul rest in eternal peace with our Father in his "Big House" up in heaven and may we all look forward to a time when we can be reunited with him again. Until then, Superman.



*By Cristina Manochio*