When Fr. Joe LaBrie called me on Friday and give me the guidelines for my talk today, it reminded me of a conversation I had with Dr. Ralph Abernathy when I worked at the White House. Dr. Abernathy told me that when Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., was to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, both of his parents, daddy King and Mrs. King, were present. When his name was called Mrs. King beaming with pride turned to her son and said “make it plain son... make it plain”. Dr. King then looked to his father and Daddy King said ... “but make it brief”.

I have known Father Donald P. Merrifield since I was 17 years old. He was my confessor, my teacher and my friend. He baptized my son Christian, buried my mother and was a celebrant at the mass when I was married. When sisters St. George and Pauline Theresa, both Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, learned that Father Merrifield had been my confessor, they blamed me for shortening his life.

In preparing for my message today, I reread the life of St. Ignatius and the history of the Society of Jesus. I read the most recent message of the general of Society of Jesus, Bishop Gordon Bennett’s January conference address and Father Lawton’s address on the mission of the University. And the message remains the same. Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam through Education and Service to others. Although the goal of the Society of Jesus has always been to spread the Catholic Faith to all people of the world, the Jesuits have never ceased to embrace and respect other religions. Like so many other Jesuits before him, Don’s desire was to live the life of Christ in spite of his own health challenges which were so similar to the life of Ignatius. Before his conversion, Ignatius had been an officer in the Spanish Army and fought the French. He understood the value of planning and quick action. He was not afraid to lead his troops from the “front”. This was Don’s approach as well. Don made me understand the value of today’s good works and the disadvantages of putting it off until tomorrow. I dropped the ball in this regard. I told Fr. Merrifield we would have another of those world affairs conversations as soon as I visited him. I did not act promptly and I will always regret not acting and not having that visit. As my confessor, the penance he gave me always required me to take some action that demonstrated love... today not tomorrow. In this case, I wish I had.

I was not surprised when I began to receive the comments from classmates who recounted touching experiences with Father Merrifield. Judge John T. Doyle ’74 told me about an uplifting, sensitive and motivating conversation he had with Don when he had doubts regarding his decision to become a lawyer. Mary Blanding, ’73 said.... “Fr. M. would often sit with us in
small groups on campus or in his office and just talk. Or, he would listen to us make demands, whine and complain. He always had a smile on his face and a gleam in his eye”.

There are many Fr. M. stories to tell. One comes from Mary’s sister Martha who attended Cal State Fullerton. You see, one day she came to campus to visit and was verbally assaulted by a white male student using the “N” word. By herself and on her own she went to Fr. M. and told him who she was and what had happened. He asked if she could locate and identify the student. She did and Fr. M. confronted him and demanded he apologize to Martha. When asked why she went to Fr. M. whom she had never met, she said ... “I felt comfortable because of the way you all talked about him. He seemed very approachable, very down to earth and, he was”.

In a heartfelt email from Chicago Marvis Hardy ’75, wrote.... “I was deeply touched to hear of his passing because I know how much he meant to me, the Black Student Freedom Alliance and the black students at LMU”.

Anthony Taylor’74, Lisa Taylor’75, Robert Taylor, Ika Bunting’72, Wayne King, Veronica Hayes’72, Judge Irma Brown ’72, Larry Braxton ’72 and Ron Galway are here for Don. He was able to touch and inspire each of us to stretch and be the best we could be. Frequently that was better than we might have imagined.

So, let us all leave here today with the intent to in his words, “take some action that demonstrates love... today not tomorrow.   God Bless.