

Msgr. Jim Fetscher Tribute & Parish Reception – Sept. 3, 2025
St. Louis Catholic Church

My name is Kelly Layman but I'm better known as a sous chef to Monsignor Jim, or just as Father Jim's niece. My Mother is Patricia Fetscher Akin, and we live up just north of West Palm Beach. As many of you know, Father Jim was the oldest of 7. Pat was his oldest sister. The family grew up on NE 141st St. in North Miami, near Holy Family.

Just a few thoughts in no particular order, and I want to share some humor to make you laugh, and to put more humor in our lives, because I know that is what my Uncle tried fervently to do.

There were only three food groups for my Uncle Jim:

EAT AND TELL.

EAT AND DON'T TELL.

And the 3rd was,

THANK YOU FOR TRYING BUT FOR THE LOVE OF GOD NO.

Before I share a few more humorous things in tribute, I want to express deep gratitude to all of you. I know many of you prayed during his funeral mass at St. Sebastian with the Archbishop last week if you couldn't attend in person.

I was truly touched looking at the reserved pews filled up by the St. Louis family, and that a bus had even been coordinated. Honestly, that's kind of when I "lost it" for a minute, because I have memories of coming here to mass at St. Louis, in your assembly hall, before the church was finished.

You may remember Jim's mother, my Gram, Winnie, attending mass here from time to time.

She would force my Mom and I – well, not force, "suggest"~! – that we sit in the very middle of the long set of chair rows. I remember one time asking in the car leaving why we did that — when we knew a lot of people up front and everyone wanted to meet us and talk to us because of "Uncle Jim." My Mom quietly turned around and said, "Because we are there to worship, not to be worshipped." That's a Fetscher.

I vividly remember sitting here as a kid when your school was just a dream ... being bandied about.
You took on that incredible project. It was not easy.
It felt like St. Louis could do anything. Because you did!
There was No Fear.

My Uncle Pete helped oversee several construction projects here, including the school.

But I want to tell you a secret about that time.

My Uncle Pete really thought seriously about writing a book.

It would have been titled:

How To Convince Contractors To Redo Anything

... and the last chapter would've been titled:

How To Take Your Contractors into a Confessional

(I've been doing renovation projects and real estate investments for 3 decades, so I adore contractors and vendors if there are any in this room! I promise.)

We all know the strength of a building is important, but it's the teachers and administrators who fortify your daughters and sons for the journey as women and men. There are several of you from the school in this room, and I want to salute you. I've always been taken with the story of St. Louis Covenant because I'm a product of that system as a graduate of St. Clare and Cardinal Newman, both up in Palm Beach County.

I want to share just two more things.

One, a little more about my uncles, aunts, and especially their parents.

And then I'll finish by sharing a few excerpts from those *thousands* of weekly writings Uncle Jim did each Sunday, called "Midnight Musings" or "Twilight Twitches." (If you didn't know, "Midnight Musings" turned into "Twilight Twitches" when Father Jim went to St. Sebastian.)

As I mentioned, there were 7 children living under the care of Winifred Murnane Fetscher and Frederick Fetcher. Uncle Jim's father worked not 2 but 3 jobs at one point to ensure those 7 had everything they needed.

He died a couple months after Uncle Jim's ordination.

Uncle Jim's father also endured brain surgery 3 weeks before.



*And yes, he was
physically present at his
son's ordination mass!*

*If you think miracles
don't exist, that's a hat
trick of them right there.*

The photo displayed at
mass, and here at the
reception, is Uncle Jim's
ordination at age 26.

There's more to this
powerful story about
what occurred in the
family around that event
... I'll share that in a
moment, from his own
"Midnight Musings."

My grandmother meanwhile was an epic Irish household budget manager. It's why my own Mother still believes there is a potato famine going on. I'm teasing her.

Of course, Winnie, or my Gram, was elated when her oldest son became a Catholic priest. She attended daily mass, before and after her husband's death.

My Gram only learned to drive after her husband died. My Mom would often drive her mother to daily mass before they both reported for work.

If you talk to some of the 6 siblings, though, I think at least a couple of them suspect Uncle Jim went into the seminary just to get a bedroom of his own. They grew up in one bedroom for the girls and one for the boys like many of you.

My Gram's devotion to the Holy Spirit and her love of the kitchen were major traits passed onto Uncle Jim.

It's no coincidence that sometimes my Gram ordered everyone out of the kitchen during special gatherings when it became too crowded. She did it because she was afraid someone would go to the hospital before we could get to the dinner table. It was a very small kitchen! Uncle Jim also did this, but it was only because the master chef's vision was being played with.

So the good and faithful servant now has the best of both worlds!
A school gym dedicated to him here at St. Louis and a fellowship hall
... and a catering kitchen dedicated to him at St. Sebastian better than most five-star restaurants! You could live in the walk-in cooler.

In all seriousness, a few words about St. Louis and all of you.

Fr. Jim excelled here, I think, in many ways because you were becoming a city of services. You were burgeoning. The list of ministries here is astounding. Truly.

Let's face it. You have a really cool parish.

... And I'm not saying that just because you accept Crypto and ApplePay on your web site donations page!

Before I read from Fr. Jim's writings, I want to thank you again. You have blessed our family enormously with your stories and with turning out tonight and taking your valuable time to be here.

A leader's job to give pause. Yet the way my Uncle Jim gave pause through humor was really powerful. He utilized every gift he had. My Uncle did not take any single God-given gift for granted.

And so I want his words to be my last words.

It was hard to choose just a few.

First, about St. Louis' people. This is from his writings just before his departure:

... For over 31 years, St. Louis has been my incubator, test tube, launching platform, the field of dreams.

Even the tragedies, we've had a few, have some element of WONDER-ful in them.

... One huge frustration is not being able to say all the thanks to all the people who have occupied my heart, or did the "thorn-in-my-side" thing.

How much I owe you, and only in God's space and time will you know that.

The next one is about Father's Day, and then Mother's Day. For all the fathers and mothers in the room, I hope this will resonate and give you comfort.

... You'd never know I was my father's son.

He had hair that needed to be THINNED when he went to the barber.

He could eat anything and never put on weight.

He had a calm and even demeanor – except in moments of pandemonium that occasionally befell a house of 7 kids.

My father was not a Catholic. However, no one could have been more supportive in the faith enterprise.... Every Sunday, 9 of us would pack into the DeSoto Suburban. He would drop us off, go home and make breakfast, and come back for us.

On the night before I was ordained, he arranged on his own to be baptized. No one knew except my Mother and a few others involved. So he made his First Communion at my first Mass.

... He hated public display. Serious water damage was done to the family section.

He died 2 months after I was ordained.

We had a Christian burial at night, which was rare then, 800 people were there because he had made so many friends and there were friends of 7 kids too.

... I share this because my prayer is that Father's Day can be filled with fathers being as good to their wives and children as my father was to us. And wives and children must call out the best from these men we call "Dad."

Next week, I need to update you on Money. So don't worry we'll be back to one page.

From a writing in tribute to Mothers –

I won't sentimentalize sacrifice. I will celebrate sacrifice, especially the ones (my) Mom and Dad made, because the word itself means To Make Holy.

We were made holy by God's love for us. They (my parents) lived it. To all our wonderful women — the ones who gave birth, and the ones who give life by their love — Happy Mother's Day.

Finally, this is a postcard from Italy he sent to my Mom (after walking the cobblestone streets):

It's been wonderful, and I have walked miles. Tough. Have written my Will a dozen times. Love, Jim