



## Thomas Zerafa

July 30, 1951 - February 13, 2023

Brother Thomas R. Zerafa, 71, of Oak Park died on Monday, February 13, 2023 at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. He was born on July 30, 1951 to Joseph and Imelda (nee Gauvin) Zerafa in Detroit.

Tom is survived by his brother, Joseph (Theresa) of Livonia. Preceding him in death is a brother, Larry; sister, Linda Montoya; and his parents.

Tom was a music minister in the Archdiocese of Detroit for many years and served many parishes. He had a bachelor's of music degree from Marygrove College and was an active alumni member. As a political and agricultural activist, Tom was the Vice President of the Executive Committee of the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights and will receive posthumously the Tom Zerafa Activist Award. Other activities include the Sierra Club, Peace Action, the Michigan Democratic Party and Act Up.

Tom was on the board of Motor City Freedom Riders which fought to bring mass transit to Southeast Michigan. Recently he traveled to Washington DC several times as a volunteer to lobby Congress for climate action with the Sierra Club and Citizens Climate Lobby. Tom was a founding member of Dignity Detroit and an advocate for the LGBTQ community. He even ran for mayor of Oak Park in 2007. Tom was known for his backyard barbecues and holiday gatherings, which brought the community and neighborhood together.

He took vows as a Franciscan brother in 2018.

In accordance with Tom's wishes, he will receive a green burial. A graveside service will be held on Friday, February 17 at 1:00 pm in The Preserve at All Saints Cemetery, 4401 Nelsey Rd., Waterford Twp., 48329.

Friends and family will gather again on Friday, April 14, from 9:30 am until time of memorial Mass at 10:00 am at St. Mary Catholic Church, 730 S Lafayette Ave., Royal Oak, 48067.

# Previous Events

## Graveside Service

FEB 17. 1:00 PM (ET)

The Preserve at All Saints Cemetery  
4401 Nelsey Road  
Waterford Township, MI 48329

## Memorial Gathering

APR 14. 9:30 AM - 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary Catholic Church  
730 S. Lafayette Avenue  
Royal Oak, MI 48067

## Memorial Mass

APR 14. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary Catholic Church  
730 S. Lafayette Avenue  
Royal Oak, MI 48067

# Tribute Wall

BS

“ So sorry to hear of Tom's passing. The world has lost a beautiful soul. Tom was an amazing musician, and had a warm and loving persona. I will miss making music with him and being in his presence.

Sincerely,  
Brandy Sinco, Ann Arbor

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**Brandy Sinco** - February 22, 2023 at 08:18 PM

RP

“ Tom was an active member of Peace Action of Michigan for many years who brought his enthusiasm and prudentia (darn good thinking) to advocate for a world without violence. We appreciate his peace and justice oriented lifestyle with hospitality for all. May his memory always inspire us to do the things that make for peace. Shalom/Salaam/Shanti, Rev. Rich Peacock, Co-Chair, Peace Action of Michigan

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**Rev. Rich Peacock** - February 20, 2023 at 09:47 AM

RE

“ A very good man who was so involved with interfaith and social justice work, especially here in Detroit. He was always a supporter of our Detroit Interfaith Outreach Network and attended so many of our events and picnics. He was also a neighbor and we just recently attended together the memorial service where he spoke so nicely about the husband of the Mayor of Oak Park. May his soul be in the highest heavens and may his name be forever a blessing here on earth. - Rabbi Dorit Edut

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**Rabbi Dorit Edut** - February 19, 2023 at 10:24 PM

MP

“ Brother Tom was a great volunteer advocate for the American Cancer Society and I enjoyed working and talking with him during my time there. He was passionate and active in supporting fairness and equality. RIP

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**Matt Phelan** - February 17, 2023 at 03:58 PM



“ We are so sorry for the loss of Tom. He had a very meaningful life and was a supportive cousin over the years. We will always remember his beautiful voice and the fact that he sang at all our funerals. We'll miss his quick wit and opinions! He was very supportive of my late Brother Mark over the years for which we were thankful. He will be sorely missed, Theresa and Joe. God bless him and God bless you and your family. Sincerely, Carol Szydowski-Eehalt (Diane)

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**Carol Szydowski-Eehalt** - February 17, 2023 at 09:15 AM

FS

“ I first met Tom when I was 13, and he was the choir director of our youth choir at St. Louis the King Church in Detroit. We crossed paths throughout the years, and he provided the music for my wedding in 1979, as well as family funerals. Rest in Heaven dear Tom. 🙏❤️

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**Felicia Szczepanski** - February 16, 2023 at 09:06 PM

RM

“ A few years back I started getting invites to his home. I promise one day I would attend, but never did. Even though I never showed up he kept sending them to me. When I saw the last invite, I thought it was another dinner, But I was saddened to find out he had passed. I will be at the service at his home.

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**Rose Morton** - February 16, 2023 at 08:09 PM

FR

“ My connection to Tom goes back 45 years plus we met at Wayne State University when we both were a part of the gay liberation front. Both of us were activist and I continued with him with different organizations from Affirmations to Detroit Area Gay and lesbian council and other the human rights organizations in Detroit and around Michigan. His impact was great in our community and we will all feel that loss. Tom was such a wonderful caring person. May his memory always be a blessing.

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**Faith Robinson Renner** - February 16, 2023 at 10:08 AM

MD

“ My goodness. Tom was at every transit conference, workshop, press conference or meeting I had about public transportation over the the last 25 years. If there was food, all the better. :) What a great advocate he was and will be since his impact and presence will live on. Rest in peace, Tom.

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**Marie Lisabeth Donigan** - February 16, 2023 at 08:33 AM

CY

“ Tom was always a light whenever we encountered one another. A true servant leader, activist, advocate, and dear friend. Words cannot express how much he will be missed, but his impact will live on forever. Well done, friend. Rest well.

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**Chantelle Yancy** - February 16, 2023 at 12:05 AM

DJ

“ My husband and I have lived directly behind Tom for 20 years. We shared a backyard fence and I have enjoyed many afternoon chit chats, at that fence. He will be a GREATLY MISSED neighbor!!

*Denise & Al LaPlante-Johnson*

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**Denise LaPlante Johnson** - February 15, 2023 at 11:24 PM

CR

“ Brother Tom was one of our most trusted allies in the fight for public transit in Metro Detroit. He called many of us younger advocates his "children" and held a presence across countless organizations throughout the region working towards a better world.

*Rest in peace, Brother Tom. We miss you.*

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**Corey Rowe** - February 15, 2023 at 10:37 PM

RS

“ Brother Thomas was a substitute music minister at St. Patrick's before we closed. I could always count on seeing him at a march for justice. I appreciated his holiday BBQs. I met so many elected officials and activists.

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**Richard Smith** - February 15, 2023 at 10:20 PM

AK

“ My heart goes out to your family. What a dear person you have been to for so many years. You will be remembered.

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**A. Nzere Kwabena** - February 15, 2023 at 09:34 PM

LD

“ Brother Zerafa leaves behind a great legacy of love for people and activism. Though gone, never forgotten.

Lacy Dawson - February 15, 2023 at 04:06 PM

DW

“ So sad to hear of Brother Thomas' passing. He completed our Michigan Economic Justice Fellowship program in 2021 and added great value and perspective to our discussions. Rest in peace and power.

DeWayne Wells - February 15, 2023 at 03:27 PM



“ I met Brother Tom a few years ago and found him to be a gentle and compassionate man. His life was about service to others. The world needs more people like Brother Tom.  
Pastor Louis Forsythe, II

Louis Forsythe - February 15, 2023 at 01:39 PM

TY

“ Tom was always there to speak up for what was right. He had strong conviction and impressive tenacity, especially in struggles like the Oakland County transit campaign. It is a shame he will never be able to ride the bus to Rochester, but I'll take that 1st ride in his honor. Will miss him greatly.

Tom Yazbeck - February 15, 2023 at 12:27 PM

MF

“ Tom’s open mind and welcoming heart to people from all walks of life clearly defines the true meaning of love. Living proof, the power just one person can prevail for thousands upon thousands of individuals that make this world a more accepting, happier, and loving place for all. Michael Fitzpatrick

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**Michael Fitzpatrick** - February 15, 2023 at 12:09 PM

NS

“ I am sad to learn of the passing of Tom Zerafa. He was a respected liturgist and organist in the Archdiocese Of Detroit. My condolences to his family. My mother, Josephine Sinacori, was liturgist and organist at SS. Peter And Paul Jesuit Church in Detroit. My mother held Tom in high regard and he supported and respected my mother as an organist and liturgist. RIP Tom. Nick Sinacori

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**Nicholas P Sinacori** - February 15, 2023 at 11:23 AM

MF

“ I have no brother Thomas for 20 years. Him and I would sit and talk about civil rights for theTLGBQ+ community. In fact two months ago and her memorial service him and I talked at length about how each of us are doing. Brother Thomas your work on this Earth is done. Now you can rest with Jesus

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**Michelle Fox-Phillips** - February 15, 2023 at 10:52 AM

MC

*I was driving Brother Tom back from getting his med's at the Meijer in Sterling Heights. We were passing a high school in Clawson & I pointed out the cornerstone with 1948 etched into it. I said, "did your parents ever tell you that story of the presidential election in 1948 Tom?" I told him about my dad telling me the Chicago Tribune had already printed up the "Dewey Defeats Truman" edition even though President Elect Harry Truman was standing there with the newspaper holding it up to show everyone while he had a smile from ear to ear. My dad went on to say that most people in the U.S. are Dem's. He expounded on it by saying that "people got out & walked through mud puddles in the rain for Harry" because they were still stinging from the Great Depression under President Hoover who told them, "there will be a chicken in every pot." "Prosperity is just around the corner." My dad then went on to say, "people were lucky if they had a pot to cook a chicken in." He assured me the electorate had not forgotten how bad so many people had it under Republican Hoover. I took my eyes off the road for a minute to look at Tom. He also had a huge smile on his face just like Harry Truman had. Just like the one in the pic of him, above. May perpetual light shine upon our good brother Tom.*

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**Michael Courtney** - February 16, 2023 at 01:47 PM

MY

*Brother Tom was a great role model to my son Tom Yazbeck. He stepped in to celebrate my Father's funeral and brought us much peace, just this past June. We loved him, rest in peace.*

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**Mary Sue Yazbeck** - February 16, 2023 at 06:46 PM