News



Michael R. Lovell, 57, president of Marquette University in Milwaukee, died June 9, 2024, in Italy while on a Jesuit formation pilgrimage with members of the Society of Jesus and the Jesuit university's board of trustees. Lovell, pictured in a 2020 photo outside of the Alumni Memorial Union building on the Marquette campus, had been battling sarcoma, a rare form of cancer, for three years. Lovell was the first lay president in the Jesuit school's 133-year history. (OSV News/Sam Lucero)

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Michael R. Lovell, 57, president of Marquette University, died June 9 in Italy while on a Jesuit formation pilgrimage with members of the Society of Jesus and the Jesuit university's board of trustees.

Lovell had been battling sarcoma, a rare form of cancer, for three years. He became sick while on pilgrimage along with his wife Amy and was transported to a hospital in Rome.

Lovell was Marquette University's 24th president and the first lay president in the Jesuit school's 133-year history.

Lovell's death was announced to the Marquette community in a statement signed by Todd Adams, chair of Marquette's board of trustees.

"President Lovell's decade of leadership at Marquette was marked by a deep commitment to innovation, entrepreneurship, community renewal and development — consistent with the university's Catholic, Jesuit mission that animated him," Adams wrote in the letter, which was also signed by Provost Kimo Ah Yun and Joel Pogodzinski, members of the University Leadership Council. The provost has been elected by the board of trustees to serve as acting president of Marquette.

"Throughout his presidency, he attended hundreds of campus events each year and continued to teach undergraduate students in his product realization class, saying that he gained great energy from his interactions with students, faculty and staff," the letter said.

Lovell was appointed Marquette president in 2014. He had previously served six years at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the first three as dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science and then as UWM chancellor.

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"It became clear to me I was called to Milwaukee six years ago to become Marquette's president," Lovell said during his 2014 introductory news conference. "It was never really my plan, but I'm just glad I decided to follow it."

In an April 2024 interview with Marquette Wire, the university's student online publication, Lovell said he and his wife planned a June visit to Portugal to check off one of his bucket list items: walking El Camino de Santiago, "The Way of St. James."

"It's always something I've wanted to do," he said. "If I wasn't sick, I'm not sure I would have done that right now at this point in my life. And it's so important for me to do things like that when I'm healthy."

He told the Wire that his relationship with God had grown during his battle with sarcoma.

"Relationships are often the most important thing in your life," Lovell said. "When you face your own morality, you realize that your relationship with God is right, because you don't know when your last day is going to be and when it comes you want to make sure that you're prepared spiritually for what lies next."

In a statement issued June 9, Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome Listecki mourned Lovell's death.

"He faced his challenges with strength and courage," the archbishop said. "He was a man of faith and an example for all. A true loss to his family, the Marquette community, the City of Milwaukee, and the Catholic Church."

Besides his wife, Amy, Lovell is survived by the couple's four children. Plans for a campus prayer vigil are underway.

Funeral arrangements will be posted online at today.marquette.edu.