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## In Memoriam, Thomas K. Burch

*Thomas Kirby Burch, December 15, 1934 - July 26, 2022*

Thomas Burch was born in Baltimore, Maryland on December 15, 1934. He was one of three sons born to



his parents, Thaddeus and Frances Burch. All three sons attended Catholic schools in Baltimore and pursued a graduate education. Tom's oldest brother Francis Burch completed his Ph.D. in comparative literature at the Sorbonne in Paris and taught literature at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Tom's other brother Thaddeus Burch completed his Ph.D. in physics at Fordham University and was professor in the Department of Physics at Marquette

University. Both of Tom's brothers pursued Catholic religious careers and were ordained Jesuit priests.

Father Thaddeus Burch currently lives in a retirement home for Jesuit priests in Wisconsin.

Tom Burch is survived by his wife Karen, daughters Julia, Margaret, Karli, son Soren and six grandchildren. He is predeceased by son Tad.

After graduation from high school in Baltimore in 1952, Tom enrolled in Loyola College, Maryland and received his B.A. degree in political science in 1956. He enrolled in graduate studies at Fordham University, where he took his first courses in population studies and completed his M.A. degree in sociology in 1957. With his strong interest in population studies, he pursued further graduate studies at Princeton University in 1957, one of the leading centers for the study of demography in the 1950s. While enrolled at Princeton from 1957 to 1960, he participated in the activities of the Office of Population Research and receiving his Ph.D. degree in 1962, when he submitted his dissertation entitled "Internal Migration in Venezuela: A Methodological Study".

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Before completing his Ph.D. degree, he had started his career as an Assistant Professor at Marquette University in 1960. Upon completing his Ph.D., he became an Associate Professor at Georgetown University from 1963 to 1970. Professor Burch organized the Center for Population Research at Georgetown, which became one of two important population research centers at Catholic universities in the United States (Fordham University in New York also has a population program). During this period, Tom and his colleagues expanded research on fertility, marriage, and the family of American Catholics. While at Georgetown University, he served as a member of the important Papal Commission on Population and Birth Control from 1964 to 1966. The Commission's majority concluded that the use of contraceptives should be regarded as an extension of the already accepted cycle method. The Papal Commission counseled that Catholic magisterial teaching on the immorality of contraception be changed, which raised public expectations for possible liberalization of Catholic teaching about contraception. In 1968, however, Pope Paul VI issued his famous encyclical *Humanae vitae* that reaffirmed traditional magisterial teaching.

Professor Burch joined the Population Council in 1970 and became the Associate Director of the Demography Division. While at the Population Council, he continued research related to the study of marriage and the family, sociological analysis of fertility, and issues involving Catholic fertility. One of Professor Burch's most innovative contributions while at the Population Council was a large survey of Catholic priests in Colombia, the Netherlands, and the United States, which involved getting the approval of Catholic authorities to interview diocesan priests in three countries on the topic of fertility and contraception. The publication of "Catholic Parish Priests and Birth Control: A Comparative Study of Opinion in Colombia, the United States, and the Netherlands" in *Studies in Family Planning* in 1971 and other publications influenced discussions of what priests thought and taught and their interaction with the Catholic public.

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In 1975, Professor Burch joined the Department of Sociology as Professor at the University of Western Ontario, where he was Department Chair during 1982 to 1985 and was faculty member for 25 years before retiring in 2000. He had a significant role in establishing a Ph.D. program in Social Demography. He was a young man when he arrived in 1975, but his intellectual breadth and personal connections in the discipline were very instrumental to the credentials needed for a new Ph.D. program. By promoting collegial relationships with faculty, staff and graduate students, Tom contributed greatly to the education and research at the Population Studies Centre. His research on family planning and fertility expanded to a wider area of family demography, including household formation, methods for the study of families and households, remarriage, kinship analysis, and life transitions and trajectories. Canadian and international students profited from his active research profile and his creative thoughts on theory and methods. His collegiality and broad international connections brought supportive connections with Statistics Canada and other government agencies dealing with population questions. He became Professor Emeritus at Western Ontario in 2000 and was Adjunct Professor at the University of Victoria since 2001. In 2013, Professor Burch received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Canadian Population Society.

Professor Burch has also been a visiting scholar or lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley (1965-66), Fordham University (1973-75), United Nations Latin American Demographic Centre (CELADE, 1974), University of Victoria (1992), University of Rome (1993), and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Germany (1998).

Professor Burch was a consummate researcher. He was dedicated to the search to better understand population dynamics, with an inventive mind for approaching existing topics from a new perspective. Even if you knew Tom for many years, he could surprise you with a new question about something that you would assume was well-known. He continued to have a curious intellect over the years. For example, most demographers are familiar with presenting numbers as rates or ratios or expressing very small and very large with scientific notation, such as stating 140,000,000 can be expressed as 1.4 times  $10^8$  power.

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Nevertheless, Burch became interested in other ways for demographers to express numbers and authored an interesting technical report entitled “On the Use of Engineering Notation in Demography” in 2021 when he was age 86.

A recurring theme of Burch’s work during the past thirty years was his interest in demographic theory. One of his scholarly quests was to demonstrate that the field of demography is not an exclusively empirical discipline, as is often erroneously believed, but in fact is rich in theory. He believed that demography already had models that point toward useful systematization and codification, and many of the usual demographic techniques, beside their empirical heuristics, share theoretical underpinnings that imply underlying population processes. Among the many examples he elucidated to support this view are the actuarial life table, the method of standardization, the total fertility rate, and population projection. Demography had an ample foundation of empirical data and technique, he argued. What was needed was to balance data and methods by a rich body of theory.

Tom’s last major work, *Model-Based Demography: Essays on Integrating Data, Technique and Theory*, was published as a Demographic Research Monograph by Springer Open in 2018. Consistent with the postulates of the semantic school of the philosophy of science, Tom advocated the adoption of the models-based approach to demographic theorizing. In the essays comprising *Model-Based Demography*, he argued that a model-based approach allows demographers to build a strong theoretical edifice on the field’s traditional empirical foundation-based approach and encouraged the greater use of computer modeling to conceptualize and evaluate theoretical models of population processes.

Tom Burch was an enthusiastic, inspirational, and influential teacher at the undergraduate and graduate level. He instilled in his students the importance of self-study, and often pointed out that difficult research problems are solvable through quiet, dedicated perseverance. At the undergraduate level, he ensured that courses dealing with demography and the family were a central part of the sociology courses. At the

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graduate level, his courses stimulated many students in the areas of family and household demography. He was the primary advisor to 8 Ph.D. students (Eric Klijzing, Kausar Thomas, Andrew Wister, Ashok Madan, David DeWit, Li Sihe, David Hall, and David Vidal) and 5 M.A. students (Fernando Mata Oleachea, Guo Zhigang, David DeWit, Mikael Jansson, and Jennifer Clifflen). He was also a member of supervisory committees for many other students. Overall, he made a major contribution to the education of many students who are now active in universities and other organizations in Canada and elsewhere.

Tom wrote well, with unusual clarity and thoughtfulness. He also wrote quickly and could produce a draft paper while others might still be organizing their thoughts. Although he was an active participant in scientific debates, he never become angry or failed to show respect for others. He expressed himself forcefully when he believed he had evidence but was always tactful. Professor Burch was an outstanding colleague and friend. Whether it be at meetings or in casual conversations, he would invariably bring discussions to a higher level of intellectual exchange.

For those who knew him well, he had an ironic sense of humor. Upon hearing that French research had shown the beneficial effect of red wine on serum cholesterol levels, he observed that he could now order a pastrami sandwich as long as he also had large glass of burgundy.

Carl Sagan famously observed that “Science is much more than a body of knowledge. Science invites us to let the facts in, even when they do not conform to our preconceptions.” For demography, Tom Burch was one of our leaders that invited in the facts and tried to improve our body of knowledge.

*Authored by Barry Edmonston with contributions from Rod Beaujot, Frank Trovato, Zenaida Ravanera, and colleagues and former students of Tom Burch.*