

Fr. Joseph Lackner, S.M.
Celebrating 50 years of profession



It is difficult to answer the question what has been the “most rewarding experience” of my Marianist life because I never know how to answer questions about “most” and “favorite” and because I do not think of things in terms of “rewards” but gifts. The gift list begins with the brothers at Purcell High School, the Notre Dame de Namur Sisters in grade school, and, of course, my mother and her family. In fact, first I am thankful to my mother and father who gave me life and bequeathed to me a genetic make-up that makes me mostly an instinctually positive person with just a touch of melancholy that never leaves me quite satisfied. Today that gift list has been expanded greatly, including my sister and her family, former students, friends along the way, and brothers with whom I have lived.

Though I have had several tussles in my life, there have always been many Marianist brothers who have supported and sustained me in them. Their easy affirmation of who I am and the service I have given has been surprising grace that I admire and desire to imitate. Novitiate, scholasticate, seminary, high school and university teaching, research, presiding and preaching at the sacraments, work at the Cincinnati worship office, administration on the Provincial Council and visitation of brothers in international settings have significantly marked my life as gifts.

Some teachers say that their students teach them more than they teach them. I cannot exactly say that. I sometimes think I have forgotten more than some of my students will ever know. But what I would say is this: my students and others to whom I have ministered have enriched my life more than I believe I have enriched them. For example, presiding at Eucharist, preaching, and hearing confessions are personally graceful events, though I sometimes wonder how worthwhile my service has been to others. It is all grace and gift, as Bernanos wrote, even when I have not recognized it.