

Eulogy for Bro Donald Winfree

February 4, 2012

Good morning, for those who do not know me, I am Bro Bob Wiethorn the director of the Mercy Siena Community.

We gather this morning to remember and pray for another one of our Marianist saints, Brother **DONALD WINFREE** who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on January 25, 2012, at the age of 68 with 49 years of religious profession.

Don was born to Howard and Margaret (Flannigan) Winfree in Chester, Pennsylvania, on Christmas Eve of 1943. He had one brother, Thomas and a sister-in law, Nancy, who preceded him in death; Nancy just passed away last week, 2 days before Bro Don. He is survived by a nephew Thomas Winfree Jr, and his wife Paula and a niece Terri Anne Furman and her husband Thomas Furman and their 3 sons: Dan, Nathan, and Stephen. Family commitments prevented Terri from attending the funeral, but Bro Don's nephew Thomas, wife Paula and Thomas Furman are with us this morning.

Don attended St. Michael's Parish grade school in Chester, Pennsylvania. Following the 8th grade, he attended St. James High School, where he met the Marianists. Don entered the postulate in Beacon, New York, on Sept. 4, 1958. Less than three years later, he entered the novitiate in Marcy, New York, and professed first vows on Feb. 11, 1962. Don made his perpetual vows August 22, 1965. Next Saturday, Feb 11th, he will celebrate his Golden Jubilee and I think he is going to have a pretty big celebration!

Bro. Don earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Dayton in 1965 and began a long career as a Marianist educator. Between 1965 and 1975, he served at Cardinal Gibbons High School in Baltimore, Maryland, with the exception of a two-year period when he was the assistant director at a retreat house in Baltimore. During the same period of time he earned a master's degree in religious education from Loyola University in Chicago, graduating in 1974.

Bro. Don and Bro. Frank O'Donnell became close friends while serving in Baltimore. Bro. Frank said "Bro. Don was beloved by his students, and they asked about Bro Don for many years after leaving the classroom."

From 1975 until 1981, Bro. Don served as principal at Chaminade High School (now Chaminade-Madonna College Preparatory) in Hollywood, Florida.

While on sabbatical in Berkeley, California, in 1982, Bro. Don was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He was devastated, but he did not lose his famous sense of humor or his love of learning. He said the best piece of advice he received was from his doctor, who told him the key to living with MS is **adaptability**. **Bro. Don accepted there was no cure for the disease, and knew it was up to him to live a fulfilling life.**

With that spirit, Bro. Don returned to Chaminade-Madonna in 1982, where he served in various roles in administration, development, and counseling until 1994, when the illness forced him to enter St. Leonard's Health Center here in Dayton.

For the remainder of his life Bro. Don led a productive and prayerful life. In 1997, Bro. Don is quoted as saying "Thanks to the support of friends, family, fellow Marianists and the God with Whom I had been quite angry, I'm more at peace playing the hand I have been dealt, While playing that hand, I pray daily I will not 'hold or bid' too low."

His leadership skills were demonstrated early in life through his roles as Principal and Administrator of several different institutions and later while at St. Leonard's when he was elected the first President of the St. Leonard Residents Council.

Bro. Don loved his Apple Macintosh. He taught himself to use it and created the "Bordeaux Chronicle," an email newsletter for the Marianist Family. Many Marianists loved it when he was able to scoop the Provincial Administration in announcing some hot news item. Don shared that the Internet allowed him to explore the world and keep in touch with his brothers and friends. He also loved pictures as you can see from the few we were able to display in the narthex. All his visitors were recorded for his reminiscence, sharing and enjoyment later.

It is clear to me from my short time at Mercy Siena that Don had a tremendous impact on the staff at Mercy Siena. He was loved and ministered to in such a caring way. Their deep sense of loss and concern for him after he went home to God was overwhelming for me. One of his caretakers, Tamara, after giving Don an intense hug, asked if she could trim his beard and hair the way she had for the past 7 years, and she did that with great love.

Fr. Jack McGrath shared a thought about Don from India: "After he was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 1981, I know he had some hard times in acceptance. Who wouldn't? But he did accept his situation. And over the long thirty years that followed, I admired so much his equanimity and determination to make the best use of his changing abilities for the sake of others' benefit, for his enjoyment, and for sharing good times with friends. This became harder and harder in these last years; I will not forget the great heart he showed for so long."

A very faithful friend of Bro Don's said "With all he had to suffer we never heard him complain." Those words have been repeated over and over this past week by those near him.

He continued to display his wonderful sense of humor right through the last weeks. I will never forget when I was updating Don about how Fr. Jim McKay was doing, because Fr. Jim was experiencing some challenges to his health. Fr. Jim is 94 years old only takes an aspirin each day. Don, who had lost his voice by then, whispers to me "He only takes one pill a day. (Pause) it's Viagra!" Of course he broke into his big smile and I cracked up.

We give thanks for Don's life as a Marianist, for his response to God's call in his life, playing the hand he was dealt, without bidding too low or holding, but winning the whole pot of life with God and his friends. I hope we are all able to learn from the example he has set of how to live with pain and suffering and choose, as he did 30 years ago, with the help of God to **"live a fulfilling life."**

We thank those who cared for Don to the end.... The caring and professional staff of Mercy Siena...Hospice of Dayton, and the Mercy Siena Support Community.

We are especially grateful to the residents of the MARIANIST COMMUNITY of Mercy Siena who spent time sitting and praying with Bro Don.

The evening Don died, our most senior member Bro Frank Deibel, who is 103, came in to sit and pray with Don. I asked the hospice nurse to come outside with me because Bro Frank wanted to be alone with Don for a little while. After several minutes we returned to the room and Bro Frank was quietly praying the Rosary. Within 5 minutes, Don peacefully took his last breath and I turned to Frank and said well you prayed him into heaven. Bro Frank just smiled, I think he knew that already.

We thank Judy Moehl, our medical coordinator and Kimberle Evans, her associate for their loving care our brother Don.

. Tom Schroer, former Director of the Mercy Siena Community, wrote from Rome: "On behalf of the "old administration", please sincerely and deeply thank both Anne and Bill Frapwell and the Jack and Mary Jo Tomas for all the wonderful support they gave to Don over the years!! They were truly his DAYTON family! everyone was truly the Marianist family in action for Don!"

May he rest in peace