

Remembrance of Father William O'Connell, SM
Born 1927 - First Profession 1946 – Ordination 1956
Died at the Cupertino Marianist Center, October 1, 2012

Once again we gather as a community
to remember one of our recently departed brothers.
Unlike others who have died in recent years,
Father Bill's passing from this life to the next came suddenly
and most of us are still in shock at his sudden passing.
As we have prayed for Bill's eternal rest
and celebrated the eucharist in thanksgiving for his life
and confident petition for his eternal life
we now come together for our community remembrance.

(Introduction to evening prayer)
Once again our flag is at half-mast.
Shortly before sunrise on the first day of October,
God called Father William O'Connell to himself.
It was the first sudden death we have had
since Brother Jim Roberts died in his sleep
just before the opening of the Center.
At Marianist Hall, Father Bill and Brother Jim
worked closely together. It took a while for them to be reunited!
Although wheelchair bound,
Father Bill had not complained of any serious illness
and always took delight in telling us
that he was "on top of the world."
He was friend and brother to all of us.

(After Brother Stanley gave us an overview of Father Bill's life*
I introduced the sharing with these comments)
Several remembrances have been posted on the Bulletin Board.
I want to give you two others.
The first is from Brother Bill Farrell
who called Father Bill frequently from Guatemala.
"...his death was a shock to me because he was healthy
and we had just spoken a few days ago.
He was a steady presence in my world:
stable and sensible in what at times
seems to be an endless sea of confusion and turmoil.

There was no guile in him.
The inevitable wounds that one suffers in life
he bore with humility and patience
and the reality of how much he participated
in the cross of Christ few were privileged to know and share.
He was a brother's priest.
Always willing to serve in whatever capacity
the Society called him to.
He was a sweet and gentle man respected for his leadership,
common sense and concern for others.
He held a special place in his heart
for the poor and the marginalized.
He always said that he was on the top of the world.
For his life well lived
and the fellowship we shared as Marianists
I am forever thankful. R.I.P."

The second remembrance
comes from a niece of Brother Xavier,
recalling that Father Bill and Brother Xavier
made many journeys together.
Some of you may remember Patti Rose
who visited when Brother Xavier – her Uncle Frank –
was at Villa Saint Joseph:
"What pleasant memories
I would say all of my siblings have of Fr. Bill.
He always had such a warm smile to share
and always kind words.
He was such a wonderful person
and I am sure Uncle Frank
would have shared a wonderful traveling companion
who celebrated the Eucharist
with his community of students
along the roads of the mainland US
as Fr. Bill was the bus driver all along.
May his soul and the soul of the faithful departed rest in peace.

At breakfast I asked Father Larry Mann
what was his best memory of Father Bill
and he responded immediately:

“He always stopped to greet us
when he passed by our table...”

I then invited the community to add further notes about Father Bill.

This is my summary:

Brother John Haster expressed well his shock and grief at Father Bill’s death and reminded us that he, Father John McEnhill and Father Bill, as past principals, attended the farewell mass when the Marianists formally left Archbishop Riordan High School. Later Brother Bill Bolts revealed that it was Father Bill’s encouragement of a student body initiative that led to the change in title from Riordan High School to Archbishop Riordan High School.

Brother Tom Deasy and other reminisced about their years together with Father Bill in various communities of the former Province of the Pacific. Father Bill’s various assignments included directing plays at his Alma Mater, Saint Joseph High School, Alameda.

Brother Pat McMahan underlined Father Bill’s friendliness and ability to take a joke and commented how he missed seeing Father Bill explore the property on his motorized chair.

Brother Frank Spaeth noted that he had been with Father Bill in four communities and admired Father Bill for his convictions and faithfulness and then commented on how he believed Father Bill had grown in patience and acceptance.

Brother Tom Redmond commented that Father Bill was good to live with, a theme echoed by others.

Brother John Samaha gave the last reflection which was a fine summary, highlighting how Father Bill was unruffled and always appreciative of anything done for him.

Stephen Tutas, SM