

September 24, 2007

Death Notice No. 23 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **DONALD BRACHT**, priest, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 27, 2007, in Dayton, Ohio, in the 94th year of his age and the 77th year of his religious profession.

Fr. Don was born in Toledo, Ohio, on September 22, 1913, to Lawrence and Cora (Lenz) Bracht. As a youngster, he moved with his family to Cleveland and began his Catholic education at St. Ignatius parish school. Fr. Don met the Marianists while attending Cathedral Latin School in Cleveland.

In 1930, after graduating from Cathedral Latin, Fr. Don entered the novitiate of the Society of Mary at Mount St. John in Dayton. He professed first vows in 1931 at Mount St. John and perpetual vows in 1935 at the University of Dayton.

Fr. Don spent the first 25 years of his 65 years of active ministry as an educator. After receiving a bachelor's degree from the University of Dayton in 1934, he began his teaching career at Trinity High School in Sioux City, Iowa. Fr. Don taught theology, language, history and economics. In 1935, he returned to Mount St. John in Dayton to teach at the postulate for four years. He spent another year at Trinity High School (1939-1940), and then discerned his call to priesthood. Fr. Don studied theology at Mount St. Mary in Cincinnati and Catholic University in Washington, D.C., before completing those studies at St. Meinrad in Indiana. He was ordained in Cincinnati in 1943.

After his ordination, Fr. Don served as a teacher, chaplain and principal at several schools in California and Hawaii. He was the first Marianist assigned to St. Joseph High School in Alameda, California, where he served from 1944 to 1949. During this time, he also earned a master's degree in American history from Catholic University. Other assignments included Chaminade Preparatory in Santa Cruz, California (1949-1952), Chaminade Preparatory in Cheviot Hills, California (1952-1953), Junipero Serra High School in Gardena, California (1953-1956), Saint Louis Junior College, which became Chaminade University of Honolulu (1956-1958), and Archbishop Riordan High School in San Francisco (1958-1960). Fr. Don also served as a retreat master for many novitiate classes.

In 1960, Fr. Don began the second phase of his career. He was assigned to the Marianist Mission Office in California to raise funds for the Marianist missions in Korea. His ministry in development would last nearly 40 years.

Although he had no experience in fundraising, Fr. Don excelled in his work. Known for his welcoming nature and love for his students, Fr. Don became the moderator of the alumni of Marianist-sponsored schools in the Pacific Province. He regularly connected with graduates of Marianist schools through yearly alumni dinners, a quarterly newsletter and personal visits. He never failed to remind former students that they were in his prayers.

Fr. Joe Stefanelli, who succeeded Fr. Don as chaplain at Chaminade Preparatory in Cheviot Hills, also knew of his work as a fundraiser for the Province of the Pacific. "I was impressed with his determination, tenacity, and, especially, with his personal contact with so many people. They loved him even when he asked for money," said Fr. Joe.

Fr. Don frequently visited parishes to preach and raise funds for Marianist works in Korea. Bro. John Ko, who was a novice in Korea when he met Fr. Don, remembers him as a role model who supported the Korean region financially and spiritually. "He gave us many beautiful examples of Marianist community life, hospitality and prayer life. He prayed the rosary all the time." Bro. John took Fr. Don to visit his hometown at Che-Ju Island. "He sat on the floor a long time and shared several things. My family was so surprised to see an American do this," said Bro. John.

Fr. Don published his alumni newsletter until 1996. Marianist Mission coworker Dora Lipps remembers Fr. Don's unique writing style, gift for storytelling, and love of ribs and sauerkraut. "At lunch he would regale us with stories, which is how I learned about the Marianists and their commitment," said Dora.

Fr. Don retired from active ministry in the late 1990s and lived at St. Leonard's Center in Centerville, Ohio, and then at Mercy Siena Healthcare Center in Dayton. Bro. Jim Vorndran knew Fr. Don in his retirement and remembers a man who never quit, despite many health problems, including macular degeneration, hearing loss and diabetes. "In spite of those obstacles, Don continued to correspond with former students, friends and benefactors he had worked with," said Bro. Jim. "My last note from him was written in a very large felt tip pen. His faithful correspondence is something he will certainly be remembered for."

Fr. Don also was an avid reader, who loved books by James Michener. Even with failing eyesight, he continued to read with the help of his page magnifier.

"Don always impressed me as a religious who was open to new Province works and did them very well," said Bro. Stanley Murakami, who knew Fr. Don for 55 years. "He was a wonderful person to live with in community."

May he rest in peace.