FR. JAMES HEFT
Celebrating 50 years of profession

I consider myself extremely blessed that my natural family raised me and my four siblings in an open and ecumenical Catholic faith even before Vatican II. I am grateful to the Marianists at St. Joseph High School who impressed me so much with their community, their dedication to teaching, and their interest in things spiritual and theological that I felt drawn to join them. I am grateful for the Marianists, who gradually trimmed my ego, expanded my educational horizons, challenged my preferences, and often knew better than I what was best for me.

Years ago, I tried to convince my superiors that I was called to high school ministry for life. They said no; go do you Ph.D. I was convinced that I would be at the University of Dayton for the rest of my life, but my superiors supported a conviction that grew in me that something new and innovative must be done to revitalize Catholic intellectual life and spirituality, and they encouraged me to start a new venture in Southern California—something I would never have imagined just five years before.

Whatever lies ahead for me, one thing is for sure: a careful communal discernment with my brothers and superiors will result in something wiser than what I would have tried to figure out on my own.

Over these past 50 years, several figures have gradually become more central in my life: Jesus, Mary, Chaminade, and several Marianists, some of whom I’ve had the privilege to live with, whose example, love and support have blessed me these past 50 years. With every passing year, I feel as though the “stakes are higher,” the ministry is more important, and the success of my efforts hardly remain in my own hands.