“Common Bond” is a bonafide association of former members of the Society of Mary (Marianists) which strives to keep alive the friendships and values forged during their shared bonding experience in the Order. Every three years these men, along with family members and current members of the Society, come together to honor the diverse paths each of them took, along with the invaluable lessons and sustaining spirit they took along for their respective life journeys. The 2012 reunion took place at the University of Dayton during the last weekend in July, and was attended by some 200 regular and associate members.

The weekend program is fairly loose, with emphasis on free time for Bonders to meet again and talk. And talk there is, often late into the night. Many report that the quality of exchange between people with a common experience of life consecrated to personal spiritual development and the selfless service of others is something rare and priceless, manifesting an intensity and depth of feeling only possible between people who know one other very well and trust one another very much. Great joy, lifting hope, and life giving energy are three instant gifts that spring from their exchange about the multiple paths taken along the way. And before the sessions end, somebody invariably quotes a line from the Psalms that was learned in younger days: “Ecce Quam Bonum habitare fratres in unum!” “Behold how good it is for brothers to dwell together as one!”

Two of the highlights of the weekend were the visit to Queen of Apostles Cemetery on the grounds of the Old Marianist Motherhouse at Mount Saint John and the liturgy in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at the University of Dayton. The first is a deeply affecting encounter at a peaceful pine-fringed graveyard where Common Bonders knew and loved most of the people buried there. They were our teachers, our spiritual directors, confessors, advisors, role models, friends and sometimes friendly foes. Attendants take turns recalling many of them and sharing funny, sad, and always moving anecdotes of the impact these men had on them, and pray for their eternal rest in loving gratitude and faith.

Later in the afternoon, the liturgy at the UD chapel is a joyous celebration of Eucharistic union, soul lifting music and evangelical exhortations. Joint
participation of former and current members of the Society of Mary gave extra special significance to moments like the Kiss of Peace and the moving homily given this year by Father Patrick Tonry, S.M.

Some business is also conducted at the triannual assembly of Common Bond, with the temporalities associated with all organizations reported on and projected for the future. An outgoing Leadership Group hands off the torch to a newly elected Board of Directors, and strategic planning for the future is passionately and optimistically commenced. When the Bonders depart after the Sunday morning brunch, they take away the feeling that in some ways they did come home again, drank at the well, and renewed the source of something in their soul that makes them who they were, are, and always will be.