



## The Marianists

### **Bro. Bernard Ploeger**

*50 years of profession*

When asked to reflect on my life as a Marianist, I am very much drawn to John's account of the call of the first apostles: they ask Jesus, "Where do you stay?" and he answers, "Come and see." (John 1: 35-39). Wonderful blessings have occurred by coming to see.

When I was growing up, I had the idea that I wanted to be a nuclear physicist. My vague plan for accomplishing this was to study mathematics and science, and enlist in the military to qualify for an advanced education. I can't really remember explicitly thinking about being a Marianist until I was asked the question by Bro. Ray Wuco in February of my senior year at Moeller. In what now seems an improbable decision process: We talked for about 10 minutes; I agreed this might be for me; he asked me to let him know in a week; I told my Mom that I thought it would be a good idea; she said she'd be pleased if that is what I really wanted; she told my Dad; I told Bro. Ray "yes" a week later.

My Marianist life has unfolded so far in surprising ways. Many of my early verities about the U.S. and the Church disintegrated in college, and the need to build a new integration tremendously broadened my education. Though I was planning a career in high school ministry, I was advised by Norb Brockman that I'd be going to graduate school if I was willing.

At Ohio State, my mentor was Frank Damm, who cultivated my interests in Africa and the international development efforts of some of the Marianists at U.D. As a member of the faculty in mathematics, I "fell in" with Ray Fitz, Don Geiger and Ed Zamierowski, and the work of integrated agricultural development in Niger, West Africa. When Bert Buby became provincial, he told me he was looking for someone who could learn finance and had an interest in the Third World and social justice. By 1985, I thought I had put myself on track for an assignment to the Eastern African Region, when my service as assistant for temporalities was concluded, but Ray Fitz got to me and the Council first, and I was appointed to what was eventually titled senior vice president for administration, University of Dayton.

Other invitations have followed: from Dr. Sue Wesselkamper, to assist her and her team “re-found” Chaminade University – first as an advisor and board member, then in 2001, as a member of her leadership team and, upon her death in 2009, as president; from Joe Kamis, to serve as a councilor during his administration; and, from Tom Giardino and the General Council to represent the Cincinnati Province on the steering committee for the merging of four of the U.S. provinces.

In preparing this reflection, I’ve wanted to name those who have asked me to “come and see” as a way of thanking them. I regret that many others had to be omitted. I trust that, in my own way, I’ve been able to invite others to an apostolic faith community and that it has been, for them, the same wonderful blessing it’s been for me.