



## The Marianists

### **Fr. Martin Solma**

*50 years of profession*

It was improbable that a 14-year-old from Berea, Ohio, would attend St. Joseph High School in Cleveland. But, through the care and invitation of Bro. Stan Mathews, that's what I did. At the end of my senior year, at the invitation of Bro. Dick Pilder and Fr. Ken Sommer, I joined the Society of Mary. It was an exciting time, just at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council.

I have learned three important lessons in my Marianist life. The first is God's providence. Despite my hesitations and doubts, I've found myself in places that have stretched me far beyond what I would have managed on my own. I've been with people and have done things that have tapped gifts and talents I would never have imagined. These past 50 years have been a journey of faith and trust in God's getting me where I needed to be.

This leads to the second lesson, about the Lord's sense of humor. In 1982, when I was asked to go to Nigeria for "three years," I stammered, kicked, fussed and had many sleepless nights about this request. In the end, like Mary, I said "yes." It was, and continues to be, the most formative experience of my life. Thank you, God, for giving me the courage to accept that invitation! I cannot imagine being where I am today without having lived for 27 years in Africa. Now, here is the humorous part: At our province assembly in 2010, each member was given a copy of the letter he wrote when he requested to make perpetual vows in the Society of Mary. I wrote mine in February 1973. In it, I made two requests: to serve as a priest in the Society of Mary and (why I included this I will never know) to someday go to Africa! Watch what you ask for.

The final lesson is about Mary, Mother of the Lord. I have sought to model my life on her response to her vocation: willingness at the Annunciation, sensitive and strategic at the Wedding Feast of Cana, becoming a beloved disciple with her as my mother at the foot of the cross, and a zealous apostle with her at the center of our apostolic community at Pentecost.

I hope my spirit has been the spirit of Mary.