

The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **ELDON REICHERT**, priest, of the Mercy Siena community in Dayton, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on March 20, 2010, in Dayton in the 88<sup>th</sup> year of his age and the 69<sup>th</sup> year of his religious profession.

Eldon was born in Dayton on August 22, 1922, the youngest of eight children of Joseph and Maude (Stuhl) Reichert. His family lived within blocks of the University of Dayton, and he attended grade school at Holy Angels parish. His family had limited means, so Eldon switched to public school for junior and senior high school. He was encouraged to practice his faith, and he walked three blocks every day to receive communion at Holy Angels.

As a teenager, he remembered speaking to his mother about the priesthood, but the idea left him until he began working with Fr. Andy Orshell, SM, at the University of Dayton stadium. Although Eldon and Fr. Andy never spoke directly about vocations, he clearly influenced Eldon to pursue religious life. He entered the novitiate of the Society of Mary at age 16 and finished his high school education with the Marianists in Beacon, New York, and at Mount Saint John in Dayton. Eldon professed first vows at Beacon in 1941 and perpetual vows in 1945 at UD.

In 1944, he earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Dayton. Eldon went on to earn a master's degree in guidance from New York University in 1947. After a few years of teaching, he entered the Marianist seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland, and was ordained in 1952.

Fr. Eldon's teaching career began before he earned his degree. With one semester remaining in college, he was sent to teach at Covington Catholic High School in Kentucky. Eldon returned to UD to finish his degree and after graduation was sent to Pittsburgh for a few months to teach English and history at Boys Catholic High School. He spent the next three years (1944-1947) at Holy Trinity High School in Brooklyn teaching history and religion. Eldon moved to Mineola, New York, to teach at Chaminade High School for two years before going to the seminary in Switzerland. When he returned from Europe in 1953, he began an eight-year stint at St. Joseph High School in Cleveland, where he taught English and religion. Fr. Eldon worked as a guidance counselor and in admissions and later became head of the guidance department.

Then came the adventure of a lifetime: Fr. Eldon moved to Eastern Africa. He began 12 years on the continent in Mangu, Kenya, at Holy Ghost College and Mangu High School as chaplain and teacher. He remained there for two years before being transferred to Aquinas High School in Nairobi as acting director and chaplain. In 1965, he moved to Karonga, Malawi, and spent his last years in Africa as a chaplain, teacher and headmaster of Chaminade Secondary School. While at Chaminade, he saw the school become one of the top institutions in the country. Fr. Eldon was seen in pictures holding a 12-foot python, examining a captured crocodile, and posing with dinosaur fossils. The natives named him Sawa-Sawa, or "okay," a phrase Fr. Eldon often used. "I was so thrilled to get an African name. I felt accepted," he said in a newspaper article.

Fr. Eldon returned to the United States in 1973 to St. Joseph High School in Cleveland. He worked there for 16 years as a counselor and assistant principal. Bro. Joe Kamis, who also served at St. Joseph, remembers Fr. Eldon as an avid reader and thinker who had papers piled

to the ceiling, yet knew exactly where everything was. "He was very generous and always in a joyful mood," said Bro. Joe. "He was a model Marianist." Fr. Eldon also spent seven years at the Christian Life Center in Cleveland as a retreat chaplain.

In 1990, he moved his ministry to St. Aloysius Parish in Cleveland, where he oversaw the St. Aloysius Hunger Center. Fr. Eldon coordinated the distribution of more than 800 bags of groceries every fourth Saturday of the month to area residents on welfare. He built up the food program so well it was able to serve residents far beyond the parish boundaries. Fr. Eldon showed great strength and stamina despite his age. Bro. Mike O'Grady, who worked with Fr. Eldon at St. Al's, remembers a 75-year-old man who would haul 50-lb. bags of potatoes up the steep basement steps of St. Al's. "He was a great man of service and a great servant to the parish," said Bro. Mike. "All he wanted to do was help people. Eldon wanted to make the Hunger Center the largest operation of its kind in the area, and I think it probably was."

In 2001 at age 78, he was honored with the Edmond V. Worley Memorial award as the person who best exemplified the work of Ed Worley, founding member and former executive director of the food bank.

Bro. Mike said that Fr. Eldon loved sending letters with commemorative stamps. One letter he received came with a Clara Barton (founder of the Red Cross) stamp. On the stamp, Fr. Eldon had circled the text "she gave her blood." According to Bro. Mike, that summed up Fr. Eldon's approach to life. "Even in his final example, he continued to serve others by donating his body to science," said Bro. Mike.

May he rest in peace.