

The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **MATTHEW KOHMESCHER**, priest, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on May 5, 2007, in Dayton, Ohio, in the 86th year of his age and the 68th year of his religious profession.

Fr. Matt was born on October 1, 1921, one of six children of Louis and Theresa (Enneking) Kohmescher. He described his family as “solidly religious” and one that cherished vocations but did not force them. His father died when he was in third grade. “My mother deserves all the credit for holding the family together and making sure we all grew up and prospered,” Fr. Matt said.

He attended elementary school at Saints Peter and Paul in Norwood, Ohio, and St. Francis de Sales Latin School in Cincinnati, and high school at Purcell High School (now Purcell Marian) in Cincinnati. Fr. Matt said his sixth grade teacher, Sr. Mary Damien, CPPS, and his association with Marianist Fr. John Finke at Purcell influenced his religious vocation.

In 1938, Fr. Matt entered the novitiate of the Society of Mary at Mount St. John in Dayton. He professed first vows in 1939 and perpetual vows in 1943 at Mount St. John. Fr. Matt received a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the University of Dayton in 1942 and taught for three years at North Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, Penn., and Chaminade High School in Mineola, N.Y. In 1945, he pursued his longtime ambition of becoming a priest and entered the Marianist seminary at St. Meinrad in Indiana. A year later he transferred to the Marianist seminary at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, where he was ordained in 1948. Fr. Matt received a bachelor’s degree (1948), licentiate (1949) and doctorate (1950) of sacred theology from the University of Fribourg.

He returned to the United States in 1950 and for the next two years taught religion and Latin and served as chaplain at the postulate at Mount St. John. From 1952 to 1954, he was a chaplain, guidance counselor and teacher at St. Joseph High School in Cleveland. Fr. Matt returned to Mount St. John in 1954 as master of scholastics and taught religion and Latin for the next five years.

“Matt was a good basketball player,” said Fr. Bertrand Buby. “He used to join with the young brothers on the court at Mount St. John. He did a very good job helping us grow into good Marianists.”

In 1956, he earned a master’s degree in education from Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve). Fr. Matt spent the 1959-1960 school year teaching at Chaminade High School in Dayton and teaching night school at the University of Dayton.

In 1960, Fr. Matt became associate dean in the University of Dayton College of Arts and Sciences and taught theology. Two years later, he added the role of chairman of the Religious Studies department to his duties— a position he would hold for the next 20 years.

Fr. Matt helped shape and expand the school's religious studies program during a time of great transition in the Church, which was prompted by Vatican II. The first Protestant and lay people to teach theology at UD were hired under his watch. "This was very controversial, and he took a lot of heat," said Rev. Bill Anderson, one of the Protestants hired to teach. "He was single-minded and single-focused and had the vision, strength and courage to help UD develop the strong program that it has today."

Upon his retirement as department chair in 1983, Fr. Matt continued to teach full time at UD until 1992. Fr. Jim Heft, his predecessor as chair of UD's Religious Studies Department, remembers how gracefully Fr. Matt made the transition from department chair to faculty member. "He really assisted me," said Fr. Heft. "He was very bright, highly organized and very generous with his time."

Fr. Matt remained a friendly, familiar face on campus until his cancer diagnosis in December 2006. In addition to teaching part time, he became the unofficial "UD greeter" and helped welcome thousands of prospective students and their families. "For those students who might be afraid they wouldn't fit into a Catholic school, or for those who might think priests are not approachable, he just exemplified the Marianist way," said Carin Andrews, UD's campus visit coordinator.

Students fondly referred to him as "Fr. Beanie" because of his trademark UD red and blue skull cap, and "Fr. Fuzzy" in reference to the "Fuzzy Pledge," which he encouraged everyone to invoke. A "fuzzy," according to Fr. Matt, was a way to make the world a better place through a smile, gesture or helpful act.

Fr. Matt was known as the grandfather of Founders Hall on campus. He often visited with students and invited them to the Marianist community house. "Nothing would make him happier than having 12 students around the table for dinner," said Bro. Alex Tuss, Marianist community director.

The last 20 years of his ministry also included serving at high school retreats, as chaplain to a faith group and work in various parishes, including Our Lady of Mercy in Dayton, where he was a permanent substitute. "He had such a profound effect on our parish and young people," said parishioner Judy Moehl. "His way of accepting and understanding everyone was a true model for Christians."

"The older I get, the more compassionate and understanding I become," Fr. Matt said in a 1998 interview. "I've learned that you can't change the world by (complaining) about it. Even if you pull all the weeds, if you don't plant flowers you still end up with just mud."

Fr. Matt was the author of two books: "Catholicism Today" and "Good Morality is Like Good Cooking: And Other Suggestions for Right Living." He once wrote that his philosophy of life included three points: 1.) Life is to be enjoyed; 2.) Life (and life's gifts) is to be shared; and 3.) Life is to be celebrated. He requested that his funeral be a celebration of his presence because "to remember, is to make present."

May he rest in peace.