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Death Notice No. 18 (To all Unit Administrations):



The Province of the United States of America recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **THOMAS OSTER**, of the Lavington Marianist Community, Nairobi, Kenya, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on July 12, 2014 in Dayton, Ohio, USA, at the age of 81 with 61 years of religious profession.

Bro. Tom was a working brother who spent more than three decades in ministry at Matero Boys' School in Lusaka, Zambia.

Thomas John Oster was born on March 7, 1933, in Cleveland, Ohio. He was one of seven boys and two girls in the family of Stephen and Helen (Bash) Oster. He first encountered members of the Society of Mary while attending Cathedral Latin School in his hometown.

Upon graduating from Cathedral Latin, Bro. Tom entered the novitiate at Marcy, New York. He professed his first vows there a year later, on September 5, 1952.

Bro. Tom served in the tradition of many working brothers of that era, taking care of Marianist properties and helping meet the needs of his fellow brothers. He served initially at St. John's Home in Rockaway Park, New York, in maintenance. He professed perpetual vows on August 15, 1956, at the University of Dayton. From 1955 to 1962, he was a cook at the Marcy novitiate and at Marianist Preparatory School in Beacon, New York.

Throughout most of the 1960s, Bro. Tom ministered at a variety of Marianist facilities, mostly in the state of New York, assuming the role of cook or maintenance worker.

In 1968, Bro. Tom went to Lusaka, Zambia, to serve at the newly opened Matero Boys' School. There was no end to the maintenance needs of the Marianist secondary school, and Bro. Tom met them with dedication and good cheer.

Fr. Martin Solma shared many years in Eastern Africa with Bro. Tom and appreciated his helpful spirit and numerous talents. "Whether he was working at the Matero compound, building stoves to heat the rooms of the novitiate during the cold July days, or taking care of maintenance needs at the Bro. Vincent House in Nairobi – in all of this Tom was handy and creative," said Fr. Martin. "He was a good example of what Fr. Chaminade envisioned for the working brothers at San Remy in France: men deeply engaged with the physical world and deeply engaged in a contemplative life."

Bro. Tom remained in Eastern Africa until 1981, serving mostly at Matero. He then returned to the United States for a sabbatical. He continued his service in maintenance at Marianist facilities, including at the provincial house which was in Baltimore, Maryland, at the time.

Over the years, Bro. Tom developed a strong interest in the charismatic Christian movement in the United States. "At times Bro. Tom felt that his work – which he always executed generously and

well – distracted him from what he understood as his deepest call,” said Bro. Stephen Glodek, who was then provincial of the New York Province.

In 1988, Bro. Tom requested to move to the Benedictine Community at Pecos, New Mexico, which was known as a center of charismatic renewal. His request was granted, and Bro. Tom spent six years discerning whether he was called to become a Benedictine.

“Just two weeks before he was to make his solemn profession, he called to say that he and the abbot had discerned that God was really calling him to remain a Marianist,” said Bro. Stephen.

And so, in 1994, Bro. Tom returned to the Society of Mary with the blessing of both orders. At his request, he went back to Matero Boys’ School, again tackling the daunting task of keeping the school and grounds in good repair. While Bro. Tom took his maintenance responsibilities seriously, there was always one higher priority.

“In my seven years living with Tom in Zambia I never saw him miss community prayer,” said Bro. Steve Grazulis. “One day as I drove onto the property at our novitiate I saw Tom running – he was 78 at the time – and I was worried that there must be some emergency. Then I realized he was rushing so he wouldn’t be late for our mid-day rosary.”

Bro. Erik Otiende, Bro. Tom’s most recent community director in Africa, was among those eager to offer a remembrance, noting that Bro. Tom led by example. “He didn’t say much, but he did much. He was the first in the chapel and the first to volunteer. He read many spiritual books and shared about them. He was accountable for every penny he received from the community,” said Bro. Erik.

Bro. Tom returned to the United States in April 2014 for treatment of health issues, complications of which led to his death a few months later.

“Bro. Tom was the original working brother. There was no task too big for him and he did all the work cheerfully,” said Bro. Frank Annunziata, who served at Matero with Bro. Tom for many years. “At present he is up in heaven polishing the pearly gates and lubricating the hinges so that the rest of us can get in easier.”

May he rest in peace.