



The Marianists

FATHER THEODORE CHARLES LEY

60 years of profession

There was, near us, a new Catholic high school for boys on a stately old military school campus that friends of mine had attended; not a long ride by Red Car. One Saturday morning in 1954, I was with some 100 boys at desks in the school's small auditorium. The supervising teacher introduced himself as Brother John. I had never known any brothers. My teachers had been sisters. He said, in a memorably friendly manner, not to worry, do your best. He was to be my homeroom teacher — Brother John Samaha — now in retirement at Cupertino! A week later, Dad drove me there again. Standing along a portico that I came to know as The Hanging Gardens of Chaminade, was another young brother, tall and smiling. Father David Schuyler became a lifetime mentor. On into the office that day, and the interview with Chaminade's engaging, classy founding principal, Brother John Perko.

I was sold.

Today I am senior chaplain of the school. I try to emulate Father Frank May, who was the older priest back then; and, if miraculously possible, our school chaplain of those days, Fr. Larry Mann. At 15, I asked Fr. Larry how to join. The provincial, Father Leonard Fee, soon told me of a new program enabling a boy in high school to gradually become a Marianist without leaving home. Although it was not today's young-adult aspirancy, I was the first person ever called an aspirant. After high school, I joined a great Pacific novitiate group. My colleagues, still living and celebrating 60 years, are Brother Paco Gomes and Fr. Ray Malley.

My consistent joy is daily priestly ministry in our community at West Hills and with Chaminade Middle and High School. Throughout the years, I also have taught in the Los Angeles Archdiocesan Seminary, administered an inner city parish, cofounded two Marianist lay communities and pastoral councils at several parishes. Having parlayed my family's musical acumen into ministry with needy youth, I was able to emulate my father's police work among the youth in four gang-ridden L.A. neighborhoods — the varied ministry our novice master, Father Joseph Stefanelli said would happen. A choral ensemble of adults and children that I founded 43 years ago has now been able to begin a true choir school at Assumption Parish in Boyle Heights, with our hopes that it morphs into a Catholic magnet school in the communication arts.

I am very grateful to the first brothers who welcomed me into the Marianist Family so long ago, and, throughout the years, the many religious and laity with whom I have been privileged to partake in this Marian calling in today's very needy world.

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