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**Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie**  
**Via Latina 22, 00179 Roma**



**March 27, 2020**

#### **Biography of Death Notice No. 4**

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **DAVID FLEMING**, priest, of the Marianist Novitiate Community in Dayton, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on March 12, 2020, in Dayton at the age of 80 with 63 years of religious profession.

Father David was a revered leader in the Society of Mary; he served as the 13<sup>th</sup> Marianist Superior General and as Provincial of the former St. Louis Province. He also was a leading force in the foundation and early growth of the Marianist District of India.

David Arnold Fleming was born on April 14, 1939, in Topeka, Kansas. He was one of three children in the family of Ambrose and Mildred (Williams) Fleming.

Young David attended parish schools in Topeka and in Chicago, Illinois, where his family lived for a time. He began high school studies at Hayden Catholic in Topeka

and, during this time, felt a call to religious life. He found the Marianist devotion to Mary particularly appealing. "A visit from the province recruiter, Brother William McCarthy, and a trip to the postulate at Maryhurst (in St. Louis, Missouri) strengthened my desire to join the Society of Mary," he later wrote. He entered the postulate at age 15 and continued to the novitiate at Marynook in Galesville, Wisconsin, in 1955. He professed first vows at Marynook a year later, on September 8, 1956.

An exceptional student, Brother David attended St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, earning a bachelor's degree in English in three years and graduating summa cum laude. He returned to St. Louis and taught at Chaminade College Preparatory for the following three years. He professed perpetual vows on August 22, 1960, in St. Louis.

From 1962 to 1965, Brother David attended the University of Chicago in Illinois, earning a master's and a doctorate in English and comparative literature. At this point, and with enthusiastic support from his peers and province leadership, he turned his focus to preparing for the priesthood. It was an aspiration he'd held since his boyhood in Topeka. He began seminary studies at Regina Mundi in Fribourg, Switzerland, in the autumn of 1965.

Father David was ordained in Fribourg on March 22, 1969, having earned bachelor's and licentiate degrees in sacred theology from the University of Fribourg.

Returning to the United States, Father David was sent to his alma mater, St. Mary's University. For the following seven years (1969 – 1976), he taught English at the university and ministered as chaplain at the scholasticate community in San Antonio. From 1971 – 1976, he was director of formation for the St. Louis Province.

In 1976, Father David was called to serve as Assistant for Religious Life at the Province Offices in St. Louis. During this time, he was sent to India to investigate the possibility of establishing a Marianist presence there. His positive report set in motion what has grown into the Marianist District of India.

Father David was named to the first of two terms as Provincial of the St. Louis Province in 1979. He is credited with restoring a level of calm and trust among members in the wake of Vatican II and social upheaval of the times, which often pitted traditionalism against an emphasis on the individual. In 1983, he led the

province's celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding with a week-long gathering of nearly all of its 300 members in St. Louis.

After a sabbatical year spent studying in England, Father David was ready for his next challenge. From 1988 to 1993, he ministered as novice master in Kathmandu, Nepal, and Ranchi, India, developing young Marianists in a young mission field. Father David later wrote of this period of his life as one of "planting seeds" and that he believed that the Marianist charism was a good fit for Indian Christian culture. In 1993, Father David moved to Bangalore, India, to direct the scholasticate there and, ultimately, to serve as Regional Superior.

"Father David is seen as the founding father of the Indian mission," said Father Sudhir Kujur, superior of the District of India. "He loved India and its mission immensely. He had friends everywhere and was liked by everyone. The District of India has lost a great spiritual guru and a compassionate leader."

"When Father David was regional superior in India, he shared with me his ideas about the appropriate formation program for the Marianist Brothers in India, a formation program that would respect the mixed composition of Marianist religious life," said Brother Ray Fitz. "In the summer of 1996, Dr. Patricia Johnson, the chair of the philosophy department at University of Dayton(UD), and I went to Bangalore to meet with Fr. David and Brother Ed Violet to discuss the opening of a UD program in philosophy in Bangalore. With the excellent work of Pat Johnson and Paul Morman, the dean of the college, we were able to get approval of the Bangalore program in 1997 and accepted our first class that year. Through the collaboration of the district of India and the college of arts at University of Dayton, the program has expanded and added students from other religious communities."

Now in his mid-50s, Father David had become recognized in the Society of Mary for his intelligence and his deep spirit of prayer, as well as his adaptability, prudence and vision. And so, perhaps not surprisingly, Father David was elected the 13<sup>th</sup> Superior General of the Society of Mary on July 20, 1996. His new role, based in Rome, included representing the Marianists to the Vatican and overseeing 15 provincial administrations, comprising some 1,700 Marianist brothers and priests.

He wrote that he spent roughly half his term visiting Marianist communities in 37 countries around the world. He also was active in the Union of Superiors General, serving as chair of the Commission for Justice and Peace and the Commission for

Interreligious Dialogue. He celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee as a Marianist as his second five-year term as Superior General came to a close.

Father David returned to his beloved India in 2006 to serve as chaplain and director of the scholasticate in Deepahalli, Bangalore. He ministered there until 2012. He returned to the States, where he spent the following year as a professor at the University of Dayton and as assistant coordinator of the Association of Marianist Universities.

Later in 2013, he was asked to go back to India to minister as novice master in Ranchi, a post he held until 2015. In an article from this time, Father David wrote, “God seems to have been working on our Marianist presence in this part of the world, and we now have a solid and growing Marianist Family. That is certainly the fulfillment of a dream for me.”

Father David returned to Rome in 2015 and spent the following years in research, writing, and leading retreats and workshops.

In 2019, in his sixth decade of ministry, Father David went back to Dayton. He served as scholar in residence at the North American Center for Marianist Studies, where he helped design coursework and recorded a series of podcasts.

Father David was extraordinarily gifted with languages, mastering Latin, Spanish, French, German, Italian and Hindi. He also was a respected conference leader and author. He is recognized for his many circulars, articles and, in particular, his book, “A New Fulcrum: Marianist Horizons Today.”

“Perhaps Dave is most well-known for his brilliance as a linguist and Marianist scholar, but his zeal was sustained by deep prayer and deep friendships that lasted for decades,” said Brother Tom Giardino.

In early March, Father David suffered a sudden and massive brain hemorrhage, which led to his death a few days later.

Brother Ed Violet, who served with Father David in India for many years, said that his friend was greatly inspired by India’s culture, languages and religious diversity. He said that the Indian Rite liturgy “seemed to touch David’s soul deeply.”

“His favorite chant during the liturgy was the *Pavamana Mantra*, and he chanted it with an incredible devotion and relish,” said Brother Ed. The ancient mantra, translated, reads:

From falsehood lead me to truth,  
From darkness lead me to the light,  
From death lead me to immortality.  
    om peace peace peace

May he rest in peace.

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