

Remarks originally prepared for the Eucharist of Transferral at the University of Dayton for David Fleming, SM [Subsequently postponed]

Thank you for your presence here as we celebrate the life of our dear brother, Dave Fleming.

David Arnold Fleming was born in Topeka Kansas on April 14, 1939, the first child of Ambrose Fleming and Mildred Williams Fleming. He attended public and Catholic elementary schools in Topeka and Chicago and then in 1952 entered Hayden Catholic High School in Topeka.

It was during his sophomore year in high school that he felt the stirrings of a religious vocation. Dave experienced something -- or better, someone -- early in his life as a deep question that the Marianist Charism was a response to. The vehicle was a vocation pamphlet entitled, "Making Leaders." He then spent the rest of his life trying to bring to expression...to describe the indescribable in his many conferences, retreats circulars and books. As brilliant as Dave was, his initial experience was not an intellectual experience but an encounter of his whole person, a grace that Father Chaminade called Faith of the Heart. Finally, Dave's whole life was his response to God and Mary's invitation.

The first years of his Marianist life after first vows on September 8, 1956 at Marynook in Galesville, Wisconsin were not untypical, including his perpetual vows on August 22, 1960 at Our Lady of the Pillar Parish in St. Louis Missouri.

He received his BA in English at St. Mary's University in San Antonio and then taught high school at Chaminade College Prep in St. Louis. I bet that was an experience for those students, as well as for Dave!

After that, his native talent took over and was recognized by Marianist leadership, as he went on to begin his higher studies with a Masters and a Ph.D. in English from the University of Chicago, the latter granted in 1965.

Immediately after that he was called to our seminary, at that time the International seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland. He earned his licentiate in sacred theology in 1969 having spent one year of his course in Munich, Germany where, of course, he picked up German. The four years in Europe were a privileged moment for him to deepen his knowledge of European languages and to steep himself in European culture, which was to continue beyond Europe and then expand for the rest of his life.

After his ordination in 1969, he spent the next seven years in San Antonio at St. Mary's University teaching English and Theology and working with the burgeoning lay Marianist communities of that era along with being Director of the Scholasticate and the formation of future Marianists.

The summer of 1976 saw him begin eleven years in Provincial administration for the Marianists in what was the Province of St. Louis, first as assistant to Father Quentin Hackworth and then his successor as Provincial. It was during those years that I first came to know Dave and we worked together on many Marianist studies projects. It was clear that here was a Marianist of extraordinary commitment and talent.

Though he grew up in the heartland of America, he was always attracted to cultural diversity and he soon began his readings and interests in Indian religion and culture. He volunteered for the young Marianist mission there and in 1988 moved to Katmandu, Nepal to be the Novice Master. Dave felt in that assignment as Novice Master were the years he most enjoyed during his religious life.

He always experienced his work as one of bridge building between different cultures, languages and continents and between different generations within the Marianist Family in its broadest dimensions, that is, both vowed religious and lay. He remained a learner all his life, which vastly expanded his horizons. This also allowed him to feel close spiritual and religious bonds with many different people.

Father Dave is perhaps most well known for his brilliance as a Marianist scholar, but his zeal was sustained by deep prayer and by deep friendships that lasted for decades. I felt privileged to be in that number. We traveled together once to Sicily and then to Ravenna in Italy to see the mosaics and on the way I learned much from him. I enjoyed driving with him -- that is, when I was driving -- as mechanical realities from cars to computers somehow seemed to baffle him and were not his strong point, to put it diplomatically.

Dave had been a translator at many General Chapters and in 1996, while being a translator, he was elected Superior General and served 2 five-year terms. I was privileged to serve with him on the General Administration in his second term.

He loved to travel to the more than 30 countries we were in at that time and he made time to write significant circulars to inspire and teach us. He was active in at least one or two Synods of Bishops as a representative of the Union of Superiors General and I recall him telling us with a smile about the labyrinthine ways of the internal Vatican workings.

It is fitting that we are celebrating this Eucharist here at UD before the transferal to San Antonio for funeral and burial. Dave at different times served as distinguished visiting professor at the College of Arts and Sciences as well as a teacher in UD's undergraduate program in Bangalore India, which he loved beyond measure. Most recently, he was the resource person for the Chaminade or now the Founders Seminar on Campus. His book, [A New Fulcrum: Marianist Horizons Today](#) has been used by many groups on campus to better understand our educational tradition, especially on a University level. The last years were difficult for Dave. He learned humility the hard way, as perhaps most of us do, as his body began to fail. He hoped to live his last years as a Marianist elder and in the last year working with the North American Center for Marianist Studies he achieved something of that personal goal.

As I close these remarks, it is still hard for me think of life in the Society of Mary and the larger Marianist family without Dave. We can be confident in knowing his legacy and zeal for the Marianist Charism lives on not only through his books, but also through us. We will miss you Dave, but as we will hear in the first reading from Ecclesiasticus in our Eucharist, “there is an appointed time for everything and a time for every affair under the heavens.”

Thank you, Dave, for inspiring us to be Marianists during our appointed time together. Intercede with Mother Mary, as they say in India, that we might live well as the Charismatic family that you wrote about and modeled. And so we say as you did so many times in your life:

May the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Amen.

Thomas F. Giardino, SM

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