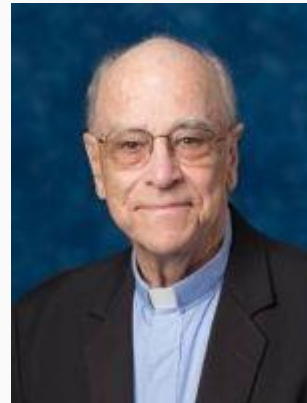




**Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie**  
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**September 17, 2020**

### **Biography of Death Notice N. 23**

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Norbert BURNS**, priest, of the Siena Woods Marianist Community of Dayton, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on August 28, 2020, in Dayton, Ohio, at the age of 96 with 77 years of religious profession.

Father Norbert was a legend at the University of Dayton, where he taught for nearly 50 years, never missing a day of class. He taught a wildly popular Christian marriage class to some 27,000 UD students. Upon his death, the tributes on social media were swift, abundant and effusive: “One of my favorite professors ever.” “He brought so much love and understanding to the world.” “If you knew Father Norb, you knew grace was real.” For decades, he officiated at two or three weddings each week, typically for former students.

Norbert Clifford Burns was born on August 7, 1924, in Cleveland, Ohio. He and a sister, Marilyn, were the children of Clifford and Julia (Gardner) Burns. As a youngster, Norbert met many Marianists through his uncle, Brother John Gardner, and even recalled playing cards with them as a five-year-old. Young Norbert attended

Cathedral Latin School in Cleveland, where the ready seed of a vocation with the Society of Mary began to sprout.

He entered the Marianist postulate at Mount St. John in Dayton, Ohio, two days after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. The city boy from Cleveland later wrote about farming potatoes, shoveling cow manure and killing chickens on the rural campus.

Brother Norb professed first vows on August 22, 1943, in Beacon, New York, where he had attended the novitiate. In an accelerated war-time program, he earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Dayton in 1945 and began teaching that autumn at St. John the Baptist High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He professed perpetual vows on August 25, 1946, in Dayton.

In 1949, Brother Norb was called back to the novitiate in Beacon, where he taught Latin and English for one year before entering the Marianist seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland. He was ordained on July 12, 1953, in Fribourg, having earned a licentiate in sacred theology (STL) degree from the University of Fribourg. Father Norb then attended the University of St. Thomas in Rome, where he earned a doctorate (STD) in 1955.

For the next three years (1955-1958), the young priest ministered as chaplain to the novices at Beacon. He then returned to Dayton as the province vocation director and director of the lay affiliates program, and later, master of scholastics. During this time, he also began hosting a call-in radio show called "The Challenge of Modern Marriage" on the UD campus station WVUD-FM. The show ran for 25 years. He also started teaching in the religion department at the University of Dayton, introducing the famous "Christian Marriage" class in 1963.

By 1971, Father Norb was teaching full time at UD. He later wrote that, at first, he was steered into being part of university administration. "Somebody's gotta do administration, and God bless them, but I didn't want that with my life. I enjoyed teaching so much; I enjoy it more than anything," he said. He also put his classroom messages to real-time work as a counselor to married and engaged couples. For four decades, he met with couples late into the evenings in his campus office.

While Father Norb taught a number of religion classes, the Christian Marriage class was the runaway favorite. There was no textbook for the class, and no topic was off-limits for frank and lively discussion. "His marriage class taught me life lessons I use

every day in my 39-year marriage,” wrote Sandra Egan Burg on the university’s Facebook page. Scores of alumni echoed her comments.

The obituary posted by the University of Dayton included this:

“And who could forget his professorial style? His priestly collar tucked casually in his breast pocket, he would bound into class 15 minutes early so he could personally greet each student. He engaged the class so quickly in lively discussions about marriage and relationships that they soon forgot about the generation gap between them — and that as a Catholic priest, he had never married.”

Father Norb officially retired from UD in 1996, at age 72. Yet he continued to teach the marriage class for another 11 years. He wrote: “My work has been my greatest expression of my love for Mary ... To spend every moment of my life in her honor and for her glory was the course of life that made the most sense to me.”

Within the Society of Mary, Father Norb was a respected colleague. He served many years as the director of the Alumni Hall Community on the UD campus, and was the first to hold that post who wasn’t also the university’s president. He served nearly two decades on the provincial chapter and was elected to the General Chapter in 1971.

At the time of his 75<sup>th</sup> jubilee, Father Norb was back where he had started his Marianist journey as a teenager. Though the Mount Saint John campus had been transformed from the farm he’d known as a postulate, his devotion to the Blessed Mother remained steadfast. He wrote: “My lifetime of belonging to Mary has reached its climax in these final years, as every day I visit Mount Saint John and spend time at her shrine, the Lourdes Grotto, talking to her, praying ... (this is) my gratitude for the wonderful life I have enjoyed.”

May he rest in peace.