



Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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October 29, 2020

Biography of Death Notice N. 31

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Wilbert Leonard HAMM**, of the Siena Woods Marianist Community of Dayton, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on October 20, 2020, in Dayton, at the age of 97 with 78 years of religious profession.

Brother Wilbert lived a fully Marianist life. He entered as a postulate at age 14 and served actively for six decades, mostly at Purcell High School and its successor school, Purcell Marian, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He will be remembered for his steadfast dedication to his vocation and to his students. He was a firm teacher with high expectations but also a sense of fun and affection.

Wilbert Leonard Hamm was born on June 25, 1923, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was one of six children in the family of Joseph and Elizabeth (Renvers) Hamm.

He first encountered Marianists teachers at St. Mary's grade school. Perhaps it was no surprise when he followed his older brother, Brother Norman Hamm, into a vocation with the Society of Mary. Young Wilbert completed eighth grade and entered the postulate at Mount Saint John in Dayton, Ohio, in 1937. He completed his high school studies while working on the farm campus with other postulates, as was the tradition at the time.

Wilbert entered the novitiate in Beacon, New York, in 1941, and professed first vows there on August 24, 1942. In an accelerated wartime program, Brother Wilbert earned a bachelor's degree in education from the University of Dayton in 1944. He professed perpetual vows on August 26, 1945, in Dayton.

From 1944 to 1946, Brother Wilbert served as a teacher and prefect for some of the youngest of the more than 300 boys at St. John's Home in Rockaway Park, New York. For the next two years, Brother Wilbert moved from St. Michael grade school in Baltimore, back to St. John's Home, and then to Mount Saint John, serving as a prefect and teacher as needed.

In the autumn of 1948, Brother Wilbert was called to Cincinnati, Ohio, to teach at Purcell High School. He couldn't have known at the time the impact his ministry would have on the venerable institution in the coming decades. His first stretch at Purcell was just one year before he was sent to Cathedral Latin in Cleveland, Ohio, where he taught business and religion courses from 1949 to 1952.

After a year in a "second novitiate" in Glencoe, Missouri, Brother Wilbert returned to Cathedral Latin. He taught religion, business courses and driver education there for the following three years. By taking summer courses, Brother Wilbert earned a master's degree in business education from the University of Pittsburgh in 1955. He then continued his tour of Ohio Marianist schools from 1956 to 1958, teaching first at Chaminade High School in Dayton, and then at Hamilton Catholic in Hamilton. He returned to at Purcell High School in 1959, where he remained until 1963.

Next was a milestone in Brother Wilbert's ministry. Recognized for his

organizational skills and business acumen, Brother Wilbert was called to serve at the Marianist General Administration in Rome, serving as secretary to the Treasurer General (now titled the Assistant for Temporalities). In an article from 1964, Brother Wilbert reported on the privilege of seeing Pope Paul VI in person and visiting the major basilicas in the Holy City.

In August 1965, Brother Wilbert, a seasoned teacher and world-traveler at age 42, returned to the United States and taught for a year at St. Joseph High School in Cleveland. And then, it was back to Purcell for a third stint, this one lasting until 1977. He was sent to Archbishop Moeller High School for a year before, at his request, being allowed to return “home” to Purcell in the autumn of 1978.

For the next 11 years, Brother Wilbert taught at “The Castle” as the high school was and is known. He continued to teach business courses, as well as English and driver education. “I can still parallel park like a champ thanks to Brother Hamm. I think about him every time I have to do it!” wrote an alumnus on the Purcell Marian Facebook page. Brother Wilbert adapted to teaching young women for the first time in his career as Purcell merged with Marian High School to become coed in 1981.

“Brother Hamm was a legend at Purcell and Purcell Marian,” wrote alumna Tammy Reasoner. “He taught my father and was there for my four years as well. He was tough and stern with the rules, but lovable and approachable with his smiling eyes and, of course, his jar.”

Nearly every Purcell or Purcell Marian friend of Brother Wilbert’s invokes “the jar,” an oddball game/ministry that became his trademark. It was a large jar, filled with water, that had a shot glass at the bottom. Students were encouraged to drop in a quarter or two in support of the Marianist Missions. If the quarter happened to fall into the shot glass – apparently a rare event – he or she would win the jar’s current contents. “I lost a ton of quarters in his famous jar over the years – but all for a good cause,” wrote one former student on Facebook. The cause was especially close to Brother Wilbert’s heart. His older brother, Brother Norman, served in Puerto Rico, which was a mission field at the time.

In addition to his other duties at Purcell and Purcell Marian, Brother Wilbert drove the team bus to athletic events, served as community director and was in charge of maintaining community cars. “The cars were always *spotless*,” said Brother Giancarlo Bonutti. “If you left anything in the car, you might not find it again when you went looking for it ... Brother Wil was very generous and helpful in community, and very faithful to community prayer times,” said Brother Giancarlo.

Brother Wilbert retired from the classroom in 1989 but continued serving as the school receptionist and, later, as volunteer manager of the school’s bookstore until 2006. Near the end of his tenure at the school – which totaled 44 years – Purcell Marian honored him with the *Praestan Inter Omnes* award, “Outstanding Among All.”

At age 83, Brother Wilbert said goodbye to his beloved Purcell Marian. He volunteered for a few more years in the bookstore at Archbishop Moeller High School.

For his 50th jubilee in 1992, Brother Wilbert described briefly in writing his many postings and assignments, though more were yet to come. He closed with this sentence: “With all this, it becomes quite obvious that I have been blessed abundantly by Jesus, Mary and Joseph.”

May he rest in peace.