



Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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December 18, 2020

Biography of Death Notice N. 37

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Robert Nelson WIETHORN**, of the Siena Woods Marianist Community of Dayton, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on December 10, 2020, in Dayton, at the age of 79 with 60 years of religious profession.

Brother Bob was a big-hearted servant who ministered in a variety of roles. He combined the traits of scientist and nurturer as a teacher and school administrator, vocation director, and administrator of outreach programs for the poor. In his later years, he lovingly cared for fellow Marianists approaching the ends of their lives.

Robert Nelson Wiethorn was the only child of Robert and Rosemary (Carney) Wiethorn, born April 4, 1941, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Young Bob attended St. Mark parish grade school and went on to Purcell High School, about a mile from his home. The Marianists at Purcell encouraged his love for science and math, and modeled the importance of service. He thought about becoming a doctor. Then, in chapel during his senior retreat, Bob felt what he called “a movement of grace within,” and he knew God was calling him to a different path.

He entered the Marianist novitiate at Marcy, New York, in 1959 and professed first vows there a year later, on August 22, 1960. He attended the University of Dayton, in Dayton, Ohio, earning a bachelor's degree in chemistry in 1964. He then taught for one year at North Catholic High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This would be his only service outside of southwestern Ohio.

Brother Bob professed perpetual vows on August 15, 1965, in Dayton, and began teaching at Chaminade High School that autumn. For the next 14 years, Brother Bob served the venerable Dayton institution. He taught chemistry, math and physical science, moderated various clubs and served as vice principal. He was instrumental in facilitating the merger with Julianne High School in 1973, which created the coed Chaminade Julianne High. By dedicating summers to study, Brother Bob earned a master's degree in chemistry from Purdue University in 1972.

In August of 1979, Brother Bob was called serve as vocation director for the Cincinnati Province, a post he held for seven years. Brother Brian Zampier responded to a clever advertisement Brother Bob helped create, which appeared in a Catholic newspaper. "Brother Bob then visited me and my parents, and helped me form my early impressions of the Marianists as kind and caring, positive and patient," Brother Brian said. "The rest is history."

Brother Bob spent 1986-1988 in studies at the University of Dayton and Ohio State University to gain certification to teach high school computer science. He returned to Chaminade Julianne in the autumn of 1988 to establish its computer science department and new computer lab. He remained at "CJ" for 10 more years, serving a total of 24 years at the school.

Next, Brother Bob was asked to rise to the challenge of a completely new ministry. He was called back to Cincinnati to develop and direct computer-based education and job-training programs within the DeSales Crossing Project, a collection of ministries serving the poor. For nearly 15 years, Brother Bob worked alongside lay people and other vowed religious in providing a spectrum of empowerment and outreach services. He was both the computer systems administrator and a one-on-one tutor, again bringing his scientist and nurturer talents to ministry. He gained scores of new friends along the way.

"If Brother Bob were ever to be canonized, I would want him declared the patron saint

of friendship,” said Brother Dennis Schmitz. “His example of friendship included deep sharing, great laughter, self-deprecating humor and profound spiritual reflection.”

In 2012, Brother Bob, now age 71, began ministry at the Marianist Mercy Siena Community, an assisted living community for our brothers and priests in Dayton housed within a senior living facility open to the public. This facility has since been re-named Siena Woods. He was a director and administrator, but also a caring fraternal presence for fellow Marianists at the end of their life’s journey.

Brother Bob served the Mercy Siena Community for six years. “The richest experience during my ministry at Mercy Siena has been to accompany a fellow brother in his last days and hours,” Brother Bob wrote. “Death is a moment of intimacy ... it is a gift to share in that moment and to assure my brother of God’s love and Mary’s care.”

After a brief sabbatical, failing health caused him to return to Siena Woods as a community member in 2018. He continued to help out as much as he could, especially with computer problems.

“I am a pretty good at assisting our Marianist Brothers with everything from iPads to cell phones, to Zoom meetings, to emailing,” Brother Bob told the Cincinnati archdiocesan newspaper not long before his death. “I like the mysterious, and when something is wrong with a computer, fixing it or finding a solution is like working a puzzle – I love it. When I solve it, I always tell the person, ‘Wiethorn – 1, Computer – 0.’”

Bro. Dan Klco said, “When I think of Bob, the phrase from Article 8 of the Rule of Life keeps coming to mind, ‘we hope to reflect to those around us Mary’s warmth of welcome to God and others.’ Bob had a big, warm heart. When I was with him, I felt his love, care and support. He always listened carefully and respected and treasured what I shared with him.

Brother Bob’s warmth, eagerness to serve and joyful sense of humor were among the hallmarks of his 60 years of Marianist life and ministry.

May he rest in peace.

