



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



April 26, 2022

Biography of Death Notice N. 12

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **Peter A. PONTOLILLO** of the Marianist Residence Community in San Antonio, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on April 12, 2022, in San Antonio, Texas, USA, at the age of 83 with 64 years of religious profession.

Brother Peter was a beloved teacher and nationally-recognized school administrator, superintendent and educational lobbyist who also served for a decade as Secretary General of the Society of Mary in Rome, Italy. One measure of his commitment to (and love of) Catholic education is the fact that he attended the annual convention of the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) for 40 consecutive years.

Peter Alessandro Pontolillo was born on March 20, 1939, in Hempstead, Long Island, New York. He was the third of four children in the family of Salvatore and Philomena (Fensore) Pontolillo.

Baptized in 1939 at his home parish of Our Lady of Loretto in Hempstead, young Peter attended the parish grade school and recalled being attracted to the idea of a religious vocation from a very early age. He first encountered the Marianists at Chaminade High School in Mineola, New York, and, after graduating in 1956, he entered their novitiate at Marcy, New York.

Peter professed first vows at Marcy in 1957 and then began his scholastic studies in Ohio, earning a Bachelor of Science in Education from the University of Dayton in 1960. His early assignments included teaching courses in math, languages and religion at Cathedral Latin High School in Cleveland, Ohio, and Chaminade High School in Mineola, New York. During this time, Brother Peter also earned a Master of Arts in Spanish from Western Reserve University. He professed perpetual vows in the Society of Mary at Beacon, New York, in 1965.

In 1966, Brother Peter was named Principal at Holy Trinity High School in Brooklyn, New York. Over the next six years, he became a leading advocate for providing state aid to non-public schools in New York City. He was also instrumental in expanding traditional education curricula to better meet the needs of urban students – adopting such innovations as independent study, college cooperative programs and advanced courses for Spanish-speaking students.

In 1972, Brother Peter was named Executive Director of the Catholic School Administrators Association of New York. This position offered him the opportunity to serve on advisory commissions for both the New York State Legislature and the Commissioner of Education for New York State. During this time, he was also elected to the Executive Committee of the NCEA.

Next, Brother Peter began serving as principal at Colegio San José in Puerto Rico in 1976. Along with performing key administrative duties at this junior/senior high school, he was named by the Commonwealth Secretary of Education to a special commission charged with writing regulations to govern private schools on the island. In addition, he served as advisor to the San Juan Archdiocesan Office of Education through 1982.

Returning to the mainland in the mid-1980s, Brother Peter was named Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of San Antonio and the Diocese of Victoria, Texas. While serving in this capacity, he led an effort to reverse a 15-

year slump in enrollment – successfully revitalizing the school systems so that they began experiencing five percent annual growth by the end of his tenure in 1996. He guided the schools through a rigorous accreditation process and was also credited with introducing new computer-based technologies to many local classrooms. These efforts led to regional and national recognition, including awards presented by the Ford Motor Company, the NCEA, *Today's Catholic Teacher* magazine, and Apple Computers, Inc.

After using his leadership skills to advance Catholic education for more than 30 years, Brother Peter was called to Rome in 1996 to serve in the *Curia Generalizia Marianisti*, where he teamed with other Brothers to direct the work of Marianists worldwide. Completing two five-year terms as Secretary General, Brother Peter was responsible for communications activities – including General Circulars, Office Reports, minutes of the General Council of the Society of Mary, and the website of the World Council of the Marianist Family.

Upon his return to the United States, Brother Peter again served in high school ministry – first at Central Catholic in San Antonio and then at Chaminade-Madonna in Hollywood, Florida. In 2020, he retired to the Marianist Residence Community in San Antonio.

Brother Paul Bredestege is grateful for the respectful relationship he built with Brother Peter, first during their time together at the novitiate and in scholastic studies, and then later as colleagues in Florida. “Peter and I differed on many political, social and religious issues, yet we were on very good terms personally,” he says. “I never saw Peter angry or upset. If things didn’t work out, he tactfully tried another path or conceded to others’ ideas.” He remembers Brother Peter for having “a refined taste in food and clothes, without veering off the charts. He always dressed impeccably and professionally when the occasion called for it.”

Brother Stephen Glodek, who once worked under Brother Peter when he was principal at Most Holy Trinity High School, considered Brother Peter “a gift” to the Society of Mary. “He set direction for us as younger brothers, to embrace Catholic education as a missionary way of life,” Brother Stephen recalls. “It was a passion that drove his commitment as a Marianist. His gift as an administrator was to create leadership teams that surrounded him, with each member of the team contributing skills that he personally lacked. Such humility in leadership – thank you, Peter!” In addition, Brother Stephen has fond memories of living in

community with him. “Peter was always fun in community, and loved to sing,” Brother Stephen says. “He took great pride in singing his favorite hymn, ‘*Puer Natus*,’ at Midnight Mass on Christmas.”

“Many of us here have fond memories of a truly ‘unforgettable’ member of this community for so many years,” says Superior General André-Joseph Fétis of the Marianist General Administration in Rome. “All of us have our own particular recollections which come to mind, usually with a smile and chuckle, but always with a strong sense of gratitude. We are grateful for his vision and work in organizing the Curia, but also in being a good host to the many Marianists, friends and family who came to spend time with the community. We are grateful to the Province for its generosity in ‘lending’ Peter to the entire Society during those years. And we are grateful to God for Peter’s vocation and many years of service to the Church, chiefly in the area of education.” May he rest in peace.
