

August 25, 2022

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother Francis Joseph O'Donnell, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on July 22, 2022, in Baltimore, Maryland, at the age of 79 with 62 years of religious profession.

Brother Francis "Frank" was a tireless advocate for the marginalized, devoting his life to procuring opportunities for and defending the rights of those in need. He was an attorney, legislative expert, teacher, administrator, librarian, novice master and community director. He is perhaps best known as a champion of civil rights who worked in the Maryland legislature and served on numerous boards for legal services groups, religious communities, Marianist schools and social justice organizations.

Francis Joseph O'Donnell was born on August 6, 1942, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was the only child of Francis J. O'Donnell, Sr. and Eleanor E. (nee Doney) O'Donnell. Frank was first introduced to the Marianists as a freshman at St. John the Baptist High School in Philadelphia. Inspired by the fine example and spirit of the Marianists who taught and administered there and with the encouragement of Brother Julius May, he entered the postulate at Marianist Preparatory School in Beacon, New York in 1956. After two years as a postulate, he entered Marianist Novitiate in Marcy, New York, in 1959. There, he professed first vows on January 22, 1960, and proceeded to Dayton, Ohio.

Brother Frank worked as an assistant librarian at Marianist College while attending the University of Dayton. He earned his bachelor's in English from the University of Dayton in 1963. He then attended the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, earning his master's in library science in 1964.

He was then sent to Baltimore, Maryland, where he would spend the rest of his life ministering and living. He was first assigned to teach at the newly opened Cardinal Gibbons High School, where he also served as a librarian and as principal from 1969-1975. He earned his master's in educational administration from Loyola College in Baltimore in 1971.

In 1976, Frank was appointed as the director of vocations for the New York Province and remained in this role until 1987. On the occasion of his 60th anniversary of profession, Bro. Frank wrote, "My 11 years in province vocation ministry, I found to be a deeply privileged time as I walked with men discerning their call in life." During this time, Frank also helped establish the Marianist Sharing Fund in the New York Province and served as its chairman for five years working to promote social change and build communities.

"Frank was committed to promoting a Church that would grow in its ability to be more centered on the issues of justice and peace. He always possessed a special love and concern for the poor and marginalized. He believed at his core that the gift of a Marianist education would change lives and ultimately contribute to healing our world," said Brother Jesse O'Neill.

Realizing that the underprivileged were also underrepresented and wanting to "do more from the inside," Frank enrolled at the University of Maryland Law School Baltimore and earned a Juris Doctor in 1991. As an attorney, he worked for the poor, providing legal services, improving the quality of life in neighborhoods and legislative aid in Baltimore City. He served as the director of the tenant advocacy project at the Public Justice Center in Baltimore from 1991-1993. He then served as the provincial assistant for education/mission for the Marianist Province of New York while also working as the deputy director for the Community Law Center in Baltimore.

In 1999, he became the legislative aid to Delegate Kenneth C. Montague, Jr., 43rd District of Baltimore City, in the Maryland General Assembly. He then served a year as Montague's special assistant to the secretary in the Department of Juvenile Services until 2003. Frank served as the special projects manager and legislative director for the Governor's Office of Children, Youth and Families (2003-2005). In 2006, Frank became the staff attorney for the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings.

"Brother Frank was a hopeful voice. He faithfully encouraged many of those who worked for justice in the Church and the world," said Barbara Bell, who worked with Brother Frank in the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative (MSJC). "When we worked together, he helped me to be hopeful in envisioning our Church as inclusive and appreciative of the gifts of ALL of its members. He also had a true Marianist passion for the mission. Influenced by Fr. Chaminade, Sr. Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and Marie Thérèse de Lamourous, he encouraged our Women & Justice Issues team to remember

the many other women throughout history who used their “feminine genius” to reach out to those on the margins.”

Brother Mike O’Grady remembered, “Brother Frank was a strong supporter of women religious and their great contribution to the Church in America. He was also a man with extensive correspondence. If you were on his list, you received a handwritten birthday card precisely on the date of your birthday. He thrilled people with that kind of attention.”

Brother Frank served his Marianist community as treasurer (1978-2015) and director (2008-2015). He also dedicated countless hours to Marianist schools and programs, local charities and organizations as a board member or volunteer, including the MSJC, the Marianist Province Justice and Peace Commission, Mother Seaton Academy, New Ways Ministry, Lifers Group at Maryland Correctional Institution, Murphy Justice and Peace Initiative, Baltimore Fundraising Committee for Sisters of St. Joseph Philadelphia, Public Justice Center and Bon Secours Baltimore Health Corporation. A staunch opponent of the death penalty, Brother Frank fought the use of capital punishment for decades and also ministered to those serving life sentences at Maryland’s Jessup Correctional Institution. He received many awards for his work in education, legal services, vocation ministry, and pro-life causes.

Jim Vogt, former director of MSJC said, “Frank loved being a Marianist Brother and an attorney. He felt called to witness the importance of faith and the presence of people of faith in the public square. He was never afraid to raise questions, even challenge those in power. He always pushed those he worked with to see the bigger picture, to look beyond individual instances of injustice to the systemic causes. He was a fervent supporter of the MSJC and embraced his leadership role in the MSJC with gusto.”

Blessed with energy and passion, Brother Frank continued working as long as there was a need. Linda Zappacosta who worked with Frank for more than fifty years and also served in the Education Office of the Northeast Marianist Family Council said, “Brother Frank faithfully supported the lay branch of the Marianist Family. His clarity and succinct style at council meetings provided a guide for understanding and living our Marianist Charism. He never forgot my birthday and always sent beautiful cards and messages. His thoughtfulness and consideration spoke of a caring soul who valued and nourished relationships over the years. He was a true son of Mary, whom I am very grateful and blessed to have as a brother. God rest his good and faithful soul.”

May he rest in peace.