



Father Thomas Thompson, SM

Celebrating 70 years of Profession

My vocation is rooted in the fervent Catholic atmosphere that was part of the family, school, and parish life in Pittsburgh, PA, in the early 1950s. Brother Joe Meder was an enthusiastic religious whose weekly letters to his mother (my grandmother) and family described the daily life of a versatile grade school principal. The Sisters of Divine Providence at my home parish and school, St. Basil's, provided a rich devotional atmosphere. I am still grateful to my piano teacher, Sr. Generosa, who introduced me to the joy of music, without which I cannot imagine life.

After attending St. Basil's in my hometown of Pittsburgh, I entered Marianist Preparatory in Beacon, NY, graduating in 1954. I spent good years there and later returned to teach for four years before entering the seminary. I professed my First Vows on September 8, 1955, at Chaminade Prep in Marcy, NY. The Hudson Valley, the beauty of the property, the spirit of the community, the building program, and the optimistic outlook of the early 1960s still provide many fond memories.

I continued my education by earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy from University of Dayton (1958), a master's in American History from the University of Pittsburgh (1963), a Licentiate of Sacred Theology from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland (1968), and a doctoral degree in religious history through the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the University of Pittsburgh (1977).

Seminary education and the international community in Fribourg were a broadening experience and instilled interests which I still pursue. Before going to seminary, I thought my service as a community organist was over, but, to my complete surprise, I was encouraged to register at the Fribourg conservatory, where I eventually attained a *Certificat d'orgue*, a degree cherished to this day. Returning to the U.S., I was ordained to the priesthood on August 17, 1968, at my home parish of St. Basil's in Pittsburgh.

Prior to entering the seminary, I taught for six years at three schools—Chaminade High School in Dayton, OH (1958-59), Marianist Prep in Beacon, NY (1959-62, 1963-64), and North Catholic High School in Pittsburgh (1962-63). Following my ordination, I returned to North Catholic as chaplain and teacher (1968-70) before serving as music director of St. Joseph Parish (1970-77) while also pursuing graduate studies. I then taught at Pontifical College Josephinum in Worthington, OH (1977-84) and St. Michael's College in Toronto, ON, where I also served as assistant rector (1984-87).

Despite my teaching experience, I seemed destined for libraries. I came to University of Dayton's Marian Library in 1987, as the technological transformation of libraries was just beginning, and served as its director until 2015. I continued my service there until 2018 as a research assistant and faculty member at the International Marian Research Institute.

The late 1980s was also the time when there was great Hispanic immigration to Dayton and Montgomery County. A small Hispanic ministry program, originally started by Cubans, was overwhelmed and seeking a priest. I took up Spanish again and served as chaplain of the Hispanic Catholic Ministry of Dayton for about 20 years; today it is a ministry of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

I was of the generation that was overjoyed with Pope John XXIII's opening of the windows of *aggiornamento* and the calling of Vatican II. The year of my ordination was also the year of the MLK and RFK assassinations, riots, Vietnam War, and *Humanae vitae*—sometimes referred to as the year “the world rocked.” Never could I have imagined the upheavals that followed the council; thank God I somehow survived. Now retired at St. Leonard near Dayton, I am especially grateful for a vocation to a community dedicated to the education and faith formation of youth, to an international community, and a Marian community with its family ethos. Thanks to all whose faith and friendship have assisted me.