



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



September 12, 2025

Biography of Death Notice N. 17

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **John Raymond HABJAN** of the Alumni Hall Marianist Community in Dayton, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 1, 2025, at Kettering Hospital in Kettering, Ohio, at the age of 80 with 61 years of religious profession.

Brother John was a dedicated teacher, high school administrator, and education innovator. Remembered fondly by his colleagues for setting high academic standards, Brother John always encouraged faculty members to teach “from bell to bell,” while also challenging students to achieve more than they thought themselves capable of doing. He played a key role in developing and promulgating “Characteristics of Marianist Education,” a document that has shaped teaching methods at Marianist-sponsored schools in the United States since the 1990s.

John Raymond Habjan was born on June 12, 1945, in Cleveland, Ohio. He was one of two children in the family of John and Vida (Kovacic) Habjan. Baptized as an infant, he also received First Communion and Confirmation at St. Vitus, the Slovenian parish where he attended grade school. While there, he was a member of the school choir – *Sveta Marija je nas vodnik* (Saint Mary is our Guide). He then entered Cathedral Latin High School in Cleveland, where he first encountered the Marianists. As a student, John was quick to notice how the brothers enjoyed their life. At Cathedral Latin, he witnessed “a life of prayer...sharing and laughter [and] a commitment to the ministry of education,” he would later write. “And they tended to play practical jokes on each other!” Attracted by what he saw, John joined a group of students that met regularly with Marianists to discern vocations to religious life.

After graduating from high school John entered the novitiate in Marcy, New York, in July, 1963, and professed first vows there on August 22, 1964. Brother John then began scholastic studies at Mount St. John in Dayton, Ohio. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in History from the University of Dayton in 1968 and professed final vows in the Society of Mary that same summer.

While still an undergraduate, Brother John began his teaching career in 1967 at Archbishop Moeller High School in Cincinnati, Ohio. He taught classes in history and French and served as band moderator. He later noted that his only credentials for taking on those positions were that he’d “once eaten a croissant and had read a biography of John Philip Sousa.” But in accepting these challenges, Brother John laid the foundation for a leadership style that would serve him (and his schools) well during his 30-plus years in secondary education.

Brother John served at Moeller for the next 13 years, earning a Master of Arts in History (1975) from the University of Cincinnati along the way. He was named the Assistant Principal for Academics at the school. He earned a reputation as an innovator in education early on, first by integrating American literature into his history classes; and later by introducing a “School-Within-A-School” program that further promoted interdisciplinary studies, supported by a block-scheduling format to permit time for coursework that did not fit into existing 45-minute class periods.

In 1980, Brother John was named academic dean at Chaminade-Julienne High School in Dayton, Ohio. There, too, he was known as an innovator –launching new science and art fair programs and revitalizing the school’s theater program. Under his leadership, Chaminade-Julienne experienced an increase in the percentage of graduates who went on to college.

Brother John then returned to Moeller in 1994 – again taking on the role of academic dean. Over the next several years, he spearheaded the launch of the faculty and student laptop programs at Moeller, expanded the school’s block-scheduling curriculum design, and promoted an enhanced role for its library in supporting learning and technology. He was also named to a national committee in 1998 that focused on developing effective ways to incorporate the Characteristics of a Marianist Education at sponsored schools across the province.

Brother John joined the staff of the office of education in 2004. He led the effort to create a “mission integration” visitation process. As part of this effort, provincial leaders would invite administrators and faculty members from various schools to accompany them on evaluation visits made to other Marianist-sponsored schools. This collaborative effort eventually flowered into a formal four-year mission integration process that remains in use in the United States today. In 2007, Brother John published a twenty-page article in *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, highlighting the history of Marianist education ministries worldwide and detailing the sponsorship process developed as part of the province’s Mission Effectiveness Program.

Returning to Dayton in 2010, Brother John retired from active ministry in high school administration and classrooms. He joined the Alumni Hall Marianist Community at the University of Dayton, and in subsequent years served at the Marianist archives and in the Marian Library at UD, while also teaching online courses through the North American Center for Marianist Studies.

Marianist Brother Ed Brink remembers the powerful influence that Brother John had on his own early years as a teacher at Chaminade-Julienne. “He set high standards for students and for the teachers he supervised,” Brother Ed says. “I learned a lot from him, directly and indirectly. In 1989, while he was assistant

principal at CJ, the school was recognized as a National School of Excellence by the US Department of Education, and John was the person who organized the effort to achieve this honor.”

Calling Brother John “an institution at Moeller High School,” Marianist Brother Steve Glodek remembers the many contributions Brother John made as a member of his provincial staff. “He was a fine asset there,” Brother Steve says. “John loved history and was a scholar of history. He brought that passion to his classrooms and his work at the national archives. I know from living with him for a few years in St. Louis that he could be kind and generous in community. He was a wonderful storyteller and a formidable partner in dialogue – intellectually fun to spar with on many topics.”

Former student and long-time friend Steve Mueller recalls first meeting Brother John in history class in 1968 at Moeller. “Wow, was he full of knowledge,” Steve says. “John was a demanding but fair teacher who taught me (and many others) the importance of academic excellence. That was something I was grateful for during my college years. John impacted my life in such a way that my wife and I asked him to do a reading at our wedding Mass in 1974. We have stayed in touch ever since. John had a great and infectious laugh that surfaced when something really ‘tickled’ him. Impressive was the respect he showed to me as a student, and certainly later in life. He dedicated his life to educating youth and for this, so many are grateful. A true Marianist!”

Even decades later, Brother John’s former colleagues recall his influence on their work at Chaminade-Julienne. Bob Young, former CJ teacher and current facilities assistant, effortlessly repeats the mantra he learned from Brother John: “Meet your students at the door, teach ‘bell to bell,’ and dismiss your students while standing at your classroom door,” he smiles.

Jim Brooks, former CJ English teacher, says of Brother John: “His impact was immediate and lasting. He helped raise our academic standards by implementing our honors program. He demanded much of his intelligent, appreciative students. Certainly, CJ’s becoming a National School of Excellence was due in large part to his efforts and leadership.”

Larry Keller, Assistant to the Office of Sponsorship, got to know Brother John through their work together there. "Brother John had a tremendous sense of humor," Larry says. "He was kind and gentle and very supportive to so many. As I visited schools through the years as a member of the Office of Sponsorship, I encountered several individuals who have fond memories of Brother John and his leadership."

Marianist Father John Klobuka lived in community with Brother John for many years at Alumni Hall and remembers in particular his "staunch loyalty" to his Slovenian ethnic background. "John was a no-nonsense type of person who was prompt, punctual and at times he could get a bit feisty with long, drawn-out community meetings or socials," Brother John recalls. "As a community member he was regular in his attendance at spiritual exercises and served the community as the newspaper deliverer, mail separator, Halloween decorator, and province jubilee toastmaster. His passing was rather sudden and uncharacteristic of what most of us would have expected to bring about his last days here on earth. His absence and empty seat in the chapel has left an unsettled and fraternal hollowness in my own heart."

May he rest in peace.
