



## **Brother Thomas Pieper**

### *Celebrating 60 years of Profession*

I grew up in a very Catholic family. As far back as I can remember, my Mom and Dad were involved in the activities and services of our local Church, St Joseph's in Covington, KY. and later at St. Paul's in Florence, KY. For us kids, helping out at church was what you always did whenever the sisters and or parish priest called. This involvement was my first experience belonging to a larger faith community beyond my family. The Marianist Brothers, who taught at Covington Catholic High School, where my Dad and uncles had gone to school, lived right around the corner from our house in Covington, and we were all part of that Catholic faith community.

After eighth grade, I followed in my Dad's and my older brother's steps in going to Covington Catholic High School. The Marianist Brothers were so welcoming and full of life, inviting me and others to join the Sodality of our Blessed Mother, opening the gym on Saturdays and inviting us to help around the school. High school was an excellent place for my faith to grow and live within the Marianist community spirit. Marianists: Bro. George Deilinen, Fr. George Cerniglia, and Fr. Bill Behringer were real inspirational people of faith and prayer for me at the school. Bro. George, back then, was even my cheerleader moderator! During April of my senior year, two of my friends told me they would join the Marianist Brothers. I thought about it and asked Fr. Bill Behringer if I could join, too. Before graduation, my friends decided not to follow this call; I then decided to at least try this "religious life thing" for four months. I believe the spirit set this scenario up because God knew I would never have decided this on my own!

What attracted me to Marianist life? The Marianist Brothers and Priests who taught in my high school inspired me to live this life. I liked how they went out of their way to help others, treated everyone as equals and lived a strong faith and community life. They were the teachers who were really alive at the school. They made me and everyone else feel important and worthwhile. I liked how they prayed, lived in community and were very happy with their lives.

The novitiate was a time of growth in prayer, meditation, Marianist history and the charism of our Founders, especially Blessed Chaminade. During this year of the novitiate, my love for Mary moved beyond devotions to an understanding of her mission of bringing Jesus to others in our world. I loved hearing this and wanted to be a part of her mission!

I have been most grateful and honored for being able to serve and continue to serve God and Mary as a Marianist brother in the Marianist community and the ministry to and with young people. It's an honor to help young people in the formation of their faith through education in a classroom and working side by side with them in many service programs and projects. Ministering to high school students was challenging, exciting and lots of fun! Thus, as a Marianist Brother, I was privileged to

hear, see, and share in the many joys and pains of mentoring teenagers and young adults as they grew in faith and Christian values for their lives.

In my ministry as assistant Director of Novices and Director of Novices, I worked with young men interested in living Marianist Religious Life, in community and service to others through the Gospel. I had the privilege of journeying with these men, helping them discern God's call in their lives to be Marianists. What a great, humble and sacred honor this was. What a great and challenging experience too - I learned so much from delving into our Marianist Spirit and Charism to share Fr. Chaminade's life, ministry and prayer.

In my ministry at the University of Dayton, I am privileged to journey and walk with students in their search to live out their faith and to become the best persons they can be. I also had the privilege of moderating the University of Dayton Summer Appalachia Program (UDSAP!). It is a great program of service to children, teens, the elderly and the families in Salyersville, KY.

In all these ministries, I try to listen with my heart and my head to what each person is saying. I try to be open to seeing how the spirit is already present in each person's life and then, through prayer, speak words of courage, challenge and support. I consider what I do a very sacred and wonderful ministry.

Throughout my many years of ministry and living in several Marianist communities, I have tried to live my religious life in service of Mary's Mission, bringing others to Jesus. I tried to accomplish this through teaching in a high school, directing novices toward their commitment to our religious life, journeying with college students in their faith and service to the poor and developing strong relationships with Lay Marianists and their communities. In all of these ministries, I focused on Mary's Mission in building communities of faith.

As a side note concerning community, I have always had a gift or eye for decorating and fixing up the common areas of the communities that I have lived in. Having a welcoming and hospitable place where my brothers can gather as a community and, at times, gather with their family and friends. These places become very sacred spaces for being together and sharing the concerns and joys of life!

As I celebrate this 60th year of my Marianist profession, I am so grateful for my Marianist vocation and for the many brothers, family and friends who helped, challenged and walked with me to live this sacred and wonderful Marianist life each day!