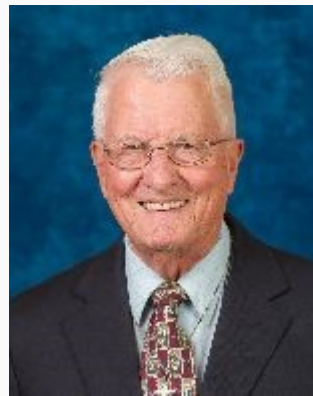




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March 7, 2025

Biography of Death Notice N. 07

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother **Donald Eugene NEFF** of the St. Leonard Community in Centerville, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on February 23, 2025, in Centerville, Ohio, USA, at the age of 94 with 74 years of religious profession.

Brother Don marveled that as a young man, he had no interest in becoming a teacher, he would find in Marianist life the encouragement and spiritual support to become “an entrepreneur in education” – one who would help establish secondary schools “in local and foreign lands.” He lived his call as a member of Mary’s Special Family in varied ways beyond teaching – by encouraging religious vocations, serving in development positions, and faithfully making missionary appeals for more than 30 years. The “driving force” for his life’s work grew out of a notion he’d encountered as an eighth grader – that two-thirds of the world had

not yet heard of Christ. “My response,” Brother Don wrote in marking his 70th jubilee, “Someone had better do something about it.”

Donald Eugene Neff was born on April 19, 1930, in Dayton, Ohio. He was one of five sons in the family of Alvin and Frances (Spatz) Neff. A priest from the Glenmary Home Missioners visited the parish grade school in 1945 and spoke of his work. “From this moment on,” Don would later write, “I have had a deep interest in the Missions.” He first encountered the Marianists as a high schooler at Chaminade (now Chaminade Julienne) in Dayton, but it was when he visited a friend – then a postulant at Mount St. John – that Don decided to follow a similar path. After finishing high school at Mount St. John, Don entered the novitiate at Marcy, New York, in 1949 and professed first vows there on September 8, 1950.

Next, Brother Don began scholastic studies at Mount St. John and continued his undergraduate education at the University of Dayton, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Education in 1954. He professed final vows there in 1955. During the early years of his Marianist life, Brother Don served as a high school teacher in Ohio and Puerto Rico while working to earn a Master of Education degree from Xavier University (Cincinnati, Ohio) in 1965. He was also named Vocation Director for the former Cincinnati Province, serving in that role for four years during the 1960s.

In 1969, Brother Don accepted a challenging assignment Down Under – one that would shape his work for the next 15 years. Initially, he served at St. Paul College in Melbourne, Australia, handling a variety of roles while there: business manager, maintenance and cafeteria coordinator, fundraising and development, and recruitment and vocation promotion. In 1973, he was named founding headmaster for a new high school – Marianist College (later renamed John Paul College) in Frankston, Australia. Brother Don remained at the school through 1985.

Upon leaving Australia, Brother Don returned to Puerto Rico and served as principal at Colegio San José for two years. He then became the school’s alumni director and special events coordinator until 1988. Already skilled in development work, Brother Don would hone and apply this expertise at several additional schools and Marianist ministries over the next 25 years. Following a two-year stint at St. Joseph High School in Cleveland, Ohio, he moved in 1990 to

Chaminade Madonna High School in Hollywood, Florida – serving there as development director and community relations coordinator until 2005. Returning to Dayton, Brother Don became property director at Mount Saint John and assisted in the Marianist Mission Office until 2013. Throughout these years, Brother Don spent part of his summers working in the Mission Cooperative Plan – a coordinated national effort to raise funds and educate the faithful about Catholic missionary activities worldwide. In all, he did “summer mission preaching” for over 30 years at parishes across the country.

Reflecting on his life as a Marianist, Brother Don once wrote that he had been blessed with opportunities to “become friends with people from different continents. My assignments and vision have been global.” By being open and positive to various opportunities, he ultimately found himself energized by the chance to “bring the Good News to others...to ‘the ends of the world.’”

Bill Stiger worked with Brother Don during his time in Australia and remembers well the impact the Marianists had on the local school community. “His time at St. Paul’s College may have been limited, but his contributions were invaluable to the success and the longevity of our school,” Bill says. “Brother Don moved to John Paul College in Frankston to become their first headmaster when the school opened in 1973. Even after his departure, Brother Don maintained a strong interest in and connection to St. Paul’s College and Emmanuel College and visited many times. A building on our Notre Dame Campus was named in his honor, and he officially opened the building in April 2015. We who were blessed to know and work with Brother Don have fond memories of a very energetic man who was a passionate Marianist, a kind and empathetic person who loved this community.”

Director of Marianist Mission Linda Hayes remembers Brother Don for his kindness, generosity, and service. “He loved to serve and work directly with donors,” Linda says. “He was a compassionate human being who genuinely cared about making others’ lives easier, better, and brighter. His service to others is a powerful and lasting gift. He lived his faith!”

Maggie Atkinson met Brother Don when she served as Youth Minister at Queen of Apostles Parish in Dayton, and he was a parishioner there. “He volunteered to be part of our Marianist LIFE Community,” Maggie says. “There, he played

games, shared his faith, and stories of his life. I was amazed at his energy and ability to connect with everyone, even though he was in his late 70s. At one point, he spoke earnestly about coming less often to meetings due to the fact that we sat on the floor – too much for him! We had a good laugh about that, but he always reached out in interest, care, and love whenever we saw him. He will be missed.”

Longtime Queen of Apostles parishioner Maria Rivera cherishes her friendship with Brother Don, which began soon after he arrived at Mount St. John in 2005. “He kept a running joke that he’d been told to watch out for the Puerto Rican woman in that pew,” Maria smiles. “He’d tell that story throughout the 20+ years that we were friends – sharing it with family, friends, church members, and at the St. Leonard Community.” It was a friendship that poured out blessings beyond the parish boundaries, too. “Brother Don came to many of my Dayton Public School classrooms to help teach my students how to read – and he brought members from his Rotary Club to help out as well,” Maria says. “He loved to promote people who followed the way of Christ, our Lord. He loved guiding people to trust in God’s ways. He was a wonderful fundraiser for the Marianists. He would help many visitors find the Lourdes Grotto on our parish grounds and invite them to our Sunday services. Some eventually joined our church and choir. Brother Don was truly a man of God! He will be missed dearly as a member of my extended family.”

May he rest in peace.
