



Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
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March 3, 2025

Biography of Death Notice N. 08

The Province of Meribah recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Gary Bernard ECK**, of the St. Leonard Community, Centerville (OH), United States, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on February 25, 2025, in Kettering (OH), United States, at the age of 79 with 59 years of religious profession.

Gary Bernard Eck was born on October 14, 1945, in Charlotte, North Carolina, the firstborn of the three children of Joseph Bernard and Martha Ann (Freeman) Eck. He was baptized on November 1, 1945, at St. Patrick's in Charlotte. Although Gary lived most of his adult life in New York, he never lost his pride in his heritage. A quintessential Southern gentleman, Gary's gracious charm and unflinching courtesy could sometimes mask a stubborn will.

In 1961, when Gary was a junior at Charlotte Catholic High School, the Marianists

came to staff the school. Gary was immediately attracted by the Brothers' lively spirit and fraternity and decided to join the Society of Mary as a teaching brother. At his parents' request, Gary enrolled for a year at the University of Dayton before entering the Novitiate at Marcy, NY, in July 1964. He professed his first vows at Marcy on August 22, 1965, and his perpetual vows on August 23, 1970. In requesting admission to temporary vows, Bro. Gary wrote to the provincial, "Since my entrance into the novitiate, I have come to the realization that the Marianist life is the fulfillment of my life as a Christian. The Marianist community, within the community of the Church, is a tremendous spiritual support for me. Here, in the Society of Mary, I have seen that I am another Christ, Son of Mary, yet I must become Him. Here, I can best fulfill and express my love for Mary. Here I can help her to form Christ in others."

Bro. Gary completed his scholasticate and graduated from the University of Dayton in 1969 with a degree in mathematics. He later achieved a master's degree in math from Adelphi University in Garden City, NY. Bro. Gary was assigned to the Marianist community at Chaminade High School in Mineola, NY and began teaching math there in September of 1969. Long Island would be his home for the next fifty years and teaching math from a distinctly Marianist pedagogy would remain his passion for the rest of his life.

Bro. Gary served as principal of Chaminade High School from 1977 until 1983 and as director of development for several years after that, but his work with students in the classroom and in extracurricular activities at Chaminade and later at Kellenberg Memorial High School brought him the greatest satisfaction and success.

Bro. Nigel Pratt first encountered Bro. Gary in 1971 when he was a freshman at Chaminade and joined Stage Techs, a group that took care of the lighting and sound equipment in the auditorium. Working alongside Bro. Gary, Nigel not only learned the principles of electricity but discovered his vocation as well: "Over the course of 4 years, Bro. Gary became a wonderful mentor to me. By the time I got to Chaminade I knew that Mathematics was the subject that I truly enjoyed and did well in. And here was a Religious Brother who was not teaching Scripture or Religion classes, but a Math teacher. So, as I began to realize that I may have a vocation to religious life, he became someone who I could emulate and talk with about not only my vocation but also mathematics and eventually its connection

to physics. After I finished my undergraduate degrees in Math and Physics, very largely due to his influence, I was very honored to be working side by side with Gary in the Math Department teaching mathematics - mainly geometry - to the next generation of Chaminade students.”

Robert York, the Assistant Principal for Personnel and Communications at Kellenberg Memorial High School, attributes a significant part of his vocation as a Marianist educator to his experience as a student in Bro. Gary’s pre-calculus class: “One of my fondest memories as a student at Kellenberg was from Bro. Gary’s class. It was September of my senior year in 2000, and the opening of the school year was delayed due to the Beatification of William Joseph Chaminade in Rome. Naturally, I was selfishly happy to start my senior year later than scheduled. However, when we returned to school, Brother Gary taught us not about math those first few days, but everything about the beatification, the history of the Marianist Community and the significance of the moment we were in. Brother Gary epitomized a Marianist educator who taught us by relationship. I owe much of my early formation in Marianist education from that moment in September of 2000, and I thank God for placing me in Brother Gary’s class that year.”

As news of Bro. Gary’s death circulated on social media, many former students recalled similar sentiments about his patience, his kindness, and his infectious love of math that made a challenging subject relatable and success attainable. Throughout his long years in the classroom, Bro. Gary delighted in corny math jokes, cartoons about square roots, and an endless stream of bad puns. For many years Pi Day, March 14th (3.14...), was celebrated with great fanfare including posters, balloons, and, of course, pie!

With advancing age and increasing health concerns, Bro. Gary’s physical mobility and mental acuity declined. When he no longer felt sharp enough to be in the classroom, he began tutoring and eventually worked at organizing the archives at Kellenberg. Mrs. Rosemary Dugal, a member of the Kellenberg staff who was facing medical challenges of her own, worked alongside him: “What made Brother Gary such a good mentor was his cheerful demeanor, clear directions, patience, and encouragement. We shared our health issues, doctors’ appointments, and physical struggles. Brother Gary never complained about his failing health but rather celebrated every good day. He provided me with comfort

and reassurance that I could handle any challenge. In Brother Gary I found inspiration in how to face each day with a spirit of gratitude and a sense of humor. Brother Gary had much more to teach me before he left. I miss my mentor, and I will miss my friend.”

When Brother Gary's health required more attention and supervision, he joined the St. Leonard's Community in Centerville, OH, in July 2023. Bro. Gary was very happy to spend his last months in that community, surrounded by the fraternal spirit of the Brothers that first attracted him to life as a Marianist. “I realize that the life of a Marianist is the total gift of self, forever, to Mary,” he had written to the provincial when he requested first vows in 1965. “This is the life, the love that I want.” This is the life that ended peacefully nearly sixty years later.