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In Memoriam: Fr. François Rossier

University of Dayton

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The Rev. François Rossier, S.M., executive director of the University of Dayton's International Marian Research Institute, one of the largest international centers of study, research and teaching on Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, has died. He was 59.
The University will hold a Memorial Mass for Rossier at 5 p.m. Thursday, March 9, in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. The Rosary will precede Mass at 4 p.m. A dinner in the Kennedy Union ballroom will follow Mass. Rossier’s funeral Mass and burial will be in his native Switzerland.

Rossier, a former student of Pope Benedict XVI, was born in Fribourg in 1957, took his first vows in 1984 and was ordained in 1991; he came to Dayton in 2003 and became executive director of the International Marian Research Institute in 2010.

"François was dedicated to the mission of IMRI of making Mary more known, loved and served. He cared deeply about IMRI's work and its students," said Kathleen Webb, dean of University libraries."He was a lovely person. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know and work with him. He was kind and thoughtful."

As executive director, Rossier worked to make Mary more accessible worldwide. He supported the efforts of the Marian Library to launch a new version of its All About Mary website with centuries of information about the world's most famous mother at anyone's fingertips — from scripture and literature to poetry, scholarly publications, art and popular culture.

"There is a great desire to be better acquainted with her by many people of faith," Rossier said at the time of his appointment. "There is a renewal of interest in Mary around the world. She's the most written-about woman in the entire human history, and she's an emblem of Catholic tradition and identity."

In addition to the world-wide web, Rossier sought to expand knowledge of Mary into University of Dayton classrooms. The International Marian Research Institute worked with the University's religious studies program to create a Marian concentration for the master's degree in theological studies and a Marian studies certificate.

"Fr. Rossier was very interested in connecting with the University community beyond the IMRI. He cared deeply about the mission and identity of our Marianist and Catholic university," said the Rev. James Fitz, S.M., University of Dayton vice president for mission and rector. "Beyond IMRI, he taught in the religious studies department, assisted in sacramental ministry, and served on a number of committees that focused on our identity — the Lackner Award Committee, the Marianist Foundation Board and the Partnership for Service with the Catholic Church."

The Marianists — Society of Mary — are the founders and sponsors of the University of Dayton.

At home around the world, Rossier spoke five languages and taught on every inhabited continent. With extended time in Togo and Ivory Coast, Rossier had a deep interest in and love of African cultures. He retained that special affection and sometimes helped out at St. Benedict the Moor parish, which ministers to many of Dayton's African-American Catholics.

Rossier is survived by his mother, Denyse Rossier; brothers Pierre, Jacques and Phillipe Rossier; and sister Christiane.

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257, 937-367-2889 or pshindell1@udayton.edu.