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103 Years of Faith, Friendship

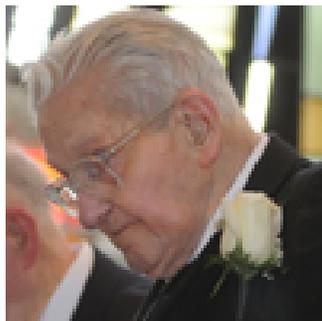
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103 Years of Faith, Friendship

07.31.2012 | Campus and Community, Catholic, Faculty

The much-beloved Brother Frank Deibel, S.M., the nation's oldest vowed religious man, passed away Monday, July 30, at Mercy Siena Gardens in Dayton, just a few weeks short of his 104th birthday and the 86th anniversary of taking vows in the Society of Mary.

Viewing will be 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 4, at the University of Dayton's Immaculate Conception Chapel followed by a 10:30 a.m. funeral Mass, celebrated by the Rev. Martin Solma, S.M., provincial of the Marianist Province of the United States. A reception will follow in the

Kennedy Union Torch Lounge. Burial will be at 3 p.m. at Mount Saint John in Beavercreek.

"It's a real loss," said Brother Bob Wiethorn, S.M., director of the Marianists at Mercy Siena. "Everyone just loved him, and he touched so many people. For me he embodied what it means to be a Marianist."

The retired University of Dayton librarian and Marianist had kept up with more than 100 friends by email, walking daily to visit other residents and to pray at a statue of Mary, the mother of Christ.

On Aug. 13 last year, he celebrated his birthday and his 85th jubilee as a Marianist. He was the oldest vowed religious man known by the National Religious Retirement Office of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

He said then his secret to a long life was daily walks and his faith.

"I think that's what's kept me going. Love Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Take a walk every day. Live a good life. Say your prayers and do penance now and then," he said.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1908, Deibel started high school in 1922 at the Marianist Postulate at Mount St. John in Greene County, Ohio, a school for boys interested in becoming Marianists as adults.

He professed first vows in 1926, and made his final vows in 1931 in the University's Immaculate Conception Chapel. He graduated from the University in 1929 with a bachelor's degree in English and minors in Latin and Greek.

He taught at Catholic high schools in Ohio for two decades, coming to the University of Dayton in 1954 as an assistant librarian in the University's library, holding that position for nearly 50 years.

Deibel moved to the Marianist retirement community at Mercy Siena in 2003, where he communicated with friends and kept up on current events through the Internet, surrounded by memorabilia of a life still brimming with friendship, faith and love across generations.

He is survived by a niece, four nephews, and many grandnieces and grandnephews.

Deibel had rallied after returning to the retirement community last week from a three-week hospitalization for pneumonia, even starting physical therapy and enjoying a visit from his family on Sunday, Wiethorn said.

"He was alert, and his mind was fine and his spirit was as good as ever," he said. "Brother Frank said he was tired, but was praying his rosary and reading his prayers as usual. He was very with it."

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