



Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie
Via Latina 22, 00179 Roma



January 11, 2022

Biography of Death Notice N. 1

The Province of Meribah recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Philip Karl EICHNER**, priest, of the Our Lady of Good Counsel Community, Cottekill, New York, USA who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on January 1, 2022, in Kingston, New York USA, at the age of 86 with 67 years of religious profession.

For many decades, Fr. Philip kept a plaque in his office with a quote from the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Every successful undertaking is a triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever achieved without it." Bro. Michael McAward, the Assistant General for Temporalities, who was formed as both a religious and a leader by Fr. Philip, summed up Philip's long life and ministry as an enthusiastic embrace of passion and compassion: "He never, never, ever, did anything half-way. His passion spanned every conceivable area of interest, and thus he could wax eloquent on so many topics. He taught us to think big, to dream, and to dare. At the same time, he taught us to plan well and to work hard, but also to read the signs of the times and to adapt as necessary."

Philip was born on June 24, 1935, in New York City, the oldest of the five children

of Ludwig and Anna (McDonaugh) Eichner. When Philip was a young boy, the family moved to Long Island where Philip attended Holy Ghost School in New Hyde Park, NY. Philip excelled as a student at Chaminade High School in Mineola, NY, cultivating the intellectual curiosity and love of languages that would characterize the rest of his life. Although he initially felt called to the diocesan priesthood, Philip's involvement in the Sodality and the influence of his Marianist teachers drew him to the Society of Mary. In August of 1953, Philip entered the Marianist Novitiate at Marcy, NY. He professed his first vows on September 8, 1954. In requesting admission to vows in the Society of Mary, Bro. Philip wrote to the provincial, "By the profession of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the religious gives himself to God. But in a truer sense he is really the receiver of the gifts of God. He is not choosing God; God is choosing him" (June 5, 1954).

After studies at the University of Dayton, Philip was assigned to St. Joseph's High School in Cleveland, Ohio. He spent five very happy years there, teaching Latin, moderating the student council and the school newspaper, and organizing retreats. Fr. James Heft, S.M., of the SJH Class of 1961, was one of his students in those days and became a life-long friend: "He was a brilliant teacher who took a personal interest in his students. He also was interested in what I thought. I found that unusual and invigorating. He was a teacher who wanted to know what I thought not just about Latin, but about life. His mentoring started me on a journey as a teacher and writer in more ways than I know. He commented on several things I had recently written just three weeks before he died." Thousands of former students could give similar testimony about their teacher of "Latin and life" whose tenure in the classroom lasted from 1957 until 2018.

Fr. Philip's years at the Marianist Seminary in Fribourg, Switzerland (1962-1966), coincided with the sessions of Vatican Council II. Philip was captivated both by studying St. Thomas Aquinas in Latin and by the "ressourcement" and "aggiornamento" emanating from the Council.

After his ordination on March 26, 1966, Philip returned to Chaminade-Mineola for what was supposed to be a brief visit home before returning to Europe to complete his doctorate. *Man proposes, God disposes*. Fr. Philip was to spend the entirety of his ministry as a Marianist priest on Long Island. In 1967, the young priest was appointed the Director of the Chaminade-Mineola Community and the

President of Chaminade High School. Fr. Philip would continue in Marianist Community and educational leadership until his retirement in 2018.

The 1960s and 70s were challenging times in the Church and society. Structures were breaking down and religious life and education were being shaken at the roots. Following our Founder's method of reading the signs of the times, Fr. Philip confronted these challenges with courage and vision. "The existence of the Province of Meribah is a testimony to his prophetic skills," Fr. Thomas Cardone, S.M., said during his homily at the funeral Mass. "Discerning what to preserve and what to update was a real challenge of the day. Community life and worship, common religious dress, the educational apostolate, religious formation – navigating these issues required courage, prudence, wisdom and a rich understanding of Church history and ecclesiology." Along with Fr. Francis Keenan, S.M., Fr. Philip was the founder of the Province of Meribah in 1976. He served as the Provincial from 1984-1992 and in various leadership roles in the Province from 1976 until 2008.

Fr. Philip's educational leadership was equally bold and visionary. Under his leadership and guidance as President from 1967 to 1992, Chaminade High School experienced tremendous growth in both the physical plant and in student enrollment while at the same time developing a national reputation for academic excellence and fostering vocations to the Church.

In 1987, the Marianists of the Province of Meribah were asked by the diocesan bishop to transform a failing high school in Uniondale, NY, a few miles from Chaminade. Fr. Philip embraced the apostolic challenge of Kellenberg Memorial High School and dedicated the rest of his life to creating an "environment that educates" both heart and mind. Bro. Kenneth Hoagland, the Principal of Kellenberg Memorial since 1994, who worked alongside Fr. Philip, summed up his legacy: "There isn't any aspect of Kellenberg Memorial that we cannot trace back to his influence. Describe anything unique to Kellenberg and you will find Father Philip's imagination and vision. 'Atmosphere educates,' he would often say. Fr. Philip certainly created a campus that welcomed students and their families to our school and reflected his love of nature and his devotion to Mary. More importantly, it was his wisdom in guiding a new and young faculty in methods of forming not only the minds of students but also their hearts and spiritual imaginations that distinguishes Marianist education at Kellenberg.

Kellenberg Memorial is known for its fervent Catholic Identity. We are grateful for Fr. Philip's religious sensitivity and his commitment to formation in faith."

Fr. Philip retired as President of Kellenberg Memorial High School in May 2018, concluding fifty-one years of service and leadership in Marianist education. Truly not only a triumph of enthusiasm, but of endurance as well.

In recent years, Philip grew increasingly frail, and his eyesight deteriorated, a great frustration to a voracious life-long reader. After a fall in November that resulted in several fractured ribs, he developed pneumonia and congestive heart failure. He died peacefully on the evening of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Pray for him, Holy Mother of God, that he may be worthy of the promises of Christ.
