



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



September 23, 2026

Biography of Death Notice N. 11

The Region of Togo commends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Norbert Piabalo AGOURA**, of the community of the Prenovitiate of Our Lady of Yes, in Kara (Togo), who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on September 4, 2026, in Kara, at the age of 64, with 39 years of religious profession.

Brother Norbert was a discreet Marianist, regular and tireless at work, whom some confreres had come to affectionately nickname "the monk". His prayer life and his punctuality in all things commanded respect. He devoted most of his religious life to agriculture, convinced that one could serve God behind a plough.

Norbert Piabalo Agoura was born on March 31, 1962 in Yadé, in the prefecture of Kozah, in northern Togo. His mother, Falla Patchazé, had him baptized on April 16, to place him under God's protection. He was the sixth of seven siblings of Agoura Kpatcha, a farmer according to Kabyè customs. His older brother

became a teacher in Catholic education. Norbert attended the primary school in Yadé, then the neighboring school until the third grade.

His Christian fervour was reawakened from his confirmation on April 29, 1979. He taught catechism to the children of his village, accompanied a nun to animate the celebrations in the bush chapels and led a group of young FOCOLARE in his neighborhood. Animated by the desire to consecrate himself to God, he visited the Benedictine monastery of Dzogbégan twice. But he understood that his vocation called him instead to proclaim Christ as close as possible to the people of the world. " *Like her, I would like to become a vestibule for the house of the Father through whom Jesus passed to give us salvation* ," he wrote of Mary in his request to enter the Prenovitiate in 1985.

Norbert entered the Marianist Prenovitiate of Our Lady of Yes in Kara on September 12, 1985 — the only candidate in his class — under the guidance of Father Paul Schenker. To reach the novitiate in Abidjan the following year, he had to pass through Lomé, the Togolese capital, which had just been shaken by the attack of September 23, 1986. He pronounced his first vows on October 11, 1987, then began studying theology and catechesis at the Catholic Institute of West Africa in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

Having become aware of his gifts for agriculture, his superiors sent him in 1989 to train in Switzerland. Attached to the community of university students in Fribourg, he had an unusual experience: during the week, he shared the work of the farm at the Cistercian monastery of Hauterive, learning to combine work and continual prayer — the *Ora and Labora* — before joining his Marianist confreres for the weekend. He completed this immersion with scientific training at the Grangeneuve School of Agriculture, also in Switzerland. He returned to Togo in 1992, rich in a spirituality of a job well done as well as a solid agricultural know-how.

Assigned to the Collège Chaminade in Kara, he taught agriculture and became bursar of the school and the community. He took care of the school farm for more than ten years, modernizing the livestock and food crops while supervising the students' manual work. Several generations of former students still remember him under the mischievous nickname of "*Two Comma Five*", a nickname

inherited from the 250 CFA francs (two hundred-franc coins and one fifty-franc coin) that he paid to each student for the work of an afternoon of service at the school.

In 2002, Brother Norbert joined the young community of Sotouboua to develop the " Our Lady of Hope " farm. But from 2004 onwards, the agricultural project gradually took another direction, transforming itself into a vast commercial enterprise that stifled the life of prayer and community. On February 17, 2006, in a letter, Norbert dared to express his suffering to his Regional Superior: " *My heart no longer beats for this project [...] I have searched and I have not found the religious meaning or the Marianist spirit.*" His frankness contributed to the separation, in 2008, between the Region and the project, which became the "CECO Group" company. He again managed the community farm for several years.

True to what he had learned in Grangeneuve, he always preferred a moderately mechanized crop. In 2008, he launched a project to produce organic fertilizers called " Get up and walk ". He negotiated the raw material directly with neighboring Fulani herders, in a gesture that nourishes both the land and peace between neighboring rural communities. His farm employed out-of-school rural youth and vulnerable women, and each year welcomed interns from the National Institute of Agricultural Training in Tové (Togo).

From 2011, he also put himself at the service of the very young Robert Mattlé Catholic Scientific High School, born on the same estate, where he taught manual work and agricultural initiation. In this way, he participated in forming the head, heart and hands of a new generation according to the Marianist ideal. In 2022, already tired by so many years of dedication, he agreed to join the Prenovitate of Kara to strengthen the formation community.

His health then began to decline. He was diagnosed with hypertension, then diabetes. In April 2025, he suffered a stroke from which he recovered quickly. " *He was a disciplined man, who scrupulously observed the instructions received* ," his doctors testify. Despite these hardships, he continued, without complaint, his activities at the school and in the community (gardening and

breeding livestock). He remained regular and punctual until the end, as during the annual retreat, which ended a week before his death.

On the morning of September 4, 2026, he was still with his confreres at prayer and work. Shortly before midday, a dizzy spell caused him to faint; rushed to the University Hospital of Kara, he fell asleep in the Lord, thus completing his life in the service of the Virgin Mary.

Brother Norbert Agoura will be remembered as a man of great humility, of quiet devotion and of a deep faith, entirely devoted to the work of the land and the poor it feeds. May he rest in peace.
