

February 6, 2024

Dear Associates and Sisters,

It is with heavy hearts that we have learned of the passing of the Fr. Thomas Ellerman, SM. Fr. Tom died on September 9, 2023, in Atlanta, Georgia at the age of 83. He was born in May of 1940 to Richard and Genevieve (Froelich) Ellerman



The Oldenburg Franciscan Sisters were frequently mentioned in Tom's childhood as he remembered four generations of his family were influenced by the Sisters in both Evansville and Cincinnati. His maternal grandfather was a friend of Sr. Clarissa Dillhoff. Sr. Francis Jean Sandschulte served as Fr. Tom's contact sister in his discernment to becoming an Oldenburg Franciscan Associate signing his commitment in June 1986. He was an alumnus of St. Catherine's in Westwood, Cincinnati and later of Marist College where he graduated in 1958 as valedictorian of the class. Upon his graduation, Tom was named by the faculty as the recipient of the Sedes Sapientiae Award, the highest honor bestowed on a Marist senior in recognition for his excellence in exemplifying the Marist mission through scholarship, loyalty, and service. After receiving a bachelor's degree in philosophy from The Catholic University of America in 1963, he received a Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical Athenaeum of St. Anselm in Rome, Italy, where he also received the Licentiate in Sacred Theology in 1968.

Fr. Tom was ordained a priest on October 2, 1967. He served as Associate Pastor at Holy Name of Mary Parish in New Orleans from 1968-1969. His next assignment took him to Notre' Dame Seminary, New Orleans from 1969-1976 where he served as a faculty member. From 1976-1977 he served as a High School Religion Teacher at St. Borromeo in Destrehan, Louisiana. From 1977 until 2001 he taught Theology and Philosophy at the University of Holy Cross, formerly Our Lady of the Holy Cross College in New Orleans. From 2001-2012 he served as rector and director of the postulants at St. Peter Chanel Seminary in Berkeley, California. After their house closed in Berkeley, he resided at the Marist Center in west San Francisco for three years. In 2015 he returned to Marist School, Atlanta where he was involved with two Boards of Trustees, four prayer groups, and a variety of Marist School Community activities.

Fr. Tom's contributions to the Society of Mary and its ministries were extensive. He served as a member of provincial chapters, councils, committees and formation programs, moderated various chapters of the Third Order of Mary, a group of Marist laity. During his retirement he wrote extensively about Father Jean-Claude Colin's vision for Marist Education. He was gifted with the ability to read Latin, French, Italian along with some German and Spanish. His areas of expertise included: Theology, Philosophy, Spirituality, Religious Life Formation, and the History of Religious Life.

Sr. Jean, when serving as Fr. Tom's contact person commented, "If Fr. Tom had been a female, he certainly would have become an Oldenburg Franciscan Sister." She went on to say, "He has helped me to think more deeply about justice, peace, and ecological issues. He has given me many good ideas for my own religious community."

Fr. Tom could not have been more grateful for the Oldenburg Franciscan Sisters and the many contacts he had made in this community. He was especially grateful that as a Marist Priest he was allowed to become an Oldenburg Associate and was quoted as saying, "Even though I live at a distance from Oldenburg, I find it enriching and enlivening to be an Associate. As a male religious it also serves me well to see things a little through feminine eyes."

Fr. Tom did not lack for humor. Upon returning an Associate Reflection Guide late, he noted, “Dear Friends, sorry I am so late with this. Thank God I did not take a vow of efficiency.”

Even though distance kept Fr. Tom from visits to Oldenburg, he enjoyed our communications especially when he was featured in Community News, Soaring Thoughts, in January of 2023.

Fr. Tom was preceded in death by his parents and one brother Roger Patrick. He is survived by two sisters Patricia O’Connell (Daniel) and Mary Ann Regan (Harry) and many nieces, nephews, and greats.

Fr. Tom you have touched the lives of many in the numerous places and ministries you have held over the years. May you rest peacefully in the loving arms of God.

Jane Schaefer