



**Society of Mary - Compañía de María - Société de Marie**  
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### **Biography of Death Notice N. 41**

The Province of the United States recommends to our fraternal prayers our dear brother, **Donald Raymond GEIGER**, of the Siena Woods Marianist Community of Dayton, Ohio, USA, who died in the service of the Blessed Virgin Mary on December 29, 2020, in Dayton, at the age of 87 with 68 years of religious profession.

Brother Don was a noted scientist, an environmentalist and a teacher for more than five decades. He founded the Marianist Environmental Education Center and was instrumental in the creation of other conservation organizations and programs. He believed profoundly in valuing and preserving God's creation, and he inspired others to join in this work.

Donald Raymond Geiger was the only child of Raymond and Hedwig (Weghorst) Geiger, born February 27, 1933, in Dayton, Ohio, where he would live and minister for nearly his entire life. Young Donald attended St. Anthony parish school and Chaminade High School, where his Marianist teachers encouraged his passion for science and his interest in religious life.

He entered the Marianist novitiate at Marcy, New York, in 1951, and professed first vows there a year later, on September 5, 1952. He attended the University of Dayton, earning a bachelor's degree in biology in 1955. That autumn, Brother Don began his long teaching ministry, serving for the next five years (1955-1960) at Cathedral Latin in Cleveland, Ohio. He professed perpetual vows on August 15, 1956, in Dayton.

For the next several years, Brother Don continued in the classroom, but as a student again. He attended The Ohio State University in Columbus, earning a master's degree in botany in 1960, and a doctorate in plant physiology in 1963.

Brother Don then returned to his hometown and to his alma mater, the University of Dayton. In January 1964, he began teaching at UD, a ministry and profession he combined seamlessly for the next 44 years. Over the decades, he developed and taught a number of biology courses, with an emphasis on plant physiology and environmental biology.

Nan Schivone was a UD student in the early 1990s, and while she was not a science major, she called Brother Don "hugely influential." "Brother Don welcomed me into his hard-science world with open arms. He showed me that the true wonders of nature are apparent only by first delving into the minutia, then zooming out to the system as a whole to appreciate the design of creation," she said. "He encouraged me to take academic risks and try new things. He advised me on courses, research and life after college."

Dr. Paul Benson, UD provost and executive vice president of academic affairs, considered Brother Don a personal hero. "He not only inspired and mentored thousands of biology students, but he was a major influence on many of our faculty across the university. Don Geiger was deeply respected by his colleagues as an excellent teacher-scholar and a beloved, visionary faculty member," Dr. Benson said.

In addition to teaching, Brother Don was also a respected researcher, author and presenter. His research often focused on the restoration of prairies and wetlands, as well the control of a sorely invasive species of honeysuckle. His research was funded by or contracted through entities including the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Energy, among many others. Brother Don was an invited presenter at numerous professional conferences in the United States, as well as in Germany, France and the United Kingdom. His list of

published articles runs many pages.

Despite his professional success and impressive scholarship, Brother Don remained a kind, generous soul, warmly supportive of his students, colleagues, fellow Marianists and all who entered his orbit. Longtime friend Brother Mitch Schweikart said that Brother Don, always a slim man, had an approach to simplicity that was inspirational. "With Don, from his wardrobe to his possessions, even to his own body, there was very little 'spare' anything. Don's lifestyle radiated simplicity," Brother Mitch said.

In 1996, working with like-minded conservationists, Brother Don founded the Marianist Environmental Education Center (MEEC) on the grounds of Mount St. John in Dayton. The establishment of MEEC continued Brother Don's restoration of Mount St. John's prairie, woods, wetlands and meadows, and his mentoring of students, volunteers and all who loved learning about and caring for God's creation.

Brother Don saw little distinction between life as a Marianist and life as a scientist. "I remember coming home for lunch one day, and there was a peculiar odd smell in the house," said Brother Mitch. A brief investigation revealed its source. "Don had loaded up our cookie trays with soil from the garden and was cooking it in order to sterilize it," Brother Mitch said. MEEC had no oven, so Brother Don "used whatever he could for the sake of the mission."

Marianist Sister Leanne Jablonski was a graduate student of Brother Don's in the early 1980s. She said he greatly influenced her own call to religious life, showing her she could be both a scientist and a religious sister. "Don applied his brilliant intellect to plant productivity research, hands-on ecological restoration and mentoring all people who loved learning and encountering the wonders of God's creation," Sister Leanne said. Brother Don served as MEEC's director until 2002 when he handed over stewardship to Sister Leanne.

During his long ministry at UD, Brother Don was involved in a number of initiatives beyond teaching and research. These included Strategies for Responsible Development and Projet Tapis Vert, an integrated agricultural development project in the Republic of Niger, West Africa. Brother Don was a co-founder of the Rivers Institute, an environmental organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of the Miami River watershed.

Brother Don retired as a UD professor in 2008 but continued to be active with MEEC, the Rivers Institute and UD's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

Long before Pope Francis penned his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Brother Don embodied it, according to Brother John Lemker. "Don's care for Mother Earth was profound, both in his teaching and tireless nurturing of the land. He planted many seeds of justice and peace as he stood strongly for the integrity of creation," said Brother John.

In 2011, an expanse of restored prairie at MEEC was named in Brother Don's honor. The site is part of a conservation area recognized by the State of Ohio and protected in perpetuity. The Brother Don Geiger Prairie, with its waving grasses, abundant wildflowers and buzzing honeybees, provides a living tribute to a man who saw God in nature, and who found fulfillment and joy in serving both.

May he rest in peace.