

[Press Release/ Obituary]

Founder of the Anawim Community Dies in the Philippines

Fr. Francis J. Marino, S.M, founder and spiritual father of the Anawim Community, passed away peacefully at the Anawim Community Center in Manila, Philippines, on October 1, 2007. He was 82 years old, and had recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

Fr. Marino – more affectionately called Fr. Francis – was born in Massachusetts in 1925. His family later moved to New York, where he grew up. After a most difficult childhood, he experienced a powerful grace of conversion, which he received through the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes. Everything changed for him! He would later describe the experience as being something like being lost in a very dark room and then suddenly coming out into the brightness of the midday sun. Impelled by the interior force of this grace, he dedicated his entire life to the service of God and the Church. In 1948, he joined the Society of Mary (Marist Fathers, Boston Province), and made his solemn profession on September 8, 1956. On May 31, 1957, at age 32, he was ordained a priest by Richard Cardinal Cushing.

While still a seminarian, Fr. Francis received a special grace of insight into the place of Mary in the liturgy. In the early 1960s, his efforts to convey this insight to others resulted in his painting of the image now known as the icon of *Our Lady of the Liturgical Life*. He had a burning desire to share with others the gift he had received through Mary, the gift of “living the liturgy” in the heart of Mother Church. Always with the permission of his Marist superiors, Fr. Francis explored various ways he could help others live according to this spirituality. In 1966, he helped establish a contemplative community of women. Some years later, he tried to found a men’s community as well, but that effort ended in failure.

Finally in 1975, at age 50, together with Barbara Brennan, he founded the Anawim Community, a community of laity and priests originally based at St. Mary’s House of Prayer in Corning, New York. (“*Anawim*” is a Hebrew word from the Bible, meaning “the poor of God.”) Fr. Francis spent the rest of his life building up the Anawim Community in a rich Marian, Eucharistic and liturgical spirituality. Barbara Brennan, Anawim’s Co-Director, remained his closest collaborator throughout his life, and cared for him till his death. Now Anawim, one of the “new movements” which have arisen in the Church in the period of renewal after Vatican Council II, has centers in New York, New Jersey, and the Philippines. During his later years, Fr. Francis spent much of his time and energy fostering the growth of Anawim in Manila, forming the seminarians and lay associates. In all, he made more than fifteen trips to the Philippines, continuing his mission travels well into his seventies and eighties.

Fr. Francis was a powerful and challenging preacher and a popular spiritual director. He had an uncanny sense of identifying the foibles and hidden deceptions in the human condition. People were at times disquieted and even scandalized by his forceful personality, but no one could question his absolute dedication to the Church and to the work of promoting the spiritual life for everyone he met. He was an avid disciple of John Paul II, in whom he found a kindred spirit as

well as a solid theological source for explaining the insights he received by grace and intuition. He was also a lifelong student of the mystical life. His primary guides were spiritual writers of modern times, notably St. Therese of Lisieux, Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity, and the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta.

Innumerable people received rich spiritual benefits through his ministry, but Fr. Francis himself struggled throughout his adult years with a sense of inner darkness, a trial he called the “tomb experience.” This struggle was in part due to his perception that he was inadequate to the task God had assigned to him. His perseverance in faith while “in the tomb” gave him a profound understanding of human nature, and tender compassion for the suffering and the broken.

Weakened by a heart condition that required two major surgeries, and a crippling bout of hydrocephalus, Fr. Francis gradually became less active in his ministry, but his reputation for holiness grew. People were inspired by his short insightful comments, his demeanor, and his blessings. Many found strength simply being in his presence as he persevered under the weight of his illnesses. In March 2007, he was diagnosed with lung cancer, which eventually spread to the brain. After a six-month battle with cancer, during which he continuously offered himself and his suffering to God, he died peacefully in his sleep at the Anawim Community Center in Manila, at 11:45 p.m. In the final weeks, he was limited to a wheelchair, but he was able to participate in the Mass right up to the day he died.

The timing of his death was most striking. It took place on the threshold between two feast days that were very significant in his spirituality. October 1 is the Feast of St. Therese of Lisieux, whose doctrine of “spiritual childhood” is an integral part of Anawim spirituality. October 2 is the Feast of the Guardian Angels, to whom Fr. Francis had great devotion, as the angels are participants in the liturgical life of both heaven and earth.

Fr. Francis can count as his spiritual children the hundreds of men and women who follow the grace of the Anawim life, and the thousands who benefit from his spiritual guidance through the publication he founded, *The Anawim Way*, a periodic collection of daily liturgical meditations still being produced by his followers.

He is survived by his brother Sebastian Marino of Massachusetts, and his sister Joyce Marino Rossitto of Florida.

In accord with his wishes, his mortal remains are buried on the grounds of the Shrine of Our Lady of the Liturgical Life, Las Piñas, Metro Manila.