

Terrence Pfender, O.Carm. 1949-1999

"Terry Pfender was very kind, loving and compassionate," wrote Fr. Samuel Citero who worked with Terry in both campus ministry and the vocation apostolate. "He was a marvelous priest and a genuine Carmelite. His authenticity is what won him confidence and respect among the students. They understood that he was real, and he lived what he preached. Honesty is the key to successful ministry to young people. Terry put on no false fronts. What you saw was what you got. Students trusted that, and they loved him for it. They let him into their lives and he was able to help them, to make a difference and to impact them for life."

Terrence Mario Pfender was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on 25 March 1949, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick and Norma (Cuda) Pfender. In addition to Terry, the family included two sisters, Judith and Janice, and a brother, Frederick. He attended St. Martin Grade School before joining the Carmelites at Mt. Carmel Prep Seminary in Niagara Falls, Ontario. In those days, high school seminarians attended Mt. Carmel for the first two years, and then spent their junior and senior years at the Carmelite Junior Seminary in Hamilton, Massachusetts.

Terrence made a more formal entry into Carmelite life when he professed his simple vows at the Carmelite Novitiate, then located at Mt. Carmel College in Niagara Falls. He would solidify his commitment to Carmel with his solemn profession of vows at Whitefriars Hall in Washington, D.C. on 30 March 1975.

Terry attended Mt. Carmel College for the academic year of 1967-68. Following the tragic fire at Niagara in November of 1967, the entire group of college students and faculty moved to Carmel Hall at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And in May of 1972, he graduated from Marquette University with a B.A. degree in Spanish. He then attended Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts for four summers to obtain an M.A. degree in education. During the winter months he attended the Washington Theological Union in Silver Spring, Maryland and received an M. Div. degree in theology.

During his studies for the priesthood, he also taught at DeSales High School in Louisville, Kentucky in 1972-73, and served in parish ministry at St. Therese Church in Cresskill, New Jersey in 1973-74. And as a deacon, he assisted at Sacred Heart Cathedral in Fairbanks, Alaska, from May to August of 1976 where he was active in developing Religious Education, setting up a Parish Resource Center, and co-founding a Parish Council.

Family and friends gathered at St. James Church in Pittsburgh on Saturday, 14 May 1977 at 11:00 AM to witness the ordination of Terrence Pfender. The Most Reverend Robert L. Whelan, S.J., D.D., bishop of Fairbanks and Northern Alaska, was the ordaining prelate. Terry had been a volunteer in his diocese.

The following day, Terry offered a concelebrated Mass of Thanksgiving at St. James Church. A public reception for family and friends followed.

Following ordination, Terry was assigned to parish ministry at St. Patrick's Church in Niagara Falls, Ontario during 1978. Here he used his considerable ministry skills to enhance the life, spiritual and communal, of the parish. And from 1978-80, he did much the same at St. Anastasia Church in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Terry's next area of apostolate was at Crespi Carmelite High School in Encino, California. Here he served as student counselor, campus minister, and Spanish teacher. He eventually rose to the position of vice-principal of Academic Affairs.

"Terry Pfender was humorous and compassionate for the underdog," said fellow Crespite, Fr. Kevin McBrien. "He was a caring and thoroughly good person, but refused to be manipulated. He was not naive but sometimes seemed that way. He could size a person up easily, and was eminently balanced. He was

always willing to help out, especially when people needed help. He always seemed to know what was going on. He seemed innocent but was savvy. He always went the extra mile for the individual and the person, no matter what the cost. He was very faithful to a sense of duty."

As a student, Terry would probably be considered average. He handled his studies well, and felt that his studies were tools for ministry. He would later be a good teacher and administrator, but was mostly interested in person-to-person ministry.

When the PCM Province undertook the campus ministry program at the University of Southern Illinois at Carbondale, Terry found a new outlet for his considerable ministry skills.

Fr. Samuel Citero said about their work there: "Terry Pfender was an excellent campus minister in that he had a gift of presence. He was able to make students, faculty and staff feel confident that he was there for them. He gave generously of his time. He was a patient listener and often helped many people through difficult times in their lives. He made each person he dealt with feel special and important. He was non-judgmental and compassionate. He was willing to share his own story, and struggle and faith."

At the University of Southern Illinois, Terry was a very popular member of the RCIA team, and also a good preacher and presider at Liturgy. People enjoyed his Masses, and found them to be very prayerful and insightful. He was also very proud of his Carmelite heritage, and shared the story and charism of the Carmelites whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Terry was then asked to participate in the Vocation Ministry of the PCM Province. Here, again, his ability to discern what individuals were about in seeking a vocation to Carmel stood him in good stead. It was said of Terry that he could size up almost any individual, and evaluate his potential as a possible Carmelite, in one or two meetings.

When his long battle with cancer began to diminish his ministry, Terry accepted the new limitations to his life, and the suffering that came, too. Through the times of illness, operations and recovery, Terry's family and friends, and fellow Carmelites, made the difficult journey with him, as much as they were able. Death came for Terry on Friday, 31 December 1999. A wake was held at the Slater Funeral Home in Pittsburgh, 4-5 January, and a Mass of Christian Burial was offered at St. James Church there on 6 January 2000. Interment followed at Queen of Heaven Cemetery in nearby Bridgeville, Pennsylvania. Fr. David Simpson, director of Carmel Retreat in Mahwah, New Jersey, was the principal celebrant, and Fr. Samuel Citero, director of the Carmelite Volunteer Community in Chicago, was the homilist.

Fr. Dominic Savino offered a Memorial Mass for Terry, who had also been very active in the Kairos retreats there at Crespi Carmelite High School in Encino.

"The beautiful part of all this is he did it with humility," concluded Fr. Citero. "He would be embarrassed by these acclamations. He was always ready to give others praise and credit. He knew his abilities and talents, but he never let success go to his head. He never thought he was better or smarter than anyone. Terrence was a gentle man with a gentle heart and loving spirit. His passing leaves an empty place in the lives of his former students and colleagues. He will be greatly missed."

Kevin Shanley, O. Carm.
St. Simon Stock Priory
Darien, Illinois