

Brother Vincent Damian, fms



Received the Breath of Life
Bronx NY — 25 June 1935

Called to Accept the Marist Brotherhood
Tyngsboro, MA 26 July 1952

Was Commended to God
27 October 2008
Lawrence Hospital, Bronxville NY

Mass of Christian Burial
St Joseph Church, Roselle NY
30 October 2008

Burial
Marist Brothers Cemetery, Esopus NY
31 October 2008

June 25, 1935 Born Francis Philip, Bronx, NY to Mary (Cunningham) and Frank Philip
His brother — Vincent Philip; his sister — Marie Philip Resmini

1948-1949 St. Agnes HS, NYC - Student

1949-1951 Marist Juniorate, Esopus NY

1951-1953 Marist Novitiate, Tyngsboro, Mass.

July 26, 1952 Received the Marist habit, Tyngsboro, Mass.

July 26, 1953 Professed First Vows, Tyngsboro, Mass.

1953-1956 Marist Scholasticate, Marian College, Poughkeepsie, NY 1956

1956 B.A. – French, Marian College, Poughkeepsie, NY

1956-1957 Marist Juniorate, Esopus, NY – Cook

1957-1962 St. Helena HS, Bronx, NY – Teacher

Aug 22, 1958 Professed Final Vows, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY

1962 M.S. – Psychology, St. John's University, NYC

1962-1967 Union Catholic HS, Scotch Plains, NJ – Asst. Principal

1967-1973 Union Catholic HS, Scotch Plains, NJ – Principal

Dec 25, 1969 Professed Vow of Stability, Scotch Plains, NJ

1970 M.S. – School Administration, Seton Hall University, NJ

1973-1974 Marist Second Novitiate, Fribourg, Switzerland

1974 Roselle Catholic HS, Roselle, NJ – Asst. Principal

1974-1977 Marist HS, Bayonne, NJ – Principal

1977-1978 Roselle Catholic HS, Roselle, NJ – Asst. Principal

1978-1980 Queen of Angels School, Newark, NJ – Asst. Principal

1980-1986 Roselle Catholic HS, Roselle, NJ – Principal

1986 Marist Brothers USA Centenary - Coordinator

1986-1992 Marist Provincial Office, Bayonne, NJ – Administrative Assistant

1992-1993 Queen of Angels School, Newark, NJ – Asst. Principal

1993-1995 Marist HS, Bayonne, NJ – Asst. Principal

1995-2001 Roselle Catholic, HS, Roselle, NJ – Principal

2001-2008 Roselle Catholic HS, Roselle, NJ – Administrator

Oct 27, 2008 Died – Lawrence Hospital, Bronxville, NY
Oct 30, 2008 Mass of Christian Burial, St. Joseph Church, Roselle, NJ
Oct 31, 2008 Burial – Marist Brothers Cemetery, Esopus NY

WE REMEMBER. WE CELEBRATE. WE BELIEVE

REMEMBERING BROTHER VINCENT DAMIAN

Eulogy given by Brother Owen Ormsby

We are brothers. We are professed religious who have heard the call of Jesus and have chosen to follow him. But we are not just brothers...we are Marist brothers and we take as our model St. Marcellin Champagnat. We live by his spirit...he guides our footsteps ...and our decisions...and we believe that we are heirs of his charism.

So it should not come as any surprise that the parallels between Father Champagnat and Brother Vincent Damian are striking:

A witness to the cause of beatification described Marcellin Champagnat in this way: "He was a little daunting to meet at first, but he quickly put at ease whoever came into contact with him. He was feared by some who knew him poorly, but he was loved by those who knew any thing of his real self."

Because he was a true son of Champagnat, one might also describe Brother Vincent Damian in the same manner. He could be a daunting much at ease. Some feared him, most respected him, but there is no doubt that he was very, very loved by those who knew him well...

As a young curate Marcellin was assigned to a small hamlet parish where he had to travel distances daily in order to serve those entrusted to him.

Francis Philip left his home at the age of 14 to enter the Juniorate of the Marist Brothers. After his profession of vows he spent 5 years at St. Helena's High School in the Bronx where he taught French and Typing. During the summer of 1962, the young brother received word through the grapevine that he was being re-assigned to "the Plains of Scotch." There he was to begin the Marist Brothers presence at Union Catholic High School. Little did Vinny know at that time that he was to spend the rest of his years as a Marist Brother living in the Garden State and serving the Church of Newark for more than 45 years.

Vinny's first introduction to RC [Roselle Catholic] also came in September of 1962. The Brothers residence was still being built at Union Catholic, so Vinny moved into his first New Jersey home – St. Walbereger's Orphanage. Bro. Vincent and Bro. Faustin lived here at Roselle Catholic and commuted daily to Union Catholic for an entire year. Vinny often recalled his bedroom. It was a first floor sitting parlor. quite large with huge florescent light bulbs hanging from the ceiling by a thin metal chain. Vinny did not sleep very well.

Marcellin faced challenges everyday of his life. He started our congregation in 1817 with just two brothers and at the time of his death the Institute had grown to 240.

In 1980 when Vinny became principal of RC for the first time the student enrollment was 352 students. The entire faculty and staff numbered 34. Robert James can vividly remember walking the halls with him wondering how they could fill the empty classrooms. They made one classroom into a Faculty Room, another into a Finance Office, and when Vinny finished his second tenure as principal, Roselle Catholic boasted its highest student enrollment. And in his last year Vinny had to make a Faculty Room back into a classroom in order to accommodate the number of students.

Champagnat was a builder; he had a deep devotion to Jesus and Mary and was confident that his work would succeed because he was convinced that it was their work...

The date was November 24, 1982. As Vinny drove down the hill by the Brothers House into the RC parking lot he was met by the sight of a complete company of fire engine. The Fire Chief approached him. "Are you Brother Vincent? Please come with me." And as he walked down the hallways everything he saw was melted; the damage was universal; the smell all encompassing; nevertheless, Vinny's worst fear was calmed: no one had been in the building, so no one was hurt.

One might think this would be a terrible memory for any principal...but it was not so for Vinny....Anyone who has ever heard him tell the story can tell you of the swelling pride in his voice when he spoke about the community of people who banded together to meet the challenge before them...

Debris was hauled out, large exhaust fans ran around the clock, and one week later school was back in session. And no one would have even known that there had been a fire.

(Of course, there are those who claim that Vinny acted so quickly because he didn't want to use up all his snow days!)

Marcellin Champagnat was a man of vision and an excellent administrator. To say that Vincent was a superb administrator is nothing less than an understatement. He has served among us as principal, Director of Education and Provincial counselor.

His philosophy on school administration was very simple: people are more important than buildings. Employ capable people, and support them as they do their jobs, and always remember that we are here for the students.

Vinny's philosophy of education rested solidly on these words of our Founder. "Those confided to you have been created in the image of God. What respect we should have therefore, for the students we teach. They are none other than the dwelling place of our God and Creator."

Vincent's sense of vision was not, however, limited to school administration. When we celebrated our Marist Centenary in 1986, Vinny and his life-long friend, Roy Mooney, provided an experience which I dare say every brother in the United States can vividly remember more than twenty years later. Their approach was simple: provide opportunities to let the brothers be with each other and enjoy each other, and together they helped, I believe, without even knowing it, to forge a spirit of pride in who we are and lay a foundation for the subsequent merging of the two provinces.

No matter how we chose to interpret past events, I am sure everyone would agree that Vinny loved to throw a party: the bigger, the better.

Father Champagnat was a "take charge" kind of person. He was able to size up a situation and act upon it, regardless of what others thought.

At the Centennial liturgy in St. Patrick's Cathedral Vincent took charge. School representatives and the Brothers of both provinces were made to line up outside on the sidewalk. Vincent saw the procession of concelebrants leave the vestibule and begin to walk down the side aisle. The Cardinal, he was told, wanted to start on time. As the Cardinal Archbishop approached the main aisle, Vincent halted the rector, who stood stunned and mystified, providing just enough time for Mike Brady to come huffing and puffing through the front doors leading the procession of Marist schools. In a booming voice Michael halted the procession "Stop! We will proceed with dignity." The Cardinal Archbishop had to wait as schools from around the US proudly carried their school banners down the Cathedral's main aisle, followed by all the Brothers, the Provincials, the Centenary Committee and last, but not least, Vincent and Roy.

Champagnat was persistent; he toiled selflessly to get the approval for his congregation, and he was relentless in his efforts when he wanted something.

I do not think I need to expound on this similarity. On a good day Vincent was "persistent," on other days one might simply say he was "stubborn." Just yesterday his brother, Vincent, recalled that one his all time favorite songs was Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way."

Champagnat had a deep sensitivity towards the poor. His institute of brothers was founded to serve the children and families whose poverty would not allow them to attend the schools of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, and he wanted his brothers to serve them in what ever way they could.

Renowned for his love of restaurants, you might be wondering what I will say next, but I can draw a parallel.

In 1978 Vinny left Roselle Catholic to start a Marist Brothers presence at Queen of Angels in Newark. While he quickly realized that he was not an elementary school educator, his dedication to the people of Queen of Angels and his support of our Marist work among the African American community is noteworthy. Vinny holds the distinction of living in our Newark community for 17 years – longer than any other American Marist Brother.

Champagnat deeply valued a sense of Family Spirit. The first thing he did after moving in with the brothers was to craft a table around which they would gather.

We all know how deeply Vinny loved Maplewood. For the last 17 years his life centered around making it a "home" for those of us who lived with him and those who visited. He enjoyed cooking and sitting by the fire. He insisted on celebrating birthdays, anniversaries and jubilees. He loved Christmas and his Christmas village.

Marcellin Champagnat was a man of passion and compassion.

In ways hidden and unknown to most, Vinny has deeply cared for the myriad of people that made up the tapestry of his life whether they be Brothers, colleagues, family members or friends. Like our Good Mother Mary, he brought the Gospel to life among us and gave us an opportunity to do the same.

Above all, Marcellin loved the brothers. And in his final days, one of Vinny's last decisions was to spend the rest of his days "among the brothers."

We are Marist Brothers, and Father Champagnat taught us that our sick brothers are a blessing not a burden. Raoul and I have witnessed no greater example of how Marist Brothers do this than walking with Vinny these last few months. We have seen our provincial, a man Vinny faced with in a run-off election for the office, hold a glass of juice to his parched lips in "servant leadership." The administration, staff and brothers of Champagnat Hall at Mt St Michael opened their arms to him and cared for him from the very moment he arrived in their midst. And neither Raoul nor I will ever forget the memory that on the day we brought Vinny to the Mount, his good friend Robert James was sitting on a bench outside waiting for him.

In Vinny's room above his bed hangs a remembrance of his 30 day retreat experience. It is a single verse from Isaiah which spoke volumes to his heart and speaks volumes to each of us this night:

*Thus says the Lord, who created you and formed you, Vincent.
Fear not, I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are Mine.*
