The Order of Carmelites of The Most Pure Heart of Mary Province mourn the loss of the Rev. Thomas Schaefer, O.Carm., who died on Tuesday, April 26, 2005 in Venice, Florida where he had been living in retirement.

Father Schaefer was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Jan 16, 1922, the youngest of three Schaefer children, to the late Ferdinand and late Genevieve (Dolan) Schaefer. Thomas was predeceased in death by his brother, Ferdinand Jr., and his sister, Margaret.


Born in Grand Rapids, Thomas, attended St. Stephen grade school there until his family moved to Chicago where he completed his grade school at St. Viator’s and St. Francis De Paula school before enrolling at Mt. Carmel High School on the city’s Southside.

According to an oral biography taken by Sister Ann Ganley, SSND, Fr. Thomas stated that his father earned a meager living for the family as a traveling jeweler. Thomas would tell the story of throwing rocks at the trains so that the engineer would throw pieces of coal back to be used for the coal stove at home.

After graduating from Mount Carmel High School he attended Mount Carmel Preparatory Seminary in Niagara Falls, Ontario to study for the priesthood in the Carmelite Order. In his biography, Thomas spoke of his love for those seminary years at Niagara Falls. Not only did he love the seminary but also his time at Camp Maria where the seminarians spent their summers. Fr. Silvan Boyle, O.Carm., who is retired and living in Phoenix, AZ, remembers his friend Ferdy as “a great classmate…a wonderful person who was always concerned about others. He was a great cook…on vacations he was the number one guy in the kitchen,” Fr. Boyle said. Thomas then went with his class mates to New Baltimore, Pennsylvania for a year of study as a Carmelite Novitiate. “He was a super guy and a good athlete,” stated Fr. Jerry Heinen, O.Carm., who was two years behind Fr. Thomas in formation and remembers him fondly. “The classes would play each other in sports contests and Ferdy (as we called him) would always excel in touch football and baseball,” said Fr. Heinen.

In New Baltimore, Thomas professed his first vows with the Order on August 15, 1942. There he took the religious name Ferdinand. Returning to Mt. Carmel College in Niagara Falls, he continued his studies in Philosophy and other subjects and also made his solemn profession there three years later to the date.

In 1945, Thomas (Ferdinand) Schaefer continued his religious journey attending Theology and other related classes in preparation for ordination to the Priesthood at Whitefriars Hall in
Washington, D.C. Fr. Thomas Ferdinand Schaefer, O.Carm., was ordained a priest in Chicago on June 5, 1948 and said his first Mass at St. Clara Parish there.

After a final year of study at Whitefriars Hall after ordination, Fr. Thomas began his career serving in parish life. Fr. Hilary Milton, O.Carm., who presently serves at St. Cecilia Parish in Englewood, New Jersey described Fr. Thomas Schaefer as “a pastoral and caring person who was there for the people.” Fr. Schaefer spent most of his career in New Jersey. From 1956 to 1989 Fr. Thomas served in St. Joseph’s parish in Bogotá; a pastor at St. John’s in Leonia and St. Anastasia parish in Teaneck until his appointment as director of St. Therese Chapel in the Bergen Mall Shopping Center in Paramus, New Jersey. Fr. Brice Riordan, O.Carm., who succeeded Fr. Thomas Schaefer as Director reflected on the six years that he spent with Fr. Thomas, “he established efficient procedures by which we run the chapel today… Oh God, he loved to shop! He was a real home body, didn’t travel much…just liked to tinker in the garage and around the house. And he loved to visit the parks and rivers by himself. During those years with me at the chapel… I found him very dedicated to his work,” Fr. Brice said.

In his priestly life, Fr. Schaefer spent a great amount of time in counseling, especially of alcoholics. He received a certificate as a psychotherapy counselor from the Alfred Adler Institute in New York. While in New York, Fr. Thomas uncovered his gift of painting. He continued to paint in some shape or form until his death. Fr. Thomas had other hobbies as well. He enjoyed whittling, and other arts and crafts, putting clocks together from kits, etc. He also received a certificate as an alcoholic counselor from the South Oaks Hospital in Amityville, Long Island, N.Y. and at Rutgers University in New Jersey. He also received accreditation from the American Examining Board of Psychoanalysis in 1981 which permitted Fr. Thomas to work as a Licensed Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist. Fr. Schaefer also did graduate work in Education at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. In his first years as an ordained priest, Fr. Thomas (Ferdinand) Schaefer, O.Carm. served in Chicago at St. Cyril’s then St. Clara’s parish and school with a short time between at St. Joe’s parish in Leavenworth, Kansas. While in Leavenworth, Fr. Thomas worked in prison ministry with women who were confined there.

In his later years Fr. Schaefer moved to Massachusetts where he served as the Director and Prior of Our Lady of the Scapular Priory and was director of the Chapel of St. Therese at the North Shore Shopping Mall in Peabody. Fr. Thomas was proud of his work as director of the Carmelite Chapels in both malls in NJ and MA. Fr. Thomas Schaefer retired from active ministry after his term at Peabody and retired first to Niagara Falls, but moved to Venice, after one year.

Sister Ann Ganley, a close friend for many years stated,” Fr. Thomas was a wonderful son, brother, an outstanding Carmelite, and a faithful friend. He had a joy about life that was catching.”

May he rest in peace.