

**R.I.P.  
DEACON WILLIAM TOTH, PH.D.**

---

*Associate Professor, Christian Ethics,  
Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology  
Seton Hall University*

*A Eulogy by Dianne Traflet*

Bill Toth knew how to craft a perfect sentence, one that was both informative and inspiring with well-chosen and well-placed words, conveying just the right tone and rhythm. My favorite line consisted of a mere two words offered with a grin and a twinkle in his eyes: “Good stuff!” Yes, Bill certainly could be more eloquent, but these words still conveyed rich meaning. When he first learned, for example, about an idea for a new encyclopedia devoted to Catholic Social Thought, he nodded and smiled in appreciation, giving his endorsement: “Good stuff!” Invariably, this was Bill’s way of promising that a project or a conversation had just begun; there would be more to say on the matter—stay tuned!

It was little surprise, then, that in the months following his endorsement, he would write thirteen articles for the encyclopedia, including such topics as refugee policy, preferential option for the poor, theology of work, the free market economy, and the role of the laity. Bill just seemed to know it all, yet he never was a “know-it-all.”

Bill could have written numerous books on a wide-range of subjects, but I particularly would have liked a spin-off of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, a book he knew almost verbatim. Bill’s book could have been titled, *The Seven Habits of Highly Virtuous People*, and it could have been autobiographical, but, of course, he was far too humble for that. His holy habits? Pray, love, listen, read, share, appreciate, and introduce—all words that paint a portrait of a learned man with a generous heart, a man of many words, as well as a man of his word—a person to be trusted.

What Bill wrote about, he enjoyed speaking about even more. He spoke with authority, excitement, often at top speed, as if he couldn’t wait to tell you a piece of information, as if it were the missing piece of a grand puzzle. There always was a sense of adventure; he didn’t want to go it alone; he wanted to share the unearthed treasure, and the fun of finding and beholding it. In one of his last e-mails to me, after I had confessed that I was tempted to plagiarize him, he wrote, “Steal everything from me. No problem.” On another occasion, he offered to give me his class notes —“It’s yours—it’s for everyone.” “Good stuff” needed to be shared.

Bill delivered countless lectures, homilies, and presentations, enjoying searching, discovering, and sharing information. But, it was not in the lecture hall that many of us will most remember Bill, but at a table, sitting back, conversing, relishing the camaraderie (“good stuff”) more than even a gourmet meal. He was blessed with the gift of conversation, quite unlike the “gift of gab.” It was the type that prompted us to pause later in awe. With so many interests, talents, hobbies, and passions, Bill moved effortlessly in the world of ideas, quoting songs, movies, books, and articles.

He moved even more effortlessly and gracefully in the world of individuals—young, elderly, all ages, and at different stages of the spiritual journey. Bill wanted to know their story, and give moral support where needed. He spoke from his heart to their hearts. His words were often offerings of compassion. I once overheard him assuring a suffering friend, “You’re surrounded by love.” His expression and tone of voice reflected supreme kindness, without even a hint of condescension or awkwardness, just a matter of fact, hitting the perfect note of love.

Those of us who were privileged to know Bill realized that he could speak authentically about love because he, too, was surrounded by love—certainly a loving family and a wide circle of friends, and also by Love Himself. This explains why he never tired of repeating certain key words: God, family, prayer, and love. These were his heart’s great passions—four words that defined his life.

Bill loved his family dearly, often speaking about his wife, Kathy, with tender admiration, convinced that she was a precious gift from God. He also spoke about each of his eight children with deep affection and understandable pride, pointing to individual talents, gifts, and personalities. But, there was something unique and humble about Bill’s fatherly pride. He was edified by each child—each one’s love, faith, and virtue. Each daughter and each son inspired him. He credited his wife and children with teaching him more about the practice of faith. He absolutely enjoyed and cherished conversations at the dinner table with his family. He loved to hear them all speak about their relationships, commitments, and spiritual lives.

He listened with eager attention and a sense of joy. Perhaps this is a key to his prayer life, too; he truly knew, to the core of his being, how to converse with God, as if he were speaking and listening to a dear friend. How he loved to pray! He and Kathy would pray together every morning, and he continued to pray throughout the day. He often took time during the workday to pray at the University or Seminary chapels. He prayed at the beginning of meals and the beginning of class, always with his head reverently bowed.

Approximately ten years ago, I assisted Bill in organizing a major conference at the Seminary. I remember my panic at the eleventh hour when I realized that Bill hadn't yet written his opening speech. I directed him to his office to type; yet, he walked to the Chapel to pray. I must have looked quite aghast, for he turned to me and assured me that he knew what he was doing. I should have known. I'll never forget watching Bill, a little while later, walking down the steps from the Seminary chapel; he looked almost radiant. "I've got my speech," he said, grinning confidently. He calmly walked to his office, typed his talk, a beautiful introduction to a wonderful conference.

Bill always loved introductions. He thoroughly enjoyed introducing us to good topics, good books, and even more so, good people: "Have you met...?" "I'd like you to meet..." "This is..." He just relished helping people make connections. Ultimately, Bill did more than introduce us; he gave us opportunities to be friends.

Mostly, he desired to introduce us to God. He wanted to help us to become intimate friends with God, and as he did so, we sensed he was introducing us to his Divine Friend. He wanted, with every fiber of his being, to share that friendship with us, and to help us meet Him on every road we travel.

Last year, Bill drove a group of colleagues to a Seminary function in another part of the state. The car ride was lengthy, but not boring, with conversations (sometimes simultaneous) spanning various topics and interrupted with laughter. I sat all the way in the back of his van, and now and then, would ask teasingly: "Are we there yet?" I really didn't want an answer and certainly not a positive one. I wanted the journey to continue. That's the way it was with conversations with Bill; they were always adventures that seemed to have more introductions than conclusions.

That's what makes a final good-bye all the more difficult. But, pondering his example, life, and legacy, we've been given some great directions on how to keep the conversation going, and how to find our way to our eternal home. What a gift from someone who cared deeply about our journey and our destination. More than a map, more than words, we have been given an image of an inspiring life brimming with "good stuff" that will continue to be shared, discussed, and stolen—compliments of a friend.