


Home
News & Features
Local / State
National / World
Columnists
Editorial
Letters
Events
About Us
Advertising
Online Resources
Subscribe Now
Search The Archives:

Go!

SERVICE DIRECTORY



Help is just a **CLICK** away!

Reach out to a
Quality Audience!
Click for details.

Take your product or service on an **ADventure!**
Click for details.

PITTSBURGH**Catholic**Your Catholic Community Newspaper:
In Continuous Operation Since 1844

Friday, January 30, 2009

News & Features

Family, education and God*archived from: 2008-11-03*by: [John Franko](#)

During his 16-year playing career, former Pirates great Frank Thomas was well-known in baseball circles for his deep faith. It has always been a key to how he lives his life.

Thomas, 79, grew up in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood, but he entered a Carmelite seminary in Niagara Falls, Ontario, at the age of 12. At 17, he entered the novitiate at the Carmelite Monastery in New Baltimore, Pa.

Within a short time, however, he realized that he wanted to play baseball and he left to begin his minor league career.

"I've always believed that things happen for the best," he said. "God had a plan for me. (I) probably did more by being a ballplayer than maybe if I had been a priest. I reach a lot of people."

Thomas clubbed 286 home runs in the major leagues and was a three-time all-star while playing for seven different teams.

His best year came in 1958, when he finished with 35 home runs and 109 RBI and was the starting third baseman for the National League in the All-Star Game.

Despite his success on the diamond, he remained focused on his goal of reaching out to others.

He was legendary for his willingness to sign autographs for kids, sometimes for up to two hours at a time. His only request was that they line up and not crowd around. When his playing days were over he took a job with the ICM School of Business, giving up to 35 presentations a week in high schools throughout the state. He spent 18 years there before he retired in 1984.

Thomas has always enjoyed talking to young people. He stresses the value of family, education and God. To him, athletics are a vehicle to a scholarship, which leads to an education that lasts forever.

An avid baseball card collector, Thomas converses with people from all over the country.

He still gets about five letters a day from fans. When people send requests for autographs, he donates the \$5 fee (\$10 for baseballs) to charity. He supports Happy Days and Special Times — The Loving Answer for Children With Cancer, and Courageous KIDZ — A Safe Haven for Children with Cancer, both in Charleston, S.C.

Thomas was touched by his encounter with sick children during a visit to the area for a golf tournament sponsored by NFL Hall-of-Famer Jim Kelly.

"I had tears in my eyes," he said. "With my eight kids I knew what it meant to me. From that time on I just said that it was what I was going to do."

Thomas and his wife, Dolores, raised four boys and four girls. Their youngest is Father Mark Thomas, parochial vicar at Incarnation on Pittsburgh's North Side.

"My vocation was fostered by my parents," Father Mark said. "They were a great example for me of what a faith life should be like."

The Thomases leaned on their faith when their third daughter, Sharon, was killed in a fall on New Year's Eve 1974. She was only 17.

Thomas recalled the support offered by the community and the reaction of his daughter's friends.

"You read about the kids that are bad, that's 5 percent," he said. "Nobody says anything about the majority of the kids who do good."

The Thomases are both extraordinary ministers of holy Communion at St. Sebastian in Ross Township.

"Our faith is our life," Dolores said.

She described her husband as a good father who never brought the game home with him.

The couple has 12 grandchildren, three step-grandchildren, one great-grandchild and two step-great-grandchildren.

Thomas stays active by attending a number of charity golf tournaments each year.

"Whatever you give is going to come back to you ten-fold, and it has," he said. "We've had a great life, my wife and I, and our family. And God has blessed us having a priest in the family. We're very fortunate."

Autograph and charity information is available at: www.frankthomastheoriginalone.com.

[E-mail this story](#) 

Google

Web www.pittsburghcatholic.org

Solar Energy Charity

Helping Relieve Poverty Through The Provision of Solar Energy. Join Us!

Public Service Ads by Google

[home](#) | [news and features](#) | [columnists](#) | [editorial](#) | [letters](#) | [events](#) | [about us](#)
[advertising](#) | [online resources](#) | [subscribe now](#)

© 2000 - 2008 Pittsburgh Catholic Publishing Associates

[Subscribe Now](#): 1-800-392-4670

[Click here to make Pittsburgh Catholic your homepage](#)

(For IE users only)