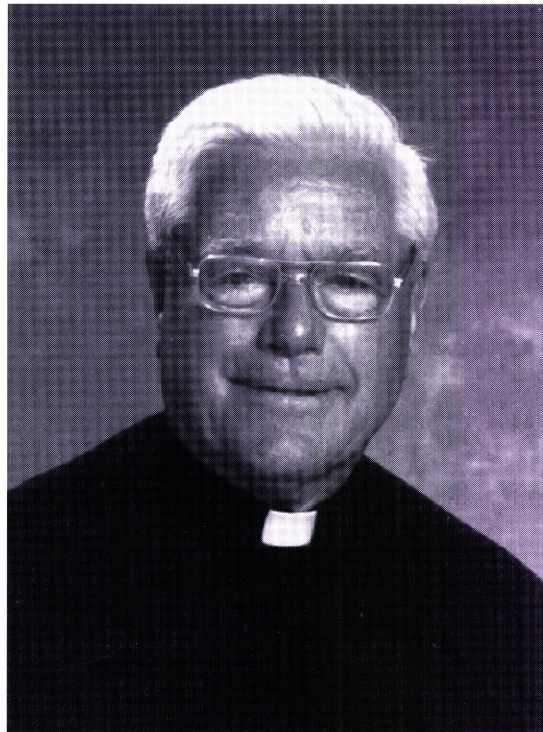




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in 1995

Fr. Louis J. Masoero, S.D.B.



Fr. Louis Masoero was born in San Salvatore, Monferrato—the Piedmontese region of northern Italy. He was born to Dominic and Angela Masoero, two hard working Piedmontese farmers. Fr. Louie often recalled the hardy work that filled his early days: splitting logs for fire, working in the fields and vineyard, and helping maintain the animals. He remembers that his father was a man of few words who loved his family dearly. His

mother, whom he adored and had missed for many years after her death, inspired him with her obedience and her devotion.

Following his older brother Bernardo, Fr. Louie went off to the Salesian aspirantate in Penango at the age of 12. He remembered coming to the director with barely a pittance to pay for his stay. At first the Salesian rector appeared flustered, but he took the meager offering and Luigi, too. This generosity and hospitality



Fr. Louie at the age of 10.

sparked a love inside the younger Masoero boy from the farm. Like his older brother, Fr. Louie decided to follow in the footsteps of his hero, St. John Bosco.

At the age of seventeen, Fr. Louis took up the challenge to become a missionary for Don Bosco and headed out for the eastern coast of the United States of America. He often recalled

with a smile that before boarding the boat his father finally spoke about his feelings regarding this move to the missions. Turning to Fr. Louie's mother rather than face his son, Dominic Masoero blurted out: "Do something! Your son is leaving!" Angela's response was classic: "He's your son too!" Fr. Louie always recognized a tenderness in this moment; a sturdy and stubborn farmer, his father found it difficult to express how hard it was for him to see his boy go so far away.

Early Years with the Salesians of America

Fr. Louis entered the Novitiate in New Rochelle, New York in the fall of 1925 and made his first profession on August 3, 1926. He completed his college studies in New York and came to California in 1927 for his practical training. As a young brother, famous for his basketball and football skills, Fr. Louie was assistant, teacher, and coach to the boys of the St. Francis School in Watsonville, California for the next three years.

He returned to Italy to study theology at the Crocetta in Turin, Italy. For the next four years he studied theology while acting as an assistant to the oratory at the Crocetta. He was ordained in the same glorious year that Don Bosco was canonized a saint—1934.

Fr. Louie was proud of that detail and re-

membered vividly the eucharistic procession through his home town after his ordination.

In 1934, he returned to Watsonville where he was prefect of studies for three years before returning to school at UC Berkeley where he achieved a Masters in Languages in 1939. While studying, he acted as associate pastor at St. Joseph's Parish Church in Oakland. He would return to Watsonville to serve as Vice Principal and then as Financial Administrator from 1940 to 1946

In 1946, Fr. Louie was appointed director of St. John Bosco School in Bellflower during its early days. He remained there until 1951.

Fr. Louie in Edmonton

In 1951, Archbishop Mac Donald of the Edmonton Archdiocese in Alberta, Western Canada, asked the Salesian provincial to consider taking over a boys' home and orphanage located in downtown Edmonton. The Sisters of Providence had managed the home from its beginnings in 1923 at the request of Bishop O'Leary. In 1941 the Sisters had to move the home almost over night. It was then that the home was relocated to northeast Edmonton. By this time the Sisters realized that for them it was becoming increasingly more difficult to manage the number and caliber of boys. Many of these boys were wards of the

Brother Louis' Early Days at Watsonville.





Br. Louie, center, leans over a young Br. Alfred Broccardo on the dock at Lake Saint Francis. Br. Covacich is above Br. Louie.

government, often orphaned, most without stable homes or families. So the archbishop called for the Salesians.

Fr. Louie was appointed director of the St. Mary's Boys' Home, north-east firehall in Edmonton, Alberta in 1951. The "Home" was a run-down three storey building did not seem the suitable environment for these young boys, so Fr. Louie mobilized the community to

build a new home for them. The new St. Mary's was begun in 1954. During those early years Fr. Louie had to obtain credentials from the University of Alberta in order to teach. Juggling assistance, direction of a community and school, fundraising for a new facility, and maintaining the workload of a graduate student, Fr. Louie was awarded an Alberta teaching credential in 1954.

From 1954 to 1957, Fr. Louie was the prefect for the home. He set the new building in motion and St. Mary's School was dedicated in 1955. On September 19, 1955 the Salesians and the boys moved from the old firehall to the city's Steele Heights district to move into the new "St. Mary's Technical School."

Fr. Louie at Bosco Tech

Apparently, Fr. Louie's reputation for fundraising and moving dreams into reality prompted Fr. Felix Penna, the founder of Don Bosco Technical Institute in Rosemead, California, to draw Fr. Louie back down to the States for assistance. This time he was named

financial administrator of the new school rising in the hills of San Gabriel. Ironically, this school, like St. Mary's in Edmonton, was the dream of another archbishop: James Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles. Fr. Louie served in this capacity from 1957 to 1958.

Fr. Louie often referred to Fr. Penna as a mentor and model of Salesianity. He always tried to imitate Fr. Penna's tenacity in working for a project. Fr. Louie continued to assert his influence over the development of the Tech as director of that school and community from 1958 to 1963. In the fall of 1963, Fr. Louie returned to St. Mary's in Edmonton where he stayed on as director for six more years.

Any "Dirty Harry" fan will know that Fr. Louie was the pastor of Saints Peter and Paul in San Francisco during the making of that Clint Eastwood film. The famous scene placed the pastor in the scope of an assailant's rifle as he aimed at the entrance to the church from a nearby North Beach rooftop. This moment of fame would become a favorite story of Fr. Louie as he remembered his days as director and pastor in San Francisco from 1969 to 1974. Fr. Louie stayed on as

Left to right: Fr. Louie, Dennis Froeler, Victor Millet (Youngest Orphan), Heni Legay (Presides), Marcel Lambert, MP (Speaker of House of Parliament) at the groundbreaking of the new St. Mary's School, November 1954.



assistant pastor in that parish for three more years. He was a much loved pastor, friend to the school children, and leader in the Italian Catholic Federation. Everyone knew Fr. Louie, from Mayor Joseph Alioto to the transients in the park.

Later Years of Ministry

In 1977 Fr. Louie began a year as confessor at St. John Bosco High School in Bellflower, but this dynamo was not ready to retire despite hip replacements, numerous operations on his knees and back, and other ailments that would have kept any strong man down. He continued to contribute wherever he could and even acted as chaplain for the Salesian Sisters way up in Watsonville for one year--though he maintained a long term assistance for their annual festivals and fundraisers.

In 1979 Fr. Louie gave his services to the Italian Catholic Federation in Los Angeles and moved back to Rosemead into Don Bosco Tech. Though he was assigned to that house, the jest was common that he was never at home. Actually, it was true that Fr. Louie was rarely in one place as he continued his decades-long tradition of arranging truckloads of free produce and frozen food for pickups in Watsonville and Los Angeles. These truckloads were frequently distributed throughout the province. His good buddy "Giacomo," Brother Jack McLinden, was most

"Giacomo" and "King Louie," friends for 50 years plus



Fr. Louie, Fr. Zatko, and a future student at Bosco Tech during open house.

often Fr. Louie's chauffeur, navigator, pallet-loader, and all around assistant. And through the years, this inseparable team would fight and fume, laugh and cry, and see to it that the Sisters of Charity and many, many others who work and live among the poor would have food in abundance. In the process "Giacomo" and "King Louie" would become the best of friends.

In 1990, Fr. Louie moved with his friend, Brother Jack, to the prenovitiate residence of De Sales Hall. In these past five years, Fr. Louie continued his food runs and distributions with Brother Jack almost up to the last month of his life. With Brother Jack always on hand to help, Fr. Louie struggled through many bouts with poor health, but he always seemed to defy the odds. During Advent in 1992, Fr. Louie became ill and slipped into a coma. The doctor told the director, Fr. Peter Bui, to send for the provincial, for he was sure Fr. Louie was at the end. To everyone's surprise, he came back with a vengeance. He increased his daily exercise, completely restricted his wine, and never missed a day on the tricycle.

The summer of 1994 was Fr. Louie's last opportunity to celebrate with friends and family in Italy. He returned to celebrate sixty years of priesthood and sixty years since the canonization of Don Bosco. He spent nearly three months in

Italy and came home filled with happy memories. But, he never seemed quite the same. His hearing had noticeably worsened and his vigor would never be the same. He would often rally and seem his old self, but those moments were fewer and fewer.

The Last Days

It was clear that Fr. Louie was losing the last of his characteristic strength the Sunday before Don Bosco's feast. He rode his tricycle over to St. Dominic Savio for the 9:00 AM mass. When he returned, he seemed to have been drained of all energy. He ate very little and slept most of the day. On Don Bosco's feast, he seemed to rally and even felt strong enough for another bike ride, but the strength would not last long.

On February 1, 1995, Fr. Louie began to eat less and less. He weakened by the day. By February 5, he could hardly move from his wheelchair or bed. But even in these struggling moments, his friend "Giacomo" could bring a smile to his face. He continued to keep his wits and to recognize what was happening around him. On February 8 the son of Fr. Louie's niece came out to visit and Fr. Louie began to sing and to talk with strength he did not seem to have left. His spirits were high.

Throughout the week of February 5, Fr. Louie went in and out of deep sleep. Br. Jack and Belia Polanco, a kind and wonderful parishioner of Dominic Savio, fed and medicated Fr. Louie. By February 13, they were unable to arouse Fr. Louie and knew that he needed to be rehydrated. He was transported that morning to the Valley Medical Emergency in San Gabriel. Fr. Louie remained in a coma until he slipped peacefully to God at 5:30 PM on Wednesday, February 15. He died as he wished to, in the presence of his brother Salesians and without "being a burden to anyone."

Tributes and Memories

Fr. Louie will be remembered as a driven man who never gave up and who rallied the support of many benefactors on behalf of many Salesian enterprises. He was one of the true pioneers

of the Salesian presence in the western United States and Canada. He was uncompromising in many ideals, sometimes to the chagrin of those with whom he lived and worked, but always with an eye to promoting Don Bosco and the Salesian mission.

His reputation in California is legendary. From networking the farmers in the Pajaro Valley to saving the Los Angeles San Antonio Winery, Fr. Louie's influence was felt far and wide. People either cringed or smiled when his truck came into sight--but either response usually concluded with a smile and a hearty toast.

No Salesian celebration will seem quite complete without the sharp whistles or the belting of "O Sole Mio." Though his speeches were often long, he always had a valuable message for his listeners as he often quoted Shakespeare and other classic authors. And Fr. Louie had a particular love and concern for the young men in formation in his last years, often launching into tales of the early days to keep them rooted to tradition.

Mrs. Vairo and Fr. Carmine joined Fr. Louie in celebrating 87 years at San Antonio Winery in 1994.



Among the many gifts Fr. Louie had for the young men was his hopeful vision of the future. He often quoted Don Bosco's prophetic dream foretelling hard times for the Salesians in the latter part of the twentieth century. Those times, Fr. Louie recalled, would come to an end as "serene skies" would return in the "seventies." Whether Fr. Louie's references were completely accurate or not, his point was very clear: the Salesian Mission would never die. Buoyed by recent events in Europe, Fr. Louie would joyfully cite the founding of new Salesian schools in Russia and celebrate the increase of vocations in eastern Europe. He clung to the hope and belief that the Salesians are on the brink of a great resurgence in the world. And he would encourage the candidates to study hard, be ever cheerful, cling to Don Bosco, and be courageous in every struggle. "Coraggio!" he would cry.

Fr. Louie will be deeply missed but his courage and optimism will live on in the countless lives he has touched from Italy to Canada, from New York to Los Angeles, from parish to school. At Fr. Louie's funeral vigil, his good friend Fr. Paul Caporali remembered a tender moment: As Fr. Paul's director in the early years at Bosco Tech, Fr. Louie insisted that Fr. Paul's father be flown in from Italy for a visit. This was something unheard of for that time. But Fr. Louie saw the importance of family and welcomed the family of his brother Salesian into their home. To top it off, Fr. Louie gave Fr. Paul a car to drive to New York to meet his father.

At the funeral morning mass, Fr. Harry Rasmussen, the novice director and a past pupil of Fr. Louie, called Fr. Louie "a diamond in the rough." He remembered that this passionate man could be rather unbending at times. But knew that there was always a very sensitive man behind that driving force. Whatever his disposition at a given moment, Fr. Louie was always dedicated to the young and stopped at nothing to help them.

Another funeral mass was held in a filled Saints Peter and Paul Church in North Beach, San Francisco. Fr. Louie's only surviving classmate, Fr. Gabriel Zavattaro, applauded the dynamism

that set so many Salesian projects in motion. These two confreres were lifelong friends and antagonists; and though they knew each other probably too well, Fr. Gabriel showed a great tenderness for his fiery friend.

A rare link to the pioneering Salesians has made his way to the Salesian Garden and the angels most certainly will be having the biggest wine and fish festival in all the heavens. "Bravo, Fr. Louie! Raise a toast with Don Bosco for all of us until we see you again!"

On the part of the De Sales Community, I would like to ask you to keep Fr. Louie in your prayers and masses. A special thanks to Fr. John Roche who helped compile this obituary letter.

Sincerely,

Fr. Jerry Bonjean and the Salesians,
Prenovices, and Staff at De Sales Hall

Father Louis J. Masoero, SDB

Born: San Salvatore, Monferrato, Italy,
January 11, 1907

Professed: New Rochelle, NY,
August 6, 1926

Ordained: Turin, Italy,
July 8, 1934

Died: Valley Medical, San Gabriel, CA,
February 15, 1995



Good Friends: Bro Tony Freitas, Fr. David Purdy, and Fr. Nick Reina celebrate with "King Louie." "Che Comedia!"



Fr. Louie at Aptos with Students



Not long after Fr. Louie celebrated his eighty-eighth birthday in January, school children from Palmdale, California came to sing for him. This was an annual treat for Fr. Louie. This was Fr. Louie's last gathering with the children. He was thrilled! As they left that day they prayed over him and sang a song about finding Jesus in Fr. Louie.

Among the pallbearers leaving Saints Peter and Paul Church are Brother Jack McLinden and Brother Pat Maloney (second and third bearers on the right). Fr. Louie's niece Margaret Kensington, follows.





Salesians of St. John Bosco

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