
PROVINCIAL RESIDENCE

148 Main Street

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. 10802

January 24, 1979



Dear Confreres,

It grieves me to write today concerning the death of

FATHER ORLANDO MOLINA S . D . B .

at the age of sixty-three.

Pastor to the poorest of the poor in Eight Mile Rock, Grand Bahama, Father "Mo," as everyone knew him, won the hearts and esteem of the tiny Bahamian republic by being a true missionary and a generous son of Don Bosco.

As the Freeport News announced his passing, caused by a sudden heart attack on Monday, December 11, 1978, hundreds gathered to pay tribute, but no tributes were more moving than those of the poor who wept openly, "We have no Father now. Who will be my father?" The Bishop of Nassau, Most Reverend Paul Leonard Hagarty led over 1500 worshippers in praise and prayer outside the tiny St. Agnes Parish Church for Father Mo's soul.

Orlando Molina was born to Catholic parents on August 8, 1915. Because of their distance from any Catholic Church in the hinterlands of Florida, they never practiced their faith and permitted their son to be schooled by the kindly Baptist preacher of the local church. As a young man, eager to help others, Orlando considered entering the Baptist seminary and later took a job with a Tampa, Florida orphanage. It was then, on a staff visit to the newly established Mary Help of Christians School and Orphanage, also located in Tampa, that “Mo” met the Salesians and discovered Don Bosco.

“I had never seen such happy faces,” he later wrote. “While I was there, a little voice inside me kept repeating: ‘Why couldn’t you become one of them? A Salesian?’”

He entered the U.S. military as a flying cadet during World War II and occasionally met the Catholic Chaplain of his outfit in the islands of the South Pacific. Once, the priest asked him, as battalion commander, to distribute some blessed rosaries he had brought for any of the men who needed one. From that time, Orlando Molina mysteriously but surely came under the care of the Blessed Virgin who led him first to his native Catholic faith and then to the priesthood.

After serving in the Korean conflict as chief of military counter-intelligence, he quit the army to enter Don Bosco Seminary at Newton, New Jersey in September 1953. His desire to be a priest led to the conversion of his parents and the blessing of their marriage according to the Catholic rite. He made his first profession on September 8, 1955, perpetual vows three years later and was ordained after studies in Aptos, California and Barcelona, Spain on June 28, 1961 at the age of forty-five.

Later assignments took Father Mo to Ipswich, Massachusetts; Marrero, Louisiana; and then to Don Bosco Technical High School in Boston, Massachusetts. But his greatest service to Don Bosco and the Province will always be remembered at the school in Tampa, Florida, and in the tiny poverty pockets of the Bahamas where he gave the mature years of his priestly life to missionary work.

Father Molina loved sports and used them as a means of drawing even the most mischievous and backward of children to him. At Mary Help of Christians School where youngsters of unsettled homes often found the school discipline difficult, American football under the Florida sun taught them the value of team work and self control. In their tireless coach they found a priest who cared for them. Together, boys and priest made a winning team, and Father Molina was proud to point to the trophies his unruly boys had won.

In 1971 he assumed an apparently temporary assignment, teaching in a high school in Freeport, Grand Bahama—an island well known for its luxury hotels and manicured sandy beaches where riches only highlight the abject ignorance and poverty of native villagers.

Soon he was catapulted from school teacher to pastor with a small Church, a few parishioners, and a community of restless people craving for spiritual leadership. Father Molina began by organizing his favorite sport—American football, and soon had four teams playing professionally in two small but competitive island leagues. Local public officials were persuaded to help by clearing a field behind St. Agnes Church. Then a playground for smaller children was necessary, then hopes for a basketball court, swimming pool, library, community center and youth hostel sprang forth from the barren sandy soil of Eight Mile Rock.

Twice Father Molina was selected by community leaders as Man of the Year. The government agency for child care called on him to advise them in youth problems. Four homeless boys had found room first in his heart and then under his small parish roof, and no one can doubt that more would have followed in the coming years.

The spirit of Don Bosco moved Father Molina to seek out those in need and to minister to them wherever they could be found. "Make known to the confreres that Father Mo has not forgotten the spiritual side of life," he wrote in a recent Province newsletter. "Don Bosco's 'Preventive System' is in full use here . . . Those we don't get in Church we get in the church grounds; we *fish* in all waters."

It is too simple to say that we “miss” Father Molina. His call from this life has left a void in the lives of his confreres and his parishioners which we must trust to almighty God to fill. We extend our sympathy to Father Molina’s family, particularly Mr. Paul Lee Molina, whom Officer Orlando Molina adopted as a small boy, homeless in a Korean orphanage.

We also commend Father Orlando Molina to the charity of your prayers and urge you to join us in beseeching God’s continued blessing on the spiritual harvest which his servant Orlando had so carefully prepared.

Faternally yours in Christ,
Rev. Dominic DeBlase, *S.D.B.*
Director

Data for the Necrology: Father Orlando Molina, born at Tampa, Florida August 8, 1915, died at Eight Mile Rock, Grand Bahama on December 11, 1978 at sixty-three years old, twenty-three years of religious profession and seventeen years of priesthood.