

# CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

47 ISLAND ROAD — MAHWAH, N. J., U.S.A.



Born: March 22, 1912

Professed: September 1, 1931

Ordained: June 9, 1940

Died: January 6, 1977

Dear Confreres:

The Rev. Henry A. Sarnowski, S.D.B., Assistant Pastor at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mahwah, New Jersey, died on Thursday, January 6, 1977, at Good Samaritan Hospital, Suffern, New York, where he had been hospitalized since December 13, 1976. He was 64 years of age.

The medical report based on an autopsy on January 7 noted the following as the cause of death: "massive, multiple pulmonary embolization." Doctor Arnold Kneitel, his attending physician, explained that there were many large blood clots in both lungs.

Father Sarnowski's life in the Salesian Society spanned a period of 47 years. During this period of time he touched the lives of many Salesians, students, parents and countless other people whom he met in the course of his ministry as a priest and educator. It is interesting to note how so many of these individuals, in commenting on his life, focused their remarks on several qualities which seemed to be the hallmark of his priestly, Salesian life.

In the eulogy delivered at the Mass of the Resurrection on January 10, the Rev. Anthony Spano, S.D.B., Director of Don Bosco High School, Ramsey, New Jersey, noted: "Father Henry was a faithful and true Salesian, completely dedicated to the ministry and to Don Bosco. He had great respect for authority and was a true believer in the old-fashioned type of obedience."

A companion of his student days in Rome, Father Angelo Bongiorno, S.D.B., currently Vice Director of Don Bosco Technical High School, Boston, Massachusetts, singled out this same sense of loyalty to the Salesian Society when he wrote: "Father Henry was fiercely proud of being a Salesian, ever upholding the name of the Society with his own truly genuine style of Salesian life. To me he was a very likeable, approachable Salesian, a true son of Don Bosco."

In much the same vein Father Paul Aronica, Director of the Marian Shrine in West Haverstraw, New York, sums up his impressions of Father Sarnowski: "He was very proud of his Catholic faith, his Salesian vocation, and his rich Polish heritage. Don Bosco was like a charm for him, and he was very proud of all that Don Bosco had accomplished, and equally proud of the methods used by Don Bosco in his educational apostolate. He was proud to be a Salesian priest and to share the heritage left by this great saint. Doubtless, his loyalty was born and nurtured during this high school years at Don Bosco High School, Ramsey, New Jersey. Wherever he served as Director, he worked very hard to give the school a good name and preserve his Salesian traditions in education and public relations. He knew Polish history very well and he considered Don Bosco's Polish heritage as a very precious and rewarding one."

While this sense of Salesianity seems to be one of Father Sarnowski's outstanding characteristics as indicated by many of his fellow Salesians, many former students of his and their parents have singled out his sense of compassion and willingness to listen to them. The mother of a black student who had applied to Saint Michael's School, Goshen, New York, when Father Henry was Director, wrote a most moving letter extolling this good priest's readiness and willingness to accept her son into the school at a time when many schools were paying lip service to integration and were employing devious methods to reject applicants from the minority groups. She expressed her everlasting gratitude for the kindness and compassion shown by Father Henry to her son and her family, and she now points with pride to that son who has since become a doctor.

Many people were impressed by the dear departed's amazing capacity for work and his dynamic management of schools placed



under his directorship. In his eulogy Father Spano observed: "Father Sarnowski demonstrated leadership qualities and scholarly capabilities during his six years as Director of Don Bosco High School, Ramsey, New Jersey. When he assumed this administrative post in 1950, the school's total registration numbered only 150 students. Within the next few years he built Immaculata Hall, a modern structure which comprises a gymnasium, cafeteria, classrooms and other facilities. He thereby increased the school's capacity to 450 boys."

During these building years at Don Bosco, Father Henry likewise gave proof of his ability to raise sorely needed funds and coordinate the activities of many school organizations in their efforts to underwrite construction costs through a variety of projects.

In spite of the inevitable demands on his time and energy as a result of these activities, Father Henry never lost sight of the more fundamental aspects of his priestly and Salesian life. To quote again from Father Spano's eulogy: "He was first and foremost a priest and a Salesian. He was dedicated to God and the apostolate of youth. He loved church music and the sacred liturgy, and he personally saw to it that church functions were always carried out with great decorum and in accordance with the prescribed ritual. By word and example he promoted devotion to our Blessed Mother under the title of Mary, Help of Christians, and those who were associated with him will vouch for his faithful recitation of the Rosary daily."

This latter practice was very much in evidence during Father Sarnowski's brief stay at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Mahwah, New Jersey, where he was assigned in the fall of 1976. Daily he could be seen walking around the church grounds, rosary in hand.

The achievements of Father Henry in the field of education were matched by his success in the very specialized area of library work. An evaluation in this regard has been provided by Father Joseph Bajorek, S.D.B., former president of Don Bosco College, Newton, New Jersey.

"Father Henry Sarnowski functioned as an educator also through his work as a librarian. It was a work that he loved and for which he was professionally trained. Through this work he rendered distinguished service to the New Rochelle Province. The reorganiza-

tion and development of the libraries at Don Bosco College, Don Bosco High School, Ramsey, and elsewhere throughout the Province, expressed his Salesian dedication and professional educational outlook. He was active in local and national professional associations, serving for a time as an officer of the Catholic Library Association. At Don Bosco College Father Henry helped in the architectural design of the new library wing, seeking to make it functional, attractive and capable of accommodating future expansion. Despite his weakened health he labored assiduously at building up the book collection and other learning resources. His work significantly promoted the academic excellence at the College and contributed to the initial accreditation by the Middle Atlantic States."

While Father Henry was concerning himself with the construction of new school buildings and the development of libraries, he was not unmindful of the social aspects of his priestly vocation. The Rev. Paul Avallone, S.D.B., Director of Salesian High School, New Rochelle, New York, offers some comments: "Perhaps one of Father's outstanding characteristics was his love for people. He had a special charisma for making friends. People liked him very much because he showed interest and cared for them. He was fond of community get-togethers and celebrations. As a Director he always showed great hospitality to visitors. When visiting other communities he brought with him a lot of joy and happiness. He was fun to have around."

Another Salesian priest who had knitted a strong bond of friendship with Father Henry writes on several aspects of his departed confrere's life. He is Father Diego Borgatello, S.D.B., Editor-in-Chief of the monumental English translation from the Italian language of the multi-volume life of Don Bosco.

"At all times I found him faithful to Don Bosco's legacy—love of the Blessed Sacrament, love of Our Lady, and love of the Pope and the church. These loves he strove to instill in the hearts of his confreres and students. His love for Jesus and Mary manifested itself in his reverence for the liturgy, his visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and his filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary through the frequent recitation of the rosary and the solemnity with which



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he wanted all her feasts celebrated. His love of neighbor shone in his generosity in providing for the material and spiritual needs of his fellow Salesians and pupils."

In 1959 Father Sarnowski suffered a major stroke. His partial recovery was most remarkable, but the cross of a reduced capacity for work and for the many demands of the priestly ministry proved to be a very heavy one. Observes Father Borgatello: "He accepted this cross with great resignation to the holy will of God. He remained a cheerful giver. Whether in Goshen or in New Rochelle, New York, he kept his fellow Salesians happy notwithstanding his physical and moral sufferings. His day was spent mostly in prayer, serious reading, meditation and work, whenever his poor health permitted it."

Early in the fall of 1976 Father Henry was asked to write a brief personal profile to help provide information for a news release announcing his assignment to the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Mahwah. What he wrote on October 13 can well serve as a source of statistical information and a resume' of the assignments he fulfilled as a Salesian. Here is that profile in his own words:

"Father Henry A. Sarnowski was born in Schenectady, New York on March 22, 1912, where he frequented the elementary school in his parish of Saint Mary's. Upon graduation, he entered Don Bosco High School, Ramsey, New Jersey, completing his secondary education in June, 1930. He was then admitted to the Salesian Novitiate at Newton, New Jersey, and completed his philosophical studies there in 1933. He remained at Newton as a teacher in the high school department until 1936, and was then assigned to Saint Michael's School, Goshen, New York, where he exercised the office of Prefect of Studies for one year."

"In 1937 he was sent to Rome for his theological studies at the Gregorian Pontifical University. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 9, 1940, and returned to the United States in the spring of 1941. In September of that year he was appointed Prefect of Studies at Salesian High School, New Rochelle, New York. The following year he was sent to Newton, New Jersey, as an instructor in theology. Remaining there until 1950, he obtained a degree in Library Science

from Saint John's University, Brooklyn, New York, and did some graduate work at Fordham University in social science."

"In 1950 he was appointed Director of Don Bosco High School, Ramsey, where he remained for six years. During that period a new building, Immaculata Hall, was added to the school complex and the student enrollment rose from 150 to approximately 450 boys."

"In 1956 Father Henry was transferred, again as Director, to the Salesian School, Goshen, New York, where he remained until 1961. He was then re-assigned to Don Bosco College, Newton, New Jersey, as librarian. During this period a new building was erected, and the Middle Atlantic States granted its full accreditation to the college."

"In 1968 Father was transferred to Provincial Headquarters in New Rochelle, New York, where he served as Library Consultant for the province. He was assigned in early October as assistant parish priest at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mahwah."

This thumb-nail sketch prepared by Father Henry very modestly sums up his career as a Salesian. He studiously avoids any reference to his stroke and its resulting impairment of his health. Nor does he elaborate on the problems and complexities of the building program he successfully completed at Don Bosco High School, Ramsey.

His life as a dedicated priest, a loyal Salesian, and as a loving and compassionate friend, can well serve as a source of inspiration to all whose lives he touched. May his soul rest in peace.

(Rev.) Eugene Palumbo, S.D.B.  
Administrator