



**Fr. Christian Hayward Woerz, SDB**

**March 27, 1944 – September 20, 2015**

# Mortuary Letter – Fr. Christian Hayward Woerz



*Fr. Chris with Linus entertaining,  
young adults and children.*

In reflecting on the life Fr. Chris Woerz one cannot help but recall his sidekick, Linus D. Lizard, who helped Chris in his evangelical ministry to young people and adults. Whether in schools, parishes, or youth centers Linus and Fr. Chris were a duo who preached the Good News to young and old. Chris and Linus made the gospels and teachings of Jesus come alive in the hearts of all who heard them.

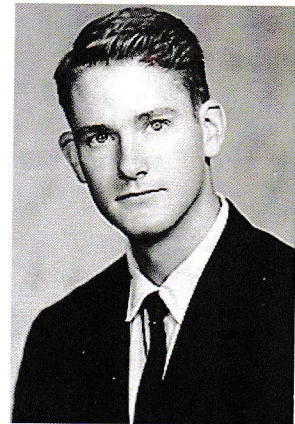
Christian Hayward Woerz was born to Christian and Ruth Woerz on March 27, 1944. Chris' father was deployed during World War II as an engineer rebuilding hospital services for injured troops. Following the war, he enrolled in a trade school and joined the staff at Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, CA. Mr. Woerz worked on America's first satellite, "Explorer." Chris' mom was employed as an administrative assistant at CF Braun, an engineering firm in Pasadena. Chris was baptized at St. Ignatius Church in Los Angeles on June 4, 1944.

The family first lived in Hermosa Beach, California. Following the birth of their second child, Paul, the parents moved the family to South San Gabriel, California. Both Chris and his brother Paul attended St. Anthony's Grammar School in San Gabriel. The neighborhood was "kid friendly" and the boys would often play with friends in their backyard which overlooked the new freeway construction zone. In 1951 a baby girl was born and then in 1957 the last child, John, came into the world just one year before Chris entered the minor seminary.

After graduating from the 8th grade at St. Anthony's Grammar School in San Gabriel, Chris Woerz entered the Salesian Junior Seminary in Richmond, California. He



spent four years in the program. He was an average student; however, he did have some difficulties with Latin which he dropped at the end of his sophomore year. Graduating in June, 1962, Chris applied and was accepted to the Salesian novitiate in Newton, New Jersey. In his application for admission to join as a Coadjutor Brother he notes: "I am prompted to the religious life out of love for God, a desire to save my soul, and a love for my neighbor." He professed his vows on August 16, 1963, in Newton, New Jersey, at the ceremony presided by Rev. August Bosio, provincial of the New Rochelle Province.



*Br. Chris Woerz  
on the day of his  
first profession,  
Aug. 16, 1963.*

After his first profession of vows, Chris Woerz was assigned to St. Joseph's Juniorate in Rosemead, California. He attended classes at East Los Angeles College and received an Associate of Arts degree from that school. During this time he also was a student instructor in the drafting department at Don Bosco Technical Institute, and he eventually became the department chairperson. He made his perpetual profession as a Salesian on August 15, 1969, in Bellflower, California.

Chris was an excellent educator. The experience in the technology program at Bosco Tech helped hone his skills at working with young people in a cooperative manner. He frequently engaged his students by garnering from them what possible solutions to the problem might be. He sought to truly bring out the gifts and talents of those whom he taught.

In the summer of 1970 Chris was taking a few teenagers up to Camp Don Bosco in Arrowbear, California. He was making a sharp turn on a mountain road when another vehicle was passing a car and heading straight to his vehicle in his lane. To avoid a head-on collision Chris veered his vehicle out of the lane, lost control, and ran straight into a metal barrier. The impact sent parts of the engine flying through the windshield. With the driving wheel in his way, Chris could not avoid the shards which hit his face and damaged his left eye. He later reflected that this event was a sign of God's calling him to the priesthood.

Although Brother Chris might have had a long and very successful career as a high school instructor, there was something else gnawing at him both in his mind and especially in his heart. He desired to be ordained a Salesian priest. From the very beginning of his stay at the Salesian seminary in Richmond, Chris Woerz had always wanted to study for the priesthood. However, difficulties in his Latin studies were an impediment for him. Rather

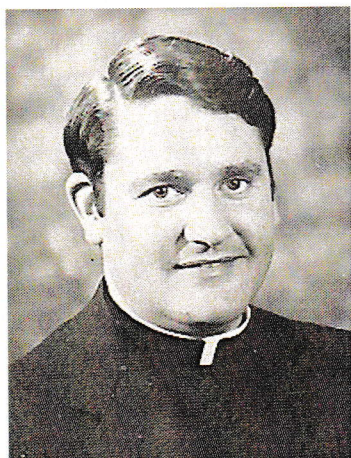
than leave the Salesians, he decided to remain as a brother. Writing to his Director, Fr. Thomas Prendiville, at Bosco Tech, Chris notes:

*When I came to the Salesians in 1958 as a freshman at the seminary in Richmond, I intended with full intention to study for the priesthood. However, I found Latin very difficult. I studied it to the detriment of my other studies. In my senior year my superiors told me that I would not be allowed to continue. I was heart-broken to say the least. I asked the superiors permission to enter the society as a Coadjutor, a decision I have never once regretted.*

*The thought of the priesthood never really left me. It has come to me with verying (sic) intensity for the past seven years. For the past two years the thought has become a part of my daily life.*

During his last two years at Don Bosco Tech he worked on this dream with his Director, Fr. Thomas Prendiville. The partial blindness he received from the accident a few years before would not be an impediment to his studying for ordination. Finally, in June of 1972, he received permission from the provincial, Fr. Bernard Justen, to begin taking courses at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley which would lead to his ordination.

In September of 1972 Chris Woerz joined the community of the students of theology who were living at the former convent in St. Paul's Parish in San Francisco. He applied for philosophical studies at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology. He began the scholastic process needed for ordination. The stay at St. Paul's lasted two years. In 1974 the province, under the leadership of Fr. Harry Rasmussen, purchased an apartment house in Berkeley, and the community moved there in August, 1974. The new residence for theology students on Arch Street provided easier access to the theology classes at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley and also eliminated problems issuing from the daily commute to and from San Francisco. Chris enjoyed participating in the various apostolic ministries during his years at Berkeley. He was involved with the youth groups at Ss. Peter and Paul Church and at



*Ordained priest Feb. 12, 1976*



Corpus Christi Parish. Together with his sidekick, Linus, he helped organize various activities to teach young people catechism and to form communities of support and friendship.

Chris Woerz was ordained a deacon on February 22, 1975, at Corpus Christi Church in San Francisco. The ordaining prelate was the Archbishop of San Francisco, Joseph T. McGucken. Chris completed the Master of Divinity Program at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in May, 1975. Completing the academic requirements for ordination, Chris enrolled at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and earned a Master's Degree in Sacred Theology. He was ordained to the priesthood on February 21, 1976 along with Gael Sullivan. Bishop Floyd Begin of the Oakland Diocese ordained them at the Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales in downtown Oakland. He then celebrated Masses of Thanksgiving at his family's parish, St. Anthony in San Gabriel, as well as at Ss. Peter and Paul and Corpus Christi in San Francisco.

After his ordination and the completion of his theological studies, Fr. Chris Woerz was appointed Vocation Director for the province by the provincial, Fr. Harry Rasmussen. He was assigned also as the Director of Religious Education (DRE) at St. Joseph's Juniorate in Rosemead, California. He quickly became involved with various local and national organizations working for vocations on the diocesan and religious community levels.

In 1977 the province consolidated the minor seminary work at De Sales Hall in Bellflower, California. Chris was asked by the provincial to take up residence in Bellflower to provide guidance and support to the seminary team. Chris continued as province vocation director and began establishing programs to make Salesian religious life better known to the wider communities in the areas in which Salesians worked.

The following year Chris was appointed to the provincial council. In recommending his name to the congregation leadership in Rome, Fr. Harry Rasmussen notes: "(Chris) Woerz is hard working and a good organizer. He likes meetings. He should give the Provincial Council some fresh ideas. He is young, but balanced and loyal. He can be quite stubborn at times and has a bad temper." That last comment pointed to a very strong trait which enabled Chris Woerz to fight vehemently for things he believed would further the Salesian ministry in the United States.



*Fr. Chris Woerz entertaining children during a Christmas Party*

With the appointment of Fr. Carmine Vairo as the provincial in September, 1979, Chris Woerz continued as province vocation director and a member of the staff at De Sales Hall. However, he was also confirmed by the National Vocation Office as the chairperson of the California delegation to that national body. Fr. Carmine congratulated Chris on the honor bestowed upon him, but he also cautioned him not to overextend himself. He thanked Chris for making vocations the number one priority for the province and reminded him to be hopeful and optimistic in spite of challenges which might arise.

In ministering as the Province Vocation Director Chris Woerz was also very active in retreat work. He would frequently assist the staff at St. Joseph's Renewal Center with retreats in addition to organizing vocation retreats for those interested in Salesian life. His commitment to vocation work on the state and national levels led to many requests for preaching retreats. Towards the beginning of 1980 Chris began to discuss the possibility of further studies in theology. Wanting to deepen his understanding of retreat work he enrolled at the Institute for Retreat and Pastoral Ministry at Notre Dame University during the summer of 1982. It was during this time that he decided to study for a doctoral degree in pastoral theology. With the blessing of the provincial, Chris Woerz enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at St. Mary's University in Baltimore. The program consisted in quarterly seminars and summer sessions. He was awarded the Doctor Ministry Degree in June, 1986.



*Linus and Fr. Chris entertaining children in Montreal, Canada, 1997.*

As he was continuing his work as vocation director and beginning his course work at St. Mary's University, Chris Woerz was appointed Director at St. Joseph's Renewal Center in September, 1983. He served in this ministry for the next six years. After completing two terms as Director, Chris remained at St. Joseph's to help with the retreat work and provide support to the province vocation efforts. In September of 1990, the provincial, Fr. Thomas Prendiville, asked Chris to take on the responsibilities of Director at De Sales Hall in Bellflower. Chris readily and willingly moved to his new assignment.

During the course of the year, Chris continued to help with vocation work from De Sales Hall. In addition he was also active in youth ministry work at St. Dominic Savio Parish which was close by. His contact with the parishioners at Savio along with his pastoral



zeal helped him to agree to become Director and Pastor of the St. Dominic Savio community in September 1991. The newly appointed provincial, Fr. William Schafer, also asked Chris to be a member of the provincial council. During the next two years Chris worked diligently at setting up the parish council and providing more ministerial services to the people of the parish. He worked at forming parishioners into teams to handle the various aspects of parish life. With the generosity of a good number of parishioners, he set up preparation classes for young couples preparing for marriage and young parents preparing to have their children baptized. He also established a bereavement committee to insure that people who were grieving would have the support they needed at a crucial time. He was a leader in engaging the laity to take an active role in parish ministry. At the same time the parish youth ministry programs continued to grow and flourish under his guidance and leadership.

In the summer of 1993, the provincial asked Chris Woerz to take on the responsibility of guiding the ministry at St. Francis Youth Center and the Penny Club in Watsonville. Together with Fr. Jesse Montes who was stationed there, Chris began to revitalize the program. The Penny Club was a California Domestic Corporation filed on May 26, 1969. By the time Fr. Chris became director, the band, vocalists and folkloric dancers had been on local and national television, special broadcasts, and had produced

recordings and videotapes of their original and contemporary music. They performed in many venues around the state. During summers, the Salesian Sisters also served at the club, teaching catechism to some 100 children and teens. Some would receive their First Holy Communion. The year-round music and dance programs developed into a year of sports and activities for all the youth in Watsonville and surrounding areas. The sisters also participated. At one point, there were close to 600 children registered in the programs. There were 12 soccer teams that would dominate the local and the San Jose area tournaments. In Fr. Chris' last year, he hosted a successful east-coast band tour which included New Jersey (where the group performed for the Sister's Academy in North Haledon and for Don Bosco Tech in Patterson, New Jersey). They toured New York City, Washington, D.C. and Disney World. All of these programs served the city's poorest youth including four migrant workers' camps. The club's swimming pool was then covered to provide



*Fr. Chris (upper left in group) with Penny Club Vocalist and Folk Dancers.*

year-round swimming: a relief for some parents who worked day long under the blazing sun of the berry fields. There were tutorial programs for those who were underachieving in schools. And he started an innovative tattoo removal program sponsored by San Jose area physicians at no cost. Three drama programs were initiated with the help of Fr. Jesse Montes: two community theater companies for both the English and Spanish speaking and one young actors' group. The last production under Fr. Chris, the musical, OLIVER! grossed \$51,000.00. During his tenure there, he continued to preach retreats, celebrated Masses to help the neighboring parishes, gave spiritual guidance to families in crisis, and took care of the adult volunteers who came from across the nation and Mexico to help the Salesians evangelize. He left the program in 1997 when he was appointed Director of Salesian High School in Richmond, California.



***Fr. Chris at a freshmen Bar-B-Q,  
giving encouragement to all.***

Fr. Chris Woerz' six-year term at Salesian saw the school population expand from 500 to 580 students. He was an active recruiter in the area, and he employed Linus to help attract young people. He used various opportunities afforded by the local parochial schools to celebrate the Eucharist and to introduce the students to Salesian High School. In addition, he worked on garnering support for the various scholarship programs offered by the school to local families.

In an effort to bolster the development efforts of the school and to bring greater notoriety of the school in the local communities, Fr. Chris Woerz established a Board of Directors for the school. Together with Dr. Robert Yahng, the first Board chair, Fr. Chris worked on formulating an acceptable set of bylaws for the functioning of the Board. He encouraged local business people and influential alumni to participate as active members so that the school might be better known in the East Bay communities.

Finally as Director of Salesian High he initiated a redevelopment program which sought to remodel the main building as well as provide more adequate facilities for sports and extracurricular activities. Unfortunately the project never managed to gain the impetus needed. He organized a "gala reception" at one of the prominent hotels in Oakland; however, the results of the evening were not enough to generate interest in the renovation projects.





*Bishop Oscar Romero, Linus  
and Fr. Chris Woerz*

In the spring of 2003 the new provincial, Fr. David Purdy, asked Fr. Chris Woerz to take on again the duties and responsibilities of the province vocation director. He took up residence at St. John Bosco High School in Bellflower and had his office at St. Joseph's Renewal Center in Rosemead. Eventually he moved to St. Joseph's where he was appointed Vice-Director of the community. He continued his ministry as province vocation director as well as helping with youth retreats at St. Joseph's.

For the 2010 school year Fr. Chris Woerz was asked by the provincial, Fr. Tim Ploch, to become the province delegate for the Salesian Family. He began this ministry at Salesian High in Richmond. He wanted to bolster the cooperator work in the Northern California area as well as work on alumni in the various schools, especially Salesian High. After two years at Salesian Chris moved to St. Joseph's in Rosemead where he continued his work as Salesian Family Delegate. He enjoyed his work in the Southern California area, and he was able to garner support for the cooperator movement in the various communities of the Los Angeles area. In July of 2014 he moved to De Sales Hall in Bellflower where he continued his work with the Salesian Family members.

During his early years of priestly ministry Chris developed diabetes. As his condition gradually worsened he became aware of his limitations. Problems with blood circulation in his lower legs also began to affect his physical wellbeing. In the mid '90's his physical condition necessitated the amputation of toes in his right leg. From then on he wore a special shoe to help his balance. His diabetic condition as its overall effects on his body caused him to be hospitalized several times. However, he kept his spirits high and relied on his faith and trust in God's providence to see him through. He frequently noted that it was his prayer life and his deep devotion to his Eucharistic ministry which kept him optimistic even in the roughest of times.

Chris Woerz was certainly a man of prayer. His deep personal relationship with the Lord could be seen in his ability to preach the Word of God in a manner which made it come alive to both young people and adults. His faith and trust in God's providence helped him to not only proclaim God's Word but also to live it in his daily life.

It was during the last few years of his life, as his physical condition steadily deteriorated, that Chris became acutely aware of the tenuous situation which his diabetic condition

was causing. His moves from Salesian High in Richmond, to St. Joseph in Rosemead, and finally to De Sales Hall in Bellflower became attempts to help him with his physical condition and to keep him close to his doctors.

In September 2012 Chris had to go in for minor surgery to place a pacemaker in his chest. His heart was failing. It was unexpected, but the operation was needed because his doctors concluded that his minor heart problem had to be resolved before other conditions could be treated. While in the hospital he sent an email to all the members of the Salesian Family. In it he reflected on his life and on his ministry as a Salesian:

*What can I tell you my dear ones? I love you, I care for you. I came to the Salesians as a 14 year old in 1958. The Salesians greeted u with smiles as I would learn was Don Bosco's way. I have been given the opportunity of traveling around the Province as vocation director, and Salesian Family Delegate for a combined 15 years. Everywhere I go I encounter the Salesian Spirit alive and well. I have met Salesians in Rome, Turin, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica who have opened their hearts to me just because I was a Salesian... This Salesian Family is a blessing to me, a sustaining strength which I thank God for every day. To my brother Salesians of Don Bosco, thank you, to my sisters in the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, thank you, to my brothers and sisters among the Salesian Cooperators, thank you, to my brothers and sisters in the Past pupils of St. Francis Watsonville, of the Philippines, of Mexico, of Vietnam, thank you, to my brothers and sisters in ADMA, thank you. To my sisters in Las Damas, thank you. You have given me strength not only at this time but all throughout my life. You bring me joy when I see your face or hear your voice.*

From 2013 to 2015 he had been hospitalized three times because of decreased blood circulation to his lower legs and especially his feet due to the diabetes. In early September, 2015, he was hospitalized at Long Beach Memorial Hospital due to infections in his feet. A diagnosis by his doctor determined that the infection might lead to gangrene. So the decision was made to amputate his right leg from the knee down. Throughout this experience Chris remained optimistic and hopeful. After the operation he was transferred

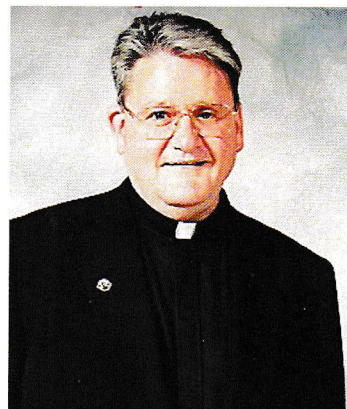


to a convalescent facility across the street from the hospital. He enjoyed receiving visitors, and he provided them with greater hope and consolation than they were able to give him. On the evening of September 19th his condition worsened. He was transferred again to Long Beach Memorial Hospital where he died on the evening of September 20, 2015, due to heart failure. The amputation of one leg below the knee a few days prior was successful but evidently was too much for his weakened condition.

On the evening of September 24, 2015, a viewing and rosary was held at the St. John Bosco High School Chapel. A good number of friends attended the service which was followed by a reception in the school's multi-purpose room. A Mass of Resurrection was held at St. Dominic Savio Church on September 25, 2015, where Fr. Chris had been the pastor. Fr. Jesse Montes was the homilist. He called upon Linus to help him reflect on Chris' life. Fr. Jesse and Linus noted how the Eucharist was the most important and central event in each day of Chris's life. As Fr. Jesse noted, "He (Chris) was beaming every moment of the Mass. And like the followers of Jesus, the table feast was where he got his strength to carry on even while suffering excruciating pain." Another reception followed in the parish hall.

Fr. Chris Woerz' body was transported to northern California. Another Mass of Resurrection was celebrated on September 29th at St. Callistus Catholic Church in El Sobrante, California. During his years as Director at Salesian High in Richmond Fr. Chris had helped with the Sunday Masses at that parish. The church was able to hold the number of people who attended the Mass. Again Fr. Jesse Montes shared with the congregation his and Linus' reflection on Chris's life. Burial immediately followed at the Salesian Cemetery in Richmond. After the interment a reception was held in the Salesian residence for all in attendance.

Perhaps one can conclude with a final thought from Linus as expressed by Fr. Jesse in his homily: "Chris was the warmest nicest hand that has ever entered into my life. He never intended to say any harmful words to anyone... well...go on Linus. I loved my friend and he loved me. I will always remember him..."



*Fr. Chris Woerz, confrere  
and friend of youth*

## **Fr. Christian Hayward Woerz, SDB**

Born: Los Angeles, California  
March 27, 1944

First Profession: Newton, New Jersey  
August 16, 1963

Ordained: Oakland, California  
February 21, 1976

Died: Long Beach, California  
September 20, 2015



***Salesians of Don Bosco***

San Francisco Province  
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