



Father Clement Cardillo, SDB

June 20, 1925 – November 22, 2011

Professed September 8, 1944

Ordained July 1, 1954

Father Clement Cardillo, SDB

Father Clement Cardillo, SDB, a member of the Salesian community of Orange, N.J., died at St. Catherine of Siena Nursing Home in Caldwell, N.J., on November 22, 2011. He was 86 and had resided at St. Catherine since March of that year. In his last years he had suffered from various ailments including a cardiac condition of long standing, hypertension, and degenerative joint disease in his spine.

He was a professed Salesian for 67 years and a priest for 57 years.

Father Cardillo was born in Port Chester, N.Y., on June 20, 1925. His father Anthony was a stonemason and his mother Beatrice Pitro Cardillo a housewife. The family, which included another son, Joseph, and a daughter, Gussie, were members of the Salesian parish of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Port Chester, and Clem was baptized there on August 30, 1925.

After completing his first year of high school at Port Chester Junior High School, in September 1940 Clem enrolled at Don Bosco Seminary in Newton, N.J., as a sophomore and graduated from high school in June 1943. In general his academic work was a little above average, but he excelled in religion. He entered St. Joseph's Novitiate in Newton in September, yearning to embrace the Salesian life, as he wrote in his application. He professed first vows on September 8, 1944.

According to the practice of the era, Clem did his first year of college studies during the novitiate. Because of illness, however, after his profession Brother Clem did not continue his philosophical and other studies at Don Bosco College Seminary in 1944-1945. Instead, he assisted the clerical aspirants and taught the coadjutor aspirants. When the juniorate moved temporarily to Suffern, N.Y., in 1945-1946 he went as well and taught American history and general science and directed the band. The following year taught geometry and piano and directed the band at Salesian High School in New Rochelle.

In the fall of 1947 he returned to Don Bosco College and was graduated in August 1950 with a B.A. in philosophy and a 2.91 GPA. During the 1948-1949 year he also taught and assisted the high school

seminarians, the juniorate having returned to Newton from Suffern. From 1949 to 1951 he was assistant to the novices. During the 1950-1951 school year he also began his theological studies with courses at Fordham University in New York City.

On September 8, 1950, Brother Clem was admitted to perpetual profession. The house council at Don Bosco College noted his "precarious health but beautiful religious character, fidelity to duty, childlike obedience, willingness to undertake any work."

From 1951 to 1954 Brother Clem studied theology at St. Anselm's Institute in Bollengo, Italy, where he was a capable student. A note by the director in March 1952 indicates that he was outstanding in his piety, of a "good and open character" with good abilities but weak health. In his application for priestly ordination, dated May 24, 1954, he expressed a desire to continue his own sanctification and "to guide souls to Christ in imitation of my heavenly Mother." He was ordained by Bishop Paolo Rostagno of Ivrea in the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin on July 1, 1954.



Ordination portrait, 1954

Father Cardillo spent his first years as a priest at Don Bosco

Juniorate in Haverstraw, N.Y. (1954-1955), teaching French, among other things; at St. Michael's School in Goshen, N.Y. (1955-1956), as catechist (campus minister and infirmarian); and at Sacred Heart Juniorate in Ipswich, Mass. (1956-1960), as prefect of studies and then catechist. In 1960 he became director of the Ipswich juniorate, serving there till 1965, the same year that he earned a master's degree from Boston College in educational psychology; his thesis was entitled "The Assessment of Minor Seminarians." He interned at the Boston V.A. Hospital and in a Boston-area public school system.

In 1965 Father Cardillo was named pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Paterson, N.J., and director of the Salesian community serving the parish. He was pastor until 1980, and director as well from 1965 to 1974. Of that period he wrote: "It was with trepidation that I took the assignment of being pastor of St. Anthony's Church in Paterson in 1965. It was my very first parish, and I feared I would not be up to the task. But the Lord was kind to me. He blessed the church with good-hearted parishioners, and through their dedication and commitment I was able to purchase five properties, renovate the rectory and the church, install centralized air conditioning, and construct the St. Anthony's Men's Club. But most of all I was able to help the community of Christ enrich their faith and get closer to the Lord."

Perhaps his studies and his counseling experience helped his own interior maturation. Father Bill Keane remembers "Fr. Clem when he was director of Sacred Heart Juniorate. He always seemed so dark and serious. As I met him later as a Salesian, he was really a friendly and fun kind of guy in his own way. I grew to have great respect and admiration for him. He was a great Salesian."

When he stepped down as pastor, he was saluted in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressman Robert Roe of New Jersey "in recognition of his exemplary achievements, in service to God and to our people, so unselfishly dedicated to the betterment of mankind," and "of the love, affection, and reverence with which Father Cardillo is held by all of us who have had the good fortune to know him" (*Congressional Record*, August 19, 1980).

While he was pastor Father Clem continued his psychology studies

at Boston College and Columbia University, earning a doctorate from B.C. in 1972. His dissertation was entitled *Empathy and Personality Traits*.

In this period, health became an issue again. Father Paul Chu relates a conversation that Father Clem had with him when he was a prenovice: “While teaching us prenovices, he would give us reflections of his own Salesian vocation. What struck me the most was when he spoke about his anguish in dealing with the news of his brain cancer diagnosis as he was completing his doctorate in psychology. He said that he prayed a lot and was angry with God for this inopportune cancer. So one day while praying in the chapel he went up to the tabernacle and banged on it multiple times while yelling repeatedly: ‘God are you there? Why did you give me cancer when I just finished my doctoral studies?!’ Fr. Clem then attributed his cure from brain cancer to this dramatic praying session.”

Licensed as a psychologist in New Jersey, he directed his practice primarily toward priests and religious. In 1980 Bishop Lawrence Casey of Paterson appointed him co-director of the diocese’s Consultation Service Center, where he worked for 28 years, until the diocese terminated the service as a cost-cutting measure. He continued in private practice, counseling both religious and lay people, while living at St. Paul’s Parish in Clifton, N.J., until retiring on January 1, 2011. In that period he belonged to the Salesian communities of Paterson (1980-1991) and Orange, N.J. (from 1991 until his death). The fees he earned helped Salesian seminarians with their financial needs.

In addition to serving as director of the Paterson Diocese’s Pre-Canas program for several years, Father Cardillo was a member, and twice chairman, of the New Jersey Board of Psychological Examiners, which administers examinations to those applying for state licensing, checks their credentials, and investigates complaints of unprofessional conduct.

On October 31, 1982, New Jersey’s Federation of Italian Societies honored him as Man of the Year, saluting “the impact of his fine deeds, whether they be at the spiritual, psychological, or social level.”

The provincial nominated him to be a member of the provincial council in 1986, writing: “Father Clement is respected as a man dedi-

cated to the cause of religious formation, both early formation as well as on-going. He is a skilled counsellor and has proven himself as a community superior as director and pastor. He has also been very active on the province formation commission for two terms. He brings to the council a warmth of personality, a dedication to collaborative style of leadership and concern for Province renewal." In the nomination for a second term in 1989, he was described as "loyal, prudent, professional and pastorally sensitive."

Father Clem's professional expertise directly and indirectly benefited young Salesians in formation. For example, Father Paul Chu recalls:

Fr. Clem taught human development/psychology ... when we were prenovices in the year 2007-2008. He was a good and kind teacher to us both. His teaching gave me good insights into my own growth and development.

Occasionally, he would facilitate a meditation for us which was quite relaxing and peaceful. After making my first vows and living in Orange for 2 years as a postnovice, I would pick him up from the rectory of St. Anthony in Clifton on Sunday afternoon to join our Orange community for prayer and dinner and take him back afterward. During these car rides, I often asked him for advice, and I remember Fr. Clem being gracious and thoughtful in giving me advice. As Fr. Clem aged, he became more forgetful, but he always has a smile on his face and a calming joyful presence about him. He was always grateful for the car ride to and from Orange.

From the San Francisco Province Father Joseph Boenzi, SDB, wrote: "[Father] Clem did a lot for our province over many years; helped me personally when I was learning the trade of formation director in the 1980s, for which I remain always grateful. [It was] my first time as director, [and] I was working with prenovices and candidates at De Sales Hall. Fr. Clem offered his invaluable help on as I tried to understand how to guide that young community. Later when I was at Don Bosco Hall as director, Clem offered his

help with Salesians who were doing a sabbatical year. His interventions were always well appreciated. Clem was one of the greats!”

Other members of the Salesian Family also drew on Father Clem’s pastoral care. A Don Bosco Volunteer recounts:

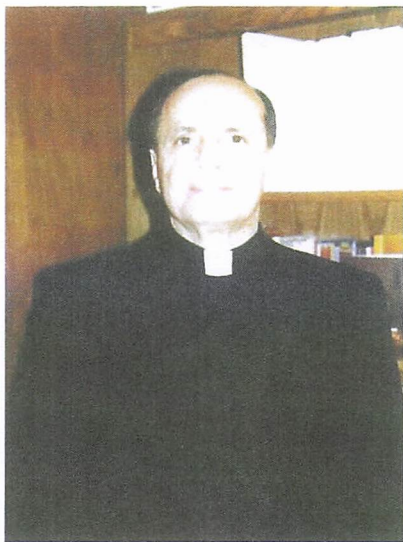
[When I couldn’t make the meeting at which Fr. Cardillo was the speaker] they recorded his conference in a cassette tape and gave it to me. I listened to it again and again. There was so much wealth in less than an hour of talk. It’s not only spiritual but a very in-depth understanding of human beings and human behavior. I found it so good and helpful to me.

I have a friend whose father died suddenly. He and his whole family was in shock and grieving. He was looking for someone to help him. I met Fr. Cardillo and told him the situation. Without hesitation, he told me to ask the young man to go to his office any time he was ready. He was very kind, understanding, and generous.

Salesian Cooperator Janis Aldridge writes that her family “knew Fr. Clem well. Having lived diagonally across Self Place [for a time the location of a Salesian formation house in South Orange] ..., we considered him our friend, and also our ‘counselor!’ He provided us, my husband Allen and myself, with insights to improve our marriage, and he was a true Salesian in showing kindness and telling jokes to our son.”

In the spring of 1990 he served an emergency interim stint as director of Don Bosco Technical High School in Paterson, while continuing on the provincial council and carrying out his work as a professional counselor.

Service as a provincial councilor with responsibility for formation was followed in 1991 to 1997 by two terms as vice provincial—for a total of 11 straight years on the council.



At South Orange, 1993

In 1998 Pope John Paul II named Father Cardillo a recipient of the papal medal *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* in recognition of his services to the Church, particularly in the Paterson Diocese. Bishop Frank Rodimer of Paterson nominated him for this honor, citing Father Clem as “well respected and loved for his devotion to his people and his faithful preaching of the Gospel and his administration of the sacraments. He continues to be an active counselor but he is, most of all, a faithful priest who serves the spiritual needs of the people entrusted to his care with tenderness, compassion and deep love for the Church.”

Father Clem always found his Salesian vocation “a source of joy and peace.” He once wrote: “My life as a Salesian has not only enriched my personal life, but it has allowed me through my ministry to bring comfort to people suffering both mental and spiritual anguish. Albert Einstein once said, ‘Only a life lived for others is worth living.’ I truly believe that this has been the focal point of my vocation.”

Jim Hurley, a former Salesian, sums up Father Clem’s contribution to the life of the Church: “Only heaven will know the many confreres, nuns, and priests of the diocese who benefitted from his ministry of counseling and psychotherapy. In the spirit of St. Francis de Sales Fr.

Clem was all things to all in order to bring them to Christ.”

Father Stephen Leake, SDB, director of the Salesian community in Orange, said of Father Cardillo: “Our Salesian Constitution #18 states that the Salesian ‘knows that by his work he is participating in the creative action of God and cooperating with Christ in building the kingdom.’ Fr. Clem lived this constitution to the full as he worked with zeal as a pastor, psychologist, teacher, and friend to so many. He was a tireless worker for souls in the manner of Don Bosco!”

Father Cardillo’s funeral was celebrated at Our Lady of the Valley Church in Orange, N.J. The pastor, Father George Hanna, SDB, preached at the wake on November 25. At the Mass of Christian Burial on November 26, Father Thomas Dunne, SDB, the provincial, presided and preached. Burial was in the family plot (#27) in St. Mary’s Cemetery, Port Chester, as Fr. Clem had requested.

Father Michael Mendl, SDB
Archivist, Province of New Rochelle
January 31, 2020

We live as disciples of the Lord by the grace of the Father, who consecrated us through the gift of his Spirit and sends us out to be apostles of the young.

-- Salesian Constitutions, art. 3

We believe that Mary is present among us and continues her "mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians." We entrust ourselves to her, the humble servant in whom the Lord has done great things, that we may become witnesses to the young of her Son's boundless love."

-- Salesian Constitutions, art. 8

The Salesian gives himself to his mission with tireless energy, taking care to do everything with simplicity and moderation. He knows that by his work he is participation in the creative action of God and co-operating with Christ in building the Kingdom.

-- Salesian Constitutions, art. 18

