



Father Charles Ceglar, S.D.B.
1912 - 1999



Obituary letter of Father Charles Ceglar

Birth:	September 19, 1912
Religious Profession:	August 10, 1929
Priestly Ordination:	July 2, 1939
Death:	June 13, 1999

On June 13th, 1999, while at the hospital in Ljubljana, Slovenia, for some tests, Father Charles Ceglar died suddenly of an embolism. He was 86 years of age and would have celebrated his 60th Anniversary of Priestly Ordination on July 2nd 1999. Happy like a child, Father Charles had been telling all his friends, half jokingly, that on his 87th birthday the Holy Father would visit his native Slovenia.

Charles Ceglar was born on September 19th, 1912 in the village of Sticna in Slovenia. Until recent years, Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia. The oldest of five children, three boys and two girls, he died the last. The three boys were priests; his brother Stanley who passed away in 1994 was also a Salesian and a member of the Salesian Province of Canada.

His father, Anton, worked as a railway foreman. His mother's name was Marija Groznik. Charles was baptised in Sticna on September 20th, 1912. He would lose his father to the Spanish flu on October 18th, 1918. In 1920, Charles entered the primary school of the Salesians at Radna. Then in 1924, he went on to the secondary level, still with the Salesians at Verzej in Slovenia. In 1928 he entered the Salesian Novitiate in Radna and one year later, on the 10th of August, 1929, he pronounced his first vows as a Salesian.

Charles, now "Brother Charles" did his tirocenium, or practical training, as a cleric in the Salesian Secondary School of Rakovnik (Ljubljana) between 1932 and 1935. The next phase in his Salesian priestly formation was the study of Theology. This Brother Charles began in Turin, Italy, in 1935 and completed it back in Rakovnik between 1936 and 1939.

"Father" Charles Ceglar was ordained a priest on July 2nd, 1939, in Ljubljana by Bishop Gregory Rozman and

celebrated there his first Mass at the altar of St. John Bosco. On July 16th he celebrated his first Mass in his native Sticna. In 1939, Father Charles was conscripted into the Yugoslavian army for six months. After this, between 1940 and 1945, he was Prefect in three different Salesian communities in Radna, Skrljevo and Selo. Then he was off to Borgo San Lorenzo in Florence, Italy, once more as Prefect. Between 1946 and 1949, he was Pastor of St. Jacob ob Gork Parish in Austria. Already the two principal future ministries of Father Charles in Canada, Prefect and Pastor, were part of his life.

In October 1949 Father Charles crossed the Atlantic and found himself in Goshen, New York. Fr. Ronald Quenneville writes of this period: "I was Assistant of a student dormitory at the time. Rooms were very limited; so he took a cell in my dormitory. True humility in practice!" After a brief time in Goshen, he was assigned as Prefect to Hope Haven Louisiana. He remained there until 1955.

It was at this time that he received his obedience for Canada. Between 1955 and 1962, he was Prefect of Collège Don Bosco in Jacquet River, New Brunswick. Father Jacques Donne recalls the following: "Father Charles was waiting for me at the train station in Jacquet River in 1956. At the time he was both Economer and teacher of languages. He certainly had a gift for languages; he could compensate his lack of knowledge of French with his vast knowledge of history, geography and English. Father Charles was a born diplomat and opportunist; his heart was open to all. He was calm, full of good advice, and able to unite around himself people of very diverse origins. The community had financial problems, but he was able to raise up benefactors in the whole area between Campbellton and Bathurst. He was greatly appreciated by all who knew him in Jacquet River, Belledune and Nash Creek."

Father Romeo Trottier also lived with Fr. Charles in Jacquet River. He writes the following: "I remember him as a Salesian totally given to his task. The Provincial had sent him to Collège Don Bosco 'for a short time to help out'. He stayed seven years! He was a man of poverty, of piety and a hard worker. Even though his contact with the students was not extensive, possibly because of his limited French, he always

had an eye open for a young person in need and sought to prevent situations that could have led to disciplinary problems." Between 1962 and 1964, Father Charles occupied the same responsibility of Economer at Collège Dominique Savio in St. Louis de Kent.

In 1964, Father Charles arrived at the recently constructed Séminaire Salésien in Sherbrooke, Quebec, once again as Prefect. This was a time of great change in the educational system of the Province of Quebec. The Séminaire had to either make the transition from the Aspirantate that it was to a private school open to regular students, or risk disappearing. An increased number of students also implied the hiring of many more lay teachers at considerable cost. Fr. Charles took all these changes as a sign of the times and moved ahead. Fr. Jacques Donne lived through these transitions with Fr. Charles and so describes this period. "Over and over again we made plans for a new building (eventually named Pavillon Don Bosco) that would be able to welcome more students and that would include a gymnasium and other physical education facilities. I was worried about the finances; he had an enormous confidence in the Virgin Mary. But sly fox that he was, he had also established numerous links with important figures of the City of Sherbrooke. What is more, he was brilliant in the transactions he made linked to the sale of some of our land to the soon to be constructed shopping centre, Carrefour de l'Estrie. He even succeeded in camouflaging the existence of certain sums of money from his Director and Provincial!"

This is the now famous "pillow incident"! Who better to tell this story than Fr. Ronald Quenneville, Provincial Delegate of the time? "I had been instructed by Father August Bosio to complete the payments on the existing building of the Séminaire. We thus needed all the extra money that was available. Father Charles, already planning the construction of Pavillon Don Bosco in Sherbrooke, was once a little slow in handing over to me a part of this money. So I asked him about it. 'Oh, yes,' replied Fr. Charles, I have something under my pillow for you.' Then did he not produce about \$120,000!"

In 1971, Fr. Charles was appointed Director of the Séminaire Community, while still remaining in charge of the

finances. It was during his first term as Superior that in March 1972 ground was finally broken for the construction of Pavillon Don Bosco. Deacon George Harkins was in charge of the sports programme at the Séminaire at the time. "He was a real pioneer. Thanks to him we were able to build Pavillon Don Bosco with its sports centre. He really believed in this and helped me bring into reality a dream I had had for so long for the young of the school." Father Charles continued as Director until 1975.

Another whole chapter of Fr. Charles' time in Sherbrooke concerns Camp Savio. This camp facility was originally conceived as a summer experience for the Aspirants, as well as a training ground for Canadian Salesians in formation. Its evolution was also affected by the changes taking place at the Séminaire and was in need of a new direction. Who better to describe this period than Fr. Bob Gagné, so intimately linked with the camp for so many years. "We were at Camp Savio in the fall of 1969. Father Charles described to me his dream for the future of the camp: destined for more needy youth, with a Salesian educational approach, animated by a mix of Salesian and lay personnel, with Salesian formation for all the counsellors, how he planned to handle the finances, etc. Then he took me by the arm as if to say: 'Be attentive, this is the important moment.' He asked me three questions: 'Do you think this work is valid?' He was looking more for a personal conviction than for religious obedience. 'Are you ready to commit yourself for the long term?' In his mind, you didn't start a project for just a year. 'Do you think it's God's will?' Human reasons alone were not sufficient to guarantee the success of the enterprise. From that time on the necessary money for the initial investment did not worry him. When I would later on ask him questions of a financial nature, he would answer: 'That's God's business!'" The number of poor, neglected and abandoned youngsters that were helped on their way through life by the Camp Savio that grew out of this faith of Fr. Charles is inestimable.

Some of the lay teachers who knew Father Charles in Sherbrooke describe him using expressions such as the following: "When I think of Father Ceglar, 'Charlie' as we affectionately called him, the strongest memory is that of 'blind trust'.

When we used to ask him where he was going to find the money for his projects, he would answer 'Don Bosco will take care of things'. However, Fr. Charles' telephone did help out Don Bosco a little! I learned from him to not be afraid of having projects, to have confidence in tomorrow, in the future." "I will never forget this man, reserved yet determined, this great builder whose motto must have been 'Don Bosco's in charge'." "A man of vision, he consecrated a part of his life to the development of Séminaire Salésien. He is to be counted among the pioneers, the builders, the craftsmen of this Salesian work."

After so many years of service as Prefect in various Canadian Salesian works, Father Charles was offered in 1975 the opportunity to minister to his own Slovenian people. What a joy it must have been for him to come to St. Gregory the Great Parish in Hamilton, Ontario! He was Associate Pastor there between 1975 and 1978 and Pastor between 1978 and 1984. We are not surprised to learn that it was during Fr. Charles' term as Pastor that the new church of St. Gregory the Great was built and inaugurated in 1982.

Fr. Ivan Dobrsek, presently Associate Pastor in Hamilton, describes Fr. Charles as follows: "He immediately put himself to the task of regularly visiting the families of the Slovenian nation, as well as the sick. He founded the Altar Association whereby lady volunteers took care of the cleanliness of the Church and the decoration of the sanctuary for Sundays and feastdays. Then he founded the St. Joseph Society for the men of the Parish. Already he was thinking of the future construction of the parish church, the rectory and even Villa Slovenia."

Then in 1984, Fr. Frank Slobodnik came from Slovenia to replace Father Charles as Pastor. Father Frank describes how Fr. Charles persuaded him to come to Canada: "He first got in contact with me through the letters he wrote to me in Slovenia. He was looking for a younger priest for the Parish. He was quite persistent indicating that I would get used to living in Canada quite fast, having already brothers here." With the arrival of Fr. Slobodnik, Father Charles once again became Associate Pastor. As we can well imagine, he was far from idle

during this period. He continued as Financial Administrator of the Parish and co-ordinated the pastoral services to the Slovenian communities of London, Kitchener and St. Catharines. In collaboration with the Slovenian Society of St. Joseph, he undertook the establishment of a senior citizens' home for the elderly. The official opening ceremonies of "Villa Slovenia", adjacent to the church property, took place on September 25th, 1992. Again Fr. Frank writes: "The Slovenian community in Hamilton owes him a lot: it was because of his vision and persistence that we now have the new church and rectory, Villa Slovenia for the elderly, a separate section in the cemetery reserved for parishioners, and so many other things."

As if all this were not enough, Father Charles began a new career in historical research! He dedicated himself to the study of the life of Bishop Frederic Baraga, a fellow Slovenian who in the last century devoted his life in North America to the evangelisation of the Native Peoples of the Upper Great Lakes. The results of his research were published in a collection called "Baragiana". Father Charles ardently hoped, prayed and laboured for the beatification of Bishop Baraga. If this blessed event ever takes place, he will have contributed to the process in a most significant manner. Father Slobodnik describes as follows Fr. Charles' 'career' as a writer: "I knew him as a hardworking man. He always had projects for the future; he did not rest much. He started to use the computer when he was 80. Those first days on the computer were for him very hard and frustrating. He would accidentally lose all his day's or even week's work, but he was determined enough to start again. He would ask me basic questions about saving documents, copying them, making backups, until he finally got it."

For many years, Father Charles was also an important benefactor for the Cistercian Monastery in Sticna, his hometown. He helped set up a Slovenian museum there and sent over 200 boxes of material – Slovenian emigration documents, books, prayer books, monthlies, missionary material, etc. For his contribution Father Charles received a letter of acknowledgement from the President of Slovenia. Of course, because of his great humility, few people heard about it. Blessed with a gift for languages, Father Charles also wrote and spoke several

other that Slovenian and English: French, German, Italian, and Croatian. His study of Bishop Baraga even gave him the chance to acquire certain elements of native Indian languages! Fr. Slobodnik again adds: "Fr. Charles' brother Ludvik, a diocesan priest in Brazil, wrote many books in Slovenian. What is not commonly known is that a lot of the material for his books was found and collected by Fr. Charles. He would find him material and Ludvik would use it in his books."

Another little known fact about Father Charles was made known to us by a parishioner of St. Gregory the Great's: "Fr. Charles was a member of the Knights of Columbus, Council 07969 in Stoney Creek, Ontario since 1982. He took his first degree on December 5th of that year and his fourth degree on September 6th, 1988. He was Chaplain of Bishop Ryan Fourth Degree from 1989 to 1993." Father Charles continued as Associate until 1997, when he decided to return to his home Province of Slovenia.

If we had to draw the spiritual portrait of Father Charles, what would it look like? Deacon George Harkins writes: "I recall that he had told me on more than one occasion that his mother had confided to him the secret of a good and long life: 'Always have projects'. Father Charles considered himself a confrere like all others and at their service. He was a simple man, humble and always happy. He was a priest who was serene, transparent, and generous with his time and his talents. He had so much confidence in the confreres that you could not say no to him and never wanted to disappoint him."

Father Georges Parent describes Father Charles in these words: "He was the confrere of Canada for whom I always had the greatest admiration and affection. Unbelievably calm and totally available, he was a man of prayer who always welcomed you with a humility that was disarming. When I was a young Pastor in Jacquet River and he would stop in at the Rectory, we would always go for a long walk on that site that he had known so well, and each time towards the end he would ask me to hear his confession. In 1990, I visited him in Hamilton and he took me around for a visit – the church, the parish hall, the old folks' home, his office. He showed me his

computer; he had a cell phone that he carried on him; and he was still full of dreams! He even shared with me, with a certain sadness, how some confreres had taken a long time to be inculturated and how this had slowed down Salesian work in Canada."

Here's how Father Romeo Trottier remembers Father Charles: "After my ordination I was once more with him at Séminaire Salésien in Sherbrooke, where he was first Economist and then Director. A hard worker, a courageous and enterprising man, a Salesian very attached to Don Bosco and Salesian tradition. He was also a spiritual man for whom the Eucharist and the presence of Mary were a real part of his life. How can we not underline his great love for his homeland Slovenia, which he had had to flee, and to which he had the happiness of returning these last years, when it had once more become free. He had tried by so many means to alleviate the suffering of his confreres in Slovenia when they were under Communist rule."

Father Stanislav Hocevar, Provincial of Slovenia, spoke of Father Charles at his funeral Mass in the following terms: "With his dedicated work as a priest, he is part of our history. He was always discovering that God became man and reveals Himself through human events. He was not a man of great theories, but was always attentive to what could be done for the Church in Slovenia and for his people. He was continually repeating that he had to prepare everything on time. When it came time to enter into his Lord's eternal rest he was well prepared and strengthened by the Sacraments. We thank him for being a Slovenian, a Salesian, and a priest with a big heart. He also reminds us that God's kingdom is coming and that we have to cooperate with this unique spiritual event. Father Charles, rest in God's peace!"

What message does Father Charles leave us as a testament? Maybe this one: Let us be proud of the roots of our faith and culture, as he was of his, but let us also be open to inculturating ourselves wherever we serve! From Don Bosco to our days, the greatest Salesian pioneers have always succeeded in doing this. Let us follow their example. May Father Charles continue to watch over Canada, his country of

adoption, in all the richness of its languages, cultures and traditions.

Fr. Richard Authier S.D.B.
Provincial
December 8th, 1999

PHOTOS

1. With his sisters on Ordination day.
2. September 14th, 1949, Feast of the Holy Cross, on Mount Grosslockner in Austria, a few days before his departure for America.
3. In Hamilton with Fathers Ivan Dobrsek, Dominic DeBlase, Provincial, and his brother Stanley.
4. With students of Collège Don Bosco in Jacquet River.
5. In 1973, on the occasion of a year's end celebration for the boarders.
6. At Camp Savio with Father Bob Gagné and campers.
7. With young people in Hamilton.
8. Accompanied by Father Frank Slobodnik, Father Ivan Dobrsek, his brother Stanley and a group of altar servers.
9. Surrounded by a group of confreres in Sherbrooke for Thanksgiving.
10. In 1991 with Father Romeo Trottier at a feast in their honour.
11. On pilgrimage with parishioners of St. Gregory the Great.
12. The "Annuity Fund of Séminaire Salésien" is dedicated to Father Charles.
13. With Don Bosco always and everywhere.
14. In 1972 Father Charles, accompanied by Father John Malloy, Provincial, launches the construction of Pavillon Don Bosco.
15. In 1964 on the occasion of his 25th Ordination Anniversary.
16. With his sisters and his brother Stanley, on the occasion of the 50th Ordination Anniversary of the latter in 1993.
17. Passport photo in 1945.
18. Eucharist of his 50th Ordination Anniversary in 1989 in Sticna.
19. The Cistercian Monastery of Sticna.
20. In front of the monastery in July 1989.







