



## **PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER NO. 123**

**Clement (Wallace) Kurowski, OFM**

**1926-2009**

On March 7, 1926, Walter Kurowski and his wife Pearl Pietka brought their son to the Baptismal font of Immaculate Conception Parish in South Chicago, IL. The Rev. J. Kendziora administered the Baptism and gave the name Venceslaus to the little boy who was born on February 24<sup>th</sup> of that year. Transferring to St. Mary Magdalene Parish, Venceslaus became

Wallace by the time he was confirmed in 1937, and graduated from parochial school a year later. After attending Edward Coles Public School for one year, Wallace entered St. Bonaventure Minor Seminary and High School, Sturtevant, WI, where he spent the war years of 1941 to 1945.

Applying to join the Friars of the Assumption BVM Province, Wallace states that since the first grade he had felt a calling to the religious priesthood. On the back of the application form, Fr. Isidore Cwiklinski, Provincial Minister, wrote in pencil that Wallace was tenth in his class, has an ability to read in Latin and Polish and is “nervous”. Wallace was admitted to novitiate on June 25, 1945, and took the name of Cedric. By the time he professed Solemn Vows on June 26, 1949, Cedric morphed into Clement and remained so until his death on Christmas Eve 2009.

Following the normal course of formation for that era, Clem took his philosophy courses and graduated from St. Francis College in Burlington, WI, in 1949. He took his theology at Lourdes Seminary, Cedar Lake, IN, and was ordained to the priesthood on June 11, 1953, by Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley at Holy Name Church, Cook, IN. His first Solemn Mass was celebrated at Immaculate Conception Church, the same church where he

had been baptized. The Solemn Mass was followed by a dinner served by Syrena Buffet Restaurant of Chicago Polonia fame. Of course the event concluded with solemn benediction at 3:00 PM.

Clem's first assignment after ordination was to St. Paschal Friary, Toledo, OH, where for two years he got his feet wet in parochial ministry. From then on, parish ministry and teaching young people became the poles of his ministerial life. Wisconsin claimed him next for a year as he continued assisting at parishes for weekends and entered the hushed world of the Provincial Library system working with Fr. Donald Bilinski, the legendary founding father and factotum of the system. In 1957, he began a five year stint as assistant to Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Greenwood MS. Upon arriving in Greenwood, Clem wrote a letter to Fr. Theophane Kalinowski, Minister Provincial, informing him that it was an error assigning him to Greenwood. Why? "Well, I heard I have to learn how to drive. It is a must out here. I fear to drive an automobile; I am sure that I would not be able to operate one. Sooner or later I will find myself in a hospital. Then, too, I found out that I will be assigned to speak over the radio every week. Here again, I find myself not suited for that." A note written at the bottom of the letter states: "Fr. Clem wrote two days later that he will make a go of it. That he will learn to drive and that he likes the assignment."

In 1962, Clem moved to Grand Rapids, MI, where he got his first taste as a high school teacher at East Catholic Center. He was also assigned to Holy Family Parish in Sparta, MI, for only a year. Nevertheless, his transfer to Philadelphia in 1963, had the parishioners petitioning the Provincial to allow Fr. Clem to remain so that he could continue his good work.

In 1963, Clem moved to Philadelphia where he would spend the final 46 years of his life as teacher at Archbishop Ryan High School and assistant at Philadelphia area parishes most notably St. Monica Parish in South Philly. Clement was part of the pioneer group of friars who moved to a residence in Chestnut Hill, PA, gaining teaching experience at St. John Neumann H.S. which they would use when they assumed direction of the boys' side of the newly built Archbishop Ryan H.S. Clem specialized in

teaching religion and earned an MA in Religious Ed. from LaSalle University.

In 1986, he moved to St. Monica Parish where he served as full-time parochial assistant for almost twenty years. In 2004, he continued serving at St. Monica's in the capacity of part-time help. He was diagnosed with a terminal illness around Thanksgiving of this year and was taken care of by a parish program called "ElderCare." Fr. Clement died at St. Monica's rectory on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2009, around 6PM just as the first star appeared in the night sky signaling the beginning of the traditional Polish Christmas Eve Supper or Wigilia.

Summing up his life, we can say that Fr. Clem developed a talent for touching people's hearts. In his simplicity and openness he brought forth the best in those to whom he ministered. He was a non-conformist in the model of Bro. Juniper of early Franciscan fame, whose guilelessness evoked reactions of generosity, cooperation and service. In a note to Fr. Theodore Zaremba, Provincial Minister, Clem quotes a greeting card sentiment: "The only way to multiply happiness is to divide it." Clem was thanking Ted for his congratulations on the occasion of his silver jubilee of ordinations. Even though he never taught math, Clem was a master of multiplying happiness in all he met and served, as well as in all from whom he asked donations in his long and fruitful ministry.

Reception of the body of Fr. Clement Kurowski, OFM will take place at St. Monica Rectory at 2:00 PM on Wednesday, December 30, 2009. At 4:00 PM the body will be transferred to St. Monica Church--2422 South 17<sup>th</sup> Street—Philadelphia Pa 19145—215-334-4170. On Thursday, December 31, visitation will take place until the time of the Mass of the Resurrection at 11:00 AM with Bishop Louis A. DeSimone presiding. Burial will follow in Sts. Peter and Paul Cemetery in Philadelphia.

MAY THE SOUL OF FR. CLEMENT AND THE SOULS OF ALL OUR FAITHFUL DEPARTED FRIARS, FRIENDS AND BENEFACTORS REST IN PEACE. AMEN.

RICHARD TULKO OFM SECRETARY OF THE PROVINCE