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Louis Stislow, OFM

September 24, 1933

January 13, 2010

Louis Stislow was born in the Back-of-the-Yards neighborhood of Chicago on September 24, 1933. His parents were Louis Stislow and Marie Plocharczyk. He was baptized and confirmed at the imposing St. John of God Church across the street from Sherman Park.

Starting his elementary education at Hamlin School, Louis graduated from St. John of God School in 1948. He tried St. Bonaventure High School in Sturtevant, WI, for one semester and then returned to Chicago, graduating from St. Joseph High School in 1952. He entered the Carmelite Novitiate in Brookline, MA, and left the community after six months in February of 1953. Returning to the world, he got a job as mail boy at Western Electric. He then contacted Fr. Theophane Kalinowski, OFM and requested to join the Franciscan Friars of the Assumption BVM Province. Louis was accepted and admitted to Queen of Peace Novitiate in Lake Geneva, WI, on August 14, 1953, taking the religious name of Capistran.

As a Franciscan novice, he was both an “insider” in regard to the mechanics of religious life and an “outsider” to the rest of his classmates who were graduates from the two Provincial Boarding Schools of St. Bonaventure and St. Anthony of Padua. By the end of the novitiate, the bonds of fraternity were forged which would endure for a lifetime. St. Francis College in Burlington took up his time and talents for the next four years. During this time, he toyed with the idea of serving in the Holy Land, but he was also attracted to teaching as his first love. In college

he worked in the library and was a frequent member of the weekly “Sanitary Brigade” that cleaned the common washrooms and kept the large friary tidy. During the summer months, he walked the outdoor Stations of the Cross with the pilgrims, served at the Masses and rang the bells announcing the arrival and departure of busloads of pilgrims.

Christ the King Seminary in West Chicago, IL, opened his mind and heart to the new developments in Scripture Studies taught by Fr. Sylvester Makarewicz, OFM. He also got his first taste of teaching in the crucible of the 4th and 5th graders of the CCD program at St. Peter Damien Parish in nearby Bartlett, IL. Part of his class was ordained after they completed their third year of Theology on May 27, 1961, by Bishop Martin McNamara of Joliet, IL. As a Junior Father, he spent a year attending classes and helping out for weekend Masses in Chicago parishes but he had no faculties for preaching or hearing confessions except for Christmas and Easter. After straining at the starting gate of the ministry, he had to wait yet another year as Rome required a “fifth year” of studies for the newly ordained.

Finally in 1963, he was assigned to St. Thomas Aquinas Friary, Saginaw, MI, to teach at SS. Peter & Paul Diocesan High School. Thus he began his teaching career as well as many years of summer courses which culminated in his earning an MA in Religious Education from LaSalle University in 1985. In 1966 he was assigned to the faculty of the newly-opened Archbishop Ryan High School for Boys in Philadelphia. The friary (St. Pius X) had just been completed for occupancy and the first of 40 friars were just beginning to take up residence.

For the next twenty years Louis (he had gone back to using his baptismal name) moved around Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and Philadelphia teaching religion and being campus minister at various Catholic High Schools: St. Mary’s H.S. in Burlington, WI; Ladywood, H.S. in Livonia, MI; St. Bonaventure Prep. in Sturtevant, WI; St. Mary’s Prep in Orchard Lake, MI; and Marist H.S. in Chicago. From 1987 to 1988, he served as Pre-Novitiate Formation Director at Tau Fraternity in St. Francis, WI. While on the Faculty at Archbishop Ryan H.S. in Philadelphia, Louis served as Vocation Director and from 1993 to 1999 he was the guardian of St. Pius X Friary.

While serving as campus minister at St. Mary's Prep in Orchard Lake, MI, Louis was diagnosed with bladder cancer. After surgery and some recuperation he was able to resume his duties but by 2004 other complications had arisen and he retired to Queen of Peace Friary in Burlington, WI, where he resided until the time of his death on January 13, 2010.

Louis served his ministry in what some would say were the best of times and the worst of times for the Church and the Order in the USA. He started his career with all the rigor and invariability of the pre-Vatican II era, continued through the revolutions of the Age of Aquarius and ended in the uncertain fog of present-day uncertainties. Throughout these shifting times, Louis maintained his dream of preaching the gospel in simple and understandable terms. He loved to work with youth and though at times his sense of whimsy made you smile, he never faltered in his basic message: love one another as the Lord has loved you. In his final years, his constant smile and uncomplaining grace belied his heavy burden of physical limitations and suffering. On November 30th he had a cancerous kidney removed surgically. Preliminary results seemed hopeful but gradually his remaining kidney began to fail. He was transferred to the Hospice section of Lutheran Home in Wauwatosa, WI, where he died on January 13, 2010.

Fr. Louis is survived by his sister, Cynthia Passantino, her husband Peter and nieces and nephews.

The Mass of Christian Burial will take place at Queen of Peace Friary, Burlington, WI, on Monday, January 18th. Viewing begins at 10:00AM followed by Mass at 11:00AM. Fr. Leslie Hoppe, OFM, Provincial Minister, will preside at the Mass. Burial will take place at the Provincial Cemetery in Pulaski WI.

May the soul of our brother Louis, and the souls of all our faithful departed friars, relatives, friends and benefactors rest in peace.

Richard Tulko OFM
Secretary

Special thanks to Bro. Jerry Tokarz, ofm, for his biography of Fr. Louis in the February 2005 issue of Sandalprints.

