

Fr. John Anthony STRMISKA 94 CZR USA

* October 23, 1900 Mikulcice, Moravia
Austro-Hungarian Empire

+ September 16, 1995 Hemet, CA

His parents migrated to the U.S. in 1904, from Moravia (which today is in the Czech Republic) and settled in Norwalk, CT where he attended St. Mary's parochial school. While working as clerk in a large stationery store, he became acquainted with the Holy Ghost Fathers and visited their Ferndale seminary. In 1921 he entered the junior seminary at Cornwells Heights, PA. Professed on August 14, 1925 at Ridgefield, CT he did his senior studies at Ferndale where he was ordained on July 31, 1929.

His first appointment was to Zanzibar but with the death of Father Sztuka, he was asked to teach Church history and liturgy at Ferndale in 1930. At the same time, he was active in Slavic ministry in the area. When the Ukrainian Byzantine Junior Seminary was established in Stamford, CT, he became confessor to the seminarians for ten years and he was also confessor for Byzantine Rite Religious. His Ferndale students were impressed by his knowledge and enthusiasm for the Byzantine Rites and History. The custom was then established of having the Liturgy of the Byzantine Rite celebrated each year in January at Ferndale.

It was at this time that his avocation of landscaping and nature study manifested itself in the beautification of the Ferndale property.

During World War Two he served from 1943 on as Army chaplain in the European theater of operations: in England, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Czecho-Slovakia and again Germany. Released from service he became briefly parish priest in Natchitoches, LA in 1946. Next, as parish priest in Opelousas, LA 1947 to 1950, he supervised the building of churches in Opelousas, Frilot Cove and Prairie Laurent, which served African American Catholics.

During the eighteen years from 1950 to 1967 Fr. John was pastor of St. Augustine's, Tulsa, OK, a parish for African Americans. While there he undertook

he construction of its church, a large hall, convent, rectory and a baseball field - the only Catholic church in the city that had such attractive facilities.

He became acquainted with many Indians there, but only a few were Catholic. He organized two pow-wows yearly: one in the spring honoring St. Kateri Tekakwitha, and one in December in honor of Juan Diego who was visited by our Lady of Guadalupe. As a token of appreciation for this, the Indians gave him the insignia of a chief: an eagle feathered head-dress and a buck-skinned shirt.

Throughout all of this Fr. John continued his interest in nature study and landscaping. He was a member of the Audubon Society and cared for birds, especially migratory birds, in the yard behind the rectory. He built feeding stations, planted special shrubbery and provided water for drinking and splashing. He left behind him a thriving parish when he was semi-retired in 1967 to Our Lady of the Valley in Hemet, CA.

From 1969 to 1989, "semi-retired" he worked among the Mexican-American flock, adding Spanish to his list of languages. While there, he continued his study of nature's flora and fauna. Practically all the trees, bushes, vines and flowers on the property were put in place by Fr. John.

In his eighties and nineties Fr. John continued to show his interest in nature with scuba diving in Florida, the Great Barrier Reef of Australia and in Mexico. In his visits to Mexico and East Africa he showed his interest in the works of the Holy Ghost Fathers abroad as well as at home. On going to Mexico to scuba dive, Fr. John visited our Mexican parishes and on this vacation he ministered to the people of El Pujal, a church without a pastor. After organizing religious instructions he had 300 young people ready for the Bishop's visit to administer Confirmation. He was there for three months doing the ministry. Fr. John was ever a priest first.

At the end of 1989 he fully retired at Laval House in Hemet, CA. Let us conclude this account with Fr. John's own words: "I retired to a warmer climate because of my legs but have been active in parish work here for eighteen years. I expect to be buried in our cemetery here." He was.

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