

Forever Remembered: Fr. Vince Aggeler, Redemptorist Missionary to Brazil

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Plentiful Redemption



NEWS FROM THE REDEMPTORIST CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA



Redemptorist Fr. Vince Aggeler (Center)

Beloved Fr. Vincent Aggeler, a dedicated missionary who served the people of the Amazon Region of Brazil for 46 years, died on March 13 at St. Clement Redemptorist Mission House in Liguori. Despite severe health issues, he always brightened spirits with his extensive repertoire of jokes, and relied on social media to maintain contact with thousands of people, especially his friends in the Amazon Region –the land that captured and held his heart.

Vincent Hubert Aggeler entered our world on October 31, 1932, the eldest of 10 children born to Hubert "Buddy" and Bernice Anna (Schuster) Aggeler in Pilot Grove, MO. He made his First Communion at St. Joseph Parish in Clifton City in 1938 with two girls and another boy, who also grew up to be a missionary priest – a Columban who spent many decades in Japan.



Young Vince attended St. Joseph Preparatory College in Kirkwood, MO and proceeded to Novitiate in DeSoto, MO, where he professed temporary vows on August 2, 1953. He continued studying for the priesthood at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Oconomowoc, where he professed perpetual vows on September 2, 1956. He was ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Albert Meyer of Milwaukee on June 24, 1958.

Fr. Vince was the first priest ordained in Clifton City – perhaps the greatest event the local folks had ever seen. His first Mass was held outdoors because St. Joseph Church was too small to hold everyone who hoped to attend. He completed Tirocinium at St. Alphonsus "Rock" Church in St. Louis, and set sail for the Amazon Region in 1960. Fr. Vince was a talented mimic, and quickly learned Portuguese when he was immersed in the culture. Redemptorist missionaries used only their first names at that time, and he was following in the wake of Fr. Vincent McLaughlin.



Confreres advised him to choose a new name, preferably short because he would be signing countless baptism, confirmation and marriage certificates. He chose Pe. Noé – perfect for the rugged outdoorsman who relished the “maritime apostolate” on the mighty Amazon River. He indulged in hunting and fishing, and captured the natural beauty of the people and the landscape with his camera everywhere he went. After only six months he left Our Lady of Aparecida Parish in Manaus and was appointed associate pastor at Our Lady of Grace in Codajás, where he served in 1961-1964. He transferred to Nazareth Parish in Manacapuru, where he ministered along the Purus and Manacapuru Rivers. He served as associate pastor from 1964 until 1967, when he was appointed pastor of St. Ann & St. Sebastian Parish in Coari.



Fr. Vince was sent to Rio de Janeiro to hone his supervisory skills, and then returned to Manaus. After a sabbatical year in the USA, Redemptorist Bishop Thomas Murphy, the first bishop of the Diocese of Juazeiro in the State of Bahia, requested his help. Fr. Vince gladly obliged his confrere, serving in the vast diocese in 1972-1975. He returned to Codajás as pastor of Our Lady of Grace Parish, where he remained until 1982. He told the humble people who eked out a living operating little stores and grew their own food in the bush on the outskirts of town that he hoped to plant his bones there. He didn't remember doing anything extraordinary during his time there, and was surprised to learn decades later that they had named a street after him. Rua Padre Noé – part asphalt, part grass and part mud – is a fitting tribute to the Redemptorist the townsfolk loved, admired and respected.

He returned to Manacapuru as local superior and associate pastor in 1982-1985, and then took another sabbatical. When he returned to the Amazon Region, he was appointed assistant director of the Juvenate. He enjoyed advising and mentoring the students from 1985 until 1992, and took great pride in his former students as they advanced to leadership positions within the Vice Province of Manaus and the Church. Fr. Vince returned to parish ministry in 1993 in Manaus. After seven years, he was appointed Vicar of the Prelacy of Coari and assistant to Redemptorist Bishop Gutemberg Freire Régis, with responsibilities at St. Ann Parish.



He considered his ordination of Zenildo Luiz Pereira da Silva to the priesthood the highlight of those busy years, and he was justifiably proud when his former student was selected to serve as bishop of the Prelature of Borba. Fr. Vince retired and returned to the USA in 2006. After four years at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Kansas City, he transferred to the St. Clement's community in Liguori. His good nature, quick wit and zest for life were a welcome addition in Liguori. He enjoyed many outings with his nearby family members, as well as his gardening, photography and woodworking hobbies. He confessed that even after 14 years back in the USA, he still thought in Portuguese: his mind and his heart never left the Amazon.



Family members joined the Redemptorists at St. Clement's for a rosary and vigil on March 16, and Mass and a reception on March 17. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. Joseph Church in Clifton City on March 18, with burial immediately following at St. Joseph Cemetery. He will be greatly missed by all who were blessed with his friendship. May this faithful son of St. Alphonsus rest in the eternal peace of the Redeemer.

Submitted by Kristine Stremel

Photos by Fr. Vince Aggeler and various other sources