

Fr. Bob Cheesman, C.Ss.R., Obituary

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Robert Edward Cheesman of the Saint Alphonsus Villa community, New Smyrna Beach, Florida, died October 17, 2020, age 90 and five months.

Born May 13, 1930 in Brooklyn, New York, he was the son of Jesse and Mary (Fagan). Baptized at Good Counsel, June 1, 1930, and confirmed October 27, 1940 at 14 Holy Martyrs, both in Brooklyn. He attended LaSalle Academy in New York City in 1948 and transferred to St. Mary's Minor Seminary in North East, Pennsylvania, graduating in 1951. He professed first vows at St. Mary's, Ilchester, Maryland, on August 2, 1952 (final vows, September 2, 1955, Mt. St. Alphonsus Seminary, Esopus, New York) and was ordained to the priesthood at Mt. St. Alphonsus Seminary on June 23, 1957.



He made the tirocinium at St. Mary's, Annapolis, from 1958 to 1959. His first assignments were to the missions of the Caribbean: Aguas Buenas (1959-1962); Frederiksted (1962-1966); and Mayaguez I (1966). From June 1966 until 1987, he served as an Air Force chaplain, beginning in Amarillo, Texas, where he completed chaplain training school at Maxwell Air Force Base and entered active duty in Montgomery, Alabama. By 1968, he was a licensed pilot. During his chaplaincy, Father Cheesman was awarded numerous decorations, including the Bronze Star, Air Force Commendation medal, Air Force Longevity Service Award Ribbon with four bronze oak leaf clusters, the National Defense Service Medal, Air Force Overseas Service Long Tour Ribbon with two bronze oak leaf clusters, the Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal with one oak leaf cluster and several Meritorious Service medals, the last with two oak leaf clusters.

He also was able to complete a Master of Education degree from Wayne State University in Detroit in 1974. He retired at the rank of major in January 1988. In 1987 he was stationed briefly at Sacred Heart of Jesus, Baltimore. From January 1988 to June 1990 he was stationed at St. Philomena in Pittsburg, PA, during which time he obtained a degree in formative spirituality at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, graduating in May 1990. He was then assigned to Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, New York (1990-1994), where he applied his skills as a devotee of "Contemplative Outreach," a ministry of the Cistercian, Father Thomas Keating.

In 1992, he graduated from sky diving school after making a jump of 12,500 feet in Perris, California. By February 1994, Father Cheesman was on sabbatical and assigned to the community of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, 61st Street, in Manhattan. In May 1998 he was transferred to St. Alphonsus, Whitestone, New York, and was in residence there until June 2009, when he returned to OLPH in New York City where he remained until 2015. Owing to health reasons, Father Cheesman became attached to the OLPH, Brooklyn, community for assisted living (2015-2019). His last assignment was to the St. Alphonsus Villa in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, 2019-2020.

Father Cheesman was a world traveler. His passports bear stamps from Scotland, Kenya, China, and Cairo. In 2002, he made trips to Australia, Nepal, and Tanzania. The following year he could be found again in Nepal, as well as Cambodia and Thailand, to which he returned in 2004. Between 2004 and 2005, he could be found in El Salvador, India, Chile, Argentina, Nepal, China, Bhutan, and Peru. Between 2006 and 2007, he traveled to Korea and Zimbabwe, Namibia and Turkey, though perhaps the highlight was a visit to Easter Island.

Father Cheesman was the author of *Christian Spirituality for the Next Millennium: A Transformation of Consciousness* (New York: Vantage Press, 1999).