

In Memorium: Fr. Jack Willet, C.Ss.R. Influenced a Generation of Redemptorist Missionaries

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Plentiful Redemption



**NEWS FROM THE REDEMPTORIST
CONFERENCE OF NORTH AMERICA**



Beloved Fr. John (Jack) Willett, who influenced generations of Redemptorist missionaries during the 20 years he was involved in formation ministry, died on August 15 at St. Clement Redemptorist Mission Community in Liguori. He was 84, and had recently been placed in hospice care. He will always be remembered as a confrere who truly loved his Redemptorist vocation.



John Ferdinand Willett was born on October 18, 1935 to Ferdinand and Ellen (Donahue) Willett in Sault Sainte Marie, MI. After graduating from Holy Redeemer Grade School in Detroit in 1949, he entered the

Redemptorist formation program at St. Joseph Preparatory College in Kirkwood, MO. He professed temporary vows as a Redemptorist on August 2, 1956 and made his final

profession of vows on September 2, 1959. He was ordained to the priesthood on June 29, 1961 at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Oconomowoc.



Newly ordained Fr. Jack served at St. Gerard Majella Parish in Kirkwood and earned an English degree from St. Louis University before entering formation ministry in 1964. He joined the faculty of St. Joseph's Preparatory College in Edgerton, WI and was appointed Assistant to the Director of Students.

Widely respected and admired by the students, Fr. Jack taught Religion, English and Guidance and coached soccer and basketball. When he was appointed Rector in 1972, he hoped to strengthen relationships between the priests and students to increase cooperation and build school spirit. Before his assignment ended in 1975, he had earned a Master's in Education/Guidance and Counseling from St. Louis University.

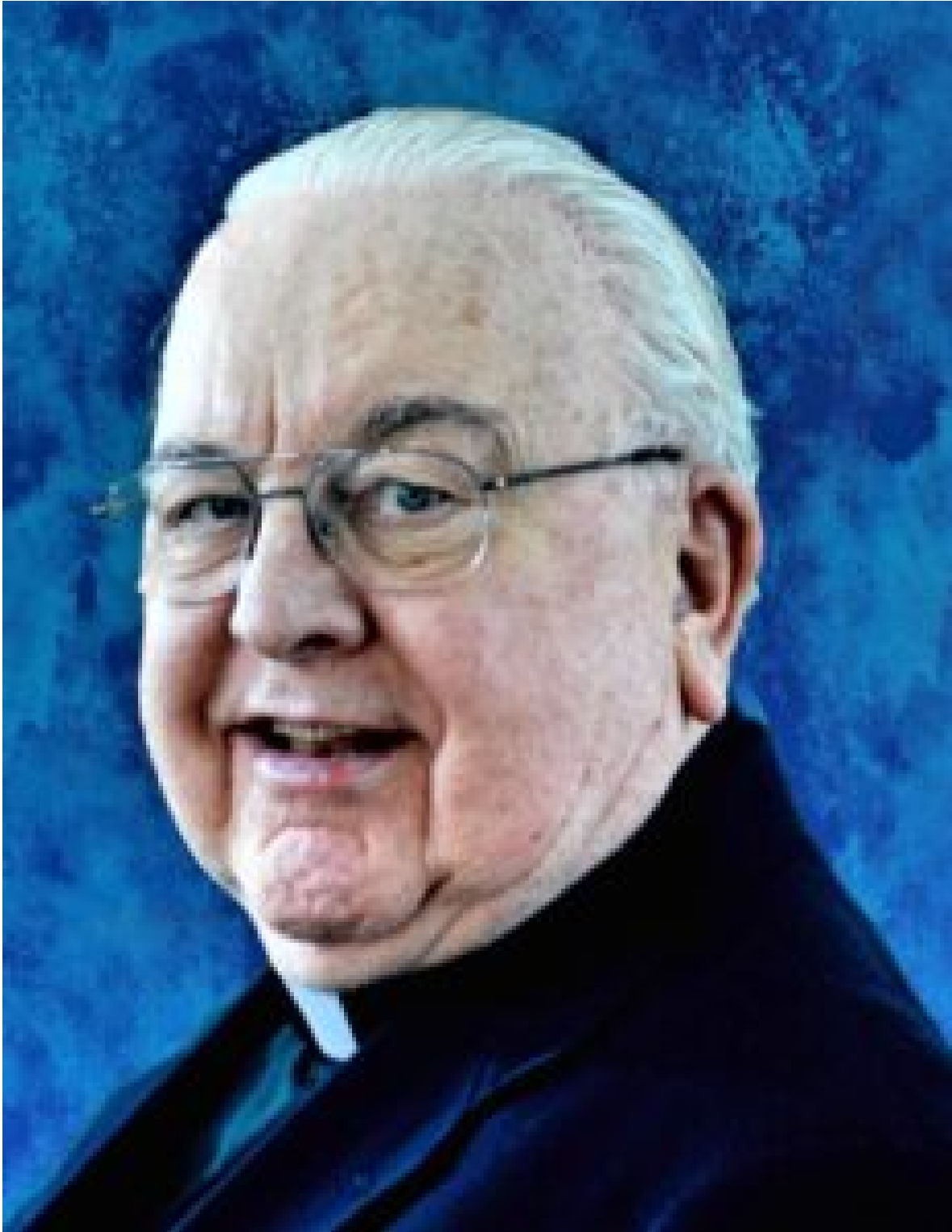


Fr. Jack served as pastor and local superior of the St. Alphonsus Parish community in Chicago in 1975-1978 before returning to the seminary formation program. He continued mentoring students at Holy Redeemer College in Waterford, WI as Director of Athletics and Prefect of Students. He also served as a professor of English, Religion and Guidance until the facility was closed in 1984. He maintained lifelong friendships with students and officiated at many weddings of those who left the Redemptorist formation program.

Fr. Jack returned to St. Alphonsus Parish in Chicago as pastor and local superior in 1984. Five years later, he joined the Redemptorist Mission Preaching Team. “At that time, the Mission Preaching team was based in Grand Rapids,” explained Fr. Tom Donaldson. “Jack was a great ‘conversational’ preacher and a joy to live with in

community. He was extremely well liked and had good rapport with everyone. He was always present – in the moment. In those days when the community gathered for a drink before dinner, Jack indulged in a bowl of ice cream. He was a good soul.”

At the age of 62, Fr. Jack was missioned to oversee the budding Redemptorist formation program in Nigeria in 1997. After a year of enculturation serving at St. Patrick Parish in Satellite Town, Ojo Alaba, he was appointed director of Redeemer House in Bodija, Ibadan. Students embraced him, and widely praised him as a good, solid Redemptorist. He was instrumental in the development of the entire formation program in Nigeria. Fr. Jack contracted malaria, and although he recovered, many believe that the illness impacted his energy level.



Fr. Jack returned to the USA in 2001 and joined the St. Joseph Parish community in Wichita, KS. He served as local superior until 2005, when he was appointed assistant pastor at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Redemptorist Parish in Kansas City. During his time there, he and Fr. Ed Morgan shared responsibilities for administrating nearby Our Lady of Sorrows Parish.

“Fr. Jack was a valued mentor to so many of us,” said Fr. Steve Benden. “He made everyone comfortable because he was authentic – comfortable in his own skin. He inspired so many of us because it was evident that he loved being a Redemptorist priest.”

In 2014, health issues necessitated his transfer to St. Clement's in Liguori, where confreres and staff alike embraced his friendly, positive presence. May Fr. Jack rest in the eternal peace of the Redeemer.

Private services are scheduled at the St. Clement Redemptorist chapel. A rosary is scheduled at 3:00 pm and a vigil is planned at 7:00 pm on Friday, August 21.

Participate via livestream at: <https://www.facebook.com/paul.yasenak>. A Mass of Christian Burial is scheduled at 10:00 am on Saturday, August 22, followed by burial at the Liguori Cemetery.

Submitted by Kristine Stremel, with contributions from Fr. Tom Donaldson, Fr. Steve Benden & Fr. Richard Thibodeau.