

In Memoriam

Fr. Sieradski, beloved parish priest, dies at 86

Redemptorist Father Alfred Sieradski, described by one confrere as "a top sirloin cut of a parish priest," died Friday, Nov. 14, at St. John Neumann Residence in Saratoga Springs, NY. He was 86 years old and had been suffering from cancer.

A native of Rochester, NY, Father Sieradski had spent most of his priestly ministry in the Virgin Islands and the Vice-Province of Richmond.

A Wake Service was held on Sunday, Nov. 16, at St. John Neumann Residence and the Funeral Mass was offered there the following morning. Burial was in St. Peter's Cemetery in Saratoga Springs.

Father Sieradski was the son of the late Carl and Veronica Janas Sieradski and was born on Oct. 12, 1922. He first came in contact with the Redemptorists at St. Joseph Church in Rochester and entered their minor seminary at North East, PA. He made his novitiate in Ilchester, MD, and first professed his vows in 1943. He earned his Master's degree from Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY. A classmate, Father Sylvester Feeley, recalled that he, Father Edward McDonough and Father Sieradski "brought back the Legion of Mary to Esopus, taking care of the altars and, in October and May, posting daily meditations on Mary."

Father Sieradski, or Father Sears as he was often called, made his final profession of vows in 1946 and was ordained to the priesthood on Feb. 6, 1949.

His first assignment was to Rome, where he earned an S.T.D. at the Angelicum in 1952. After a year of pastoral experience at Sacred Heart Church in Baltimore, Father Sieradski taught theology at Mount St. Alphonsus for eight years, until 1961. Although he was "a model theologian," Father Feeley said, his confrere had no gift for teaching and was delighted to be sent to Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. After serving there for three years, Father Sieradski was named rector of Holy Cross Church in Christiansted, St. Croix, from 1964-69.

"He was quite a foreign missionary," said Father Carlyle Blake, a native of St. Thomas. "He was always for the downtrodden and the poor." The Virgin Islands were then part of the Vice-Province of San Juan and Father Feeley, who served as Vice-Provincial, said he recalled only one time when he gave a "formal obedience" to his classmate: "The confreres at Holy Cross were worried about him because he worked so hard. They asked me to get him off the island for a few days of rest." Father Sieradski so threw himself into serving the community that he broke out in hives from the stress, Father Feeley added.

When Father Sieradski's second term as rector came to an end, Virgin Islanders gave him a farewell dinner, complete with a message of thanks for all his work from Gov. Melvin Evans. Bishop Edward J. Harper, whom he had served as diocesan Vicar General, said, "It is fitting that we try to express our appreciation of all that Father Sears has done – for the civic community, for the growth of the spirit of ecumenism and the spirit of charity and cooperation among the churches of the Islands, for Christian education, for the Redemptorist Fathers, for the parishes in St. Thomas and St. Croix, for the People of God in the Virgin Islands."

After giving of himself to the point of exhaustion, Father Sieradski applied for and was granted the status of limited excommunication, remaining a Redemptorist priest but living outside the community and not assigned to a particular ministry. During this time, he served in the District Attorney's Office in Dedham, MA, where he specialized in drug education and enforcement issues. Father Thomas Travers said, "He'd try to get first offenders into rehab instead of jail; he was into rescuing people." This work followed a path he had taken in Esopus, Father Travers explained: "There, he'd spend his evenings rounding up the drunks and the homeless on the streets of Kingston." He would take those with alcohol problems to AA meetings and hook up the homeless with shelter opportunities. During the



early 1970s, he also became involved with Father McDonough's healing and restoration ministry at Mission Church in Boston and joined prayer groups associated with the Charismatic Movement.

When Father Sieradski returned to full-time ministry, he was assigned to Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, NY, in 1976 and then to St. Wenceslaus Church in Baltimore. In 1978 he was assigned to St. Clement Church in Saratoga Springs and, three years later, to Sts. James and John Parish in Baltimore. Father James Geiger, who served with him in Baltimore, is the one who described Father Sieradski as "a top sirloin cut of a parish priest." "He was always on the go, always doing, always happy; a good community man and a good confrere."

In the summer of 1984, Father Sieradski was assigned to the Vice-Province of Richmond, and he served the next 15 years in pastoral ministry in Wachula, FL; Orangeburg, SC; and Jacksonville, FL. "He took care of the out-missions from Holy Trinity in Orangeburg," said Father Geiger. Father Michael Hopkins, who first met Father Sieradski when the former was a student at Esopus, recalled that when his confrere was in Jacksonville, "a whole bunch of people came from the VI for his anniversary celebration" because he was so warmly appreciated in the islands.

In 1999, the year he turned 77, Father Sieradski was transferred to St. Alphonsus Villa in New Smyrna Beach, FL. Although his health was not good and he was "all bent over like St. Alphonsus with arthritis," Father Blake said Father Sieradski was still helping out. He raked the leaves and tended the garden at the Villa and, on weekends, went up to Orange Park, FL, to celebrate Masses there. "He taught us about growing older with grace," Father Blake said. "He was a very beautiful man and he truly, truly lived a Redemptorist life." Father Michael Koncik, who knew Father Sieradski at the Villa, said he was a joyful confrere and a good storyteller who very much cared about people. "He was always lively and enthusiastic," said Father Edward Gray, a former Vice-Provincial. "I enjoyed conversations with him - and his emphatic language; you always knew how he felt and where he stood!"

When he needed nursing care, Father Sieradski was transferred in 2004 to St. John Neumann Residence. Benedictine Sister Serafina Samouska, director of nursing there, described him as "very charismatic, with a sense of humor and a concern for others to the end." In his last days, when he could barely move a hand, he still blessed her, she said. "He touched thousands of lives," she added.