



SECRETARY OF THE PROVINCE

## REDEMPTORIST PROVINCIAL RESIDENCE

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# Bro. Bob: The Unassuming, Joyful Nourisher

Redemptorist Brother, Robert Paul Skinner, was born on May 23, 1938 in Binghamton, NY. He professed his first vows on August 29, 1981 and made his final profession on September 7, 1985 at the Bishop Neumann Shrine/St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He died peacefully surrounded by the comforting prayers of his confreres on April 13, 2015 in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, just a few weeks short of his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday.

A viewing will be held at Our Mother of Perpetual Help Church in Ephrata, Pennsylvania on Wednesday, April 15 from 6:00 PM till 9:00 PM with a wake service at 8:00 PM. A funeral Mass will be concelebrated at the Church on Thursday, April 16 at 11:00 AM followed by interment at St. Clement's Cemetery.

As a young eighteen-year-old brother candidate, Bob Skinner left his novitiate year at St. Gerard's Hall in Ephrata, Pennsylvania so he could return home and take care of his ailing parents. Twenty-three years later when they were deceased he returned to the CSSR formation system and began his postulant year at St. Alphonsus College, the Redemptorist Seminary located in Suffield, Connecticut.

Following his novitiate year in 1980, this time at Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, he returned to Suffield where he professed his vows and began his first assignment in religious life as a full-time cook for the community of nearly 100 members and as a part-time hospital chaplain visiting the sick and the dying. From 1990 until 1996 he continued to minister to the Redemptorist collegians when they moved



*Brother Bob Skinner, CSSR*

from Suffield to Douglaston, New York for two years and eventually to the Whitestone vicinity of Queens where they lived in community while commuting to St. John's University to pursue their education in philosophy.

His ministry changed from nourishing meals to nourishing spiritual reading when, in 1996, he was appointed manager of the Religious Articles and Book Store at the Redemptorist Retreat Center in Esopus, New York. This was the same year that he was also appointed to serve on the Provincial Secretariat for the Brothers. For the next nineteen years he successfully organized and operated this Catholic Book Store ministry until failing health required his transfer to the Redemptorist Assisted Living Facility at Saint Clement's Mission House in Ephrata, Pennsylvania in 2009.

During the last six years of his life, living directly across the street from St. Gerard's Hall where he had begun his Redemptorist journey as a teenager, Brother Bob offered his prayers and sufferings in uncomplaining peace as his final ministry of an exemplary son of Saint Alphonsus and true follower of Christ, the Redeemer.

To believe that Brother Bob's ministry at Suffield was limited to occasional hospital visitations sprinkled among the arduous task of daily meal preparations would be seriously shortsighted. His superiors frequently noted how students often found their way to the kitchen between classes to confide in him and solicit his advice. Since he was neither their professor nor their supervisor, he was in a uniquely approachable position where he could listen attentively to their troubles and offer them gentle, encouraging words of wisdom. His joyful demeanor, regular prayer life, participation in community events—he starred in more than one musical production on stage—and his disciplined work ethic afforded him this additional ministry which might be characterized as a “formator-by-example.” Although not an official appointment, such an empathic and caring apostolate nourished the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the students as surely as his homemade pizza nourished their palate.

“He was an absolutely loveable confrere,” attests his first superior at Suffield, Rev Patrick McGarrity. “He worked seven days a week and never took a full day off. He enjoyed the company of the students and they enjoyed his. He was serious about his spiritual life and responsible in his apostolic work. But it wasn't all prayer and work. He also loved taking part in the plays, and whenever we had skit nights, he was the first to jump up and join in the line dancing. I also had the great privilege of his company here in Ephrata during his final years with us. At this stage of his physical life, he was totally dependent on canes and walkers. Even so, he took charge of setting up our chapel for liturgies. He was always the first one to arrive for community acts, and, although not too many people know this, he worked with Sister Alexandra doing the laundry! He was a gentle, kind man with a heart of gold and he will be sorely missed.”

His novitiate classmates in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin also speak of him in glowing terms. “Brother Bob was like our dad,” recalls Father Jim Dowds. “He had been through a Redemptorist Novitiate before and he was much older than the rest of the class, so we looked to him for guidance. He was a great man of prayer and had special devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. But on top of it all he possessed a dry sense of humor and kept us in stitches which really helped us get through the rough times. God rest his soul.”

We hear similar sentiments from another Novitiate classmate, Rev. Rodney Olive. “He was a gentle, humble guy, a man of character who stood up for what he believed in. He was wonderful to be with in community, a truly great community man. He was an older man, of course, and therefore had a more mature outlook on life than the other novices. But the age difference never presented a barrier or stopped him from blending in and bringing laughter to the group. Bob may have had a more realistic view of life than the rest of us, but even if he wasn’t as romantic or starry-eyed as his fellow novices, his attitude was certainly solid, positive, and upbeat.”

Fellow religious and co-worker, Brother Frank Roberts, agrees. “He was originally in the novitiate at Ephrata with Brother Charles Somers and in many ways he was very much like him. He was a very holy man, spiritual and also very easy to be around. He was charitable and kind, the type of person you could just love to death. He never said a bad word to anyone or about anyone. I believe he was one of the nicest Brothers I have ever met and I wish we had more like him. He never rash judged or criticized others. He was a real, true Redemptorist in every sense.”

His final superior, Rev. John McLoughlin, summarized it best when he said, “Brother Bob was a saintly man. Even in his sickness he bore witness to the strength of the Redeemer and the Blessed Mother. In a way you could say he was as joyful in dying as he had been in living. He wasn’t a pope, but he certainly stood shoulder to shoulder with Saint John Paul II in his preparation for death. Our life will never be the same without him. We will miss him terribly.”