

## In Memoriam

### Fr. George Bridge: Priest-Pilot for Christ

Redemptorist missionary, Father George Henry Bridge, remembered as the hard-working priest with his own pilot's license, died on the afternoon of Monday, February 28, 2011 surrounded by his confreres at their religious community in Stella Maris in Timonium, MD.

Father Bridge was born on April 16, 1922 and professed his first vows on August 2, 1943. He was ordained a priest on June 20, 1948.

He began his ministry as a parish priest in the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, the Mission Church, in Boston and in St. James Parish in Baltimore. Then for five years, while still a very young priest, he was assigned to the responsibility of Assistant Novice Master (Socius), directing the spiritual development of future Redemptorists at St. Mary's in Ilchester, MD.



Next he was assigned to missionary work in Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

For 34 years he preached in impeccable Spanish to the faithful in San Lorenzo, Guayama, Mayaguez, Caguas, Las Matas, Aguadilla, Ponce, and Aguas Buenas. He built chapels, shrines and even a landing strip for aircraft because he believed that aviation would become the preferred mode of transportation in the future. He was appointed rector in Christiansted, St. Croix, and eventually served the poor and abandoned migrant workers in Wauchula, Florida for the last seven years of his active ministry.

Those who knew him well sing his high praises because that was something Father Bridge never did for himself. He preferred to be humble and didn't brag about his own talents or accomplishments.

But much like his founder, St. Alphonsus, he ventured among the people who lived in remote and hard to reach areas and was instrumental in bringing the Adult Christian Initiation program to the forgotten souls in the hill country.

"Although he was unassuming by temperament, he was enthusiastic when preaching the Spirit of the Lord in the context of the Charismatic Movement," says fellow Redemptorist, Father John McKenna.

"He was a hard worker and very responsible," says his confrere, Father Tom Travers, who can still recall sermons that Father Bridge preached over sixty years ago on the topics of respect and obedience! "Once, while he was assigned to campo work in Las Matas de Farfan, Father George was returning from a long trip in the mountains by mule. He suddenly lost his footing, fell, and dislocated his shoulder. We had to rush him to the hospital in San Juan de la Maguana to have it put back into place."

Small wonder why this priest would look to aviation as the safer mode of travel for the future. Also indicative of his being ahead of his time, Father Bridge was especially health conscious in an era when health food was anything but fashionable. He even diagrammed his own physical, emotional and intellectual biorhythms and was willing to help others plot theirs. He did all this in an effort to foster harmony between physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Perhaps most significant of all, he was both a prayerful and a happy priest. Father Travers verifies, "As a young priest, he used to spend a great deal of time praying in chapel, which is probably why he was assigned as the Socius for the novitiate."

Father Charles Guttenberger, who preached on the occasion of his silver jubilee of Ordination, said this about Father Bridge: "People sometimes ask a priest: are you happy being a priest? If you asked Father George if he is

happy being a priest, he would say yes, I am happy being and living as a priest of Jesus Christ.”

In his own words, some sixty-eighty years ago, while he himself was a young novice, Father George wrote simply and genuinely: “I tried to give myself, heart and soul, to my novitiate. Maybe its success will be really authenticated ten or twenty years from now. It was here at the novitiate that I learned the value of my vocation, of the religious life, the priesthood and fellowship in the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. I am determined now to make the very best of my vocation...by the grace of God and the all-powerful aid of our dear Mother of Perpetual Help, who has led me along ever since my early boyhood.”

The hearts and minds and souls that he touched through the ministry of his priesthood and religious life stand in fervent testimony that this journey, which began as a dream for young George, was certainly authenticated and fulfilled in the pathways of Father Bridge as he followed for a lifetime in the footsteps of Christ. May he rest in peace.