

August 30

Br. Henri Van Olfen (Vitus)

Henri was born on March 29, 1911 in Prinsenhage, Holland the son of Henri Florent Hubert Van Olfen and Henriette Sophia Velge. He would enter the Capuchin Seraphicate in Belgium and become a Capuchin novice on September 15, 1930 where he was given the religious name of Vitus. First profession of vows would be on September 17, 1931 and Solemn profession on September 17, 1934. He was ordained on May 22nd 1937 by Msgr. H. Lamiroy, Bishop of Brugges. From 1937 to 1947, he was student supervisor and teacher at the Seraphic Capuchin Minor Seminary, preacher and chaplain for the Scouts and Girl Guides and local Director of Third Order and District Commissary in Belgium.

He arrived in Canada on April 18th 1947. He served as assistant pastor and pastor in Ontario, Newfoundland and Manitoba. On July 23, 1974 Br. Henri became the first Capuchin pastor of Mary Queen of the World, Mount Pearl Newfoundland. It was a growing parish, from 360 families in 1974 to 1100 in 1980. He had a German shepherd named Ralph who accompanied Henri to Church and was his faithful companion for many years.

He would be elected as Custos for the Capuchins of Central Canada in 1962 and re-elected in 1965. Br. Henri resided in many different houses at this time and it was said of him that his residence was somewhere between Highways 400 and 404. A man of prayer, he was admired by both the laity as well as his fellow friars. He was very conscious of the fact that his vocation as a Capuchin priest and brother was to serve others. He did not know the meaning of the word "No". As a result, he was sought out by persons wishing to untangle personal messes in their lives in order to find peace of heart and mind. He like Jesus was a man of compassion. He did a lot of ministry with the Secular Franciscans and was a welcomed confessor to priests and religious. Being well-read and mastering a number of languages he also had a keen interest in theological discussions, in justice, history and world events. He once shocked a former General by telling him that the Capuchin Constitutions should be written in pencil so that it would be easy to modify them if needed. He had many passions, among them, walking, reading and family. He must have walked and visited every park in the city of Toronto. At a later age, he took piano lessons. He was energized by the people and they by him.



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In October 1986, he retired at St. Philip Neri Parish Downsview, Ontario. Our Br. Henri passed away as gently as he had lived, on August 30, 1997, a mere six hours before Princess Diana. At his wake service a few days later, one of our friars observed that “while the world is in mourning for the loss of a princess, we are in mourning the loss of a prince”.

Funeral Masses were conducted at St. Philip Neri Church, Downsview on Tuesday September 2nd 1997 at 10 a.m. and at St. Mary’s Church, Blenheim on Wednesday September 3rd 1997 at 3 p.m. Bro Henri was interred in Evergreen Cemetery, Blenheim On. where he rests among his Capuchin brothers. He will always be remembered as a Prince of a Man!

