

Br. Henry Van Elslander (Willibrord)

Henry Van Elslander was the first Canadian born Capuchin of our province in Central Canada. He was born on October 21 1903 in Winnipeg Manitoba the son of Flemish immigrants Alidor Van Elslander and Maria Soens. He received the habit on September 15, 1930 and did his first vows September 17, 1931 and final vows on September 17, 1934. He was ordained a priest in Belgium where he did his studies by Msgr. Lamiroy on June 6, 1936. In September 1936 he left for Poland where he studied his last year of Theology at Lublin. He learned Polish in order to work with Polish immigrants in Canada. He then left for Canada where on August 27, 1937 he celebrated his first mass in Sacred Heart church St. Boniface.

Br. Willibrord was his religious name and he served in Toutes Aides Manitoba from 1937 to 1940. He enjoyed bringing the school children together during lent and the month of may where he would have them recite the rosary, stations of the cross and so on. He enjoyed beautiful ceremonies and pious demonstrations. Once a month he went to Meadow Portage and when the roads were too muddy for his jeep he would travel with the mail carrier. He enjoyed celebrating Mass once a month for German immigrants in Magnet. He especially enjoyed visiting the elderly and bringing them communion. He served as socius at St. Boniface with the young friars in formation in 1942. He also served in St. German for a short period but from then on he was in Ontario.

He served as pastor in Blenheim in 1954 but the largest part of his life was serving as assistant pastor in St. Philip Neri parish Downsview, Ontario. He was seen as a humble gentle religious caring priest by all those who met him but he could be harsh if you were caught chewing gum or disturbing Mass. He was very soft-spoken and in his later years he would be forgetful and often he would greet you by saying: "And whose little boy are you?"

On his 75th birthday, the parishioners of St. Philip Neri together with Br. Guglielmo Corbo wanted to reward him with a birthday present. It was decided to give Willy (as he was affectionately known) a small color TV set for his room. People felt that in his old age, he would prefer to be in his room instead of a busy recreation room. When he saw the TV and realized that it was a present for him he became angry and refused to accept it saying: "I don't want a TV in my room. I want you to know that I am a good religious person". Luckily Br. Guglielmo was not offended and began to laugh making the situation more acceptable for the parishioners. No one knows where the TV went but Br. Willibrord is well remembered for his great sense of poverty.



DECEMBER 25

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He died on December 25th 1982 after celebrating the nine o'clock morning mass at the age of 79. He lay for two days in an open casket in the church of St. Philip Neri and after celebrating the Mass of Resurrection he was brought to St. Mary's parish in Blenheim for a mass the following day with the parishioners of Blenheim. He was then buried in the Capuchin plot in Evergreen Cemetery.

