

Rev. Brother Paul Stratonic, 1937-1942

Brother Paul Stratonic (Joseph Lelievre) was born on October 11, 1892, at St. Malo, P.Q., Canada. In 1905 he sought admission to the Marist Institute at St. Hyacinthe, P.Q., Canada. A year and a half later he was one of thirteen juniors selected to continue their studies for the brotherhood at Poughkeepsie, New York. Like his predecessor, Brother Henry Charles, he was among the first group to be invested at the Poughkeepsie Novitiate in July 1908.(14.)

As a young teacher he taught for six years at St. Ann's Academy and St. Paul's School in New York City. From 1919 until his appointment as the sixth provincial in December 1936, he was given several responsible administrative positions. Among them were the directorates of Marist School for Boys in Savannah, Georgia (1919-1922); of St. Ann's Academy (1931-1933); of Central Catholic High School in Wheeling, West Virginia (1933-1936) and of St. Anne School in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1936.(15.) He also served as master of juniors (1923-1931) in Poughkeepsie, New York.(16.)

These varied posts prepared Brother Paul effectively to guide the Province during the late depression years and the early war period. Early in his administration he appointed Brother Emile Nestor as Supervisor of Marist High Schools, in order to co-ordinate the different programs of studies. To begin with, Brother Nestor organized a series of provincial tests in subjects not given by state or diocesan boards. This was an important step forward in the Marist school system.

In 1939 and 1941, when economic pressures were especially felt in Savannah, Georgia and Manchester, New Hampshire parish schools, the brothers were withdrawn from them. Because of these withdrawals, brothers were available for high school work in Boys' Catholic High School in Augusta, Georgia, and thirteen brothers were assigned to the Mathematics and Language Departments of Cardinal Hayes High School in New York City. This was part of the trend towards high school teaching that the depression hastened. That trend also shifted brothers from the grammar school of St. Agnes in New York City to the high school department of that school.(17.)

In Lawrence progress was being made in the plans to expand Central Catholic High School. To this end a two and a half acre site was acquired in 1938 for the construction of a building to replace three old structures acquired from the City. Brother Paul Acyndinus was appointed to supervise the construction of this two story frame building. With more classroom space, it became possible to accommodate more students and add four brothers to the faculty. The success of Central Catholic High School inspired at this time a similar institution in Poughkeepsie, but negotiations to that end proved futile.(18.)

Brother Provincial had to turn his attention to the Hermitage property in Poughkeepsie, where the need for better facilities became acute. Among the number of projects undertaken to relieve congestion in the different houses of studies was the addition of a dormitory building at the Novitiate in 1941. The Provincial House-Juniorate building was also renovated, to provide better living quarters for the three communities there.

At long last the most important development, the building of a large Provincial House for all the Hermitage communities was approved by the Superiors in a cablegram dated December 12, 1940.(19.) Immediate preparations for the excavations were unexpectedly halted in November 1941, at the request of the Superior General. Because of the rising costs occasioned by World War II, he suggested that a saving could be effected by the purchase of an old estate in the Poughkeepsie area. The news was a painful blow, but the suggestion proved to be a wise move. Several hundred thousand dollars were economized as a result.

The search for an appropriate estate ended several months later. Bishop Stephen Donohue, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New York suggested to Brother Provincial that the Oliver H. Payne estate in Esopus New York might meet his needs. There has never been any doubt that it has since, and it was purchased from the Episcopal Diocese of New York in June 1942.(20.) Brothers from Poughkeepsie were sent to Esopus to adapt the buildings for the transfer of the juniors in August. Thus Marist Preparatory in Esopus was opened and St. Ann's Juniorate in Poughkeepsie New York, was closed.

To complete the Province training centers, Brother Paul had long hoped to establish a graduate house of studies near the Catholic University of America in Washington, D. C. A small sixteen acre property in nearby Hyattsville, Maryland, was purchased for that purpose in 1939. In September of that year four brothers arrived to occupy the ten room houses and to inaugurate Champagnat Hall.

During this administration Brother Paul and his council gave serious considerations in 1941 to appeals for missionaries for the Philippines and Africa. But the Provincial Council decided to wait until the wartime hazards in these areas were removed.(21.) In the meantime they did answer the appeal to staff summer camps in the Archdiocese of New York. An accelerated study program to train diocesan priests had limited the number of seminarians for this work.(22.)

Two of the most significant years in this administration were 1940 and 1942. The first witnessed in all Marist communities and schools the observance of the centenary of the death of the Venerable Champagnat the Founder of the Marist Brothers. At the time of the centenary there were eight thousand brothers, and five thousand young aspirants to the brotherhood. Throughout the Marist world Masses of Thanksgiving were offered on June 6, 1940. Each Marist community prepared a comprehensive exhibit on the life and work of the brothers since the founding. To mark the occasion in this Province, a souvenir journal was published.(23.)

These years also became the occasion of a series of golden jubilees commemorating the arrival of the brothers at St. Joseph School in Lowell, Massachusetts; at St. Anne School in Lawrence, Massachusetts; and the founding of St. Ann's Academy in New York City. Elaborate religious ceremonies and civic receptions were held at these schools. In April 1942, its Excellency Archbishop Francis Spellman presided at the Mass of Thanksgiving in St. Jean Baptiste Church, as part of the St. Ann's Academy commemoration The Right Reverend Charles D. Wood (the last surviving member) of the original faculty, officiated at the mass.(24.) Bishop Francis McIntyre, present Cardinal-Archbishop of Los Angeles, presided at the civic reception at the Hotel Astor, New York City.

In Lowell and in Lawrence the observances of the golden jubilee occasioned rejoicing among the many former students who were on hand to honor the brothers and their Venerable founder. Masses were offered in both parishes by alumni priests. Souvenir journals were prepared for the occasion to present the highlights of the fifty year history of the respective schools. A Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Joseph Church in Lowell was held and a civic reception followed.(25.)

Although 1942 was a special year for rejoicing in the Province, it also brought the news of the deaths of Very Reverend Brother Diogene, Superior General and of Reverend Brother Francis Borgia, Assistant General for the North American Provinces.

During Brother Paul's administration twelve brothers went to their reward. Among them were the first two provincials of the United States Province: Brother Heribert (+1939), and Brother Ptolemeus (+1940). Other deaths of this time included local administrators: Brother Leo Adolph, Master of Novices (+1937); Brother Mary Florentius, Director of Central Catholic, Lawrence, Massachusetts (+1938); and Brother Alphonse Victor, Director of St. Anne School in Lawrence, Massachusetts (+1941).

Brother Paul's administration was curtailed abruptly in 1942 by the death of the Reverend Brother Francis Borgia whom he succeeded as Assistant General. After a six year term (1942-1948) in Europe, he retired to his native Canada where he is presently assigned to the community of Valcartier, P.Q.

On July 26, 1942, Brother Paul, the last of the Canadian-born provincials, handed the responsibility of his position over to Brother Louis Omer, then Director General in Poughkeepsie.