

Brother Leo (1922-1930)

Brother Leo was the first of three Canadian-born brothers who were appointed to direct the United States Province. They followed one another in succession between 1922 and 1942. They were of the first generation of Canadian brothers who were teaching in the Marist schools in the United States at the time of the division of the North American province in 1911. Like many other Canadians these brothers chose to continue teaching in this country.

Brother Leo was born George E. Brouillette on August 22, 1883, in Batiscan, P.Q., Canada. He received his Marist training at Iberville, Canada. It was there he received the Marist habit and the name of Brother Legontianus.(22.) Early teaching duties were assigned to him in Marist schools at Iberville, Montreal, and New York City. In 1914 he received his first administrative assignment as Director of Ecole Hevey, in Manchester, New Hampshire. The directorship of St. Ann's Academy was entrusted to him in 1919. Here he remained until he was appointed Provincial.(23.)

For the next nine years Brother Leo continued several projects under development. He wished to carry out Brother Heribert's plans for new accommodations in the houses of studies, and for the improvement of existing schools. In general he implemented the reorganization plans. To this end he withdrew the brothers from St. Michael's School in Montreal, Canada in 1925; he formulated new curricula for the houses of studies; he authorized the construction of new buildings in New York City and in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts; he encouraged the establishment of high school departments in existing schools; and he denied the requests to staff other parish schools because of lack of personnel and revenues.

Brother Leo's interest in new curricula stemmed from a problem of long standing. From the beginning of the American Province the personnel were so occupied with school work that the preparation of the brothers for the teaching profession was not properly maintained. This situation was responsible for the assignment of young professed brothers without the proper training to classroom duties. Brother Provincial's ambition was to correct this situation. In a report written thirty years after his provincialship, he summarized the educational background the young religious received before he outlined the new courses of study for the houses of studies:

In 1911 the professional training of the brothers coming out of the Novitiate was very deficient. Many went directly into the classroom with results that can easily be imagined. They had to be very gifted to make a success of their discipline and their teaching: Those who found their way into the scholasticate formed a kind of pool to secure replacements for the different schools of the Province.(24.)

Though some improvements in this field had been made from 1911 to 1921, the economic resources of the Province limited the professional training of the young brothers. This was obtained mainly through the imitation of former teachers, and through the assistance and advice of local superiors and fellow teachers. Professional courses were also offered at the [?] during the summer vacation. It was here and at Fordham University that they were prepared to obtain the New York State teacher's license (the State Life Certificate).(25.)

To advance the organization of studies that Brother Leo had in mind Dr. Skinner of the board of Regents in Albany, New York was invited to recommend Improvements for St. Ann's Hermitage. With the implementation of these recommendations a Regents' charter was granted to this school in 1923. The next step was to establish a junior college for the scholastic With the assistance of Fordham University authorities, Marist Training School was started in Poughkeepsie in 1928. In that year a charter was granted by the State of New York for the junior college in affiliation with Fordham University. Seventy-two credits towards the Bachelor's degree were offered in this college, and it its extensions at St. Ann's Academy and Mount St. Michael in New York City. Provisions were made for the student brothers to earn the rest of the credits towards a Bachelor's degree at Fordham University during the summers and after teaching hours.

Many physical changes in the Hermitage houses contributed to better studies. These changes were made financially possible by sales of portions of that property. Land close to the Hudson River was sold for fifty

thousand dollars. With this money the Greystone college building was renovated and laboratory equipment and books were purchased. An addition was also built to the brothers' residence.(26.)

Brother Leo's plans reached out to New England. In Tyngsboro, Massachusetts, Brother Aloysius Mary was appointed supervisor of the construction of a New England junior preparatory. A modern four-story brick building, with accommodations for seventy-five students was ready in September 1924. This was the first of two major constructions which Brother Leo felt was needed. In order to obtain students for the preparatory, Brother Frederick Charles, the recruiter, was assisted by Brother Austin Mary in the New York area in 1925. Brother Charles was then able to visit more New England schools to recruit candidates.

To continue Brother Heribert's program of consolidation Brother Leo and his Council decided to refuse requests for missionary brothers for the Philippine Islands and China. Twenty-three years elapsed before an American staff was to establish a school outside this country.

In line with Brother Leo's plans the Marist schools in New York City benefited by the addition of new buildings. A community residence for the brothers teaching at St. Agnes School was acquired by the parish in 1923. A new school for the Boys' Department of St. Jean Baptiste parish school was ready for use at the beginning of the 1925 scholastic year.(27.) As a result the former site of the St. Jean Baptiste School was purchased by the Province as an annex to St. Ann's Academy.(28.) Lastly, the addition of the modern Mount St. Michael Academy in 1926 implemented the plan to build a sister school to St. Ann's Academy in New York City.

Throughout the Province, the introduction of high school departments in the existing schools met with success. St. Agnes School in New York City started one in 1923; Ecole Hevey in Manchester, New Hampshire tried in 1923; and St. Peter's School in Poughkeepsie, New York opened a similar department in-1927. This emphasis on secondary education eventually resulted during the next twenty years in the transfer of brothers from grammar schools to high schools.

Brother Leo's years in office witnessed the deaths of several pioneer brothers of the Province. Many had passed on and the new generation of brothers replaced them. Of the twenty-two brothers who died during this twenty year reorganization period eleven died during Brother Leo's tenure of office. Of these, the two founders of the New York area apostolate (Very Rev. Brother Stratonique and Brother Zephiriny) died in 1926 and 1927 respectively. After a long illness, Rev. Brother Angelicus, Assistant General and founder of St. Anne School Marist community in Lawrence, Massachusetts, passed on in 1928. To replace him Brother Francis Borgia, director of St. Ann's Academy, was appointed Assistant General.(29.)

By the time Brother Leo turned the direction of the Province over to Brother Henry Charles on December 29, 1930, the numerical strength of the Province had increased from one hundred and sixty-three brothers to two hundred and seven.

Since that time Brother Leo was appointed to fill a number of posts. He served as Director General of the Poughkeepsie Hermitage (1934-1940; 1942-1944) as director of St. Joseph School in Haverhill, Massachusetts (1931-1932); and of Mount St. Michael Academy in New York City (1932-1933). He spent nineteen years teaching in the training schools: the Poughkeepsie Novitiate (1933-1934); the Marist Preparatory School in Esopus, New York (1944-1952). He retired at the Provincial House in Esopus in 1952. Since December 1958 he has been retired at the Novitiate in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts.(30.)

And so the end of his administration concluded what has been referred to as the Reorganization Period of the United States Province. During the twenty-year span, the four Provincials accomplished the task of building a prosperous province on the foundation of existing schools, houses of studies, and personnel allotted to the United States Province in 1911. During the twenty-two years of the following period, known as the Transitional Period, four other provincials continued the work of their predecessors. What had been left by Brother Leo was significant, but the depression which had already started to influence the course of his administration was felt by the provincials who followed him. Despite the hardships which were experienced by them the inevitable advance in secondary education was hastened in the Province when the return of prosperity resulted in expansion.