

## Brother Louis Omer, 1942-1948

Brother Louis Omer (Omer Duprez) was born on December 22, 1897, in Lowell, Massachusetts. He was educated by Marist brothers at St. Joseph School in that city. In 1912 he entered the Institute at the Poughkeepsie Novitiate. After his novitiate training he was sent to St. Pierre Jolys in Manitoba, Canada.(26.)

He began his teaching career in New York City, where he spent fifteen years at St. Jean Baptiste School, St. Agnes School, and at St. Ann's Academy. In 1931 he was called to Europe to further his ascetical studies at the Second Novitiate of the congregation. Upon his return Brother Louis was assigned to a number of directorates which prepared him for governing the Province in 1942. He served as director of St. Joseph School of Haverhill, (1932-1933), of St. Peter's School in Poughkeepsie (1933-1936), of St. Agnes High School in New York City (1938-1940), and as Director General of the Poughkeepsie communities (1940-1942).(27.)

Brother Louis Omer's administration (1942-1948) covered a very trying time for the Province. During six and a half years as provincial, he had to cope with vexing wartime problems. These included various shore ages, rare contacts with the Mother House at St. Genis Laval, (then in Vichy, France), draft board complications over the admission of postulants, the internment of three German brothers from Samoa and various other problems.(28.)

The most urgent of these was the food shortage throughout the war. Fortunately by this time the dairy farms and vegetable gardens and orchards in Poughkeepsie and Tyngsboro provided part of the needs requirea to feed the students in training. The interned German brothers were assigned to these farms and gardens to help out during their wartime stay is the United States Province.

Once the war was over, postwar prosperity affected an increase c provincial finances and of personnel.(29.) An unusual number of candidates for the novitiate and juniorate applied for admission at this time. The two juniorates had sufficient accommodations for these students, but the Novitiate became very inadequate. To remedy the latter situation, on October 18, 1948 the Provincial Council decided to transfer the Novitiate to the more spacious juniorate building in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts.(30.) This was accomplished a year later, during the next provincial administration. It was the solution to a problem which had vexed the various provincials for thirty years.

Another blessing which accompanied postwar prosperity was the establishment of the Marian (Marist) College in Poughkeepsie, New York. Consultations to this end had begun in 19" with Dr. Roy J. Deferrari, Secretary General of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. His directives and advice enabled the brothers to meet the requirements for a four year college. Two years later on September 20, 1946, a Provisional Charter was granted to Marian College by the University of the State of New York.(31.) The new college had already been affiliated with the Catholic University of America. A building and renovation program was the; begun to meet urgent needs. Several buildings were renovated and in 1947 the brothers began the construction of a gymnasium-utility building. Brother Francis Xavier, member of the faculty, was appointed to direct the work, which was completed in 1949.

One reason for the increase of vocations during this administration was the influx of hundreds of students into the schools of the Province. In New York City alone, a fifth and a sixth Marist school were added to those in existence. In 1946 brothers were sent to St. Helena(32.) parochial school and to Bishop Dubois High School.

Elsewhere in the Province more brothers entered new fields of Catholic education. At the urgent request of the Benedictine Fathers at Marmion Military Academy in Aurora, Illinois, six brothers were sent to teach there in September of 1944. This foundation was to be a temporary one, for the Provincial agreed to replace the number of lay teachers at the Academy. This was delayed until 1958, when the brothers were needed in two newly acquired Texas schools.(33.) While the Marist Brothers were being welcomed in the Midwest, they were being withdrawn from two schools in Massachusetts: St. Jeanne D'Arc in Lowell, in 1946, and St. Joseph School in Haverhill, a year later.

In Lawrence, Massachusetts on the other hand, permanency and expansion were unquestioned. As the school enrollment increased the need for a major construction at Central Catholic High School became urgent. Brother Provincial and his council considered plans for the erection of a large gymnasium-classroom building. Because the provincial funds could not meet a million dollar expense, the brothers of the Province were asked to spend their holidays and summer vacations working at this giant project. Under the direction of Brother Nilus Vincent, the edifice was completed in three years (1948-1957). This magnificent building was the first of a series of imposing Marist constructions.(34.)

During Brother Louis Omer's administration, the Thirteenth General Chapter of the Institute helped to solve the many administrative problems that had arisen since 1932. It was held in Grugliasco, Italy in October 1946. Brother Provincial was accompanied to the Chapter by two elected delegates from the province: Brother Francis Xavier and Brother John Lawrence. The capitulants elected Reverend Brother Leonida, superior general. Reverend Brother Paul Stratonic, the former Provincial was re-elected as Assistant General for the North American Provinces. One of the resolutions of the Chapter encouraged province-sponsored missions by the thirty-two provinces.

This resolution proved to be very significant in the development of the American Province. Strongly mission-minded Brother Louis Omer began planning for a mission territory in the Philippine Islands. He traveled to the Island of Mindanao in 1948 to confer with Most Reverend Gerard Mongeau, O.M.I., Bishop of the Cotabato Diocese. As a result of this meeting, a staff of four brothers was sent to Notre Dame of Cotabato High School in June 1948. This was the beginning of the present prosperous and autonomous Marist District for the Philippine Islands.(35.)

Brother Louis Omer's administration will be remembered also for the help he supplied to missions outside his jurisdiction. Thus Brother Victor Ralph left for the African mission school at Kutama, Southern Rhodesia, in 1946; Brothers Charles Raymond and Henry Firmin, for New Caledonia that same year.

Another postwar development which affected the Province was the plan to re-enter the field of camp work during the summers. The success achieved by the brothers in this work during the war years encouraged the Provincial to make plans for a province-sponsored summer camp. Toward the end of Brother Louis' administration, Brother Mary Andrew, Provincial Treasurer, was assigned to investigate various possibilities. (36.) It was not until the next administration began that a camp site was purchased at Center Ossipee, New Hampshire.

Before the end of his administration, Brother Louis saw seven of his brothers buried in Poughkeepsie. Four of them were among the early missionaries from France. One of them, Brother Mary Anicetus, had been provincial treasurer for over thirty-five years.

Benedict Henry (1949-1959). Extensive remodeling, and the construction of several additional buildings have made the Camp one of the best in the United States.

During Brother Thomas Austin's administration, candidates for the brotherhood increased considerably. Groups of forty or more were invested with the Marist cassock during the summers of 1950, 1951 and 1952. As a result, the personnel of the Province increased by one hundred and forty brothers.

Because these large groups had to be trained at Marian College before receiving teaching assignments, there were few available for the staffing of new schools. The Provincial Council had to decline offers to staff such schools as Archbishop Stepinac High School in White Plains, New York; St. Joseph Deaf and Dumb Institute in New York City; Bishop Carroll High School in Washington, D. C. and several others. The only offer which was accepted was St. Mary's Parochial High School in Manhasset, New York in 1950.<sup>3</sup> This was the first Marist community in the then Diocese of Brooklyn. That same year the four remaining brothers assigned to the St. Anne's Grammar School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, were withdrawn from the last remaining Franco-American grammar school in the Province.

The mission territory in the Philippine Islands was greatly helped during this administration. The first four brothers who opened a Marist high school mission at Cotabato were supplemented by the addition of ten others. In 1950, 1952 and 1953, three high schools on the Island of Mindanao were staffed by the brothers. These schools included Notre Dame of Marbel, Notre Dame of Lagao and Notre Dame of Kidapawan. In 1952, Brother Provincial accepted Brother Louis Omer's resignation as master of novices to allow him to investigate possibilities of starting a novitiate in the Philippines. He was given the title and authority of Provincial Visitor. It was also at this time that the first five Filipino candidates for the brotherhood arrived at the novitiate in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts.

One year and a half before the end of Brother Thomas Austin's second term he travelled to St. Genis Laval, France to undertake the work of Assistant General. In that capacity Brother Thomas was delegated to visit the United States (1955) and Canada and their respective mission districts.

In 1958 Reverend Brother Thomas Austin, A.G., returned to the United States to assume the post of director of the Marist community at the Catholic University of Washington, D. C. As such he was also Director of Men's Residences, and an executive officer of Catholic University. From this active position Brother Thomas watches the work of the American Marists expand and prosper.