

Brother Henry Charles, 1931-1937

The Transition Period of the American Province opened with the appointment of Brother Henry Charles as fifth provincial. Upon acceptance of the new post, he undertook the task of leading the Province through difficult times during the depression. Economic difficulties were responsible in part for the altering of the work of the brothers whom he was to direct. During Brother Henry's six year tenure his policies helped to solve the serious financial problems of the Province, and ensure a secure future for Marist work.

Brother Henry (Charles Henri Gregoire) was born on September 11, 1892. He was reared and educated in the city of St. John, P.Q., Canada. He entered the Institute in 1906 at the juniorate in Poughkeepsie. Two year later, on July 26, 1908, he was invested with the Marist cassock with the first group to be received in the United States.

Following his scholastic training, he was assigned to St. Boniface College in Manitoba, Canada; to St. Ignatius and St. Agnes Grammar Schools in New York City; and to Marist School for Boys in Savannah, Georgia. In St. Ignatius he served as head of the boys' department from 1915 until 1920. Previous to his assignment as provincial, Brother Henry was appointed to the directorships of Marist School for Boys in Savannah (1922-1925); of Ecole Hevey, Manchester, New Hampshire (1926-1929) and of St. Ann's Academy in New York City (1929-1931).(3.)

In 1931 he was responsible for the appointment of eighty-nine brothers to grammar school classes and thirty-nine to high school work. Twenty-two years later, at the end of this period (1953) there were only twenty brothers assigned to grammar schools, and over two hundred assigned to high schools, as administrators, or teachers. This shift of personnel was stimulated mainly by economic circumstances, which forced the brothers who were poorly remunerated, to withdraw from grammar schools and take up better paid high school work.

It was early in Brother Henry's administration that monetary concerns became critical. The majority of the pastors in the parochial school of the Province asked for reduction in the brothers' salaries. At two of the parish schools, where brothers had taught for forty-two years and twenty-seven years respectively, the burden of conducting two separate departments forced the pastors to adopt co-education under the Sisters or discontinue the high school. The first withdrawal of brothers was from St. Jean Baptiste School in New York City in 1934. Two years later the brother left St. Peter's Grammar and High School in Poughkeepsie. In the two New York City academies rates had to be lowered in order to retain the students.(4.) Expenses for maintaining the training centers grew more burdensome.(5.) The idea to send brothers to establish a mission in the Philippines was abandoned, because provincial finances could not sustain the expenses involved in mission work.

In order to relocate these brothers, Brother Henry and his council accepted requests for high school teachers. They were sent to Central Catholic High School in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1933 at the request of Archbishop John J. Swint; to Central Catholic High School in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1935; and to the Tyngsboro Juniorate in Massachusetts.

Commitments were also made to send teachers to grammar schools where future high school classes were envisioned. The first of these was St. Peter's School in Haverstraw, New York. Four brothers were assigned here to staff the higher grades in 1931. Father Maher, the pastor, and Brother Provincial had agreed that the brothers would teach later in a proposed high school. Unfortunately, the untimely death of the pastor forestalled the beginning of this project. The succeeding pastors found that the construction of a high school was not feasible. Therefore, since 1931 four brothers have been reassigned annually to teach in the grammar grades.

A similar situation was accepted in Lowell, Massachusetts, where students of St. Jeanne D'Arc and St. Louis de France parishes could be encouraged to attend nearby St. Joseph High School under the direction of the Marist Brothers. The first staff of three brothers arrived at St. Jeanne D'Arc in 1936. Due to the slow recovery of the parish finances, the Pastor of St. Louis was unable to obtain the services of the brothers. Nevertheless, within a few years, St. Joseph High Schools enrollment had grown sufficiently to ensure success.

Elsewhere the Provincial Administration met with greater success. A High School, started by the principal, Brother Florentius, of St. Anne's Grammar School in Lawrence met with immediate success. The new school, Central Catholic, was a provincial undertaking to educate the boys from the various parishes of the city. Measures had to be taken to secure property for a sizeable school. Temporary buildings were rented to accommodate the first group of fifty-five students. The following September (1936) six brothers were withdrawn from St. Anne Grammar School and five others were added to the new Central Catholic High School faculty. Today, twenty-five years later, there are thirty-one brothers and four lay teacher-s teaching almost a thousand boys in this school.(6.)

The training of the young candidates for the Marist life was also strengthened. For instance a high school department replaced the grammar grades at the Tyngsboro Juniorate. From 1934 until 1949 this preparatory offered a three years high school course. The students completed their fourth year at the Novitiate in Poughkeepsie during their postulancy.(7.) This training was temporarily suspended because of a fire that gutted and destroyed part of the dormitory at this juniorate in December 1933. Brother Henry transferred the first group (freshmen) to the Poughkeepsie juniorate, and sent the other students home until the repairs were completed one year later.

To assist young brothers in preparing for their religious and professional duties, the Great Exercises of St. Ignatius were initiated in 1932. These thirty-day retreats were held every two or three years during the summer before the brothers made their final vows.(8.) One year later negotiations were begun to offer a full college course of studies at Marist Training School in Poughkeepsie. Unfortunately it took thirteen years to achieve this goal.(9.) Lastly for the first time brothers were allowed to attend any university to take courses.

Professional advancement was also made by the brothers in the field of graduate studies. No longer did the Bachelor's degree suffice. After the brothers had finished their undergraduate work at Fordham University they often continued their studies towards a Masters degree or doctorate. After the closing of St. Ann's Camp in 1931, more brothers were released from camp work, and sent either to study at the universities or to special projects at the training centers.

During Brother Henry's administration, the Thirteenth General Chapter was convoked at Grugliasco, Italy. Brother Henry, and Brother Leo, his predecessor as the elected delegate, represented the American brothers in 1932. Among the first results of the Chapter were the re-election of Very Rev. Brother Diogene as Superior General, and of Rev. Brother Francis Borgia as the Assistant General for the North American provinces. One of the policies which was adopted was to award diplomas of affiliation to the benefactors of the congregation. Since that time twenty-three American men and women have been affiliated to the Institute.(10.)

Between this Chapter and the following one (1946) the work of the brothers in Europe was seriously interrupted. Over two hundred brothers became the victims of war due to religious persecutions in Germany, Italy, and Spain. (11.) The ravages of the Spanish Civil War, the Sino-Japanese War, and World War II took many brothers' lives and destroyed millions of dollars of property. By 1938 the number of German brothers (340) was reduced to 240 because of Nazi persecutions. In Spain, 192 brothers were martyred by the Communists during this country's tragic civil war. Elsewhere the Japanese had already bombed a Marist school in Chungking, China, in 1930; others suffered the same fate later. Brothers in Mexico were still persecuted. However in the United States and in Canada the Institute fared well.(12.)

At the end of Brother Henry's tenure as provincial, he could count an increase of sixteen brothers in the Province; six brothers had died during this administration. Among the dead was Brother Felix Eugene, a former visitor for the North American mission (1901-1903) and its first provincial (1903-1905). Others who died were the aged Brother Cesidius, the founder (1933)s 1" h'. William Murray, a Poughkeepsie attorney and benefactor (1933) and Rev. Fr. DeJordy, chaplain at the Tyngsboro Juniorate (1936)

In December, 1936 Brother Henry was replaced by Brother Paul Stratonic as provincial. He remained on the Provincial Council for the next twenty-one years (1937-1958), assisting four provincials in the formation of policies. For a few months, December 1936 until March 1937" Brother Henry served as director of St. Anne School in Lawrence, Massachusetts. After the death of Brother Leo Adolph in March, Brother Henry was

assigned to replace this brother as Master of Novices. Ten years later a serious fall caused him to be hospitalized for several months. Finally in 1948 he retired from this post in order to fully recover from this accident. In the years following, he was appointed Director General in Poughkeepsie (1949-1950), Provincial Secretary (1950-1952), and Director of the Novitiate in Tyngsboro, Massachusetts (1952-1958). Presently Brother Henry continues his active service in the Province (of Esopus) by managing the building and property at Archbishop Molloy High School in Jamaica, New York.

His influence in training young brothers and in policy making in the Province was noted in a formal address on the occasion of his golden jubilee as a Marist in 1958:

The history of his fifty years in the order is practically coincident with the history of the Province. The latter history can never be adequately written without constant reference to the important part which Brother Henry Charles had had in the growth, development and advance of education, and in the formation of that spirit of work and family devotedness which is so characteristic of this Province today.(13.)