

Fr. George A. Crocenzi 75 USA TZA UGA WI

\* May 15, 1922 Monongahela, PA

+ Jan 25, 2000 Sarasota, FL

His parents migrated from Italy to the U.S.A. and settled near Pittsburgh. We find him at the age of seven in St. Paul's Orphanage at Crafton, near Pittsburgh, attending the primary school. Reports about him indicate that he was a very special boy, earning the highest praise: one report saying that he was the best boy the orphanage had ever had in its seventy years. He attended high school at St. Luke's in Carnegie, PA, from 1936 to 1941. Then feeling attracted to the priesthood, he asked his spiritual advisor whether he could pursue that vocation. Encouraged, he enrolled at Duquesne University in the same year. There he felt attracted to our Congregation's foreign missions. Meanwhile, World War Two had started and it was feared he might be drafted for military service unless he was registered as a theology student. So in February 1943 he switched to Cornwells to increase his knowledge of Latin.

In June he was ready for the novitiate and made his vows on July 16, 1944 at Ridgefield, CT. An above average student, he had no trouble keeping up with the others during his senior seminary studies at Ferndale, CT, where he was ordained on June 3, 1949. Meanwhile he had earned a B.A. and a B.D.

The following year he received his assignment to the Kilimanjaro District. He was destined to spend 38 years in Africa.

For his initiation he was placed at Umbwe's Holy Ghost Secondary School and then at the Kilomeni mission for one year each. The Vicariate was then in full bloom: it had 55 Spiritan priests from abroad and a rapidly-growing number of African priests of 18, 11 Spiritan Brothers and 18 African, 21 foreign Sisters and 109 African ones, 465

catechists, 72 primary schools, 10 middle schools, 3 secondary or teachers training schools, and a total of over 108,000 Catholics in a population of 550,000. It was expected that soon the vicariate would be raised to a diocese. This came about in 1953 while he had been stationed at Kilema's Our Lady of Lourdes Parish of over 11,000 Catholics and nearly 300 catechumens. The Diocese of Moshi replaced the old vicariate.

After serving for some time as assistant to the District Superior of Kilimanjaro, he was named its Principal Superior in 1966. Meanwhile he had returned to Umbwe to take charge of its Holy Cross mission with close to 8,000 Catholics in 1956, followed in 1960 by three years at Moshi.

In 1963 the Holy See carved the new Diocese of Arusha out of that of Moshi and he moved to that location. The new diocese encompassed a population of about 300,000, but had only some 8,000 Catholics, 20,000 Protestants, an estimated 12,000 Moslems, and some 2,000 Hindus. So, much work remained to be done there by the Spiritans in charge.

Fr. Crocenzi remained district superior for all Spiritans working in both the dioceses of Moshi and Arusha and as such, took care of religious discipline, relationships with the general and provincial superiors as well as with the local bishops until 1972. We need not go into details, except for a few important points. He vigorously supported the idea that the time had come to start a Spiritan Foundation in East Africa that could develop into a full-fledged province of the Congregation. The initiative for it had come from a few African priests who had joined the Congregation in earlier years. As we all know, the attempt succeeded and led to the flourishing East Africa Province, covering Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya with many missions elsewhere.

With the same vigor he came to the defense of his confreres when they were accused of closing their eyes to polygamy and other indefensible pagan practices, an accusation made without any attempt to consult the district superior about the truth of the matter.

Fr. Crocenzi was replaced as District Superior in 1973, but continued to reside at Burka, near Arusha, as its pastor. He built a church there before he moved to Usa River in 1969. Later we find him listed at Mto Wa Mbu as pastor of that parish.

After an extended leave in the U.S.A., where he served at St. Mark's Parish in Harlem and did a splendid job assisting the Mission Procurator by preaching the annual mission support appeals, he was assigned to Mulago Parish, Kampalam, Uganda as its pastor in 1983. It was a very large parish with a congregation of some 40,000 people; fortunately he had a confrere assisting him. He worked there with his usual zeal and was greatly respected by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The parish is now staffed by five Spiritans, four of them from the East Africa Province.

Increasing infirmities led to his return to the U.S.A. in 1988. After recuperating, Father was assigned to the St. Peter Claver Faith Community in Philadelphia, using the facilities of the former St. Peter Claver Parish, once more rendering valuable service in a complicated situation. A hipbone replacement relieved him there from the agony of arthritis.

When in 1992 Fr. Robert Spangenberg arrived to relieve him from the material part of his administration, he stayed on for a few months to acquaint him with the job and then asked permission to join Fr. Patrick Bascio, doing ministry on the Turk and Caicos Islands in the West Indies. Though he was 71 years old, his wish was granted. There

were many refugees from Haiti on Grand Turk Island and for them he learned to preach the Sunday sermon in French. He also taught them English as that is the local language. His stay came to an end in mid-1994 when the rent for the part of the house he lived in was raised to \$700 a month, more than he could afford and no other place was available.

Returning to the U.S.A., he still served at St. James Parish, Dayton, OH, until 1998 when he retired, first to Bensalem, PA, and then to Sarasota in March 1999.

On the occasion of his golden jubilee as a priest, he was once more lauded for his many years of dedication to the people of Africa. Throughout his life he was known as a priest who was always on the go looking after the people entrusted to his care.

Diagnosed with lung cancer, he died in Sarasota on January 25, 2000. Interment took place at the community cemetery of Sharpsburg, PA.