

Fr. James K. HEALY 62 U.S.A. USW USE TZA
* September 29, 1934 Bridgeport, CT + January 10, 1997 Silver Spring, MD

He was the youngest but one of the thirteen children of Mr. and Mrs. Michael and Elizabeth Healy; he was also one of three sons who reached the priesthood in the Congregation, while another son became a diocesan priest and two of the family's girls Sisters of Mercy. After attending Fairfield College Preparatory School, 1948-52, he did two years of studies at St. Thomas Seminary at Hartford College, followed by two years of philosophy and two of theology at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore.

He then opted for the Congregation and made his vows on September 21, 1960 at Ridgefield. In his final year of theology at Ferndale, Norwalk, CT, he was ordained there on June 6, 1962. As he had not yet made his perpetual vows at that time, he was provisionally ordained for the Diocese of Basse Terre, Guadeloupe, until his final vows in September 1963. Having earned a B.A., a B.D. and a M.Ed. Adm., he had started his ministry in the new Girard High School in Phoenix, AZ, as teacher and chaplain.

In 1964 he was posted to St. Francis de Sales High School in Chicago, where he served as a teacher and activities director for five years. He then worked for one year as assistant at St. Anthony Parish, Portsmouth, RI, while also teaching at the local college, until in 1970 he went to Tanzania as headmaster of the Catholic junior seminary in Arusha for a three-year term. In 1974 he became chaplain and director of campus ministry at Salve Regina College in Newport, RI, and in 1978 he was named dean of students there.

Meanwhile he was getting more and more concerned about the poor and their helplessness when they get caught in a legal system that was unable to help them even in their most basic needs. He received permission to study law in 1979 and enrolled at Duquesne University's School of Law and later at Antioch School of Law in Washington, D.C., which specializes in training for legal services to the

poor and disadvantaged. In 1983 he became a member of the Rhode Island Bar and two years later of the District of Columbia Bar. In 1982 he had already been chosen as Justice and Peace director of the Congregation's U.S.A.-East Province with the mandate of special attention to the plight of Haitian refugees. To his delight, he received congratulations from the Vatican Commission for Migration. He also became in 1983 a member of the Christic Institute, which works for social justice through legal structures and attempts to establish precedents by pursuing specific lawsuits. Fr. Healy's role in it was directed to the plight of refugees, especially those from Haiti.

These positions were not mere titles for him, but involved a tremendous amount of work, all in line with Fr. Francis Libermann's admonition that Spiritans are to be "the advocates, the supporters and the defenders of the weak and the little people against all who oppress them." He laid bare the connection between individual cases and their structural causes while fighting with all legal means at his disposal for the rights of the poor and in this way became a prophetic voice, a rallying figure for those interested in the integral liberation of people. He retained these positions until 1991.

From 1984 on he also served as pastor of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Arlington, VA, a suburb of Washington, D.C. It was mainly an African-American parish, already known for its extensive social service activities. He expanded its social justice orientation on behalf of the poor and dispossessed, established what became the *Ujamaa* Committee (Familyhood) for mutual collaboration, which aimed at fostering the cultural riches, gifts and skills of Black Catholics and at responding sensitively and forcefully to the needs of African-Americans. At the same time the parish's social services were coordinated in one

social ministries office to provide more efficiently for emergency financial, food and referral assistance to the poor.

In his Sunday homilies and the weekly parish bulletin he also reached out to the surrounding communities and, on a wider scale, to national and foreign policies in matters of justice and peace because he was very sensitive to the fact that all human beings are God's children. From 1984 on he had been co-founder and executive director of the Washington Office on Haiti and from 1986 on he functioned as chairman of its board of directors until 1993. He also served in a similar capacity on the board of the Central American Refugee Center from 1983 till 1989.

From the time of his seminary days he had always been very interested in liturgy and as a priest he made liturgy—the “people's deed”—the core of parish life. Whatever apostolic or charitable activities people undertook, whether individually or as a body, they all culminated in the liturgical proclamation of the Good News and the celebration of the eucharist as the unity of worship and apostolate. People from outside the parish, whether Black or White or Hispanic, flocked to the church to hear him and immerse themselves in what it means to be a true Christian in a spirit of openness to all. In particular, we may mention that many Hispanics became a regular part of the worshipping community.

A gifted speaker and preacher, he held his audience captive. His homilies and the parish bulletin always contained practical points through which the people were able to participate as apostolic workers in the service of justice and loving concern for the common good. Some of his homilies were printed in the National Catholic Reporter and reached a wide audience.

His health became increasingly worse. After celebrating Easter Mass for the parish on April 14, 1995, he limited himself to minister to the Dignity Community of Washington, D.C. until late 1995, still teaching that our God is mercy, forgiveness and love. Interment took place in his hometown.