Father Joseph Writes

A man dedicated to mercy

On Nov. 3, 1999, at the age of 90, Fr. Francis C. Duda, MIC, passed onto the Lord. I remember him fondly as a gentle, caring, and sensitive soul who was particularly devoted to Jesus as The Divine Mercy.

"Father Joseph, MIC"

Some of you will remember that he served as director of the Association of Marian Helpers from 1954-57. He also served as both our Provincial and Eden Hill House Treasurer for many years. In fact, he was one of the first Marians to live in the Eden Hill Stockbridge House.

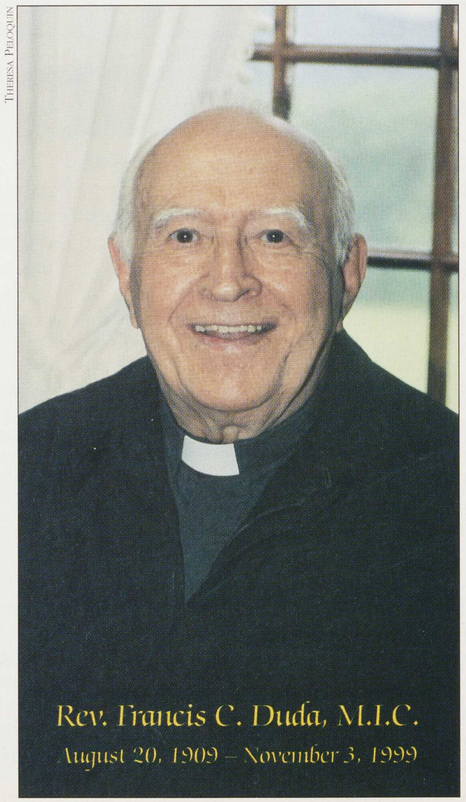
Born on Aug. 20, 1909, in Oil City, PA, Fr. Francis was the son of Casimir and Angela Tochman Duda. He attended high school and college in Orchard Lake, MI, and Sulpician Seminary in Baltimore, MD.

He entered our religious community in 1939. He was a professed member of the Congregation for 58 years, professing his first vows on Sept. 2, 1941, and his perpetual vows on Sept. 2, 1943. His ordination to the priesthood came on Oct. 2, 1943.

As a caring and sensitive soul, Fr. Francis was totally concerned about others and had a love for animals and nature.

I still remember a special kindness he showed me after I had just transferred from Poland to our Province here in the United States in 1988. At the time, I was assigned to Eden Hill, and he did the shopping for our Eden Hill House while he was in his retirement years.

I was having a hard time adjusting to a diet of Mexican and American food, and Fr. Francis noticed that I liked salami. So, every week, he would buy me a pound of salami to help ease my adjustment to life here in the States. It was a very touching gesture that was typical of him.



Theresa Peloquin

Then, there was his love of nature. Father Francis was like his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi. He would feed the birds, chipmunks, and squirrels from the back porch of our residence. Some of the chipmunks and squirrels would eat right out of his hand.

After he suffered a stroke, I took over his ministry to animals for a while and fed the squirrels and chipmunks from our back porch.

Of course, many of you who have visited Eden Hill have enjoyed firsthand examples of Fr. Francis's nature photography. His photographs still grace many of the hallways at the Divine Mercy Building here on Eden Hill. Nature photography became one of his hobbies in retirement with the aim, as he put it, of capturing "the beauty of God's creation and His infinite love."

But now let me share about Fr. Francis's special devotion to Jesus as The Divine Mercy. It was a natural fit for this gentle and sensitive man.

I saw evidence of this devotion when, even in his retirement years, he would make a special point of going to confession before Mercy Sunday — based upon the instructions our Merciful Savior gave Sister Faustina for preparing for Mercy Sunday, as recorded in the Diary.

His love of mercy started from his early days as a Marian.

Fr. Francis Duda, MIC

An appreciation for the natural beauty on Eden Hill shines through Fr. Duda's collection of photos taken in his senior years.

In his memoirs, he writes:

> I joined the Marians in September 1939. Father Joseph Jarzebowski, MIC, arrived in Washington, DC, the following summer. He brought the story of Sr. Faustina and the revelations of the Merciful Christ.
>
> In 1944, I was assigned to our Stockbridge House as secretary to the Office of Divine Mercy, handling all incoming mail. It was a one-man operation: picking up the mail at the post office, processing and answering the mail, filling orders and requests for novena booklets and prayercards.

In the Fall 1956 *Marian Helpers BULLETIN*, Fr. Francis writes with dedication about his love for spreading the message, but now as "Fr. Joseph, MIC":

> As the year draws to a close, we inevitably direct our attention to the entire year gone by. Reviewing the past months, we feel much deep satisfaction, primarily because of the progress made in the work of promoting the devotion to the Mercy of God. The fact that over one million of the plain holy cards and another million of the reprint sheets were distributed this past year easily indicates the growth and vigor of the lay apostolate behind this mercy movement. ... God deigned in His infinite mercy to bless this work.

Perhaps the most fitting tribute to Fr. Francis's memory is our continuing commitment to sharing the message of Divine Mercy through our printed materials. I know that he must be smiling on us even now as we prepare to publish more Divine Mercy materials before Sister Faustina's canonization, which is expected this Mercy Sunday!

May God in His infinite mercy bless this work.

Fr. Joseph, M.I.C.

"Father Joseph, MIC," is the honorary title of the director of the Association of Marian Helpers. The current director, Br. Andrew R. Mączyński, MIC, serves also as vice-postulator for North America for the Marian Causes of Canonization.

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