



SECRETARY OF THE PROVINCE

## REDEMPTORIST PROVINCIAL RESIDENCE

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# Fr. McGonagle: A Scholar In The Cornfield

Redemptorist missionary, Rev. James Edward McGonagle III, died on October 18, 2014 in the CSSR community at Timonium, Maryland while his sister, Sister Helen Mary McGonagle, and his confreres surrounded him with their prayers and goodbyes. At seventeen days shy of his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday, he was the oldest confrere in the Province.

A viewing will take place from 8:30 – 10:30 AM followed immediately by a Mass of the Resurrection on Saturday, October 25 at the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Mission Church, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Father McGonagle was born on November 4, 1918 in Boston. He professed his first vows as a Redemptorist on August 2, 1939, was ordained on June 18, 1944, and died October 18, 2014.

He attended the Redemptorist Preparatory Seminary in North East, Pennsylvania for six years and went on to make his novitiate year in Ilchester, Maryland where he professed his vows.



*Rev. James E. McGonagle, CSSR*

He completed his philosophical and theological studies at Mount St. Alphonsus, the Major Seminary in Esopus, New York where he was ordained.

From there he continued his studies in Washington, DC and received his STL degree in Sacred Scripture from the Catholic University in 1948. After four years of parish ministry in Philadelphia, Manhattan, and the Bronx he headed south to the Vice-province of Richmond where he served for most of his priesthood.

His apostolic work included parishes in Charlotte and Wilson, North Carolina; Orangeburg, South Carolina; Griffin, Georgia and Jacksonville, Florida until he retired to St. Alphonsus Villa in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Ill health prompted his relocation back to the Province at Saratoga Springs, New York and finally to the St. John Neumann Residence in Timonium, Maryland where he died.

“He was a brilliant student,” remarked his close contemporary, Father Carl Hoegerl. “Even before he began his post-graduate studies at CU he was already fluent in German and Spanish. Later on his facility in the very ancient biblical languages was truly remarkable.”

“Every night he spent some time reading in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew,” declares his confrere, Father Tom Burke. “His proficiency in Scripture research was what attracted people to his preaching and to the Bible study groups he formed in the parishes.”

“He was a scholar in the cornfield,” attests the current Vice-provincial superior, Father Jerome Chavarria. “But he also possessed a deep spirituality that fueled his overwhelming passion for justice. He placed his own life in danger on several occasions because of his untiring work for African-American communities during an era that more than discouraged integration. We had a church and mobile chapel that were burnt to the ground and “Mac” himself was tear-gassed during the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. demonstrations. But this never stopped him from marching ahead to forward the rights of the poor and most abandoned.”

In Georgia the men of the parish initiated the McGonagle Council of the Knights of Columbus. “This was actually named after his deceased brother,” recalls Burke, “because the K of C chapters cannot be named for someone who is still living. So that was the only way the folks who loved him could get his name into lights. But they all knew the real star behind the marquee.”

However, this shining star was genuinely unassuming. Humility was part and parcel of his upbringing and spiritual life. When asked to name his patron saint, Father McGonagle specifically selected St. James the Lesser who is practically unknown compared to St. James the Greater. And even at the age of twenty-one, in his own words, he wrote, “I sincerely believe that it was God’s providence which led me to enter the Redemptorist Congregation but I know it was only His infinite mercy that kept me here.”

*Eternal life, grant unto him, O Lord. May he rest in the peaceful protest for justice and truth and authentic Christian love which he lived and practiced every day.*

*Father McGonagle 2*