

REMEMBER OSMUND GALLAGHER, C.F.X.



This article was originally published in a series of reflections based on the lives of Xaverian Brothers who have played influential roles in the life and development of the Congregation in America. They are written in commemoration of the Xaverian Brothers 150th Anniversary of their arrival in America in 1854.

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Saints have come in all shapes and sizes, personalities and temperaments. Some like Blessed Mother Teresa were loving, gentle, soft-spoken, and self-effacing. Others like Saint Paul of Tarsus, kind and loving though they be, were also highly opinionated, occasionally abrasive, and thoroughly decisive. Brother Osmund Gallagher, the fifth provincial of the American Province (1928-1934), was definitely more Pauline than Teresian. He was unmistakably a Xaverian who fell in love with the service of God.

The Power of Good Example. Born in Portland, Maine in 1873, Charles Augustine Gallagher and his family migrated to Somerville, Massachusetts, and to St. Joseph's Parish, where the Xaverian Brothers had taken up the staffing of the boys' division of the parish grammar school. Young Charlie attended St. Mary's parochial school and high school in Cambridge, worked as an apprentice at the Brass Moulding Co., and became one of the Sunday school teachers at St. Joseph's. It was the exemplary example of the Xaverian community under the late Brother Basil that inspired and attracted him to join the Congregation at the age of twenty, becoming the very first of a long line of Xaverian vocations to come from Somerville.

He received the holy habit in 1894, taking the name Brother Osmund, pronounced vows in 1896, and was promptly missioned to Louisville for nine years, living with such legendary Xaverians as Brothers Stanislaus, Stephen and Martin, all of whom had known Theodore James Ryken personally. Undoubtedly, their good example was such that Brother Osmund absorbed the spirit, traditions, and customs of the Congregation and deepened his life-long love for all things Xaverian.

The Cultivation and Nurturing of Vocations. Before the Divine Office was introduced into Xaverian prayer life in the 1960's, the Brothers included among their daily prayers from the *Manual of Prayers*, "A Prayer to Obtain Good Members for the Congregation." It began "O Father of all holiness, Whose goodness is infinite, humbly prostrate before Thy Divine Majesty, I pray and beseech Thee to give to our Congregation members according to Thy own heart." This prayer Brother Osmund surely recited with great devotion throughout his religious life, but especially after his term as provincial ended in 1934, when he was named Vocation Director of the American Province. In that capacity in 1936 he wrote *Vocation Day Monthly Suggestions* to aid our Brothers in their endeavors to cultivate an interest in religious life among their students.

In 1947 he took up the task of postulant master to aid Brother Kevin, director of novices, attempting to nurture the spiritual lives of his young charges by conducting resumes of morning meditations and giving conferences on aspects of the religious life. The postulants were impressed by his solid faith, his deep love for the Congregation and his fervent expectation to have good members – and only good members – among the ranks of the Xaverian Brothers. He, in turn, looked upon the young Brothers in the novitiate with great geniality and kindness.

The Educational Life of the Brothers. Brother Vincent Engle once referred to Brother Osmund as "The Great Apostle of Teacher Preparation and Advanced Studies." And so he was. He served as supervisor of schools for the American Province, first for New England and then for the entire American Province. As Brother Vincent noted "in this office he distinguished Himself by his spirit of encouragement and leadership." He authored a manual entitled *School Routine*, "the *vade mecum* of Xaverian teachers." Sitting in classroom after classroom observing the Brothers instructing their students, he recognized first-hand what Brother Isidore Kuppel, the provincial from 1907 to 1925, had so clearly recognized: the dire need for the Brothers to be professionally trained and educated. Brother Osmund would turn Brother Isidore's recurring dream and consuming passion for an educated membership into a magnificent reality with the founding of Xaverian College in 1931.

After pursuing several sites for the housing of the young Brothers, almost as an afterthought, he finally settled upon the 325-acre plot known as Kinkora, a name given to the property by the previous owner, William Wimsatt, and bought it for a sum of \$80,000 in September of 1931. To finance the purchase of the property,

Brother Osmund took out life insurance policies on all the perpetually professed Brothers to provide collateral for the sale. His was a very bold and courageous move. A more cautious, fiscally-conservative person would have waited or would have proceeded with much timidity. One can only marvel at his faith, his determination, and his courage. To conduct business as he did had to be either completely foolhardy or truly Spirit-driven. One must constantly remind oneself that 1931 was the make-or-break year of the Great Depression. The country's economic turnaround would not begin until Franklin Roosevelt assumed office in the White House. Yet, here was feisty, impetuous Brother Osmund, overflowing with love and passion, the divinely blessed risk-taker, the faith-filled servant of God and loyal son of Ryken, who would not let the collapsing economic world and the scary newspaper headlines deter him from providing a quality education for his young Xaverians. He courageously marched on, believing that God would abundantly provide. And over forty years He surely did. In 1933, in recognition for his outstanding service to Catholic education, Mount St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg, Maryland, conferred on him an honorary doctorate.

Striving for Perfection, Living the Holy Rule. "As the end of the Congregation is to sanctify its members, it follows that they must apply themselves incessantly to acquire religious perfection and the particular virtues of their state by detaching themselves from earthly things, and by always acting with an evangelical simplicity, an entire submission of heart and mind toward the rules and the commands of Superiors of this Congregation in which they have been accepted and in which they should live with perfect unanimity and love."

So stated the very first article in the old *Manual of Advice*. Brother Osmund strove throughout his life to embody the sentiments expressed in this article. He was a deeply spiritual person, whose great sense of poverty prompted him never to throw away an envelope. He cut up every envelope he received containing mail and made for himself note pads.

As demanding he was of himself, so also, as provincial, Brother Osmund was demanding of the Brothers. He scorned laxity. He could not abide fraud. He insisted upon authenticity. At the end of the annual August retreat held at Mount St. Joseph's, the Brothers in attendance regularly looked forward to the concluding conference that he gave, presenting something like a State of the Province address. In this very blunt, straight-from-the-shoulder discourse, delivered with great good humor, he never failed to hammer home his points. He let all the Brothers know in clear, unambiguous language what was expected of them as individuals and as communities. He was committed to leading the Brothers to live the religious life correctly, as stated in the Rule. He did so because he wanted the Brothers to be genuine, not fraudulent, religious.

In living out his calling to follow the Rule through perfect obedience, Brother Osmund gave great service to the Congregation. He was asked by Provincial Brother Isidore to select the site for the new Juniorate, the Rogers estate in Peabody, to which he was appointed the first superior in 1923.

In 1928 Brother Paul Scanlon, the superior general, named him the fifth provincial of the American Province. During his time in office, he opened Immaculate Conception High School in Malden and John Bapst High School in Bangor. He established *The Xaverian* magazine, according to Brother Vincent, "as a means of disseminating knowledge of community activities and keeping alive the spirit of the Congregation."

For a number of years he then served as a General Counsellor and as Secretary General at the generalate in Bruges, Rome and Old Point Comfort, Virginia. His faith in God was matched by his good works for the Congregation.

In Brother Osmund Gallagher we Xaverian Brothers of the new millennium have an outstanding example of faith, hope and love in action. May he serve as an inspiration and a challenge to all of us to be faithful in our vocations and confident in God's purposes and promises.