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PROPHET FOR THE PEOPLE

A BIOGRAPHY OF
FATHER LOUIS J. PUTZ, C.S.C.

BY

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During a span of sixty years of priestly life, Father Louis Joseph Putz founded and saw flourish *nine* different projects that glorified God and enriched countless lives. This human dynamo no sooner finished founding one visionary work than he was planning another with far-reaching consequences. With clear foresight and stubborn tenacity, he was far ahead of his time in carrying out his apostolates that were obviously blessed by the Holy Spirit.

A Holy Cross Sister played a decisive role in the journey Louis Putz began toward his ordination as a Holy Cross priest. Sister Marooma Putz, Louis's aunt, a nurse who cooked for the bishop of Fresno, California traveled to Simbach, Bavaria in 1922 for the Golden Wedding anniversary of her parents--Louis's paternal grandparents. There she met her thirteen-year-old nephew and learned not only of his desire to emigrate to the United States but, more importantly, of his intense and long-held desire to study for the priesthood. Upon her return to the United States, she not only enrolled him in Holy Cross Seminary at Notre Dame, Indiana, but sent the money he needed for his voyage from Germany to the United States. At her request the bishop of Fresno donated the $100 needed for the boy's trip to America.

Louis Putz was born on June 1, 1909, in log cabin farmhouse near the village of Simbach, Bavaria in Germany. His parents were Ludwig Putz and Anna Leidman. Their first-born and only son was carried to St. Joseph's church the following day to be baptized and named Ludwig Joseph. Two daughters were born to the couple in succeeding years. Louis's father was a locomotive engineer and his mother was an excellent cook. The family was so poor, however, that there was seldom enough food to eat and World War I, which exploded when Louis was five years old, only made matters worse. His mother was frail and sickly and much attached to her son. His father was once drafted into the German army

but never saw battle. He was of greater value as a locomotive engineer transporting German troops than as a soldier killing other soldiers in battle.

After the war and the defeat of Germany, starvation stalked the family. Young Louis was sent to live with his maternal grandmother, Anna Butz, a devout Catholic with a large family of her own. There Louis attended daily Mass with his aunts and uncles. He wanted to be an altar boy but was never allowed to do so for some reason. His vocation to the priesthood was clear to him from an early age. His father urged him to become a Capuchin monk and even enrolled young Louis in their seminary. But the boy refused to consider their lifestyle because they wore beards! (1)

New World

With a message pinned to his clothing that read, "Deliver me to South Bend, Indiana," Louis Putz arrived at Ellis Island, New York on August 15, 1922. He was thirteen years old, spoke not a word of English and was shocked to see Americans working on the feast of Our Lady's Assumption. In Catholic Bavaria that holy day was a holiday and no one worked. He suffered a second shock. No one came to Ellis Island to meet him. Father George Marr, then stationed at St. Patrick's Cathedral, had sent a Notre Dame student to meet the *Minnekadha* when it docked but for some reason, the young man failed to appear. Poor Louis was left imprisoned on Ellis Island awaiting clearance to enter the country for nine days! He was given a physical examination and in California, his aunt, Sister Marooma, had to swear before a notary public that she would care for him even if he failed to become a priest. Not until August 25 did Louis arrive by train in South Bend. It was two o'clock in the morning. Again, there was no one to meet him at the station. A German-speaking policeman , Officer Schricker, took the boy to his parents' house for cake and coffee. He then drove him on a motorcycle to Walsh Hall where a Holy Cross Brother found him a room at four a.m. One hour later a loud bell roused him from bed for meditation and Mass in the crypt of Sacred Heart Church.

At Holy Cross Seminary, Louis found two seminarians who spoke some German. There were German sisters working in the kitchen and laundry with whom he could converse and Father Michael Oswald, pastor of a local German parish, invited him to a picnic where he felt welcome and finally very much at home. Young Putz's first year in America was very

difficult for him. His violin was confiscated as was his treasured stamp collection. He was not allowed to use his Latin missal during Mass because the seminarians prayed the Rosary aloud during that time. He struggled to learn English and did not do well in classes his first semester. His superior, Father George Finnegan, was kind and supportive, but the assistant superior, Father John Margraf, and Putz's spiritual director, Father James McElhone, did not understand Louis's aversion for athletic games which they enjoyed. When Father Michael Early replaced Father Finnegan as superior of the seminary, Louis felt even more alienated. He believed the priest took better care of his dog than he did of the seminarians! (2) According to Putz, Father Early was "very heavily task-oriented and rather self-serving." For three summers, Louis was made to do menial work--scrubbing floors, washing windows and dishes and doing the laundry. At least he was able to speak German with the Sisters in the laundry room.

Once he had mastered the English language, Louis Putz achieved real academic success. He did well in Latin, Greek and French. He was not encouraged to write in English nor to study German literature, mathematics or science. "One class schedule was set for every person," he complained, "with no individual consultation on the talents and background of the individual. With the University of Notre Dame, there could have been consultation for individual cases.We were all cast in a mold with no exceptions tolerated." (3) Years later as rector of Moreau Seminary, Father Putz would make radical changes in the training of seminarians, remembering the mold-process he had been subjected to. At times during his seminary days he volunteered to baby-sit the children of Knute Rockne. He graduated *magna cum laude* from Notre Dame in 1932. Father James Donahue, Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross, then sent him to LeMans, France to continue his theological studies. Before leaving the United States, Putz, still a German citizen, requested American citizenship. Father Donahue saw no need for that, telling the young seminarian that a war between France and Germany was highly unlikely. One month after Louis's arrival in LeMans, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany.

France

Louis Putz's prefect and professor of moral theology at the major seminary in LeMans was Father Jules Lebreton. They became good friends and Father Lebreton asked Putz to

type his class notes for him. As chaplain and director of the Young Christian Workers of the area, Lebreton often met with these young men. When Monsignor Jean Guerin, national chaplain of the Young Christian Workers, lectured in LeMans, Louis learned that the movement had spread nation-wide. He was fascinated by its impact on young Christians who opposed both Communist and Fascist ideologies then rampant in Europe. Thus the first seeds were planted for Louis's future involvement in the movement to Christianize young Americans.

Putz spent his fourth year studying theology in Paris with the finest theologians and scripture scholars. Teilhard de Chardin taught at the Catholic Institute. Fr. Dion, his dogma professor, would later become chaplain of the French Underground after Hitler's occupation of Paris. Dion would be the last man killed by the Nazis as they fled the city after the Normandy invasion. Yves Congar, O.P., Henri DeLubac, S.J. and Jean Danielou--all these men would later advise Angelo Roncalli in planning Vatican Council II after the aging and ill Roncalli had been elected Pope John XXIII. As a deacon, young Putz worked with Father Celeste Niard, a Holy Cross priest, in the Red Zone--the Communist-controlled area of Paris. He was put in charge of the parish's Young Christian Workers. At a gathering of French seminarians, he learned that the principles of Canon Joseph Cardijn of Belgium were then being adapted not only by French workers but also by students, farmers and sailors. After his ordination to the priesthood on April 11, 1936 during noisy protests from Communist youths, Father Putz was sent to direct the minor seminary at Dinan in Brittany and one year later he returned to head the seminary in LeMans. He was also actively engaged in Catholic Action on the diocesan level. During his three-year stint at LeMans, Father Putz organized the parish of Our Lady of Holy Cross and returned the remains of Father Moreau to the crypt of the church the Holy Cross Founder had built years before.

With the outbreak of war between France and Germany on September 3, 1939 Father Putz was ordered back to the United States by his Superior General, Father Albert Cousineau. At the U.S. Embassy in Paris, Putz, the German citizen, had trouble obtaining a visa to leave the country. He could not provide the functionary, a Mr. Wilson, with a contract to teach at Notre Dame as proof that he had a job waiting for him in the United States. He was then asked, as proof of his veracity, to name the shirt factory located in

South Bend. Father Putz not only remembered: Wilson shirts--but assured the clerk that he was wearing a Wilson shirt at that moment. His visa was granted at once on his German passport. Finding a ship bound for America was another problem since American ships sold tickets only to United States citizens. With the help of a Young Christian Worker, Putz gained passage on a French ship sailing to England and from there he crossed the Atlantic, its waters menaced by German submarines and warships. Safe at last in New York, he learned that during his voyage the Notre Dame football team had lost its game with Iowa by a score of 7 to 6. Consoling Notre Dame graduate Putz, the friendly immigration officers made his second entry into the country much easier than his first!

Notre Dame and YCS

Back at Notre Dame in 1940, Father Putz began teaching German, French and moral theology classes. (In fact, he spoke five languages but someone remarked in jest that they all sounded like German!) He was also assigned to prefecting the second floor of Cavanaugh Hall. His assistant was a student, Joe Bagiackas, who soon learned of Putz's involvement with Young Christian Workers in France. After the priest's lecture on his experiences with young European Christians, Putz was followed to his room by four students who would form the first Young Christian Worker cell in America. These pioneers were Gene Geissler, Martin McLaughlin, Burnie Bauer and Joe Bagiackas. According to them, what was needed on campus was lay leadership training and Fr. Putz could provide it. An empty room in the basement of Cavanaugh Hall provided space for the cell's incubation. It was called "Moscow" to show its subversive intent to spread Catholic Action on the campus and later across the entire country. The Second Vatican Council was decades in the future and here were clear-headed young laymen preparing to play major roles in the future of the American Catholic Church. Their first president was Gene Geissler.

The *Catholic Action Bulletin* was founded to spread information about the new apostolate. Membership increased as a result and Father Putz, as chaplain, simply stepped back and let the students develop the program on their own. Once a program was successfully begun, he was off to another venture in his zeal for souls. One of these was the founding of a Catholic Worker House in the poorest area of South Bend. Notre Dame students, Julian Pleasants and Norb Norjinski, had begun the project after the pattern

set by Dorothy Day in New York City. Fr. Putz heard confessions and said Mass there on weekends. The Catholic Worker project was housed over a drug store. When questioned about his saying Mass in an unconsecrated building, Putz's answer was simple: the poor have no decent clothes to wear to a parish church. So he brought the sacraments to them in their own setting. Unfortunately the Catholic Worker House did not survive when the United States entered World War II. Both Pleasants and Norjinski were drafted into the armed forces and jobs for the unemployed poor became plentiful because of the war effort.

Student Mark McGrath served as third president of Catholic Action at Notre Dame. He would later become a Holy Cross priest and Archbishop of Panama. McGrath's friend, Jim Cunningham from Chicago, followed him as fourth president of NDU's Catholic Action. It was Cunningham who worked with Father Putz to found a Young Christian Workers house for secretaries and women office workers of South Bend. Mary O'Neal and Catherine O'Connor were summoned from Chicago to oversee this project. Again, Putz and a friend had initiated an apostolate and left it in capable hands. They then went on to pursue other needs and interests.

During World War II military personnel from the U.S. Navy and Marines lived in Notre Dame residence halls. Some of these men were recruited for Catholic Action cells by Fathers Putz, Howard Kenna and Charles Sheedy. Putz continued writing and publishing the *Catholic Action Bulletin* . With help from young ladies at St. Joseph's Academy and St. Mary's College, he and Catholic Action officers organized Saturday dances for service men and young Co-Hop women. When St. Patrick's parish hall proved too small for such gatherings, Jess I. Pavey, the Mayor of South Bend, opened Leeper Park for the racially integrated dances.This was years before President Truman issued his Executive Order integrating all U.S. service units in July, 1948. Women became involved in Catholic Action on campuses such as St. Mary's College across the highway from Notre Dame, Rosary College in Chicago and Ursuline College in Toledo, Ohio. *Training of Lay Leaders* was published in 1944. Its author was Gene Geissler and it became <u>the</u> manual for training young Christian leaders throughout the country.

Father Putz now decided to change the name of his Catholic Action apostolate to that of Young Christian Students (YCS) which was already an international movement. On a visit

to Canada he had met and was inspired by Alex Leduc and Gerard Pelletier, two YSC leaders. He also had visited Father Martin, editor or Fides Press, a Holy Cross publishing house in Montreal. Years later he would model Fides Publishing House on what he had observed in Canada.

The Prague Conference

An International Student Conference was scheduled for Prague, Czechoslovakia during August of 1946. Organized by Communists, its purpose was to involve youth from many countries in promoting the political goals of the Communist Party. In the United States, an alarmed Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., urged American youths to join him in a delegation going to Prague to combat this global menace. Archbishop Richard Cushing of Boston gave his approval for Murray to select a group of thirty young people--Catholics, Protestants, university students etc.--to accompany him to the conference. Father Putz was asked to send one of his Young Christian Students from Notre Dame to join the group. Unfortunately shortly before his departure for Prague, Father Murray became ill. He asked Father Putz to serve as chaplain for the Catholic group in his place. Putz readily agreed because the trip would give him an opportunity to visit relatives in Bavaria and meet European leaders of Christian workers, students and families. Tragically both of Louis' parents had been killed by American bombs during the last week of World War II in May of 1945. (4) Other Putz relatives had survived the ghastly carnage.

What impact the American delegation had on the Prague conference is unknown. What did result from their participation was the fact that the Young Christian Students of the United States joined the international movement with remarkable consequences. Claude Julien, a YCS member, came from France to study at Notre Dame. Later he would edit the international edition of *Le Monde*, France's outstanding newspaper. Father Henri Nouwen came from Holland to help form lay apostles on the campus. And Torf Juell, Norway's YSC leader, came to study on a full scholarship--giving Notre Dame an international reputation as leader in the YSC movement. In just ten years, cells of Young Christian Students would germinate and grow in universities, high schools and parishes nation-wide. Out of their ranks would come not only zealous lay leaders but priestly and religious vocations in large numbers. For example, in just five years St. Anthony High School in Long Beach, California

produced what would be an archbishop, a bishop and a cardinal's co-adjutor bishop! Archbishop William Levada, Bishop George Niederauer and Bishop Gerald Wilkerson had all been YCS members encouraged during their high school years to leadership and priesthood by Brother Theophilus, C.S.C. (5) It is important to note that YSC and YCW were broad-based non-hierarchical movements--not organizations set up and handed down by Church leaders. Lay people organized and controlled them with a priest-chaplain serving only as an advisor. The priest was a team-member, spiritual director and guide but never the leader. From the beginning of his work with each of these movements, Father Putz made it clear that lay leaders were to be in charge--person to person, student to student and worker to worker--sharing their zealous Christian lives freely and openly for the good of society.

The Christian Family Movement

France saw the beginning of the Christian Family Movement initiated by former Young Christian Workers who had married and wanted couple-to-couple support in their new mode of Christian living. Father Putz learned of the movement in 1946 and wrote with prophetic clarity: "We need to realize that public media, advertising, material standards of living, easy communication and changing mores make it difficult for families to stay healthy and wise. But these handicaps could be turned into stepping stones for families who band together for survival--for reformulating their own values and priorities. Today's family can count less on help from social props and therefore needs other families to form a larger community that will be a strong defense for each unity (sic)... Hence the valiant and noble purposes reflected in the Christian Family Movement." (6) He asked Burnie and Helene Bauer to consider starting such a group in South Bend. Again the emphasis was on lay leadership. On St. Patrick's Day, 1947 a first meeting was held in the Bauer home with Father Putz serving as chaplain. The format of the meeting was much the same as that followed in YSC meetings--a reading from Scripture, reflection, prayer and the usual "Observe, Judge and Act" to get the couples moving. Newly-married World War II veterans and their wives became interested in the project and asked Father Theodore Hesburgh to serve as their chaplain.

In Chicago Patrick and Patty Crowley heard Father Putz describe the South Bend

experiment and started the movement in their home. Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand supported their efforts whole-heartedly while Father Putz continued his support of the South Bend groups. A retreat brought both cities' groups together and resulted in the writing of the *Yellow Book* --a guide for Gospel Inquiry, Liturgical discussion and Social Inquiry of local needs and problems. In due time the Crowleys became national leaders for CFM and the Archdiocese of Chicago set up a headquarters for them in Holy Name Cathedral parish. The South Bend groups centered their attention on such issues as racial equality, Mexican immigration and flight from the inner city to the suburbs. In their zeal, they once invited an Anglican priest to celebrate Sunday Mass for them and got into trouble with their bishop. Unfortunately Father Putz was out of town at the time or would have dissuaded them from such a liturgy. The idea was many years ahead of its time!

The Printed Word

Father Putz had long realized the power of the press. He knew how to use it to inform and inspire his followers. Over a period of ten years he wrote and published five books: *Theology of the Apostolate, The Sacraments: Magic or Mystery?, The Modern Apostle , The Lord's Day* and *Seminary Education in a Time of Change*. When Harold Berliner, a law student, needed a place for his printing press, Putz found him a room in the basement of the Notre Dame law school. There began the Print Shop of Berliner and McGinnes, publishers of student newspapers, posters and flyers. Like a camel with its nose in the tent, the printing shop gradually spread its operations throughout the entire basement of the law building and grew to include the YCS office and student housing as well. Although law professors strongly objected to this elephant-like-enterprise in their building, long years would pass before its removal..

The Notre Dame Book Exchange, begun by Putz and YCS leaders, provided second-hand textbooks at reasonable prices. When Father Putz decided to start Apostolate Press, he was helped by Jim Cunningham, then president of Notre Dame's YCS, and Catherine O'Connor who was over-seeing the Young Christian Workers center in South Bend. With Bob Reynolds as editor, the press began publishing a national magazine for college students called *Concord* . Its articles spread news and ideology of Catholic Action to campuses across the country and made Notre Dame the national center for such activity.

Writers from other campuses were encouraged to contribute articles. Reynolds soon needed a circulation manager, a bookkeeper and a staff to help him run the burgeoning operation. When Reynolds graduated and went on to edit *Today* magazine, Vincent Giese took over as editor. After only three years, *Concord* ceased publication and Apostolate Press was ready to join Fides Press and take on a new direction and exciting projects.

Fides Publishing House

In a windowless room in the heart of Chicago's Loop, Vincent Giese began operations as editor of Fides Publishing House. It was 1949 and Giese was only twenty-seven years old. Louis Putz kept his eye on the business office, shipping department and warehouse ninety miles east at Notre Dame, while Giese managed the editor's desk, sales and printing operations in the "Windy City". Every week the editor commuted to Notre Dame for meetings with Putz and his co-workers. This went on for twleve years during which time Fides Publishers became a major Catholic publishing house in the United States. Catholic bookstores did brisk business across the country. Then in 1961 Pope John XXIII opened the sealed windows and doors of the Church to the fresh air of the Second Vatican Council with its sweeping reforms. Yearly visits to Europe by Fides founders, Putz and Giese, resulted in contracts signed with leading publishers and brilliant theologians. Important manuscripts from France were translated and published in Chicago. Pastoral letters written by Cardinal Emmanuel Suhard of Paris were printed for the first time for American readers. Suhard's *The Church Today* became a best seller. So did books by Joseph Jungmann, Cardinal Joseph Suenens, Romano Guardini, Henri DeLubac, S.J. and Yves Congar, O.P. Giese also found some American theologians willing to write for Fides. *Many Are One* by Father Leo Trese, *The Week with Christ* by Emeric Lawrence, O.S.B., *The Answer Man* by Msgr. James Conway and five books by Vincent Giese, himself, all became best sellers. Bishop Edwin O'Hara, founder of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), ordered 50,000 copies of Trese's *Many Are One* for adult discussion groups and his nation-wide CCD movement. Eventually one million copies of the book were sold.

Fides had become a profitable publishing house growing both in size and influence. A six-volume Theological Library edited by the best theologians of France was published. It sold well with the blessings of Chicago's Cardinal Stritch who told Putz and Giese he was

thankful to God they brought him a theological project to support and not another church building! (7) A four-volume religion textbook for high school students was written by Sister Jane Marie Murray. It was widely used in Catholic schools and parish CCD classes but it led to the demise of Fides Press. By 1960 the entire Fides operation had moved to Notre Dame and Vincent Giese went off to study as a late vocation to the priesthood. While Giese studied theology in Rome and observed the entire four-year span of Vatican Council II, Father Putz was faced with a lawsuit in South Bend. Publishing houses were producing religion texts similar to those of Sister Jane Marie and selling them for profit. Fides was a non-profit corporation. The for-profit companies felt they were facing unfair competition and sued. After long litigation, Fides Publishing House lost its case and also its non-profit status in a federal court ruling. In 1963 the company was sold to Claretian Publications in Chicago. Later it was re-sold to another company and in 1966 it ceased to exist altogether. Father Putz was convinced to the end that his publication helped the lay apostolate to develop in this country by preparing both clergy and laity for the much-needed reforms of Vatican II. Never one to look back at failure, Putz was ready for a new adventure--this time as rector of Moreau Seminary on the Notre Dame campus.

The Rector

Father Howard Kenna, Provincial Superior of the Indiana Province of Holy Cross priests, named Father Louis Putz rector of Moreau Seminary in June, 1966. Like Pope John XXIII and his surprise invocation of Vatican Council II, the new rector both revolutionized and reformed seminary life at Moreau during his six-year tenure. No doubt he remembered his own early days as a seminarian struggling with a new language and deprived of his violin, stamp collection and Latin missal. In those days a noisy bell announced morning rising, religious exercises and meals. Putz hated that bell and got rid of it as soon as he assumed his new duties. He was convinced that what worked well for lay people in organizations he had founded would work just as well for seminarians. So that future priests would have a greater sense of responsibility and accountability for their actions, he organized small teams, appointed a priest leader to advise each and then allowed them to determine the schedule and activities of the house. No longer was the rector a leader handing down decrees to be obeyed as in the past. The term for such management was "blind obedience" and it

was highly regarded until Putz came on the scene. Under his regime, Mondays and Thursdays became community days with Mass at 5 p.m. instead of at dawn. Dinner followed and then a community meeting for the entire staff and membership. On Tuesdays the teams met and made their own plans and decisions. Individuals learned to work together, share ideas and come to a common consensus after frank and sometimes heated discussions. As priests these young men would have to co-operate with lay staffs and parish organizations headed by lay people.

Wednesdays and Saturdays were devoted to apostolic work away from the seminary with parish youth groups, Young Christian Students and couples from the Christian Family Movement. Seminarians even offered their services to Lutheran congregations--an ecumenical move that was thirty years ahead of its time. They worked at St. Mary's College, at St. Joseph's High School and at a nearby youth camp--all activities undreamed of under former administrators.

The revolution spread inside the walls of Moreau itself with the rector opening doors to the families of seminarians for Mass and meals, not just on visiting Sundays as in the past, but whenever relatives were in the vacinity and came for a visit. Women, once segregated to eating in the guest dining room, were invited into the community dining room. On week-ends the chapel filled with families from local parishes. The music and homilies at Moreau were excellent--better than those in their home parishes. Local priests became upset and notified the bishop who in turn became very upset. He even threatened to suspend Father Putz from performing his priestly duties and wanted to place the seminary under interdict! That would mean visiting Catholics could not fulfill their Sunday obligation by attending Mass there. A meeting of representatives from both camps was arranged. What were the issues causing such a storm of controversy? Nothing that Vatican II had not recommended. English replaced Latin for the liturgies. The altar was turned around so that the priest faced the congregation. Holy Communion could be received in the hand and under both species. Guitars accompanied the singing instead of the organ. All these issues were openly discussed between bishop and rector but no real conclusions were reached. Tempers cooled; the crisis passed and the chapel doors remained open to all who wished to enjoy excellent liturgies. The Putz method of reform calmly continued.

Noted scholars and theologians were invited to teach the seminarians and live with them. Monsignor John Egan and Fathers Henri Nouwen and John Dunne all joined the faculty. Other priests came on staff to serve as advisors for each of the small teams. Controversial speakers gave conferences. The Berrigan brothers, who had been imprisoned for their convictions, talked about their opposition to the Vietnam War and their struggle for civil rights. Bernard Cook and Bernard Haering lectured on theology. Susan B. Anthony pleaded for women's rights. Lutheran seminarians came to speak about their training and goals as future ministers. To such heady intellectual stimulation was added the careful development of each one's spiritual life. Weekly confessions were encouraged along with regular spiritual direction and daily personal prayer. A keen sense of responsibility was fostered not only in team-work but in apostolic and individual development. Father Putz's convictions which had found written expression in his book, *Seminary Education in a Time of Change,* proved to be correct and well-founded. Years later his sweeping reforms were stilll in effect in Moreau Seminary and were adapted by seminaries in other parts of the country.

The Miracle

Father Putz ended his term as rector in early 1972. He had served forty years as a teacher and administrator. At sixty-two years of age and suffering from crippling arthritis, he was ready to retire. Confined to a wheelchair, he was told by his doctors that he would never walk again. The stubborn German had other ideas. He was a terrible driver--too short to see over the steering wheel, with thick glasses and a heavy foot. Yet against the advice of superiors and physicians, he drove alone from South Bend to Montreal, Canada to visit the Oratory of St. Joseph. There on St. Joseph's feast day, March 19, 1972 he prayed to St. Joseph and Brother Andre Bessette for the miracle of his recovery from crippling arthritis. By June of that year he was completed cured! (8) The miracle was documented as authentic and helped secure beatification for Blessed Brother Andre in 1985. With his health restored, Fr. Putz returned to work at once for Catholic Social Services in the Fort Wayne-South Bend diocese. He gave pre-marriage counseling to high school students and engaged couples. It was not long before he was ready to found yet another movement to help others--this time for the elderly.

Harvest House

At a 1972 summer workshop dealing with the concerns of the elderly, Fr. Putz learned about Project: H.E.A.D. (Help Experienced Adults Develop). He was convinced that its six-point program could be adapted to his new Christian movement that he named: Harvest House. This program dealt holistically with the whole person: physically, socially, culturally and spiritually. It involved elderly people helping one another. For intellectual stimulation Putz founded the Forever Learning Institute in 1974. The school's first administrator was Sister Madeleine Adamczak, SSJ-TOSF. The former novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph in South Bend served as its first site. This project was open to anyone over 50 years of age. It assembled retired teachers who volunteered their services for classes in such topics as American humor, comparative religions, money management, law, national and international issues, psychology of aging, drawing, piano, painting, human sexuality, needlepoint, scripture and other choices.. A twelve-week course cost $25 in tuition. A second course could be taken for only $10. Activities generated by the institute brought together people for learning, fun and companionship.Other Harvest Houses and Forever Learning Institutes began on both parish and diocesan levels. The South Bend establishments served as models for those in other parts of the country.

Bishop John Rausch of Phoenix, Arizona invited Father Putz to work for his diocesan office of Catholic Social Services in 1979. The aging apostle gladly accepted the invitation and in Arizona co-operated with members of S.A.N.G. (Senior Adult Neighborhood Groups) working with the elderly. He continued this work until 1984 when, quite unexpectedly, he was called back to South Bend to direct his first Forever Learning Institute. Its director had resigned on short notice and the founder took command temporarily. He increased student enrollment from 115 to 600 and raised the number of faculty from seventeen to seventy-five in a very short time. He then appointed a new director and went off to new adventures: traveling, establishing other institutes and finally retiring to Palm Desert, California. There he temporarily took over Father Ned Reidy's parish, while the young priest went off to study. He started another Harvest House and initiated a Children's Mass in the parish of Christ of the Desert.

In 1993 Father Putz took up residence and semi-retired as chaplain in St. Paul's

Retirement Community in South Bend.

Harriet Kroll died in 1994. For more than fifty years she had served as Putz's secretary and co-ordinator of practically every visionary project he founded. She brought order out of chaos, calm to hurt pride and rising tempers while quietly keeping each of Putz's projects organized and thriving. Her death was a sorrowful loss for the priest who had depended upon her expertise and dedication for half a century. In 1995 he moved to Corby Hall on the Notre Dame campus. With failing health, he finally agreed to live in Holy Cross House, a home for assisted living. There he died of a stroke on June 24, 1998. He was 89--full of years and good works.

"What has Fr. Putz left behind?" asked Fr. Robert Krieg during his funeral homily. "What is his legacy? His lasting gift is twofold. It is his vision of the church and his hope for the church's renewal. Father Putz envisioned a church in which lay women and lay men--of all ages and with many different gifts and abilities--pool their talents as they work for the coming of God's kingdom. In 1993 the *South Bend Tribune* quoted Louie on our post-Vatican II church: 'The church is a new church today. The big emphasis up to now was clerical, but now the church needs to be run by the laity.' Louie made this same point about the church on many occasions when he said that he had pursued a single idea in his many various projects, namely, that the church includes the liaty, indeed, that the laity, along with the clergy, must use their talents for the church's mission. The entire people of God--the clergy and the laity--must give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty and shelter to the homeless (Mt 25)... For over sixty years, Louie Putz embodied one prophetic insight in at least nine new forms of life and service... May (he) now start his new mission in paradise and may we....give thanks to God for the life of this hope-filled visionary."

The End

Footnotes

1. Giese, Father Vincent J., VENTURES IN FAITH, Father Louis J. Putz, CSC of Notre Dame University. Unpublished manuscript in the Province Archives Center,Congregation of Holy Cross, Indiana Province, Notre Dame Indiana. Undated. p 2.
2. Peralta, Victorina Nonato, BIGGER THAN LIFE, a profile of the Reverend Louis J. Putz, C.S.C. Harbor House (West) Publishers, Inc. P.O. Box 2545, Rancho Mirage, CA, 92270. 1991. p 54.
3. Giese, p 8.
4. Ibid. pp 37-8.
5. Telephone conversation with Bishop Gerald Wilkerson and the writer, August 18, 2001.
6. Giese, p 45.
7. Ibid. p 55.
8. Peralta, op. cit. p 87.
9. Krieg, Robert A., C.S.C., "Funeral Homily for Louis J. Putz, C.S.C.", June 26, 1998. pp 2-4 in Province Archives Center, Notre Dame, Indiana.

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