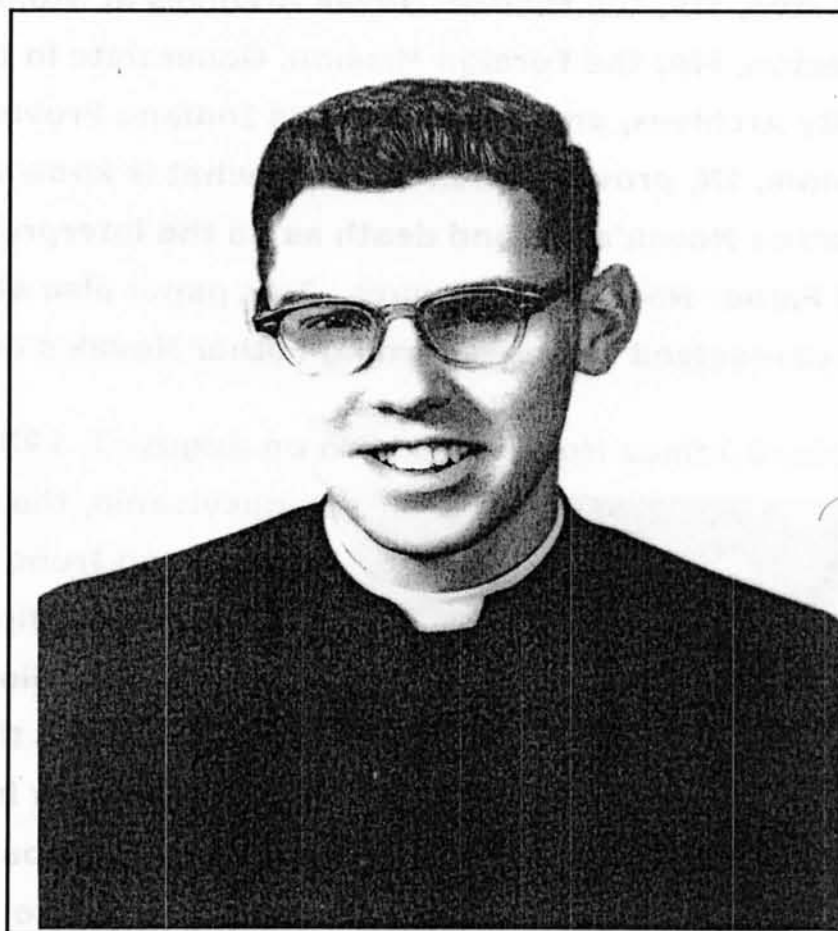


2008-8

**Revisiting the Life and Death
of
Father Richard J. Novak, C.S.C.
[1935- 1964]**



**Prepared for the
Holy Cross History Association
27th Annual Holy Cross History Conference
Salt Lake City June 2008**

**Mary Ann Novak
3701 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 903
Washington, DC 20008
202.363.9766
MNovak9619@yahoo.com**

This paper is an exploration of the life and death of Fr. Richard Novak, C.S.C. The resources still incompletely researched include a trove of family letters and papers, the National Archives outside of Washington, DC, and Pakistani court reports and transcripts. The available resources in the Holy Cross Eastern Province Archives in North Easton, MA, the Michael Novak Archives at Stonehill College in North Easton, MA; the Foreign Mission, Generalate in the Notre Dame University Archives, and the Holy Cross Indiana Province Archives at Notre Dame, IN, provide much detail of what is known and understood about Father Novak's life and death as do the interpretive memories of many of Father Novak's colleagues. This paper also attempts to identify unresolved issues regarding Father Novak's death and his life.



Richard and Michael Novak, circa 1938

suppressed their culture. Richard's paternal grandmother, Johanna, arrived in NY on the USS Friesland in August 1900 at age 15, and within a year met and married Stephen Novak. Stephen was a Slovak immigrant 15 years her senior, a widower with three children, but he

Pennsylvania, the second son of Michael and Irene Novak. Michael and Irene were first generation American born Slovaks whose parents had fled the Empire of Austria-Hungary between 1870 and 1900. Their parents had reacted to severe Hungarian oppression and the "Magyarisation" movement that had clamped down on the use of the Slovak language and

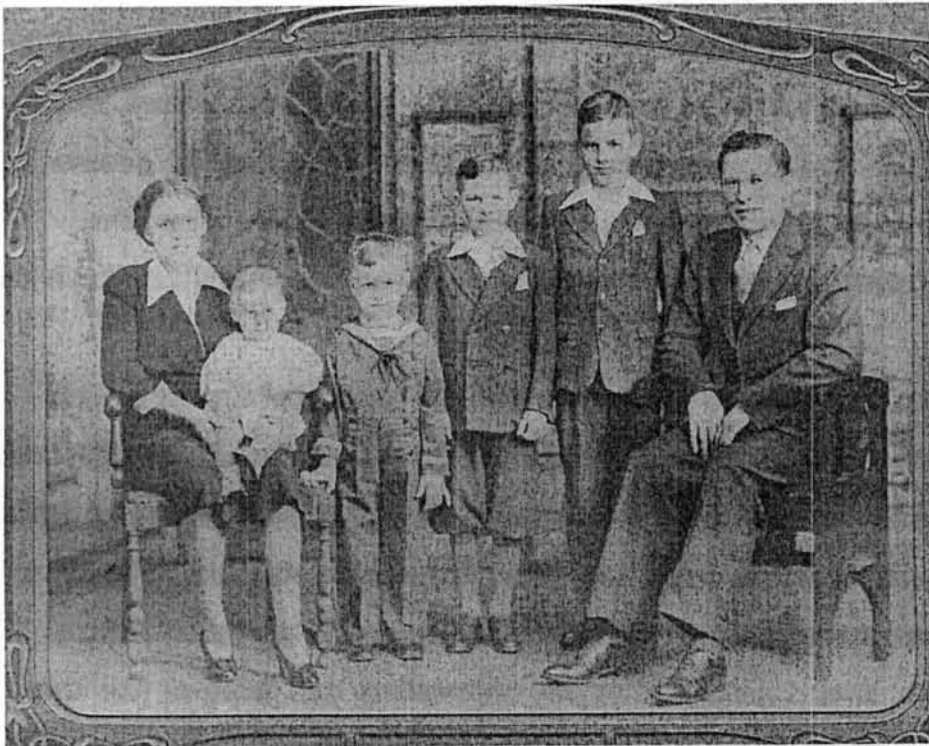
had the necessary U.S. citizenship. He died 10 years later, leaving Johanna a penniless widow with seven children. Nonetheless, Johanna faithfully contributed to Matica Slovenska, a society dedicated to the preservation of the Slovak language and culture, a substitute for national political institutions prohibited by the Kingdom of Hungary.

Father Novak's maternal grandfather Ben Sakmar, who emigrated to avoid being drafted into the Hungarian army, arrived in the USA in December of 1900 at the age of 21. In his 61 years in the US, he used his native language most of the time in order to preserve it. Ben often told his family that his inheritance to them was the Catholic faith, especially a strong devotion to the crucified Lord, to the holy cross.

Before leaving the empire of Austria-Hungary on October 31, 1900, Ben had a tall wooden cross placed near his home in Brutovce on a steep hillside in the Carpathian mountains that overlooked the Spis valley. Later he sent money back to have the cross replaced with a full metal crucifix enshrined in a wooden frame with a metal fence enclosing the shrine and a small plaque recording his prayer for the safety of his family. It is there to this day, with a stunning view of the snow-capped Tatra Mountains above green expansive valleys. This deep commitment to the Catholic faith through Christ on the cross, and the value and the importance of preserving indigenous culture and language, were to reverberate throughout Richard Novak's life.

By 1944, when the family picture below was taken, Richard had two more brothers: James Joseph, born in 1939, and Benjamin Edward, born in 1943.

He was confirmed Richard James Michael Novak by the Most Rev. Hugh C. Boyle at St. Pius Church in McKeesport, PA on May 27, 1947. In August of 1947, his older brother Michael left home by train for Holy Cross Seminary at Notre Dame, IN, following a cousin who had departed to study for the priesthood at Notre Dame the year before.



Novak Family February 1944, left to right: Irene holding Ben, James, Richard, Michael and Michael Sr.

This brought the whole Novak family into close contact with the Congregation of Holy Cross. It was only natural then that when Richard's grandmother Anna Sakmar suddenly died of a stroke in 1952, Irene asked

Michael's superiors at Holy Cross about an appropriate memorial for her mother. When advised that a *tabernacle* and an *altar* were needed in East Pakistan for the new Notre Dame College, Irene's father Ben Sakmar agreed to donate the funds for the *tabernacle* in his wife's name. His three children then donated the altar in their parents' memory, a more fitting tribute than they realized at the time.

Called Nick by his friends and Richie at home, he was an honors student at Johnstown Catholic High School, a member of the Student Council, a sports reporter, a literary staff writer, a member of the orchestra and the band playing the clarinet. In early 1953, Nick won a competitive examination for a \$500.00 Rev. James A. Burns Memorial

Scholarship to attend Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. He planned to take a combined engineering and law program when he entered Notre Dame in September of 1953, immediately enrolling in ROTC and joining the famed marching band.

However, by January 1954, Nick, now known as Dick, decided to join the Holy Cross order and, according to the Holy Cross Eastern Province archives, on February 1, 1954 he entered the seminary at Notre Dame. In June of that year, he elected to join the still new Eastern Province of Holy Cross, which his brother Michael had chosen for his novitiate in 1951. Both Fathers Bob Malone and Jim Denn reported that they and their classmates were disappointed Dick had left the Indiana Province.¹

Dick Novak entered the newly established Holy Cross Novitiate at Bennington, VT, and on August 15, 1954, he received his holy habit. Many of his classmates at Bennington remember him well. "His classmates loved him," Joe Skaff told this author in conversations at Stonehill. Joe explained how he, Dick, Bill Gleason and Jim Donohue started the "Good Neighbors Club", which required them to go around to celebrate a classmate's birthday with paper hats, kazoos, and tin drums before the bell for the 5:30AM rising.²

Father Bill Condon, after recalling Dick's love of pranks, noted about him in the novitiate: "Dick was a very serious novice, very intense, very spiritual, and kept silence better than most. He was kind, considerate, gentle of others, and engaged in no disputatious fights."

Father Dick Segreve said that "Richard never pushed himself on you; he was a very low key guy. You accepted Dick Novak as Dick Novak or not; he was self-directed, knew where he was going. The

¹ Novak, Mary Ann, conversations with Father Bob Malone at Holy Cross Center, North Easton, MA, October 31-November 2, 2007, and with Father James Denn at Holy Cross House, Notre Dame, Indiana, May 4-7, 2008

² Novak, Mary Ann, conversations with Joe Skaff at Stonehill College Archives; with Father Dick Segreve at Holy Cross Center; with Bill Braun and Father Bill Condon at Holy Cross Family Ministries, North Easton, MA, October 31-November 2, 2007

essence of Richard Novak was that he was complete, integral. He was a very calm and collected person."

Bill Braun, another fellow novice of Dick's at Bennington, recalled that "his smile is what stands out. He saw through things; he never had a need to get even or prove himself to anyone. He was obedient to the rule, but he saw human kindness and charity as more important than the rule."

It was at Bennington while taking his vows as a religious on August 16, 1955, that Dick first declared his intention to become a missionary, and Father DePrizio, then Provincial Superior of the Eastern Province, asked him to wait another few years until he "was certain enough to fight for the Missions."³ According to his brother James Novak in an introduction to his 1993 book, **BANGLADESH: REFLECTIONS ON THE WATER**, Dick's announcement caused an unexpected reaction:

When he announced the [missionary] vow to my father, a strange thing occurred. After we left the Novitiate House in Bennington, Vermont, my father, suddenly and uncharacteristically, pulled our car to the roadside and stopped. Then he cried. Recovering his composure, he told me he had had a vision that had seemed so real: he had seen my brother stabbed. As my father was a man of intuition but not of visions, this demonstration of emotion greatly impressed me.....⁴

1955-1958: Studying at Stonehill

In September 1955, Dick joined his older brother at Pius X Seminary at Stonehill College for Michael's senior year. Brother Herman Zaccarelli, C.S.C. wrote:

It is true that Richard Novak's story of love for his fellow men and women was indeed short, but he was a powerful example to me and our community.... I lived with Richard and his brother Michael at Pius X Seminary in the early 1950's for approximately two years. During his seminary days, it was his Joy and Peace [sic] that I especially

³ Novak, Richard J., C.S.C, letter to Rev. George S. DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial, 17 September, 1961

⁴ Novak, James J., **BANGLADESH: REFLECTIONS ON THE WATER**, 1993, Preface, page xiii

remember. The living situation in the seminary at that time was extremely difficult. I never heard Richard complain about anything. His simplicity of life was evident. He stood out as a seminarian for his peacefulness and his genuine sense of humor. It was apparent to me that his goal was to be a missionary at the service of the poor. He spoke about this with me and others. Richard was always a true example to me that 'God is revealed when we love one another.' The space between Richard's birth and death was a short span of years in which he did love his flock, and he laid down his life for them. I consider him a martyr and a saint.⁵

At Stonehill, Dick was known for his dry, mischievous humor, his bright imagination and his love of the outdoors. He was active in sports and, slight though he was at about 5'11 and 130 lbs⁶, he was well known for being tough, wiry, and playing football smarter than almost anyone else. In his 1958 Stonehill yearbook, and in the living memories of his former classmates, he is credited with being the creator and driving force for via Paludosa, a land bridge and short cut the seminarians built across the boggy fields to the classrooms, allowing them to avoid the 'beltway' which circled the grounds the long way to Donohue Hall.

Upon graduating *magna cum laude* from Stonehill in 1958, Dick was sent for the summer to lead pilgrimages at the Oratoire Saint-Joseph in Montreal, of which he said in a letter to Father DePrizio:

I hope I may become worthy of the honor of wearing the Crucifix, that I may become a worthy religious of Holy Cross.....[working here] makes us realize the greatness of the Priesthood for which we are preparing. And to desire more that we may use these years of preparation to make us more worthy to 'go unto the altar of God, who gives joy to our youth.'⁷

⁵ Zaccarelli, Brother Herman E., C.S.C., signed, undated document on letterhead entitled Richard J. Novak, 1935-1964, to Mary Ann Novak, postmarked Orlando, FL, 01 May 2008

⁶ Novak, Richard James, Selective Service System Registration Certificate, August 3, 1953

⁷ Richard J. Novak, C.S.C., letter to Rev. George S. DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, 25 July 1958

Dick was assigned to Le Mans, France, for his theological studies on the recommendation of Superior General Christopher O'Toole⁸, and on August 16, 1958, Dick made his perpetual profession. But on August 25, he wrote to Fr. DePrizio of his concern that Fr. DePrizio might not send him to France because of Michael's recent decision to return home from Rome, and he reiterated his own desires:

I am anxious to study theology, and willing to do it wherever I am sent, certain that wherever obedience sends me I will find fulfillment of my vocation....I do not feel that anything which occurs should take away from the dedication of myself which I made the 16th last....I find it constantly necessary in everything I do to reaffirm a decision to be a good Religious and a good Priest....⁹

1958-1961: Studying for the Priesthood

On September 14, 1958, Dick sailed to France on the S/S Homeric from Montreal for his theological studies at the University of d'Angers. On arrival in France, he wrote Father DePrizio:

If first impressions are the most important, then I should not have troubles at all over here. Of course, a life without troubles would be most boring, so I'll manage to find some --- as soon as I learn the language.¹⁰

Several people told me that Dick learned the language in remarkably short time, showing his aptitude and respect for indigenous languages. Pere Daniel Deveau wrote in January 2008:

I remember him as a quiet and peaceful young man, more on the intellectual side than the usual American seminarian. He loved to discuss ideas and concepts. He also was a man of prayer, and he led a simple life....he learned the language very early. I considered him as a very bright mind.¹¹

After describing a mission in Mers-les-Mains in the summer of 1960, Dick showed his love for France in a letter to Father DePrizio:

⁸ O'Toole, Rev. Christopher J., C.S.C., Superior General, letter to Rev. George S. DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, May 20, 1958

⁹ Novak, Richard J., C.S.C., letter to Rev. George DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, August 25, 1958

¹⁰ Novak, Richard J., C.S.C., letter to Father George S. DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, 8 October, 1958

¹¹ Deveau, Pere Daniel, C.S.C., District Superior, District d'Acadie, letter to Mary Ann Novak, January 8, 2008

It was a good and deep experience, Father, and thus extremely hard to describe. But it sure was delicious to live among the Frenchmen, and have the occasion to see their manner of living and thinking.¹²



From left to right : Daniel Deveau (Canada), William Norris (Indiana Province), Charles Bodin (France), Claude Richard (France), Gérard Roquet (France), Roger Marchand (France), Jacques Choquette (Canada), local superior, unknown French postulant, Bill Persia (U.S. Eastern Province of Priests), Charlie Stahler (Indiana Province), Richard Novak (U. S. Eastern Province of Priests), Robert Morin (Canada), Archibald Keilen (Indiana Province), Henri Bourgeois (U.S. Eastern Province of Priests).¹³

Dick also arranged for bicycles for all the seminarians and led them on weekend and mission trips throughout France. Father Bill Persia, C.S.C., a fellow seminarian in Le Mans, said of Dick:

He was the lone American sent to Le Mans following graduation in 1958; he provided care and concern for all of us that followed, and led reconstruction of the living quarters: installing showers, and a new furnace. Dick translated notes so that we could study, and ordered English books for the library. He convinced Pere Gagnon to buy us bicycles so we could travel, and he traced out a plan of action for all our trips, wrote to different seminaries to arrange for us to stay there, just had everything set up in advance. Richard had a great

¹² Novak, Richard, C.S.C., letter to Rev. George DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, 6 August 1960

¹³ Photo and identifications courtesy of Pere Daniel J. Deveau, C.S.C., Superior, District d'Acadie, CANADA

simplicity, even in the way he dressed, no errors in his appearance. He didn't flaunt his intelligence, but was always analyzing and looking ahead: he was visionary, way ahead of Rome, even as they were preparing for Vatican II. He used beautiful liturgies and songs. Dick was not afraid to express his opinions; if he thought something was right, he said so, even if it was far out or might offend someone: The truth was the truth. He was straightforward, and people admired him for that. He couldn't sit by and do nothing, ever. ¹⁴

Dick's ability to immerse himself in the culture was evident in his travels through the countryside that he described in his many letters to Father George DePrizio. Dick adopted the French beret and noted in an October newsletter entitled *French Follies '58*: "Have bike and beret; will travel." Dick is pictured on bended knee in front of his fellow seminarians on a trip in 1959. ¹⁵



In the spring of 1961, he received his S.T.B. *cum laude*. His ordination that June is memorable for several unusual reasons, in addition to the obvious attainment of his sacred priesthood. For one, he was scheduled to be ordained with great pomp and ceremony with the French seminarians by Archbishop Chevalier of Le Mans at the 11th century Cathedral of St. Julien at 8:30AM on June 29, 1961. The invitations were all printed that, including those for his First Mass to

¹⁴ Persia, Rev. William, C.S.C., conversation with Mary Ann Novak, Holy Cross Family Ministries, November 1, 2007

¹⁵ Richard Novak with classmates in France, 1959, picture courtesy of Pere Daniel Deveau, C.S.C.

be held in Johnstown, PA, in August. Instead, at the last minute, when he heard that Archbishop Lawrence Graner, C.S.C., of Dacca 'and the Indes Orientales', as the local paper in Le Mans noted, would be passing through Le Mans on that day, he asked permission to be ordained by him, symbolic of his commitment to the missions.



Archbishop Lawrence Graner, C.S.C. at ordination of Father Richard Novak, C.S.C., Notre Dame de Sainte Croix, Le Mans, June 29, 1961 ¹⁶

Permission granted, he was ordained alone 'in all simplicity,' as a French paper reported, in Notre Dame de Sainte Croix at 9AM on June 29, 1961, the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. Father George DePrizio, his Provincial Superior, Pere Gagnon, his parents Michael and Irene, and a dozen of Dick's seminarian friends, were present.

¹⁶ Photo courtesy of Notre Dame University Archives



The second reason Dick Novak's ordination is so memorable is that Archbishop Graner tripped while descending to distribute communion and the Holy Hosts scattered across the altar steps. Even then superstitions were whispered, and this event was recalled by many upon news of his death, including by Fr. Bartley MacPhaidin, C.S.C., in a

verse of a poem he wrote dedicated to Father Novak:

Who could have told nine hundred days ago
White priest, gathering white hosts,
That God would ask your Christ-life to unite
The dusky host of thousands dying with you
And value with your own the Orient-rich life
Asked by the Prophet's holy hair ¹⁷

While in France, Dick continued to consider taking the fourth vow, recognized as the missionary vow, "discussing it with the Director in France from the 1st year on." ¹⁸ While assigned to Washington following his ordination in 1961, he wrote in the same letter to Father DePrizio: "Although I have not spoken of the Missions for three years, the thought of this apostolate has not been far from my mind during this time." This time his request for the foreign mission was approved, and he was assigned to the Foreign Mission Society under Father Arnold Fell, C.S.C. ¹⁹

In the Fall of 1961, Father Dick Novak reported to the Foreign Mission Seminary in Washington, DC, where he chose to be the first Holy Cross priest to study Arabic and Islam in a systematic way, to

¹⁷ MacPhaidin, Rev Bartley, C.S.C., "For Richard Novak My brother-priest in Holy Cross", final verse, 1964

¹⁸ Novak, Rev. Richard, C.S.C. letter to Rev. George S. DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, 17 September 1961

¹⁹ DePrizio, Rev. George, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, letter to Father Richard Novak, C.S.C, September 29, 1961

support Christianity's earliest dialogue with Islam, to become an interlocutor between the two religions. He hoped to find a bridge between the two religions, with the idea of continuing the dialogue which St. Thomas Aquinas had begun in his *Summa Contra Gentes* nearly seven centuries earlier. In the process, he fell in love with Bengal and the study of Arabic, and was strengthened in his strong desire to become a world-class expert on Moslem and Christian relations. In this alone, he was seen as a model for many of the young Holy Cross seminarians. The late Father Richard Mazziotta, C.S.C. noted in a January 1994 Memorial Liturgy for Father Novak, held only a few months before his own premature death, that twenty-five years earlier:

We seminarians often spoke about Father Novak. As the first priest to study Arabian philosophy, he seemed the epitome of the new Catholic missionary, one fully immersed in another culture, and someone sympathetic to a different religion. Struck down by the same people who were the subject of his openness, he seemed the prototypical imitator of Christ, a priest whose life and passage schooled us in what ministry and witness would mean in the open Church of Vatican II.²⁰

It is clear from the letters found in the various Archives that Fathers DePrizio and Fell had a program in mind for Father Novak, which certainly entailed his beginning his desired Islamic studies, but their long range plans for achieving the program weren't fully revealed. On September 22, 1961, Father Fell writes Father DePrizio:

Your telephone call the other day concerning the assignment of Father Richard Novak took my breath away, and perhaps I was not responding with the normal reflexes. I called him and informed him of the decision, after talking it over with Father Harrington, and advised him to say nothing about it until you had written Father Bernard. He was, of course, quite elated with the assignment....If he is to emphasize Islamic studies, it will

²⁰ Mazziotta, Rev. Richard, C.S.C., Sermon for the Memorial Liturgy: Father Richard J. Novak, C.S.C., given at the Chapel of Mary, Stonehill College, North Easton, MA, January 21, 1994

be necessary for him to begin some study of Arabic immediately.²¹

On September 30th, Father DePrizio responded to Father Fell:

Father Novak is an excellent worker and has a strong intelligence. He should be able to do well in specialized language study as well as missiological studies. I think this is a good opportunity for you to develop one of those specialists that you have frequently spoken about.²²

On October 2nd, Father Fell outlined an immediate course of study for Father Novak, beginning with an initial study of Arabic at Harvard, and a course in Cultural Anthropology, recommended by Dr. Frank of the Department of Semitic Languages at Catholic University. But he notes in his letter his concerns about Father Novak:

It was necessary for him to register quickly, and we told him to do so, presuming that the course outlined would meet your approval.....This is not, as I am sure you know, an easy field he is choosing, and he will certainly need to be the excellent worker and strong intelligence that you described him to be.²³

Father DePrizio responds quickly with approval on October 5th:

The Program you have outlined for Father Novak seems excellent. Be sure that whatever you decide for him to do and study meets with my full approval. As far as I am concerned he is entirely in your hands. Although the program will be a great challenge, I am certain that Father Novak will respond to it well. So far as I know he is a good worker and will keep at it faithfully.²⁴

²¹ Fell, Rev. Arnold A., C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, letter to Rev. George DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, September 22, 1961

²² DePrizio, Rev. George, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, letter to Father Arnold Fell, C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, September 30, 1961

²³ Fell, Rev. Arnold A., C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, letter to Rev. George DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, October 2, 1961

²⁴ DePrizio, Rev. George, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, letter to Rev. Arnold A. Fell, C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, October 5, 1961

1962: His first year preparing for Missionary Work

Thus, Father Novak began his course of studies at Catholic University, and made his Foreign Mission vow on February 2, 1962 in the chapel of the Holy Cross Foreign Mission Seminary, completing the Special Missiology Program in May of 1962. He spent the summer of 1962 at Harvard University studying Arabic as planned. He was then assigned to the Oriental Institute in Barisal, East Pakistan, for the study of the

Bengali language, and the study of the culture and history of the Bengali people.

In October 1962, he left the United States for the last time, traveling to Lebanon for ten days on his way over to visit with the extended family of Joe Skaff. In this picture he is shown with his sister Mary Ann leaving his family home in Johnstown, PA.



In November, Father DePrizio wrote to Father Novak on his trip:

I enjoyed hugely your description of the ten days spent in Lebanon. That paragraph of your letter should be amplified into a monograph...You have this great blessing of being able to draw readily from every facet of your experiences, ---spiritual, temporal, cultural.²⁵

²⁵ DePrizio, Rev George, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, letter to Rev. Richard Novak, C.S.C., November 10, 1962

1963: His first full year as a Missionary in East Pakistan



During studies at Barisal, he was bored by being kept indoors in classes and asked to be released,²⁶ when he promptly joined the third-grade boys in their classes at Kishore Primary School in Barisal – ‘after falling behind the fifth graders’, he joked in a Pakistan Letter.²⁷ Then, Father Novak was sent to Dacca to be an instructor in logic at Notre Dame College. One of his first acts in Dacca was celebrating Mass on the altar donated in honor of his grandparents. “We were so happy when Richard told us he was there saying mass on it...at Notre Dame College. Back in ‘52 or ‘53 we never expected a son of ours to say Mass at that particular altar! Dacca seemed so remote.”²⁸ Irene Novak wrote to Fathers DePrizio and McKee.

In October of 1962, Dick received a letter from Wilson Bishai, an Assistant Professor of Middle East Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, commenting very favorably on the research potential in an essay Dick had sent him about “the clash between Israel and Canaan,” and referring to a visit Dick had had with them and wishing him “the Lord’s blessing as you serve him in East Pakistan.”²⁹

Dick had a deep interest in the Bengali people, culture and language, and, as Fr. Gus Peverada noted in his *vignette* on Father Novak, “He would often visit local families and he was frequently seen at the Tejgaon Bottomley Home Orphanage, where he loved to play

²⁶ Novak, Father Richard, C.S.C., letter to Rev. Arnold Fell, C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, January 23, 1963

²⁷ Pakistan Letters, undated

²⁸ Novak, Irene, letters to Rev. George DePrizio, C.S.C., February 11th and to Rev. Robert McKee, February 15, 1964

²⁹ Bishai, Wilson, letter to Father Richard Novak, C.S.C., October 8, 1962

with the children and practice his Bengali with them. He slept on a native *chowki* and often wore the *chaddar*..." Father Richard Timm, C.S.C., wrote of Father Novak:

He was very friendly and likeable and showed his unmistakable interest in people. The kids at the orphanage loved him and liked to play and converse with him. He got around to more places than most of our men who have been here for many years. People everywhere still remember him. I used to worry about him, though, because it seemed to me that his liberal spirit was liable to get him into trouble sooner or later.³⁰

In a letter to his parents in January 1963, Father Novak stated that "I just learned that I shall probably spend 2 years at ND College in Dacca after I finish my year here, and then, if plans continue, should go to Montreal for studies. There is talk about attending a summer school in Morocco, but that's still vague yet."³¹ This uncertainty remained in the background for all of them.

Father Fell was clearly working from a plan for Father Richard, and he wrote Father Richard in February 1963:

Incidentally, and I know you understand that this and much of the rest I write you is confidential (nothing like being quoted overseas to raise the hackles). I recently wrote to Father McKee again and reminded him that I did not want you put into definite work under ecclesiastical authority but rather in a Community house, i.e., the College or Moreau House. I would have no objection to your teaching, or taking courses in your line at Dacca University, but with some consideration of your having some time to visit other parts of the mission and soak up as much knowledge of the mission operation as possible. This before returning to this country or elsewhere for further studies in Islamics. Just how long you should stay over there this time cannot be specifically determined right now. Maybe a year, a year-and-a-half, or two years. Perhaps you would need the latter period to really absorb some of the mission life and flavor. I also mentioned to

³⁰ Timm, Rev. Richard W., C.S.C., letter to Mary Ann Novak, February 6, 1966

³¹ Novak, Rev. Richard J., C.S.C., letter to Michael J and Irene Novak, 24 January 1963

him that if he could not so base you (and I do not see why not) in a Community house, then to send you back home.³²

Some correspondence suggests that the plan was to bring him back quickly for advanced studies, likely within the year. In June, Father Novak told Father Fell that he was "awaiting a meeting of the Equivalence Committee at Dacca U to see if I can go for the M.A. in one year."³³ Instead, the word came back, he wrote Father DePrizio in August, that "...the final decision was that it will take two years. I would not have to go to class; merely to appear for the final exams; but since I am not sure how long Fr. Fell and yourself are going to leave me over here, I don't know whether two years will be soon enough."³⁴

He began work on a Masters in September 1963 although Father Fell did not give his final approval that he could stay the full term, despite strong pleading by Father Novak. He gained many admirers while studying at Dacca University, including Dr. Ghani, Vice-Chancellor of Dacca University, Dr. Habibullah, Head of the Department of Islamic History, and Dr. Rahman, Provost of Dacca Hall.

Dick's name was submitted for membership in the Bengali Academy and the Asiatic Society of Dacca in 1963,³⁵ one of the first Americans to be admitted. He noted that he was translating from the French a work from the Sorbonne on Bengali phonetics.

1964: Beginning his second full year in East Pakistan

The entire decade of the 1960's was marked by great ferment in East Pakistan as this Bengal province sought to define its identity within the larger Moslem state. "Trouble had been brewing between East and West Pakistan since their union in 1947, which was based

³² Fell, Rev. Arnold A., C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, letter to Rev. Richard Novak, C.S.C., February 25, 1963

³³ Novak, Rev. Richard, C.S.C., letter to Rev. Arnold Fell, C.S.C., Director, Holy Cross Missions, 17 June 1963

³⁴ Novak, Rev. Richard, C.S.C., letter to Rev. George DePrizio, C.S.C., Provincial Superior, 21 August 1963

³⁵ Ibid.

solely on the fact that East Pakistan was predominantly Moslem," as Father Richard W. Timm, C.S.C., noted, "and many felt that such an unwieldy combination based solely on a common religion, would not last long."³⁶

Separated from West Pakistan by almost one thousand miles of Indian territory, East Pakistan was essentially a Bengali Province, in both language and culture, whereas West Pakistan spoke several languages including Urdu. There was considerable turmoil in East Pakistan when it was commanded to adopt Urdu as its language and to alter its culture in the 1950's. By the 1960's Syed Abid Hussain, a former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia stated quite frankly in his 1965 book '*The Destiny of Indian Muslims*':

There has been a re-emergence of Muslim communalism. This is, as a matter of fact, the same movement of religious communalism which had started shortly before 1947, had temporarily subsided after partition and is now coming to the surface again. It is sponsored by a small section of religious leaders but is becoming fairly popular among the middle class and to some extent among student.³⁷

Thus, in these days Moslem riots were easily set off against the long-settled Hindu minority, and such was the case in January 1964 when the theft of a Muslim relic – the "Prophet's holy hair" in Father MacPhaidin's poem -- at Srinagar in Kashmir triggered ferocious Moslem attacks against Hindus in East Bengal. Over 29 people were killed. This event sparked retaliation against Muslims in West Bengal, where over 100 were killed by January 13th, and from there the riots spread. Holy Family Hospital in Dacca was operated by the Catholic Medical Missionaries, and its 100 beds were crowded with victims of the riots in those early days of January 1964. These were sights and

³⁶ Timm, Richard W., C.S.C., *150 YEARS OF HOLY CROSS IN EAST BENGAL MISSION*, Congregation of Holy Cross, Dhaka, 2003, pg 66

³⁷ Quoted in the *Organiser*, August 17, 2003

conditions that greatly disturbed Father Novak as he traveled around Dacca on his bike on January 15, Sister Lourdes reported to Father McKee.³⁸ According to Sister Mary Lourdes, Administrator of the Holy Family Hospital, "Fr. Novak came on several occasions [during the riots] to ask if he could help as we brought in the wounded. He was distraught at the sights on the street."³⁹ Sister Angela, Superior of the Medical Mission Missionaries, wrote of Father Novak: "He could know no rest because he wanted to become personally involved in the suffering of the people."⁴⁰

In a US Government report dated Washington January 16, 1964, in the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Papers, it states:

The major scene of the Hindu-Muslim rioting has shifted to Pakistan at Narayanganj, a few miles south of Dacca in East Pakistan, a minimum of 300 Hindus were killed on January 13-14.... One such demonstration in Khulna, East Pakistan, deteriorated into anti-Hindu riots in which at least 27 persons died. A factor which undoubtedly contributed to the atmosphere in which these riots took place was the Indian policy of expulsion from Assam of Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan. [Pakistani] President Ayub, in a strong letter sent to [Indian] President Radhakrishnan January 13, said that already 20,000 Indian Muslims had crossed into East Pakistan since the Calcutta riots began. There are still 10 million Hindus in East Pakistan and over 44 million Muslims in India."⁴¹

The turmoil in Dacca and environs resulted in the imposition of martial law in the area, but as is often the case, it restricts all but those with the worst intentions. This is the environment in which Father Novak went suddenly missing in January 1964. For many years, the details were unknown to the family, and many of those I

³⁸ McKee, Rev. Robert, C.S.C., "Fr. Novak Case - His Contact with Holy Family Hospital" as learned from Sister Lourdes, Superintendent of Holy Family Hospital, January 15th and 16th, 1964

³⁹ Cody, Loretta, formerly Sister Mary Lourdes, *Life's A Story, An Autobiography*, second edition, 2007, page 53

⁴⁰ Sister Mary Angela, Holy Family Hospital, letter to Rev. Robert McKee, C.S.C., January 25, 1964

⁴¹ Memorandum From the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Read) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Pakistan, Vol. I, Memos, 11/63-5/64. Confidential

have learned are shocking. In any case, briefly, this is what I have been able to piece together, and this account resolves many questions.

Father Novak had visited the Holy Family Hospital to see how he could help several times on January 15th, and had been turned away. Late on the evening of January 15th, Sister Mary Lourdes asked Sister Maria Goretti to call Father Novak the next morning and ask if he would help locate the family of a student nurse at Holy Family hospital as she could get no word of her father who worked at the Dhakeshwari Cotton Mills nor of any of her family. When contacted that next morning, Father Novak immediately offered to call or go to Narayanganj to enquire about them.⁴²

On January 16, 1964, Father VandenBossche was acting for Father Eugene Burke, Superior of Notre Dame College, who was traveling with Father Robert McKee, the Dacca District Superior, to Bandhura. Father Novak came to him early that morning and told him of the call from Holy Family Hospital asking him to help locate the Hindu family of the student nurse at the jute mills near Naranyanganj. "He informed me that he was going to go looking for them, having had no success on the phone. I gave him my permission, but made him promise he wouldn't cross the river. What could I do?" Father VandenBossche said to me, "I couldn't stop him from going."⁴³

On that same morning of January 16th, Sister Mary Lourdes said she arrived early at Notre Dame College in an ambulance to pick up Father Bill Graham on an emergency errand, when Father Novak came out dressed in his white cassock, full black trousers, and a light blue jacket. Father Novak stopped to speak to Sister Lourdes through the back seat window, and he confirmed that Sister Maria Goretti had called him and that he was leaving to make enquiries about the nurse's family. He then spoke briefly to Father Graham in the front seat,

⁴² Cody, Loretta, formerly Sr. Mary Lourdes, conversations with Mary Ann Novak, January 2, 2008, and a document from Patricia Traveline, formerly Sr. Maria Goretti, December 28, 2007

⁴³ VandenBossche, Rev. John, C.S.C., conversations with Mary Ann Novak., Indiana Province Archives, May 5, 2008

according to Sister Lourdes, got on his bicycle and pedaled away while they left on their own emergency errand.⁴⁴

When Fathers McKee and Burke returned to the College that evening of the 16th and learned that Father Novak was missing, they began to search for him. "In the afternoon [of January 16th]," Father VandenBossche indicated, "I went to Comilla to replace Father Dan Kennerk, and I didn't know he was missing until Father Burke called me late that evening enquiring into Father Novak's whereabouts. I told him what I knew at that time."⁴⁵

For Fathers McKee, Burke, and Graham and the Holy Cross community in Dacca, the next two weeks were suspenseful, stressful and uncharted territory. The day-by-day details are extremely intricate, grotesque and riveting. They spent each day searching the Narayanganj area with police escorts, walking miles to villages, crossing and recrossing the river, and investigating hundreds of corpses: "All the bodies were bloated, distorted and practically naked."⁴⁶

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The Notre Dame Chronicles in Dacca on January 22, 1964, indicate that the search party found "a Pharmacist who identified without a doubt Father Novak, who stopped there for directions at about 10AM, giving them a definite positive lead for Fatullah."⁴⁷ That same day they also made an assessment that:

"they could not establish that a man like Father Novak actually crossed the river. The only definite facts of all searches so far:

1. Pharmacist at Fatullah at about 10AM directed Father Novak to Narayanganj, on January 16, 1964.

2. Father Novak spoke to Msgr. D'Costa at St. Paul's Church, Narayanganj, about 11:00 A.M on the 16th January, 1964.

⁴⁴ Novak, Mary Ann, conversations with Loretta Cody, op cit, confirmed by notes of Rev. McKee, undated, but reversing who Father Novak spoke to first in the ambulance that morning

⁴⁵ VandenBossche, Rev. John, C.S.C., conversation with Mary Ann Novak, op cit

⁴⁶ Notre Dame Chronicles, Vol III, Father Novak Search, 20 January 1964, Page One

⁴⁷ Notre Dame Chronicles, Search Report – January 22, 1964, Sheet One

3. Father Novak was at Luxmi Narayan Mills at about 1:00 P. M. on the 16th January, 1964 and went to the ferry ghat.⁴⁸



Pier Father Novak boarded the ferry from, January 16, 1964

It was not until January 24th, eight days after Father Novak disappeared, that a witness by the name of Ashraful Huq came to the College. He reported that his maidservant saw

the murder of Father Novak occur sometime after 1300 hours by five men, whose names were known. Father Novak was on a boat coming across the Sitalakhya River when, near the landing, he was attacked by two youths on board. When he struggled, the youths called out for others to come and 'kill another Hindu.' Huq was able to offer vivid details from his maidservant about Father Novak's last moments:

He reached for his cross which he wore about his neck and held it out to them, saying 'I am a Christian.' He spoke in Bengali to the youths. But they paid him no heed. Three new youths responding to the calls as the boat docked helped overcome him, dragged him ashore, and while four youths held Father Novak down, one of those on shore named Yunus had a sword, and he stabbed Father Novak twice in the neck and chest, and he died rapidly.⁴⁹

Other witnesses testified to the enormous amount of blood from the stab wounds, according to the Chronicle Records. The Holy Cross

⁴⁸ Ibid, Sheet One and Two

⁴⁹ Ibid.

search party had in fact stood on the spot near Fatullah where Father Novak was murdered at several times during the investigation, and saw the blood-stained area, but did not know at that time that it was



where Father Novak had died. Partly to spare Father Novak's mother the gory details, Father McKee, whose meticulous reports on these events make gripping reading, did not write all the details he knew to the Novak family. But he did advise them and Father Novak's superiors

Father Robert McKee at the site of Father Novak's death

in the US that, even though Father Novak's body had not yet been located, he was "morally certain" they should go ahead with the requiem Masses in North Easton and Dacca on January 27th.

Only on January 29th were the searchers informed that the police had captured the actual murderer, named Yunus, who confessed to stabbing Fr. Novak, and that they were in possession of Father Novak's cycle, watch and glasses:

At the Narayanganj police station, Father Burke saw Father Novak's watch, glasses, and cycle and positively identified them beyond any doubt....YUNUS was brought in chained or tied to another man who was very dark and is said to be one of the men who assisted in throwing Father Novak's body into the river. There was no exchange of words between us.⁵⁰

Thus, two days after the formal requiem masses were held in Dacca, in North Easton, MA, and in Johnstown, PA, the intensive search for Father Novak ended in East Pakistan.

⁵⁰ Notre Dame Chronicles, NOVAK CASE – Identification of his effects (29 January 1964), ibid

On January 30, the American Consulate General in Dacca, Pakistan, filed a "Final Report of the Death of an American Citizen" with the State Department in Washington. Not long after this report, the newly elevated President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, called Michael and Irene Novak to express his condolences on the murder of their 28-year-old son, Father Richard Novak, C.S.C. This tragic news was followed so closely the horror of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

When they learned that Father Novak's killers had been apprehended, his parents appealed for leniency, claiming there had been enough suffering and pain already. The Trial Court in Dacca nevertheless sentenced to death by hanging the one who had stabbed Father Novak, and sentenced the four others to serve life imprisonment in a decision issued on October 3, 1964.

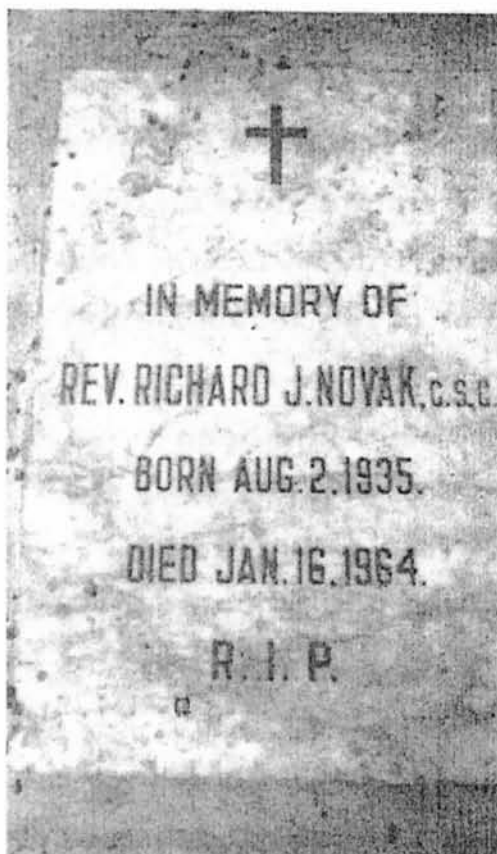
But on December 22, 1964, the Dacca High Court confirmed the death sentence passed on Yunus Ali on appeal and, on its own motion to the four other accused to show cause why they should not also get the extreme penalty of law, sentenced all five persons to death on the charge of killing Father Novak. Mr. Justice B. A. Siddiky in issuing the judgment 'observed that it was a coldblooded murder and that the offence was proved beyond reasonable doubt.'⁵¹

In May of 1966, the Supreme Court of Pakistan confirmed the death sentence passed on Yunus Ali who had "killed Father Novak an American missionary by dagger blows,"⁵² and the Court reinstated the original life sentences for the other four.

⁵¹ The Pakistan Observer, Dacca, "Father Novak Murder Case: FIVE TO DIE," December 23, 1964

⁵² The Pakistan Observer, Dacca, "Father Novak Murder Case: One to Die, 4 get life term," May 13, 1966

Father McKee ordered and had placed a marble memorial stone at the 17th century Tejgaon Holy Rosary Church on January 4, 1966, at a cost of 258 rupees.⁵³



Father Novak's beautiful chalice, made in France with the melted down gold and silver of his parents' wedding rings and other family jewelry, is preserved and used for daily Mass at the Holy Cross chapel in North Easton, MA. It has been used by the priests of the Eastern Province in Father Novak's memory since Father Joseph Lehane, C.S.C. brought it back from Dhaka in 2001.



Remembrances and Responses to Father Novak's Death

In all, Father Novak spent over one third of his life as a member of the Holy Cross Congregation, some ten years. Though he served as missionary for just fifteen months, he made a strong impression on people, and the lasting effects of his work are still remembered. He is

⁵³ Novak, Father Richard, C.S.C., files, Eastern Province Archives, copy of invoice paid by Father McKee, Dacca

remembered as a scholar and as a model by Holy Cross seminarians and priests in the 44 years since his death.

in his moving funeral oration on January 27, 1964, in Johnstown, PA, Fr. Fell wrote:

He was one of the most fearless young men I ever met, and one of the most selfless, which combined to make him most adaptable for the work of a missionary. He was constantly looking for an outstanding challenge and he found it in his decision to dedicate his life to the apostolate to the Moslems, admittedly one of the most difficult of all apostolates. In twelve hundred years Christianity has never really built a bridge to Islam. Yet, that is what Dick chose, and went off unquestioningly, fearlessly and selflessly to Pakistan.

In recently contemplating Father Novak's life, Father Ernest J. Bartell, C.S.C. said:

Fr. Fell had a plan for Richard -- we all did. We surely miss the many contributions Richard would have made to our Holy Cross global ministries. He brought a clear perspective on the faith we shared that enriched our commitment to mission. Richard would have used his intellectual abilities to enlarge and integrate our understanding and relations with other cultures, perhaps especially with respect to Islam. Richard would have been a leader for Holy Cross in developing a *musicology* to meet the needs of today's Church.⁵⁴ *missiology* *man/sky*

Father Germain-Marie Lalande, Superior General of Holy Cross, wrote on January 27, 1964, to Father Robert McKee in Dacca:

In the course of a private audience with the Holy Father [Pope John the XXIII], I informed the Holy Father of your great trial. The Holy Father's immediate reaction was: martyrdom. As you can well understand, the nature and reasons for Father Novak's death will have to be ascertained before we can speak of martyrdom...This is God's mysterious way of building up His Church....

Fr. Germain Lalande, in telling Pere Daniel Deveau, C.S.C. of Father Dick's death shortly thereafter, asked if Pere Deveau was surprised:

⁵⁴ Bartell, Rev. Ernest J., C.S.C., conversation with Mary Ann Novak, Corby Hall, Notre Dame University, May 4, 2008, confirmed in an email to Mary Ann Novak, May 20, 2008

and I answered 'no'. There was something radical about Dick's zeal: I think he would not even have thought about the risks in store....I certainly share the idea that Dick died for his faith and for the service of people in need. He was a man of prayer and of deep Christian convictions.⁵⁵

Further, Pere Deveau wrote:

I have known Dick as an even-tempered young man with a shy smile, yet I never doubted that behind that he had guts, a great courage and a lot of determination. Christ's words "Don't be afraid!" had already resounded profoundly in his soul. There was something in him that reminds me of St. Therese of the Child Jesus: simplicity, genuineness and daily quiet determination. When I hear someone mention "that good men die young", I think about [Richard]. I can say that in my younger years as a religious I met a dedicated young religious in whom there was no falsehood and no vain pretense. He truly was a disciple of Christ, and his death simply cannot have been worthless: he had too much price in the eyes of God.⁵⁶

As Father Alfred D'Alonzo, C.S.C., showed in his extensive discussion of martyrdom in his paper on Father William Evans, C.S.C., who was murdered in Bangladesh in 1971, "It is widely understood that a Christian Martyr is one who gives his life for the tenets of his faith, who gives witness to his faith, who dies while performing acts of mercy."⁵⁷

In an undated note in the Holy Cross Eastern Province Archives, Fr. DePrizio wrote to 'Father Bob'[presumably McKee] thanking him for a letter regarding Father Novak: "I really think that given his good intentions, etc. we have a martyr for our Missions. I knew him well—through the years --- have a great deal of his correspondence and have been amazed at the charity of the man and priest." Tantalizingly, he concludes the short note with: "More later. See you in Rome."

⁵⁵ Deveau, Pere Daniel, C.S.C., letter to Mary Ann Novak, dated January 8, 2008

⁵⁶ Deveau, Pere Daniel, C.S.C., letter to Mary Ann Novak, dated May 11, 2008

⁵⁷ Dacono, Rev. Alfred F., C.S.C., PhD, "THE STORY OF FR. WILLIAM EVANS, C.S.C. MISSIONER AND MARTYR," pages 7, 33-34

Father Willy Raymond wrote to this author:

I entered the seminary in the fall of '64 so your brother Richard was already considered a martyr in Holy Cross at that time and as a new seminarian I was very interested in the heroism of this young priest who was killed while on a mission of charity.⁵⁸

Family Reminders through the Years

Three of Father Novak's siblings have visited Bangladesh since his death. His brother James lived and worked there for many years, mostly because of Father Novak, and he wrote a book on the country, as mentioned earlier. He told family members, on his first visit there in the early 1970s, that he received a call from the hotel manager just after he got to his room, who said some people were in the lobby for him. Since he was not expecting anyone, he went down mostly out of curiosity. A long line of Bengali men and women were waiting quietly in a line, and as Jim came out of the elevator, they came toward him and one by one, kissed his hand and told him how much they loved and revered Father Novak and wanted to pay their respects to his family.

In December 1996, at a memorial service held in Dhaka for Father Novak's brother James Novak, the student nurse whose family Father Novak had sought that final day in 1964 approached Jim's family members to give her condolences on Jim's death, and to assure them that Father Novak's charity would never be forgotten.

Likewise, Father Novak's brother Michael has had several instances reminding him of the young priest's effect: An older worker at the Dacca Hilton in the late 1980s hurried across the lobby to him, took his cuff, and asked if he was the brother of Father Novak? On Michael's nod, the Bangladeshi knelt down and kissed his sleeve, saying it was respect for Father Richard, whom he regarded as a good man, and whose memory he continued to reverence. More recently, in

⁵⁸ Raymond, Rev. Wilfred J, C.S.C., National Director, Family Theater Productions, email to Mary Ann Novak, 8 November 2007

Brussels in about 2000 at a conference on democracy, two Bangladeshis approached Michael at the dinner to tell him that Fr. Richard's memory is still cherished in Dhaka. And within the last few years in Casablanca, a Lebanese Muslim engaged to a Bangladeshi related to Michael that his fiancée spoke to him about Father Richard, of how he was still fondly remembered, and that some said there should be a public statue to him.

Father Novak's nephew Joseph, son of James Novak, is currently serving as Political officer in the U.S. Embassy in Indonesia and recently received a note from a former U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh:

It is great to hear from you. While I never knew your father, I did read about and learn much about your uncle from long-serving priests teaching at Notre Dame, the Archbishop and freedom fighters. Father Richard is admired to this day.⁵⁹

There are many more stories his family has related of people contacting them around the world. In about 1967, Michael received a clipping which said that "a horse named Father Richard finished in first place in Calcutta in the seventh race." Another story is of special interest: Michael Novak and his wife Karen were planning to travel to Dhaka for the dedication of the Father Richard Novak Memorial Library at Notre Dame College in August of 1995. When Michael went to the Bangladeshi embassy in Washington to pick up their visas, he was asked to wait until the Ambassador arrived. An hour passed, and he began to think their visas were being denied. Another half hour later, the Ambassador explained that he had wanted to personally thank Michael as the brother of Father Novak to whom the Ambassador felt he owed his career. Father Novak had been his logic teacher at Notre Dame College and in that year of schooling, he himself had won the

⁵⁹ Thomas, Harry K., Jr., former U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh, now Director General of the Foreign Service, in an email to Joseph L. Novak, May 20, 2008

national prize in logic, which he credited to 'Father Novak being such an extraordinary teacher.' That award greatly advanced his reputation and career, he said, and that is what led to him becoming Ambassador to the United States of America.

I had the pleasure of meeting that same Ambassador at a reception at the new Bangladeshi embassy in Washington, and heard his words of gratitude to Father Novak directly. Several other diplomats who had also studied under him remembered him with reverence. During my visit to Bangladesh in 1983, I was constantly reminded by people there of how much effect Father Novak had on many people in his less than 15 months in the country, how much they remembered him and prayed to him and for him. I was introduced everywhere I went as the sister of Father Novak, and the reactions of Bangladeshis were very moving those 20 years after his death.

Pope John Paul II told Michael that he had remembered Father Novak at the Mass he celebrated during his 1986 visit in Dhaka. In 2003, at Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome, Michael Novak came by surprise upon a ceremony honoring the martyrs of religious orders of the 20th century. One by one, names were read aloud of those members of religious orders who had been killed, and a candle was lit for each one. The name of Father Richard J. Novak, C.S.C., along with that of Father William Evans, C.S.C., was read aloud, and two candles were lit in the darkness.

Conclusion: The Quest Continues

I hope this paper recalls this young priest to Holy Cross, and clears away some of the misconceptions and mysteries surrounding his character, his life and his death, even as I continue to explore unresolved issues. In 1964, only a few, sparse details of Father Novak's death were revealed to the Novak Family. Somehow, perhaps

inadvertently, the family was left with the impression that Father Novak had acted imprudently. Over the years, the family has learned that a few of his colleagues in Bangladesh were angry at him. Some gave the impression that he had gone out that day on his own, unbidden, reckless, independent and immature. One suggested that he was disobeying orders. It is possible that Dick's characteristic courage independence, and religious zeal, prized by some of his Superiors, did not always sit so well with others in Dacca. For the family's part, parents and siblings were willing to wait for the judgment of the Church and of history, and we really did not know enough about the details.

When this author began searching the archives in earnest in 2006-07, she discovered that others knew important details soon after his death and that these details were meticulously committed to writing. Maybe others in the community thought that they knew more than they did; certainly there is evidence in the records that they wanted to spare Richard's mother Irene, in particular, many of the gruesome details.

In any case, witnesses and records now put to rest two major concerns raised about Father Richard's actions on January 16, 1964. There is conclusive evidence that Father Novak was asked to go by Sister Lourdes to undertake a mission of mercy and that he did *not* go out on his own during the riots. Second, there is conclusive evidence that Father Richard sought out and received permission to go out to see what he could find regarding the Hindu family of the nurse in the hospital – a nurse he had never met. As the Principal of Notre Dame College, Father Bill Graham, put it in his remarks on Father Novak's disappearance and death:

For Father Novak it did not matter that he had never seen the family, had never seen the employee concerned. Here

was a good deed to be performed, an opportunity to put into action his desire to be of service. And for him a task undertaken had to be completed....He never reached his destination. Yet, in a more profound sense, he gloriously arrived at his goal: He gave his life in a journey of charity.⁶⁰

We do not know the motive for the attack on him. The issue of robbery as a motive is unclear from the records we have. We do not yet know enough about the killers, their previous and later histories, though it was an email received in 2003 referring to one of those killers serving as a 'bat boy' to a jailed journalist friend of James Novak that sharpened this author's interest in learning more.

We do not know if the death sentence against YUNUS Ali, who was seen and convicted of stabbing Father Novak to death, was ever carried out. Nor have we found any records to verify that they were all released in 1972 following the general amnesty after the War of Independence.

We do not know what happened to his personal belongings, his cassock and other clothes, his bicycle, his watch, his holy cross, except to assume that those identified by Father Burke and McKee were taken by the police as evidence for the trial and retained by them. We do have two sets of his glasses in the Michael Novak Archives at Stonehill College, though it is not clear which of these he was wearing on January 16, 1964.

Above all, we do not know for sure what happened to his body. The stories related to us are conflicting and confusing. Newspaper articles at the time of this death, and again at the time of the trials of the murderers, spoke of his body having been found. Then, on August 21, 1995 at the consecration of the Novak Library at Notre Dame College in Dhaka, an old man approached Michael Novak and grasped his hand tightly. The man was unusually tall, Michael related to this

⁶⁰ PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE, Memories of Father Richard J. Novak, C.S.C., in Blue and Gold dedicated to him, undated

author, and he said he had been the detective at the time of the murder. This detective told Michael he had discovered a detached skull long the river bank, and had taken it to a dentist, and achieved positive identification of Father Novak's teeth. Can this be verified? Who was the dentist? Is that skull in Father Novak's memorial grave in Dacca? I intend to continue seeking the answers to these questions.

The tasks ahead are something like a detective story. Many records are incomplete, missing, or contradictory, such as which church in Dhaka holds or held the altar and tabernacle donated in memory of Anna and Ben Sakmar? Also, many records have yet to be fully searched or obtained, particularly from the National Archives in the United States and in the Pakistan courts. For the murder of Father Novak occurred in what was then East Pakistan, not Bangladesh, and all the records at those courts are under the jurisdiction of the Government of Pakistan. Moreover, I have not found nor reached all those who might know of these long-ago events in 1964. I hope to track down these witnesses in the days ahead and more completely document Father Novak's life and death.

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