

## ANGELUS G. LAGER, O.CARM. (1871-1923)

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Fragrant flowers grow only in a garden well kept. In like manner priestly vocations are found generally in homes breathing a religious atmosphere. This is particularly true when two priestly vocations are found in the same family. Our Province was fortunate in having several of these. Thus we had two brothers, Fathers Dionysius and Philip Best, Fathers Angelus and Urban Lager, Fathers Dionysius and Dominic Lickteig, Fathers Bonaventure and Brendan Gilmore, Fathers Walter and Ignatius Poynton and one or two among the clerics.

Father Angelus Lager was born in Pittsburgh, November 26, 1871, and received the name of George at Baptism. He attended Holy Trinity parish school, entered the Carmelite Order July 8, 1885, and spent the time of his probation and novitiate at Our Lady of Peace Monastery, Niagara Falls. The present majestic Mount Carmel College wasn't even thought of then, and the monastery consisted of a half-frame, half-stone building on the brink of the hill, overlooking the roaring cataract and rapids, with a magnificent view of both. The accommodations were scanty — the north end, being occupied by the students. The first floor served as a study hall and the second as a dormitory. When this proved too small, the students slept in an adjacent building called the "ecclesiastical barn" because on the first floor there was a stall for a horse and room for wagons.

Father Angelus entered the novitiate in 1889 and was professed the following year. He then went to New Baltimore for his studies. In the fall of 1890 the new addition to the monastery at New Baltimore was opened, affording better accommodations for the students. All were transferred to that house, and the novitiate was opened up there. Father Angelus was alone in his class, he being the only one who had completed the novitiate, but under the able guidance of Fathers Pius and Cyril Kehoe he received a good course in Philosophy and Theology. He was ordained priest at Pittsburgh by Bishop Phelan June 8, 1895, and celebrated his first Solemn Mass June 16. After spending two years in Leavenworth as assistant to Father Louis Guenther and one year at Scipio, he was sent to Englewood in 1898 and was made pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Tenaflly. This was a mission church; the priest lived in Englewood and went to Tenaflly on Sunday and twice during the week for the school children's Masses. Though it was a mission, Tenaflly was privileged in having a parochial school taught by two Sisters of Charity, who also lived in Englewood and traveled there on the Erie Railroad. In those days automobiles were unknown, and horse and buggy or carriage were the ordinary means of travel. Father Angelus, however, preferred to use a bicycle most of the time; and, even when it rained, he could be seen pedaling his bike along the highway, guiding it with one hand and holding an umbrella with the other. Father Angelus soon showed his ability for work in the parish. He paid off the debt, made some necessary improvements, raised the income considerably and gained the affection of his parishioners. Those who are alive today speak of him with the highest regard.

In 1904 he was called to New Baltimore to take charge of the parish. Here he showed his efficiency as a pastor, and before long he had put the parish on a solid basis both financially and spiritually. In 1907 he returned to Englewood, where he was assistant to Father "Dion" Best.

At the Provincial Chapter in 1909 Father Angelus was made Prior of St. Cecilia's, Englewood, and pastor of the parish, succeeding Father "Dion" Best, who had been elected Provincial at the same Chapter. Here a difficult task confronted him. Plans had been made to erect a new church. Not only was there no money in the treasury for the construction of the new building, but the parish also carried a debt. The new church was a necessity as the old frame building was inadequate for the growing congregation. Father Angelus set to work with a brave heart on the new edifice, and his earnest plea for funds was answered generously. The living-out girls on the hill, the Altar and Rosary Society and the parishioners as a whole responded nobly to his efforts. The cornerstone was laid on August 28, 1910, and the work progressed rapidly. He supervised the construction, watched every stone placed in the new edifice and used every penny for a good purpose. His tenacity was rewarded in seeing the new church brought to completion, and in a short time new pews and a renovated pipe organ added. This church, by the way, is the grandest and most outstanding which the Carmelites have in this country. Of Romanesque design and built of Pennsylvania white marble on a knoll with a beautiful artistic approach where it can easily be seen for miles, it will always stand as a monument to the genius of the architect, Mr. Poole of New York, and the zealous efforts of Father Angelus.

Here he also gained the lifelong affection of the people. This was proved by the fact that, when he died some years later, the parishioners endeavored to have his body brought there for funeral services and interment. He was pastor of St. Cecilia's for nine years, and during those years not only did he build the new church but he also reduced the debt considerably and made many improvements.

Father Angelus had a special devotion to St. Joseph, whom he called "Good St. Joe" and to whom he attributed the success he had had in his undertakings. With the aid of his faithful workers he was able to erect a beautiful marble altar to his favorite saint. He inaugurated the devotion of the nine Wednesdays in preparation for his feast. The attendance increased each year so that before he left, the church was practically filled at these services. But the work of building the church and paying the debt was too much for his constitution, and in 1918 he was given the easier charge of St. Joseph's Church, Leavenworth. The Englewood people were loath to see him leave, but duty called him elsewhere, and he obeyed. He was successful in the administration of his new parish, and at the Chapter of 1921 he was given the same charge.

His failing health in 1923 caused him to take a rest, and he visited Englewood where his many friends gave him a hearty welcome. During his stay there he contracted a severe cold. This was just before Lent; and, although everybody endeavored to have him delay his departure on account of his ill

health, he insisted on going that he might be at his parish for the beginning of Lent. His sickness became more serious on the way, and he was compelled to stop at Chicago.

There on February 17 he said Mass and fainted after Mass. The doctor ordered him to stay in bed but failed to diagnose his case correctly. Father Angelus was permitted to leave for the station in a taxi, accompanied by a trained nurse, intending to go to Leavenworth. While on the way he fainted and was taken to Mercy Hospital, where it was found that he had double pneumonia and a streptococcus infection. He died the same day after receiving all the sacraments. His body was brought to Pittsburgh where his brother Father Urban, celebrated a Solemn High Mass for him. His body was buried in Mount Carmel Cemetery in Pittsburgh.

Although possessing no extraordinary talents he was successful in his parochial work by strict attendance to duty. No matter how much work was at hand, he was always accessible to everybody, always willing to help. He was fond of the children and frequently was seen surrounded by a bevy of tots whom he encouraged to practices of piety. He had a peculiar knack of getting money from the parishioners even where others failed, not by using abusive language, but by a simple, sincere statement of his needs. His priestly life was devoted to parochial work, and his parishioners everywhere hold him in grateful memory. '