

Most Reverend Stanislaus Vincent Bona
(1945-1967)

Former biographer Monsignor Orville Griese quoted the *New World*, the official weekly of the Archdiocese of Chicago, after Stanislaus Vincent Bona was appointed Bishop of Grand Island, Nebraska in 1931 at the age of 43, "...He [Bishop Bona] is a man of rare simplicity of character...He is deeply sympathetic and possesses profound understanding. His zeal is vouched for by both his life and his deeds. His sanctity is the kind that strives to hide itself in becoming humility...."

Almost 13 years later on December 2, 1944, Bishop Bona, a friend of Bishop Paul Rhode who had assisted earlier with celebrations of the Sacrament of Confirmation in about 35 parishes in the Diocese of Green Bay, was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Green Bay with the right of succession.

When Bishop Bona arrived in the diocese on January 17, 1945, he visited with Bishop Rhode at Mercy Hospital in Oshkosh before he officially came to Green Bay. The following day his formal installation as the Seventh Bishop of Green Bay took place in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral. In less than two months after Bishop Bona arrived in Green Bay on March 3, 1945, Bishop Rhode died; Bishop Bona immediately became the Bishop of Green Bay.

Stanislaus Vincent Bona was born on October 1, 1888 in Chicago, Illinois. Earlier in 1881, his parents, John and Catherine (Smigel) Bona had come to Chicago from Drzycim, Poland. Of the seven boys and two girls in his family, Stanislaus was the fourth child. He had an older brother, Thomas, who was an example to his younger brother and also became a priest. Following his graduation from St. Casimir Parochial School and St. Stanislaus High and College in Chicago in Chicago, Stanislaus was chosen to study philosophy and theology at the Propaganda College in Rome.

On November 1, 1912 he became Father Stanislaus Bona in the Church of St. Apollinaris in Rome. With doctoral degrees in both philosophy and theology as well as a licentiate in canon law, he returned to the Archdiocese of Chicago, and in 1913 was named the assistant at St. Barbara Parish in Chicago. In 1916, Father Bona was named the resident chaplain of the Chicago House of Correction. In 1919, he was appointed to the faculty of Quigley Preparatory Seminary in Chicago to teach mathematics, Latin and Polish.

In 1922, Father Bona was appointed pastor of St. Casimir Parish, his home parish, along with serving as a member of the Archdiocesan Board of Supervisors of Women Religious Communities.

Shortly after receiving the papal honor of being named Monsignor on December 18 of that same year, he received the papal appointment as Bishop of Grand Island, Nebraska.

On February 25, 1932, Monsignor Bona was ordained to the episcopate in Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago with Bishop Rhode being one of the two co-consecrators. His brother, Monsignor Bona, served as presbyter assistant.

Before Bishop Bona came to Green Bay in 1945, he guided the Diocese of Grand Island through difficult years which caused crop failure, but received the full cooperation of the people in turning the tide toward progress. In his own words, "*Few [parishes] remain with financial obligations and many even saved for future enterprises still needed.*"

About nine months after Bishop Bona became the Ordinary of the Diocese of Green Bay, a decree from Rome transferred about 15 parishes and several missions of Portage County to the Diocese of La Crosse. As a result, more than 10,000 people were placed in the new diocese, consequently lessening the population of the Diocese of Green Bay. The new Diocese of Madison was also established and resulted in the re-shuffling of the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the other dioceses of Wisconsin.

The founding of Sacred Heart Minor Seminary in Oneida in 1953--- with Monsignor Griese as its founding rector--- was a highpoint in Bishop Bona's tenure. In a consistent effort to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, Bishop Bona encouraged the formation of Serra Clubs throughout the diocese and supported efforts to organize a seminarians' club for young men who were considering the priesthood.

While the new Sacred Heart Seminary was being constructed (at a cost of two million dollars and dedicated on September 3, 1957), a \$631,000 addition to St. Joseph Home for Children in Green Bay was also completed in 1954. The result of this extensive construction of two separate buildings became Bona Hall and the St. Joseph Chapel on the diocesan grounds. Other major construction projects at the time also included St. Vincent Hospital and Premontre High School (now Notre Dame Academy) in Green Bay.

During the 22 years that Bishop Bona served the Diocese of Green Bay, a good number of parishes were established. St. Agnes Parish, which was dedicated on June 18, 1953, was the first of the new parishes. The following parishes were also founded:

- Holy Redeemer, Two Rivers and St. Jude and St. Bernard, Green Bay in 1956;
- St. Pius X, Appleton in 1957;
- St. Gabriel, Neenah in 1959
- St. Bernadette, Appleton in 1960;
- St. Thomas More, Appleton and Resurrection, Green Bay in 1963;
- Nativity of the Lord, Ashwaubenon and St. Aloysius, Kaukauna in 1964;
- St. Bernard, Appleton in 1966.

In a post-mortem tribute to Bishop Bona, a special issue of the *Green Bay Register* was published on December 8, 1967; it included his phenomenal response to education needs in the diocese: "*Sixty-seven new grade schools were dedicated since 1945. Some forty-five others added more classrooms and new facilities totaling [a cost of] nearly ten million dollars.*"

According to *1928-1978, Fifty Years of Partnership*, a 1978 publication of the Diocesan Department of Education, in 1965 the total enrollment in Catholic elementary and secondary schools was 52,093 (which was double the 1945 figure). Xavier in Appleton, Lourdes in Oshkosh and Roncalli in Manitowoc-Two Rivers were also established as high schools along with the transfer of three earlier established high schools to new locations and facilities: Premontre in Green Bay, Abbot Pennings in De Pere and Catholic Central in Marinette.

Due to Bishop Bona's active interest and energetic encouragement of Catholic education at all levels, Holy Family College (now Silver Lake College of the Holy Family), at Alverno near Manitowoc, was constructed at the cost of \$3,300,000 and blessed on December 4, 1960. It was also at this time that he encouraged the expansion program at St. Norbert College in De Pere and provided chaplains and facilities for Newman Clubs, beginning with the one at Oshkosh in 1960, and other secular institutions of higher learning throughout the diocese.

Likewise, with the strong efforts of Bishop Bona, Catholic hospital facilities grew. At the same time the lay retreat movement was initiated at Holy Name Retreat House on Chambers Island in 1951, at Monte Alverno Retreat House in Appleton, at the Jesuit Retreat House in Oshkosh in 196, and other part-time retreat locations.

It was also during Bishop Bona's long and active tenure that Diocesan Catholic Charities offices adjusted their social welfare programs to the new emerging needs. Advancing the objectives of the Catholic Rural Life Conference and establishing a very successful program of marriage preparation courses for both engaged and married couples throughout the diocese were equally important to him. Already in the late 1940s on one occasion he addressed over 800 couples in the WBAY auditorium in Green Bay.

According to Monsignor Griese, Bishop Bona saw as a high priority the need for a diocesan paper. His preference was to have the paper join the Denver *Register* chain of Catholic editions. Father Orville Janssen then became the founding editor.

The work of the St. Vincent de Paul Societies captured a special place in the heart of Bishop Bona. In a similar vein he supported the work of the Legion of Mary Apostolate.

Another of Bishop Bona's deep concerns was the diocesan program for migrant farm workers. He often addressed them in Spanish at special Masses and other gatherings.

The annual Bishop's Charities Game was initiated during his time. It developed a warm bond of friendship with Green Bay Packers' Coach Vince Lombardi, a member of Resurrection Parish in Green Bay. As a result of this relationship, hundreds of thousands of dollars for diocesan charity projects were raised during Bishop Bona's tenure.

His annual visit to the summer camp for girls at Loon Lake near Shawano with the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women remained special to Bishop Bona. He had a similar interest and participation in events for men through Diocesan Holy Name Societies, the Knights of Columbus and the Third Order of St. Francis. He was personally honored to be named a member of the Third Order of St. Francis with the Franciscans in Pulaski.

Numerous celebrations, including the blessing and the dedication of Sacred Heart Seminary in 1957, the dedication of the new St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere in 1959 and his silver jubilee as Bishop in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral on May 7, 1957, were highpoints of Bishop Bona's episcopate. On August 22, 1962 he celebrated his anniversaries of 50 years as a priest and 30 years as a bishop. A personal letter from Pope John XXIII added even more joy to the occasion.

Bishop Bona was always loyal to God and the Gospel of Christ Jesus as proclaimed through the Church. The content of religious teaching was carefully preserved. Being faithful to authority and propriety served him well as he prayed and lived to do God's will; thus, special ceremonies were always done properly.

Although--- according to Monsignor Griese--- Bishop Bona never did inflate a fellow priest with fancy words of praise, he treated all of them with courtesy and kindness and with an open door policy to all. Visiting the sick and elderly priests of the diocese was also a priority for him. Humility was a strong virtue to him as he preferred the simple joys of life. The log cabin he shared with his priest brother in the north country of the Diocese of Superior provided relaxation and enjoyment. In fact, he stated that he would be willing to serve as Bishop in that diocese if he were ever asked.

Despite declining health in his final years, Bishop Bona actively participated---though briefly--- as a Council Father at the Second Session of the Second Vatican Council in 1963 in Rome. It was said to have offered him a certain spiritual joy in the midst of his personal physical poor health.

For what has been described as "five long years" after the diagnosis of cancer, he decided to continue his duties and responsibilities as Bishop. He maintained as much of his work as possible with the personal assistance of various priests in the area.

On December 1, 1967 Bishop Bona died. His funeral took place in St. Francis Xavier Cathedral on December 6. He is buried next to Bishop Rhode near the entrance to Allouez Catholic Cemetery. This is where he wished to be laid to rest so that people would pray for him. *Nomini tuo sit Gloria* (Let there be glory given to Your Name), as his Episcopal motto, guided him throughout his life and accompanied him into eternity.

Father James P. Massart