

## Rev. Henry W. Yzermans, O.S.C.

July 3, 1870 - April 28, 1938

Buried: Onamia

Many stories live on about this true Crosier character who was in the first group of three Crosiers who came to Minnesota in 1910. Born in Vlaardingen, the Netherlands, Henry attended Crosier Seminary in Uden and St. Agatha near Cuyk. He was professed as a Crosier on September 25, 1890, and was ordained to the priesthood on June 11, 1895.

Fr. Yzermans' assignments were as teacher and prefect at the Crosier minor seminary in Uden and then as professor of dogmatic theology, novice master of the brothers, and *socius* of the clerical novices and scholastics in Diest.

When asked to be a member of the pioneer group of Crosiers going to the U. S. to minister to the Dutch and Belgian immigrants, he was eager to go. Their group included Fr. William Van Dinter, Br. Henry Van der Aa, and eighty immigrants. They arrived in Butler, Minnesota in March 1910.

*"Before I came to America," Fr. Yzermans once wrote, "I was able to read and to write English. But upon arriving here, I found out that I didn't understand a word of what people said."*

That first summer in Butler the temperature rose to 100 degrees, compared to the Netherlands where it got no higher than 80. *"Neither had we screens in front of our windows, and we were too inexperienced in the American ways to buy ten cents worth of mosquito netting."*

from *Crosier*  
Remembered by  
Albert Becker, O.S.C.  
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*"We had also plenty of trouble with our bread. The one that baked for us was not used to American yeast and we had to eat a kind of bread, which was named by our guests, iron bread."*

Fr. Yzermans was a prolific writer, contributing to newspapers, the **Crosier Missionary** magazine, and the **Catholic Encyclopedia**. He was also the first editor of the **Crosier Missionary**, founded in 1926.

From Butler in 1910, he wrote to the Master General and asked him to send some things with the next group of Crosiers: an English dictionary, cassocks, surplices for altar boys, an accordion, flute, and ocarina.

Fathers Yzermans and Van Dinter both preached their first sermons in English just eight months after their arrival, and both wrote to the General in Holland to tell him of this milestone.



Fr. Yzermans lived a life of great simplicity and self-denial, living the life of poverty to the letter. Still, there was nothing sour about his poverty. He was also known as a witty and entertaining host.

Among the examples of his simplicity and self-denial:

*He tried to get as many words as possible on a page.*

*When a typewriter ribbon became worn, he doused it with oil in hopes of squeezing a few more pages from it.*

*He took pride that on a train trip from Minnesota to Hastings, Nebraska, he spent only one cent, and this for a paper cup so he could have some water. He saved the cup for the return trip.*

*He seldom wore socks, reasoning that they wore out too quickly.*

*When his wealthy family sent him checks for clothing, he gave the checks to the Prior for the support of the monastery.*

*At one of his missions, Fr. Yzermans stayed at a boardinghouse once a month. In order to get to his sleeping quarters, he had to climb a staircase on the outside of the house; this led him to the roof of the kitchen; from there he had to walk across the roof to the second story.*

*He did oil paintings which he sold for a small fee. All the money he collected went into a small cloth bag. Whenever he visited the monastery in Onamia he brought the bag along and gave the entire contents to the Prior. Although he saved to the point of real poverty, it was all for the support of the monastery.*

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In February 1923, he gave the new students at Onamia their first retreat. Afterwards the students joked about whether their retreat master knew they were present, since he

never looked at them but kept his eyes closed, except to look out the window or at the opposite wall.

After accepting various small assignments that first year, Fr. Yzermans was appointed pastor of St. Frederick's in Verndale, with a mission in Aldrich, where he served until his death. The Verndale paper wrote: "*His kind deeds, thoughtfulness, and ready advice to any that may have asked it are beyond value. . . we do believe he knew hardly an idle minute in his life . . .*"

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One Saturday Fr. Yzermans caught the train to his mission in order to teach catechism. Because of the heat, only five of the twenty students appeared. The church was like an oven, and Father cut the class short. Walking to the hotel where he was to spend the night, he thought how refreshing a bath would be. Then he remembered the sign he'd seen at the barbershop announcing "BATHS!" He stopped in, and in short order the proprietor had filled the tub in the back room and directed Father to enter. Not until then did he notice that only a few sheets of beaver-board and a flimsy curtain separated him from the customers in the shop. A hot breeze wafted in through an open window near the ceiling, causing the curtain to flutter. Wanting "*to prevent unwanted publicity,*" Father determined it would be best to close the window. There was no chair on which to stand, so he climbed onto the edge of the tub (half-filled with ice cold water). As he reached over to the window, his foot slipped, and down he went, clothes and all, into the tub of water.

"Dripping like a wet poodle, I crawled out and all my appetite for a nice cold bath was gone. I walked through the barber shop . . . with as much dignity as I could muster, threw my half dollar to the barber and walked out accompanied by the tittering . . . of the crowd." He went to the hotel. When the landlord saw him, he exclaimed, "Why, sir! What has happened to you? Did you fall into the river?" "To me?" he replied. "Nothing much. I just tried to take a bath!"