

July 23, 1938

Father John Smolej

Father Smolej (Smoley) was born Jan. 19, 1873 in Jesenice, Yugoslavia, and was ordained in his native country in 1895. He accepted a chaplaincy in the Austrian army in 1903 and rose to the rank of captain before he resigned in 1907 to come to the United States.

Father Smolej spoke fluent English, German, Russian, Polish, Slovak and Croatian. His linguistic ability made his services greatly in demand in the foreign settlements around this country.

His pastoral assignments took him to the mission fields around Indianapolis, Ind.; New Hradec, N.Dak.; Iron River, Wisc.; Zealand, S.D.; Calio, N.D.; Roscoe, S.D.; and McKeesport, Pa.

In 1936, after becoming ill, Father Smolej retired from active service and entered St. Francis Sanitarium at Colorado Springs. After staying at the sanitarium for more than a year, his doctor advised him to go to Dodge City "where the altitude would be low and more conducive to his health concerns."

He took up residence at St. Anthony Hospital in October of 1937 and remained there until his death. He suffered a stroke of apoplexy and then died several weeks later of a heart attack July 23, 1938.

Father Smolej had a unique quality for making friends, and as a patient in the hospital made a great many friends.

Father Alexander Linneman, CPPS., the hospital chaplain, celebrated the funeral at Sacred Heart Church in Dodge City. Burial was in the lot reserved for priests in Maple Grove Cemetery. The parish death registry notes that he was a priest from the Diocese of Superior in Wisconsin.