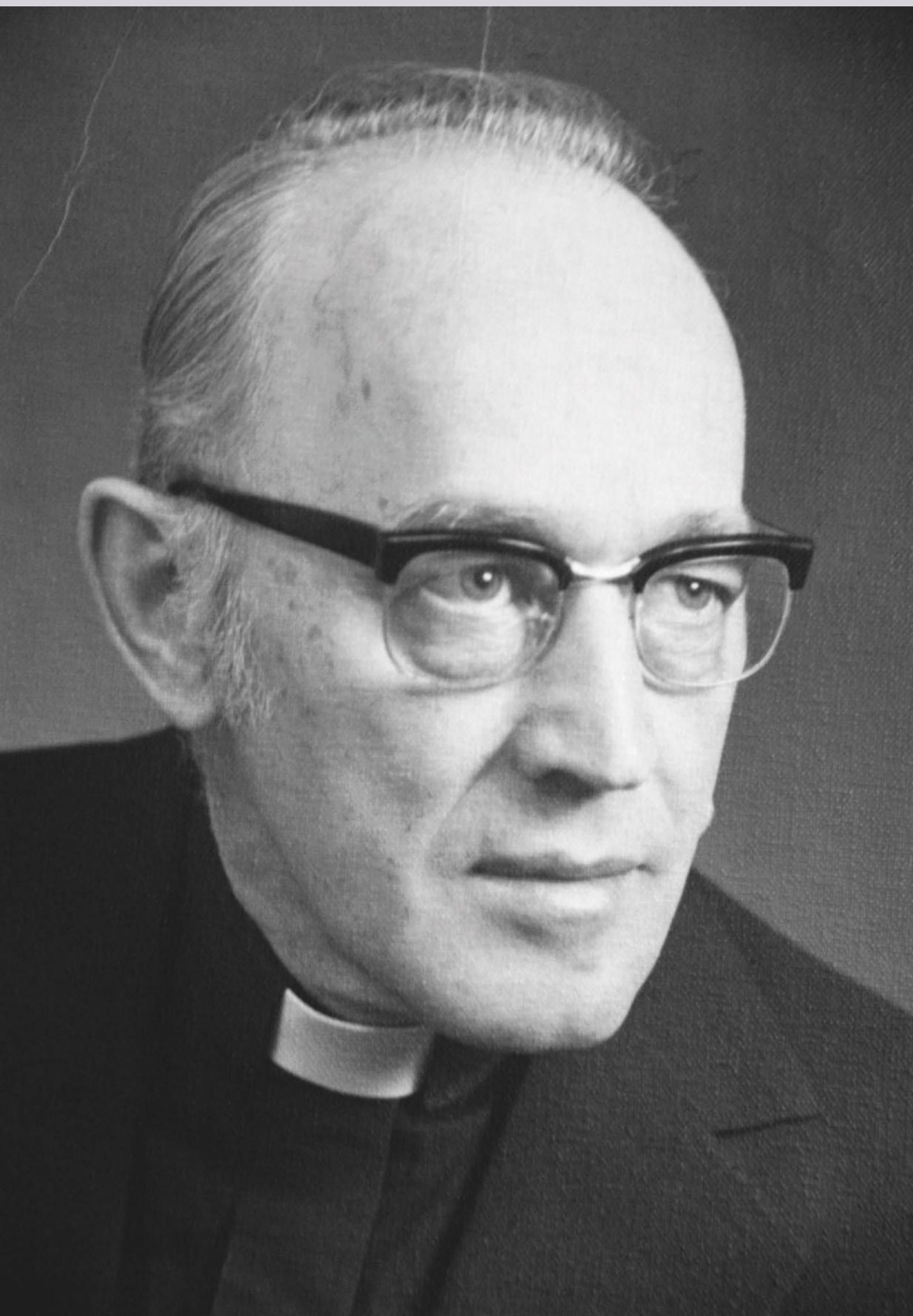


Father Michael Smith OMI

(1911-2002)

Religious and community leader



POLISH SPIRIT



As a monument to his leadership, faith, and dedication, Polonia is blessed with Copernicus Lodge. A dream fulfilled.

Commemorative plaque dedicated to Father Smith

Micheal Smith was born to Polish immigrant parents in Leduc, Alberta. Upon completion of his education in Edmonton and Winnipeg, he went into banking. However, after a lot of soul searching, he entered the priesthood and was ordained an Oblate father in 1938. His first appointment was to Ashem, Manitoba, where with \$500 and enthusiastic help from the town's Catholic community he built a chapel in time for Christmas mass.

Transferred to Toronto in 1941, he headed the St. Stanislaus' Parish youth programme, which became the largest youth organization in the Archdiocese of Toronto. To help meet spiritual needs of postwar immigrants, he was entrusted in 1948 with founding a second Polish parish in Toronto, St. Casimir's. Again he embarked on a construction project, completing St. Casimir's Church in 1954. In cooperation with Father Stanislaw Puchniak, he also organized the St. Stanislaus' / St. Casimir's Credit Union, now the largest parish credit union in North America and the largest Polish-Canadian financial institution.

Father Smith became the first Provincial of Assumption Province, founded in 1956 to minister to Polish-Canadians. Concerned with newcomers' adjustment and family problems, he created the Queen of Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, since 1963 the site of marriage encounters for thousands of couples and a retreat and conference centre.

1979 was eventful for the Polish community in Toronto: a home for the elderly, Copernicus Lodge, opened under Father Smith's leadership. A commemorative plaque in the lobby of the building reads "Father Smith envisioned a Home that would provide for the needs of the whole human being, not only for food and shelter, but their emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual needs... where the dignity of a human being would be given the highest respect... where all residents would truly regard the place as their home....." His final project, an expansion of the Lodge, was completed in 2002.

Father Smith was inducted into the Order of Canada "in recognition of his success in integrating war refugees into new surroundings and of his deep concern for the Polish community at large."

At 88, Father Smith passed away peacefully at Copernicus Lodge.

(In 2008, the Oblate Order posthumously returned Father Smith's Order of Canada medal to protest the awarding of the same honour to Dr. Henry Morgenthauer, Canada's leading abortionist.)

Photos from top left clockwise:

• Father Michael Smith • St. Stanislaus' - St. Casimir's Polish Parishes Credit Union, founded by Father Smith / Photo - Ewa Szozda
• Copernicus Lodge - Phase I, 1978 • Father Smith with volunteers at Copernicus Lodge

Other photos - Copernicus Lodge archives

