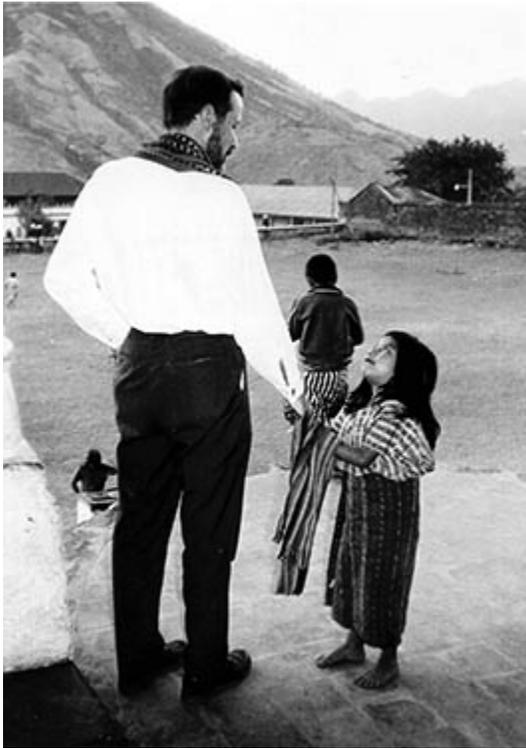


# About Father Stanley Rother

## The Story of Father Rother

Venerable Servant of God Stanley Francis Rother

Oklahoma Priest and Missionary



An Oklahoma farm boy, Father Stanley Francis Rother (ROW-THER) was born March 27, 1935, in Okarche, Oklahoma. Ordained a priest for what was then the Diocese of Oklahoma City and Tulsa, he served in the diocese's mission in Guatemala for 13 years. Seeking justice in the midst of a protracted civil war, Father Rother fought courageously for the well-being of his people in combating a culture that was excessively hostile to the Catholic Church.

The oldest of four children born to Franz and Gertrude Rother, Father Rother grew up in Okarche and attended Holy Trinity Catholic Church and School.

Being a normal child raised on a farm, he worked hard doing the required chores, attended school, played sports, was an altar server and enjoyed the activities associated with growing up in a small town.

While in high school, he began to discern the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood. He was accepted as a seminarian and was sent to Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas.

The journey to ordination was not without its challenges. More practical than academic by nature, young Stanley struggled with Latin, which at the time was a critical requirement since the entire curriculum was being taught in Latin. Due to his difficulties, he was asked to leave the seminary as his grades were inadequate.

He sought the counsel of Bishop Victor Reed. It was decided that Stanley would be allowed a second chance, enrolling at Mount Saint Mary Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. He graduated from the Mount and was ordained a priest on May 25, 1963. Father Rother served as an associate pastor for five years in Oklahoma. Heeding the call of Pope John XXXIII, he sought and received permission to join the staff at the diocese's mission in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala.

Father Rother's connection with the people of Santiago Atitlan was immediate. He served the native tribe of the Tz'utujil, who are decedents of the Mayans. In order to serve his people, Father Rother had to speak Spanish and the Tz'utujil language. He not only learned both languages, but his working knowledge of Tz'utujil enabled him to celebrate Mass in their language and help translate the New Testament. Tz'utujil was not a written language until the Oklahoma mission team arrived and so, despite his past issues with Latin, what he accomplished was remarkable.

As the years passed, Father Rother tried to live a simpler life to be in communion with his people. He was surrounded by extreme poverty with the Tz'utujil living in one-room huts growing what they could on their small plots of land.



Father Rother ministered to his parishioners in their homes; eating with them, visiting the sick and aiding them with medical problems. He even put his farming skills to use by helping them in the fields, bringing in different crops, and building an irrigation system.

While he served in Guatemala, a civil war raged between the militarist government forces and the guerrillas. The Catholic Church was caught in the middle due to its insistence on catechizing and educating the people. During this conflict, thousands of Catholics were killed.

For a time, the violence was contained in the cities, but it soon came to the highlands and Santiago Atitlan. Catechists began to disappear, people slept in the church for protection and death lists began to circulate in the towns.

Eventually, Father Rother's name appeared on the death list after a parishioner from an Oklahoma parish sent a complaint about Father Rother to the Guatemalan embassy, saying he was advocating for the overthrow of the government in his preaching by supporting his local residents. For his safety and that of his associate, Father Rother returned home to Oklahoma. He didn't stay long. He was determined to give his life completely to his people, stating that "the shepherd cannot run." Returning to Santiago Atitlan, he continued the work of the mission.

Within a few months of his return, three men entered the rectory around 1 a.m. on July 28, 1981, fought with Father Rother and then executed him. His death shocked the Catholic world. No one was ever held responsible.

The people of Santiago Atitlan mourned the loss of their leader and friend. His memory continues to stir the passion of the people he served with dignity and vigor. Because of the affection and veneration that the people of Santiago Atitlan displayed for the priest, they requested that Father Rother's heart be kept in Guatemala where it remains enshrined today.

From the onset of his death, the people of Santiago Atitlan, the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and the Diocese of Tulsa have believed that Father Rother died for the faith. In 2007, his Cause for Canonization was opened.

In June 2015, the Theological Commission at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome voted to formally recognize Oklahoma's Servant of God Father Stanley Rother a martyr. The determination of martyrdom was a critical step in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City's Cause to have Father Rother beatified, the final stage before canonization as a saint.

On Dec. 2, 2016, Pope Francis officially recognized Father Rother as a martyr for the faith. He is the first American-born martyr and the first U.S. priest to be beatified. Cardinal Angelo Amato will celebrate the Rite of Beatification on Sept. 23, 2017, at the Cox Convention Center in downtown Oklahoma City. The event is free and open to the public.

Father Rother, pray for us.