

Shrine of Stanley Rother | Archdiocese of Oklahoma City

Standing as a beacon of faith and a visible sign of the Church's presence in Oklahoma, the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine is a resource for the entire archdiocese. The shrine seats 2,000, and welcomes pilgrims from throughout Oklahoma, the United States, and beyond.

Inside the 6,000-square-foot facility, pilgrims will find the museum and gift shop. The museum highlights the story of Blessed Stanley Rother's life and mission. It features artifacts from every stage of his life, and provides information about his martyrdom and beatification. With God's blessing, one day, it also will contain information related to his canonization!

Archbishop Emeritus of Oklahoma City, Eusebius Beltran: "Stanley Rother was a very ordinary person. By his life and witness, he showed us that ordinary people can become saints. ...Stan attained this goal by his ordinary daily dedication to our Lord."

Quotes of Father Rother:

"I don't know what the future holds, but I know where God is calling me." – expressing trust in God's guidance despite uncertainty.

"The only thing that matters is to love God and to love your neighbor." – summarizing his guiding principle.

Blessed Stanley Rother, may your prayers and example help us to defend the poor and to share Christ's love with those around us. Pray for us!

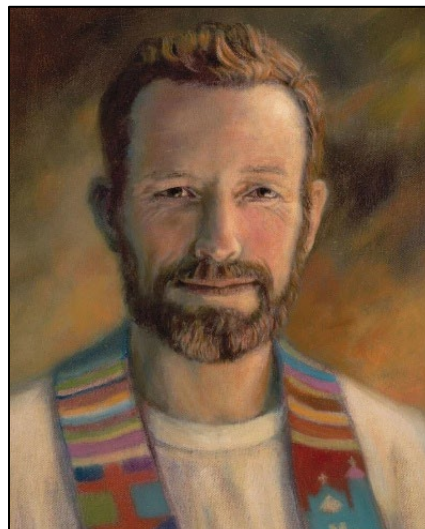
Recommended reading: *The Shepherd Who Didn't Run* – Fr. Stanley Rother, *Martyr from Oklahoma* by Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda

Sources include: rothershrine.org, archokc.org, *The Shepherd Who Didn't Run* by Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda, Felician Sisters, befagi.com, Aletia, National Catholic Register.

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Blessed Stanley Rother *Priest, Missionary and Martyr*

Born: March 27, 1935 in Okarche, Oklahoma

Ordained a priest: May 25, 1963

Assigned to Guatemala: 1968

Died: July 28, 1981 (age 46) – Guatemala

Formally recognized by Pope Francis as a martyr: December 2, 2016

Beatified in Oklahoma City by Cardinal Amato on behalf of Pope Francis: September 23, 2017

Feast Day: July 28

Patronage: Missionaries & priests

Stanley Francis Rother was born March 27, 1935, in Okarche, Oklahoma. The oldest of the children born to Franz and

Gertrude Rother, he grew up on a farm and attended Holy Trinity Catholic Church and School. He worked hard doing 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. He completed his studies at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, and was ordained a priest on May 25, 1963. At his ordination, Father Stanley chose St. Augustine's motto as his own: *"For my benefit I am a Christian, for the benefit of others I am a priest."* Father Rother served as an associate pastor for five years in Oklahoma.

Only a few years after his ordination in 1963, he answered Pope John XXIII's call to send missionaries to Central America and joined the Oklahoman mission in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala.

He served the native Mayans of the region, particularly the Tz'utujil people. Note about the Tz'utujil: They trace their origins to the period of the Maya civilization (900–1500) and migrated from the Campeche/Tabasco region of Mexico to Lake Atitlán in Guatemala. During the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, the Franciscans were instrumental in bringing Christianity to that region.

By 1975, Fr. Stanley Rother was alone at his parish in Santiago Atitlán, since the others had returned home for various reasons. He served the Tz’utujil people for 13 years and won their hearts and souls.

While fulfilling his heavy pastoral duties which included as many as five Masses in four different locations on a given Sunday and as many as 1,000 baptisms a year, Fr. Rother experimented with various crops. Although he had struggled with Latin in the seminary, Father Rother learned Spanish and the Tz’utujil language in Guatemala. He celebrated Mass in their language, and helped translate the New Testament.

Father Rother was surrounded by extreme poverty among the Tz’utujil, who were living in one-room huts, growing what they could on their small plots of land. He ministered to his parishioners in their homes; eating with them, visiting the sick, and aiding them with medical issues. 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. In the Guatemalan context, guerrillas refer to members of armed leftist rebel movements that fought against the Guatemalan government during the 36-year Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996). These groups were typically composed of rural, predominantly indigenous, Maya peasants and urban activists.

Guatemala’s civil war reached the highlands and Lake Atitlán by 1980. Government troops camped on the parish farm, and Fr. Rother witnessed the assassination of a number of his parishioners, including the parish deacon. 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. Priests from Europe serving the rural areas were killed. Fr. Rother wrote to his Bishop in Oklahoma City asking for help for his pastoral assistant, a newly ordained priest who was from that village. Fr. Rother was concerned he would be killed, as well.

Eventually, Father Rother’s name appeared on a death list. For his safety and that of his associate, Father Rother returned home to Oklahoma in 1981. He didn’t stay long, though, as he was determined to give his life completely to his people, stating; *My people need me. A shepherd cannot run from his flock.* He returned to Santiago Atitlán to continue the work of the mission.

Within a few months, three men entered the rectory around 1 a.m. on July 28, 1981, fought with Father Rother, and then executed him. The utility room where

he was shot has now become a small chapel where parishioners gather to pray. The hole left by the bullet is still in the floor. The stain caused by Father Rother’s blood is now encased in a glass with a sign. For the Tz’utujil, Father Rother’s death is just one more outward sign of his deep and abiding, holy love for them.

Immediately following his martyrdom, the people of Santiago Atitlán mourned the loss of their leader and friend. Thousands gathered at the Church crying out: *“They have killed our priest!”* They collected Fr. Rother’s blood into two glass containers for veneration. They requested that Father Rother’s heart be kept in Guatemala, where it remains enshrined today.

His death shocked the Catholic world. No one was ever held responsible. While the murderers’ reason to kill Fr. Rother was to silence him and the Church, they failed. Evil never triumphs. Father Rother’s martyrdom in Guatemala had a profound impact on the Church, especially in the diocese of Oklahoma City. His witness inspired many in the local community to pursue priestly vocations. According to the Felician Sisters’ account, since Fr. Rother’s martyrdom, nine parishioners from Santiago Atitlán have been ordained priests, and seven more men are in seminary formation. This shows that his sacrifice directly led to at least 16 new priests or seminarians in the local diocese.

In 2007, his Cause for Canonization was opened. In June 2015, the Vatican congregation responsible for the causes of saints, formally voted to have him recognized as 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 December 1, 2016, Pope Francis officially recognized Father Rother as a martyr for the faith. He is the first martyr from the United States, and the first U.S.-born priest to be beatified. The Rite of Beatification was held on September 23, 2017, in downtown Oklahoma City—an event attended by more than 20,000 people from around the world.

Sister Marita Rother, the younger sister of Blessed Father Stanley Francis Rother, is still alive as of this publication. She lives in Wichita, Kansas. Sister Marita, who took the religious name Marita upon entering the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in 1955, has served as a teacher and principal for more than 40 years.

She has remained active in her religious community, and has spoken publicly about her brother’s life and work. She often says: “He was an ordinary guy that answered God’s call.”