

Stevens Point

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MASS OF RESURRECTION

Church dignitaries celebrate the Mass of Resurrection for Brother James Alfred Miller at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Polonia, Thursday. Brother James, 37, was slain by hooded gunmen while fixing a window at an Indian school where he worked in Huehuetenango, Nicaragua. (Staff photo by Doug Wojcik)

Town buries Brother James Miller Thursday

By BONNIE BRESSERS
Staff reporter

ELLIS—The town was waiting when the body of Brother James Alfred Miller came home to Ellis, a tiny unincorporated community northeast of Stevens Point Thursday afternoon.

It was in Ellis that Brother James grew up, the first child of Lorraine and Arnold Miller. It was here that he attended eight years of school in a one-room classroom and with one teacher. It was in Ellis that he learned his love of the soil, and it was Ellis that he left to become a Christian Brother—dedicating himself to serving the poor and ultimately being murdered by four hooded gunmen in Guatemala.

And it was here that he was buried on a foggy Thursday afternoon in the cemetery behind St. Martin's Church, a little white wooden church on Highway 66 within sight of the dairy farm where he grew up.

Over 750 people attended the Mass held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Polonia, a few miles from Ellis.

Many of the people came early and waited. Some came in their finery, some came in their work clothes. There were Christian Brothers from throughout the United States, church dignitaries, priests and sisters, elected officials and townspeople—people who knew him, people who knew of the work he had done.

They came early and waited in the old, ornate church with its high domed ceilings and its stained glass windows that proclaim the Polish heritage of the area.

They waited for Brother James to come home again.

Brother James Alfred Miller, 37, chose the life of

a Christian Brother early, a year after attending Pacelli High School in Stevens Point, which the Christian Brothers operate. He went to religious schools, completing his formal training in 1966. His first assignment was teaching at Cretn High School, St. Paul, Minn.

Four years later he was transferred to Bluefields, Nicaragua, then to Puertos Cabezas, Nicaragua, where he was a teacher, principal and director of a school.

Shortly after former President Anastasio Somoza was exiled from Nicaragua, Brother James returned to the United States for a year.

But he yearned to return to service among the poor in Third World countries, and he was assigned to Huehuetenango, Guatemala, where he taught, farmed and was in charge of an Indian school.

Brother Santiago, as he was called there, was shot to death while he was fixing a window at the school. His friends called him jovial, some said he was a man with a humble life and still others said he was a true missionary.

During Thursday's Mass, Brother Cyril Lizecky, provincial of the Winona District of the Christian Brothers and a former principal at Pacelli, called him a martyr.

"May the angels lead you to Paradise where the other martyrs greet you. Brother James died for what he was and what he stood for—he was a worker for justice," Brother Cyril said.

Brother James was a man who wanted 26 hours in a day, Brother Cyril said. "He gave people with nothing knowledge and hope."

The tone of Brother James' life was that "with support of family, community, friends and church, we will continue," said the Rev. Charles Hiebl, dean of the Portage County deanery, co-pastor of St.

Bronislava's Catholic Church, Plover, and Thursday's homilist.

Brother James was born into a family of love and a family of faith, Hiebl said.

"He was born next to nature where the presence of God was everywhere. His choice in life was to dedicate himself to serve the God he loved, to meet the challenge that was presented to him, to share his God-given talents, ability and love of nature with those who found his everyday life their existence."

Brother James' choice separated him from his family, his home and his country, Hiebl said. But he accepted the challenge to "go to those who needed to know the love of God" with the help of his family, who gave their blessings that their firstborn could find his dream, Hiebl said.

His death will not be "utter destruction for us," Hiebl said.

"Those who knew what he worked and hoped for, who knew what he loved, cannot forget his life."
Like Brother James, "we must take the ordinary things of life and do them extraordinarily well," Hiebl said.

In an eerie reminder of a 1979 incident, Bishop Frederick W. Freking, La Crosse, fell ill during the Mass, at which he was main celebrant.

Freking suffered a type of heart attack while officiating at confirmation services at an Amherst church in the spring of 1979. He was hospitalized for 11 days.)

But Freking recovered and returned to the sanctuary, although the remainder of the Mass was celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop John Paul, La Crosse.

Freking later spoke of the importance of "taking a stand" for the rights of the poor, individual dignity and justice for all people.