

## **Fr. John W. Crossin, O.S.F.S. (1947-2023)**

### **Biography**

#### **Early Days**

John was born in 1947, the oldest of four children of John W. Crossin and Marie (Astley) Crossin. He attended St. Matthew's Parish grammar school. John grew up in Mayfair, playing in the "alley" outside the row home where the family lived. To his brother, Jim, 19 months his junior, that meant: "we did many things, from playing in 'the alley' outside the row home where we lived, to organized sports. We played half ball and wall ball, touch football on the concrete, and shot bottle caps across the "Dead Box" while wearing holes in the knees of our jeans. We rode our bikes anywhere and everywhere, took buses to visit friends, and "the EI" to the YMCA."

John and Jim also played little league baseball for Shel mire AC, where their father was a coach. John developed a lifelong love of Philadelphia sports teams, most especially the Philadelphia Phillies, whom he followed every day from his residence in Washington, D.C. later in life.

#### **High School**

Father Judge High School brought a transition for John, from the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who instilled in John a love for learning, to the priests of the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales, where he was taught by some truly amazing men. However, the seeds of John's vocation had been sown during his Confirmation, when the good sisters at St Matthew's school "planted" at the end of every pew, kids most likely to know the answers to the questions the Bishop might ask as he walked down the aisle. One of them, of course, was John. When he answered the Bishop correctly, he gave John his crozier, and placed his miter on John's head. This no doubt had a profound effect on John.

But beyond the influence of the Bishop and the Oblates was the example of John's parents. His Dad's moral compass was always true north, and his devotion to his faith was evident in his attendance at daily Mass and reception of Holy Communion as he started his workday in the early hours of each day. His mother was gentle and caring and committed to living her faith. She showed her faith in action by volunteering and working at St. Vincent's Orphanage, and being a member of the Catholic Daughters of America, Mothers at Father Judge, and DeSales Guild. They were great role models.

John was both a scholar and athlete at Judge. John was a Merit Scholarship Finalist, ranked 2nd academically in his class of over 800 students, scored a perfect 800 in the

Math SAT exam, and declined numerous scholarships, including the Mayor's Scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, to enter the priesthood.

In athletics, John competed all four years in cross country and track, including as a member of the Catholic League Championship track team. In his final high school track meet, he set the school record in the 2-mile run with a time of 9:59, winning the 4th place medal.

Other achievements include his selection as first choice among the Judge Men of the Year, first student editor of the school yearbook, *The Quest*, valedictorian of his graduating class, and as a Boy Scout, earning the prestigious Eagle Scout achievement award.

In writing for his high school yearbook, John described the importance of friendship. He picked up on the themes of friendship and relationships later in life when he wrote a book on friendship (2014) and one on relationships with people of different faiths (2022). One can see the threads of friendship, relationships, and spirituality in his early life in the neighborhood, family, grade school and high school, coalesce into his life's work.

### **Adult Life**

John entered the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales in 1965. Following John's Oblate novitiate at the farm at Childs, Md., where he learned not only about God, but how to slop the pigs, John taught math and physics at Northeast Catholic High School for two years. While there, he helped coach the track and cross-country teams and learned how to drive the school bus to meets.

John earned a B.S., *summa cum laude*, in Mathematics at Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales (now DeSales University). While there, he competed on the cross-country team, winning five races in a row and leading his team to second place in the league championship.

He later earned an M.A. in Theology and an M.A. in Psychology from The Catholic University of America. Fr. John was ordained a priest on May 15, 1976, at Our Lady of Ransom Church in Philadelphia. Subsequently, Fr. John taught religion at Salesianum School in Wilmington for a year. In 1982, he received his Ph.D. in Moral Theology from Catholic University.

Throughout the 1980s, Fr. John was on the faculty and formation team at the Oblate seminary in Washington, D.C., and served as religious superior. In 1987, Fr. Crossin became President of the De Sales School of Theology.

In 1999, Fr. John was appointed the Executive Director of the Washington Theological Consortium, where he served for the next fourteen years. During this time, he also taught at several theological schools, including Catholic University, Wesley Theological Seminary, Virginia Theological Seminary, and Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary.

From 2012 to 2017, Fr. John served as Executive Director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in Washington, D.C. During this time, Fr. John was a visiting fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University, President of the North American Academy of Ecumenists, and a Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at the Vatican. In the latter capacity, Fr. Crossin was a member of the Pontifical Council's team for the Joint Working Group with the World Council of Churches.

Upon completing his term at the USCCB, Fr. Crossin became Director of Spiritual Formation at St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland. Subsequently, Fr. John had a research sabbatical during which he wrote his latest book, *Moving into the Ecumenical Future: Foundations of a Paradigm for Christian Ethics*, which was published in 2022. In addition to this title, Fr. Crossin is also the author of the following books: *What Are They Saying About Virtue* (1985), *Walking in Virtue: Moral Decisions and Spiritual Growth in Daily Life* (1998), *Everyday Virtues* (2002), and *Friendship: The Key to Spiritual Growth* (2014). Throughout his long career, Fr. Crossin contributed numerous articles to many theological and ecumenical journals.

Recognized as a national leader in ecumenism, Fr. John was the recipient of the Interfaith Bridge Builders Award of the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, the Pillar of Faith Award of the Howard University School of Divinity/United Church of Christ, and the Washington Theological Consortium Ecumenical Award. He was also a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Society of Christian Ethics, and the Thomas More Society of Washington.

Throughout his many years in the Washington/Northern Virginia area, Fr. Crossin ministered on weekends at Annunciation Parish in the Archdiocese of Washington, Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Vienna, Virginia, and St. John Neumann Parish in Reston, Virginia.

Fr. John retired to Reston in 2022 so that he could concentrate on his writing and assist in the parish. He brought the lessons and inspiration of St. Francis de Sales into his academic and pastoral work. He was passionate about exploring the breadth of the

Christian faith and finding common ground with all faiths. In reflecting on his most recent book, Fr. John was most optimistic that it could be the foundation for an international dialogue about ecumenical studies. He reflected, "I hope this book will help bring us together, which is Jesus' will at the Last Supper; as He prayed that we be one."

Fr John passed into eternal life on May 12, 2023 after a short illness. On May 17, 2023, his Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. John Neumann Catholic Church, Reston, Virginia, by the Provincial-Superior of the Wilmington-Philadelphia Province of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, in the presence of the Most Rev. Michael F. Burbidge, D.D., Bishop of Arlington, who also did the Final Commendation. The next day, Fr. John was laid to rest in the Oblate Cemetery, Childs, Maryland.