

Get to know catholic priest Alfonz PAULEN



Alfonz Paulen was born on January 26, 1913, in the village called Malé Bedzany, district of Topolčany, in the family of Ján and his wife Anna (born Števicova).



He came from agriculture background, his father's dad was a shepherd, his mother's father was a farmer.

The mother of Alfonz wanted her son to become a priest. In 1912, she went to Mariazell as a pilgrim. The journey took about 14 days. In front of the altar of the Virgin Mary, she said: "Virgin Mary, if I conceive a son after this pilgrimage, ask for grace for him to become a priest"⁵. Mrs. Anna Paulenová did not reveal her request to anyone. She kept it a secret and prayed to St. Alfonz and to the Virgin Mary for her wish come true.

At the beginning of the following year, Paulen family had a son, who was named Alfonz after a great worshiper of the Virgin Mary. Ján Paulen was 23 years old at the time of his birth, his wife three years younger⁶. Alfonz was baptized on January 27, 1913, in Krušovce by chaplain Ladislav Horváth⁷.

In addition to Alfonz, the Paulen couple had three other children - two sons: Viktor, who was three older than Alfonz, and Anton, who was two years younger. Anton, however, lived only one day. They also had a daughter Jolanka who was 1 year younger than Anton.

When Alfonz was five years old, his family went through a difficult time. His father fell ill with Spanish flu soon after returning from the front of the First World War. It was the kind of flu doctors couldn't treat at the time. Two-year-old Jolanka was also infected. Nothing helped – not medicine, not the careful care of a wife and mother. Jolanka died and her father died a week after her.

Although Alfonz was still young at the time, he did not forget this great family misfortune. Mrs. Anna became a young widow with two young sons. The upbringing of Alfonz and Viktor rested on her shoulders.

Alfonz visited basic school in Veľké Bedzany. He received his first Holy Communion in Krušovce, and he received the sacrament of confirmation in Nadlice on October 14, 1924. His mother supported his studies. After finishing the basic school, he enrolled in the grammar school in Kláštor pod Znievom, which he visited until 1931. During his studies, he became seriously ill with tuberculosis, so he was treated in the High Tatras.

After careful consideration, Alfonz really decided to become a priest. Not because of his mother's words, but because he had felt an affinity for that state since his youth. His only hesitation was his poor health. In 1931, he applied to the priestly seminary in Trnava. He spent five years there. He studied with vigor and joy, although his health worried him a little. The seminar was on Jan Holly Street, close to Church of St Nicolaus. On May 15, 1935, he took part in the primaries of his cousin Anton Vácval in Veľké Ostratice, which he was very happy about.

His classmates mention that Alfonz took seminary preparation for priest life very seriously. Before his ordination, according to the memories of his classmate, he cried a lot, maybe he had an inkling of his difficult life. The reason for the crying remained his secret. After the ordination, he was very happy, which everyone noticed. After his death his classmates confirmed these memories.

Ordination

Alfonz Paulen was ordained to priesthood on May 17, 1936, in Trnava. He was ordained by ThDr. Pavol Jantausch, bishop of the Apostolic Administration of Trnava. He celebrated his first Holy Mass on May 21, 1936, in Malé Bedzany. He served the Holy Mass with the greatest devotion and performed it devoutly throughout his life. Alfonz was a half-orphan, so he was very sympathetic with the suffering people.

Priest service

Alfonz's first place of work as a chaplain was the small town of Leopoldov in 1936. In the 1936/37 school year, he taught children at school and prepared them for their first Holy Communion. As Mrs. Mária Svetlíková, at the time not even a 10-year-old girl, recalls: "He immediately gave us memorial pictures of Saints from his first Holy Mass. This had never happened to us before. No one had given us pictures of Saints until then. This is how the chaplain did it throughout the school year, he especially liked to reward those pupils who answered the questions correctly.

He introduced us to "Friends of children" concept - he was a friend of children! He taught us to save money - we saved pennies and gave them to the chaplain to give to the missions. He gladly supported us in this activity. He was kind and friendly to children and respectful to people. He always respectfully greeted everyone.

When we were leaving school and he was walking down the street, we would run around him as kids, pushing each other and trying to grab his hand. He just smiled; the flock of children was around him. He was kind to children. He stroked the children's hair with love and a smile. Goodness and joy emanated from him."

From October 1, 1937, to March 1, 1938, he was in military service in Prague.

In 1938, he was an administrator in Sološnica. Sološnica was close to Šaštín, where he liked to provide his priestly services such as confession, especially during the pilgrim events.

Kolpachy

In 1939, he became the administrator of the parish in Kolpachy, nowadays called Banský Studenec. The first memory of Ľubor Paulen, Alfonz's nephew about the parish in Kolpachy says: "Before my uncle came to the Šenkvice parish, he worked as a priest in the village of Banský Studenec, which at that time was called Kolpachy. This village is located in the area of Štiavnica hills (highlands), which was a really poor region of Slovakia. Uncle came to the new parish in 1939, at a time of great poverty and lack of basic necessities - such as food. He very quickly understood that these people absolutely needed help. The help came from my father Viktor, who sent to Kolpachy parish three cows and a supply of grain to ensure there is milk available for poor children. The childless couple Foltán took care of the economy at the parish. Mrs. Foltánová used to divide milk to little cups of poor and hungry children. There are still people living in the village today who remember these times.

During 8 years of Father Alfonz Paulen's work in Kolpachy, a beautiful bond of friendship was formed between his and Foltán's family, which continued even after Father Paulen's death. Mrs. Foltánová often visited his mother, they remembered this cordial and charitable priest again and again and mentioned his deeds of kindness. Mrs. Foltánová was always friend of Alfonz's mother, even though many resented her after her son's disgraceful trial. In the funeral photo (December 8, 1969) Mrs. Foltánová is standing next to her coffin, escorting her on the last journey. That's why I never forgot these happenings!"

During our visit to this beautiful and charming village, the mayor showed us a precious treasure, which is the Municipal Chronicle of Kolpachy: "In it, the chronicler devotedly recorded the events that took place in the village. And so faithfully and truthfully he also recorded the events of the war period of World War II and two years after that, when the honorable pastor Alfonz Paulen worked in our village." Verified and confirmed photocopies of the Municipal Chronicle of Kolpachy should be a testimony about this holy priest.

The mayor says: "There are several parts within the municipal chronicle, which contain information about Alfonz Paulen. During his tenure, it did not happen that any of our citizens were killed or kidnapped. Our village was lucky that at the time the local parish was occupied by the honorable pastor Alfonz Paulen. He accepted and hid in his parish a well-known partisan commander Jozef Trojan and his wife, who were apparently fleeing from German soldiers. It is also documented in the chronicle that the partisans and the German army soldiers, who were located in Banská Štiavnica, took turns visiting or hiding in the parish."

It must be said that Banský Studenec is only 5 km away from Banská Štiavnica, and therefore it was no problem for the Germans to quickly access the village.

"The old people say, and it is also recorded in the chronicle, that the parish priest hid the partisans and their commander Trojan down in the cellar of the parish house, and the Germans - the Gestapo from Banská Štiavnica - came upstairs to the parish office. Of course, they did not know about each other. The parish priest Alfonz Paulen spoke German and Russian and was an authority for both Russians and Germans.

During the liberation of the village, it happened in following sequence: the Russians were in the village first, then the Germans took over, and Russians returned again the next day..... The German commander also stayed in the parish, maybe only for one day. He came there to see the parish priest with the municipal chronicle and asked the priest to give him information about people (for example if he knew who helped the partisans during the war) but the priest did not provide him with this information and the people were secured..."

Various associations, communities, priests, teachers, and the residents themselves played an important role in the life of the village in several areas. They tried to raise culture, teaching, and charity to a higher level.

When the military or civilian resistance groups were formed in 1944, they were preparing an uprising for freedom for a long time. These efforts culminated at the end of August with the announcement of the Slovak National Uprising and 34 residents of the village of Banský Studenec actively participated in it. Not far from Krupina, in the settlement of Šváb, resistance groups had their headquarters. From October 1944, the Schill regiment started fighting against them. In the village Banský Studenec, the battle of both sides took place on October 18, 1944. The uprising went into retreat, the members of its armed forces were suppressed. Many of them underwent reprisals which they did not survive. After the retreat of the Uprising, members of the German army came several times to Banský Studenec. They plundered food and animal feed. During February 1945, units of the 2nd Ukrainian Front advanced from the southern parts of Hont towards the north. The German troops put up strong resistance, the fighting took place right in Banský Studenec. During the fights, several houses burned down, and local church was also damaged. More than four people died during the removal of mines and grenades and several people became war invalids because of their injuries. Some other people were taken to Germany and never returned, and war orphans were left behind in the village.

The emerging disputes between supporters and opponents of the regime were moderated by pastor Alfonz Paulen. His merit was especially valued in the times of 1944, when the German army was conducting anti-partisan actions. Inhabitants of the village were threatened with harsh countermeasures for cooperating with partisans. The German army was shooting the inhabitants and burning down the village buildings, similar to the villages of Kľak and Ostrý Grúň. Thanks to his authority, priest Alfonz Paulen helped several residents from persecution during World War II. He actively helped the poor and needy and especially orphans, according to their needs and his possibilities.

People from Banský Studenec remember him as a zealous priest who took exemplary care of the parish and the community. Especially during the Second World War he demonstrated his position. Thanks to his merits and diplomacy, there were no losses of life during the persecution of residents for participating and helping in the Slovak National Uprising. He showed his bravery by offering parish house as a shelter for the commanders and participants of the Slovak National Uprising.

In addition to pastoring and teaching, he supported the reconstruction of the chapel of St. John of Nepomuck. After liberation, Alfonz Paulen acquired three new bells for the church. He organized folk missions in the parish and prepared children for confirmation. Bishop Michal Buzalka granted them the sacrament of confirmation in 1947. This event was the last until 1993.

"Reverend Alfonz Paulen was the administrator of our parish during the interwar period, where, especially at the end of World War II, he protected the population from the reprisals threatened by the German army. This fact was a real blessing for our village".

"The work of the pastor Alfonz Paulen was a great blessing for our community. We will not allow the next generations of our children to forget this holy priest!"

After Kolpachy, effective October 20, 1947, Alfonz Paulen was appointed by the Apostolic Administration in Trnava to the parish of Veľké Šenkvice by letter No. 11291/1947 dated 17/10/1947. In Šenkvice he began a new stage of his self-sacrificing and very short life as a priest.

When he became the administrator of the parish in Šenkvice, he already had served as priest for eleven years.

To Šenkvice, a parish with Catholic tradition, he came in a difficult political situation. He believed that he would be able to devote his focus on everyone in the parish, but especially the young generation. He understood the young generation was very important – especially in context of incoming regime. That is

why he zealously taught religion (24 hours a week) at the national and municipal schools together with a catechist (4 hours a week). The parishioners were waiting for him with love and hope because there had not been any priest in Šenkvice for more than a year. And the new pastor certainly did not disappoint them! To strengthen the relationships within the church community and in families, he organized missions in 1947 and to strengthen its influence he set up a three-day spiritual renewal in 1948. He took great care that people were educated not only by the word of God in sermons and catechesis, but also by reading and studying religious press. More than 500 copies of religious newspapers and magazines were distributed to Šenkvice. He also devoted a lot of energy to the support of Catholic communities in the parish. There were various religious organizations here: Catholic Unity, Association of Catholic Youth, Work of Spreading the Faith, Childhood of Jesus, Rosary Society, Society of the Heart of Jesus, Society of St. Vojtech.

From the memories of contemporaries still living in 2018-2020 I will try to introduce how the parishioners got to know Alfonz Paulen, how they remember him and how they lived together while his appointment in Šenkvice.

* "Pastor Paulen taught us religion and prepared us for our first Holy Communion. I started going to school in part of Šenkvice called Cerove where I lived. This part belonged to Šenkvice parish. The school was approximately 3 km far from the church and he used to walk to meet us. We liked the pastor very much. He was interesting in his appearance - tall, strong, kind, pleasant and always smiling. I don't remember him ever raising his voice at anyone. He always went around dressed as a reverend and always carried a large bag in his hands. Before the beginning of religious education, we all waited for him in front of the cemetery - that was the beginning of our part of the village - and we carefully watched when he would appear around the corner from behind the hill so that we could run to meet him. The most successful ones took the bag from his hand - none of us looked inside the bag and we did not find out what he was carrying. The ones who ran slower held his hands or the reverend. We chatted around him, he smiled and listened to us.

We all came from Christian families where we received a basic Christian education. Our parents and grandparents taught us how to pray and we went to church with them. The pastor knew so many new things and they were all very interesting. He was telling us stories about Old Testament, and before Christmas holidays he told us about the birth of baby Jesus - the Savior Christ the Lord. First Holy Communion was our first celebration. After the Holy Confession - pure in soul and body, we received the Eucharist for the first time. It was in May 1950. The joint photo from this celebration with our pastor Alfonz Paulen is the last and only picture of this good priest and teacher. He was never "mean" to us at school - he didn't even know how to be mean. He liked people in such a beautiful and natural way. There is also another priest in the mentioned photo. His name was Titus Zeman. He was a Salesian.

As we grew up, from our parents we have gradually learned the story of these two priests, who had to learn the terrifying evil of this world. Even today, when we are much older, the horror they had to go through scares us. The destiny of our pastor, Alfonz Paulen, was a martyr's death. He sacrificed his life to save the lives of persecuted priests. He was a great person and a holy priest."

* Titus Zeman was a young Salesian priest; he was a professor of chemistry at the grammar school in Trnava. In 1946 the Ministry of Education took this school away from the Salesians and made the communist Mikuláš Gašparík the director. The new director immediately banned cross-wearing at the school and removed all the crosses from the walls. Students, professors, parents, and residents of Trnava protested this ban, but their protests were ineffective. Titus Zeman courageously returned the removed crosses back to walls and he was expelled. In the years 1946 - 1947, he worked as a school counselor. When the police occupied the premises of the Salesian Society in 1949, Titus Zeman had to leave. He went to the parish in Šaštín, where he worked as a chaplain. Since his brave act, he has been constantly in the sights of the police.

One cold autumn day, Reverend Paulen organized the parish meeting. He informed the members that Bishop Michal Buzalka had visited him and asked him to accept Titus Zeman as chaplain because he had problems with the police, and he needed to hide. He didn't withhold anything, he openly talked about possible dangers. He also admitted that in other parishes priests were afraid of this threat and refused to help their colleague.

* When the pastor came to teach religion, we breathlessly listened to the stories he told us. Therefore, we didn't have a problem to answer questions he asked at the end of the class. We eagerly absorbed everything he told us. I loved those moments. Every new information he shared with us was culminating on Sunday holy mass. It was a real celebration of God. The dignity with which he celebrated the mass was special. His appearance also contributed to it. He was extremely tall, calm, and had an expression of immense joy on his face. If he was displaying Eucharist, he could place the monstrance high in the altar and he didn't need assistants carrying ladder around. He only reached a little and placed the monstrance safely on the tabernacle. When he opened his arms during the holy mass it looked as if he were embracing the whole world through the altar. I must explain that at that time the Holy Masses were not served "facing the people". During his sermons he advised and encouraged the listeners, gave hope, and brought peace to people. The pastor made sure that we were educated as Christians."

* When pastor Alfonz Paulen came to Šenkvice, I was attending the Municipal School in Pezinok. We lived in Šenkvice close to church and rectory. I knew the pastor and his mother very well. He was a remarkably good, open-minded, and selfless person. I remember that before pastor Paulen came to Šenkvice, it was a duty of a parishioner who needed the services of a priest to arrange transportation - horses with a cart - to bring him to the place where his services were needed (confession, sacrament of the anointing of the sick, funeral).... An exception was introduced by pastor Paulen, who rejected these established practices and came to the designated place by foot. I remember that he didn't only walk within Šenkvice. He also went to the more distant settlement of Svätý Martin. Children from this place also visited school in Šenkvice, although I'm not aware what were the reasons. There was also one girl from Svätý Martin in our class. Šenkvice and the settlement were connected by a dirt road through the forest. The road was more than 5 kilometers long. He walked there and back. The priest also went there to celebrate mass. I don't know how often.

He liked people and he showed it in his own way - kind and unobtrusive. Before Christmas, he visited old and sick people who could not come to the church for holy confession. After the confession he asked them if they needed anything. Most often people needed money. He also asked my mother-in-law. She thanked him and did not take the money, because there were other people in the village who were poorer and needed such help more. The pastor didn't talk about it, but people told each other. He did not show off his acts of kindness. Families in need gratefully accepted his help.

We went to church every Sunday for Holy Mass and litany. Every holy mass celebrated by him was a valuable and lasting experience for us. Father Paulen remained a part of our lives with his charitable life.

* We were three siblings. I was the oldest and I was 13 years old, my brother was 12 and the youngest sister was 4 years old, when our 39-year-old father died in July 1949. It was a great tragedy for our family. Our pastor Alfonz Paulen, who buried my father, did not take a penny for performing the funeral rites. He bought us presents for Christmas. He knew that mom couldn't afford to buy any "unnecessary things". Even today, I feel the joy which the priest gave us on Christmas! I don't think we were the only ones in the village whom the parish priest helped at Christmas. For our parish priest, "Christmas" was any time his neighbor needed help.

I always lived near the church - when I was in my parents' house, and after I got married. I personally witnessed how our pastor was brutally taken away by the Czechoslovak State Security (also referred to as StB) and I remember this day very well. I can vividly see the people who came to defend him. All the officers were armed - deputies with their sleeves rolled up and also the StB officers with rifles.

The pastor knew very well that if police were given the slightest reason, they would have shot anyone. He was a wise, sensitive, and caring person and protected his parishioners. He could not tolerate shooting of unarmed people. Many of the people who came to defend him were fathers of large families. That's why he asked everyone to calm down with the words "Don't worry, I didn't do anything wrong. I'll come back! He was right - he came back, but how? After 44 years in a pile of ashes!!!

In January 1995 I participated at a solemn act of burying his remains at the Church of St. Anne and I cried. He had returned to our church, a place where he has renewed Christ's bloodless sacrifice every day during the holy mass. He was a courageous protector of the poor and weak people.

He was a kind, gentle, cordial, considerate, perceptive, empathetic, dignified person with the qualities of an angel.

He was a great man and a holy priest!

* I was born in a house located right in front of the parish office in Šenkvice. My father Jozef Novák was a parish clerk and a member of the parish council. The premises of the rectory and parish office yard were my second home. One day during the winter I remember talking with pastor about our plans for that afternoon. My two older brothers and I were planning to go skating at the nearby lake called "Šúre". I was a good skater. The new priest, Chaplain Titus Zeman, was also at the parish at that time and he heard us speaking about our plans. He asked us if he could join us. Of course, he could! It was strange and funny to see the chaplain in a reverend on skates. Later, he went to skate to Šúre lake more often with other children.

One day, the parish priest Alfonz Paulen summoned the parish council members for consultation. The members of the parish council were Jozef Novák - a parish clerk, Július Strašífták, father of Tomáš Strašífták, who played a very important role in the following days of the parish's history. Tomáš used to go with the pastor to meetings with unknown refugees. He was the first point of contact between refugees and the pastor. First, he checked the background of the stranger, and then he invited the priest, who observed the meeting. Tomáš was an altar server and a confidant of the pastor. Other members of the parish council were Janko Novák, Dominik Srnák, František Bokroš and Silvester Baričič from Cerové.

Pastor Alfonz Paulen announced to the members of the parish council that Bishop Buzalka requested his help to accept Salesian priest Titus Zeman in Šenkvice parish. He agreed with this request and accepted Titus Zeman as assistant chaplain and teacher of religion. Titus Zeman arrived in Šenkvice in the first half of October in 1949. Reverend Alfonz Paulen was the only priest from the parishes of the Modra district who did not hesitate for a moment and was willing to accept the persecuted colleague! ... and he was willing to do much more!

Titus Zeman knew the bad situation after February 1948 for the Church, priests, and religious authorities in Czechoslovakia. The first steps of the regime consisted of persecuting and incarceration of priests in 'collecting' monasteries, such as the monastery in Podolíneč, and their subsequent liquidation. That is why he asked Pastor Paulen for help. They helped to transport the priests, monks, and theologians abroad. Their goal was to help their transit across the Moravia River and Austria to Italy. Some priests requested the government of Czechoslovakia for permission to travel, but their requests were rejected.

Father Paulen's help consisted of providing accommodation and food for escaping monks, priests and theologians who wanted to leave the republic because they could not freely continue with their clerical activities. The parish priest informed the members of the parish council about the possible threats associated with this help. All members of the parish council agreed to provide Christian aid, realizing its danger in the given conditions. However, they had one fundamental condition - no one could be accommodated in the parish house! The refugees would be accommodated in the house Silvester Baričič in Cerové. All members of the parish council were married and had several children. Together with a threat of disclosure, this meant a threat of losing fathers of the families. Everyone agreed with the proposal. They also tried to keep this hiding place confident, so that as few people as possible knew about it. Even Titus

Zeman did not live in the parish house, but in Cerové with Silvester Baričič. This solution was proposed by Silvester Baričič himself because he didn't have any kids.

Much later it became clear that Silvester Baričič organized the accommodation of refugees very well. There were 4 other childless families in Cerové, and they were willing to help the persecuted. They were committed Christians and trustworthy, reliable, and kind people.

* The oldest, 97-year-old parishioner as of the year 2021 recalls: "When the pastor started helping Titus Zeman to hide persecuted priests and theologians before they went abroad, he bought them boots to keep their feet warm. They were coming to hide from autumn until early spring when the weather was rather unpleasant. My brother Ondrej Somorovský had a shoe store in his house (he was nicknamed "Baťa"). He himself ensured the purchase of all shoes and their subsequent sale to the parish priest. He was afraid that increased amounts of shoe sales could raise suspicions. My brother said that he gave pastor a discount and he did not keep any profit from the sale, he also mentioned that pastor Paulen paid for all the boots with his own money.

* Mrs. Zdenka Baričičová remembers, among other things, the story told by Mr. František Bokroš, who was a member of the parish council during the tenure of pastor Alfonz Paulen in Šenkvice. Later he assumed the role of parish clerk. He witnessed a dialogue between pastor and his mother. The pastor lamented that he wanted to help a person in need who needed a larger amount of money. However, he no longer had any funds that he could lend him. Then his mother told him not to worry, that she would write to her son Viktor and ask him to sell the cow so they could have the money for people who need it most.

* Mrs. Nemčovičová added her memories: "I also remember that unfortunate day when the pastor was taken away by force.

The pastor came to visit my father, who was a man of prayer, and they were preparing for the pilgrimage to Marianka, which was to take place in the next few days. At that time, I lived in the house of my parents in law, and I was pregnant with my fourth son. The place where I lived was not far from the church and my parents' house. The surname "Somorovský" was not rare in Šenkvice, and many times there were not even family ties. So it happened that Helena Somorovská who was much younger than me, came to our house. She was out of breath as she was running to my place. She asked me to run home, because "secret police" had come to their house looking for Reverend Paulen. They came to the wrong "Somorovský" family, and Helena correctly assumed that the priest was with my parents. She came to warn the pastor and ask him to hide. "Mr. Paulen hide! Secret police are looking for you!"

When I arrived home, I heard the words: 'Reverend, hide, secret police are looking for you' and I heard the pastor's reply: ... 'And where would I hide? I am not going to hide as they would find me later anyway. I have nothing to be afraid of. I didn't do anything wrong, why should I be afraid to go home?'"

When my father saw me, he asked: 'what are you doing here?' However, the news about the secret police arrival looking for the pastor spread very quickly. People from the village wanted to defend him, but the pastor did not let them do anything. He was convinced that police had no reason to punish him and repeated that he hadn't done anything wrong and he would return. He promised it, but he could not fulfill the promise And the pilgrimage to "Marianka" did not take place that year.

Tall lilac bushes grew in front of the church and the secret police officers were hiding behind them. Their guns were noticeable. Other deputies were in the yard of parish house and in the church. There were ten of them and they were armed - rifles were visible under their coats. They must have been very afraid when so many armed men arrived to arrest one good and friendly priest!"

Testimonies from the period after pastor's arrest can only be referred to from the court documents, such as: statements of the defendants in the prosecutor's lawsuit, from the Minutes of the main hearing from

June 21, 1952, at the State Court in the criminal case against Alfonz Paulen et al. for anti-state activity, from personal testimonies of fellow prisoners after 1960, when they were amnestied.

* **Don Leonard Tikl:** He was born on May 11, 1902, in Dúbravka. He attended primary school in his hometown. He completed his Salesian novitiate in Italy (1922-1923). He continued his high school and philosophical studies in Genzano, a little town near Rome (1923-1925). He was appointed for teaching practice in a town called Macerata (1925-1928). He studied theology in Rome (1928-1930) and in Ljubljana. He was ordained a priest on December 8, 1932, in Trnava.

He edited the magazine Salesian News in the central office of Salesians on Miletičová Street in Bratislava. He published a report about the massacres in the Katyn Forest. The communist regime later sentenced him to prison for distributing a magazine from the period of the Slovak Republic, which after war co-editor Jozef Baťo added to the current issue of Salesian News. He was supposed to be penalized together with J. Baťo. They faced a high penalty. He also worked as the secretary of the inspector (provincial) of the Salesian work in Slovakia. After a violent abolishment of the Salesian Society during the night of April 13 to 14, 1950, he was confined in a monastery in Podolíneč (the cover operation for a violent liquidation of male religious communities by the communist regime was called Operation K). In 1951, he managed to escape from Podolíneč. Due to threats of imprisonment, he decided to run away from Czechoslovakia.

Don Tikl was the oldest member of the third Titus expedition. Between February and April 1951, he was hiding in the house of Silvester and Anna Baričič in Šenkvice on Cerovská Street. Titus Zeman was also accommodated there at that time. During Easter, Titus Zeman offered him the opportunity to leave abroad. Leonard Tikl escaped from Podolíneč when he learned that he had been accused of promoting fascism. He went to Bratislava to consult with Don Viliam Vagač (1899-1970). His brother, JUDr. Karol Vagač was a judge of the State Court. He warned Don Tikl that he faces a high penalty. Don Tikl then hid in Šenkvice and waited for the arrival of Titus Zeman. He was part of an expedition that ended unsuccessfully. All members of the expedition were caught by the border guards on River Morava.

The state prosecutor prepared a lawsuit after many hours of inhuman torture during interrogations and manipulation with statements. The state prosecutor made his statement as follows:

I. Alfonz Paulen, born on January 26, 1913, in Malé Bedzany. Occupation: catholic priest. Last residence: Veľké Čaníkovec (Šenkvice) Current residence: in custody

II. to XI. : Augustín Karmaš, Occupation: catholic priest; Jozef Havran, Occupation: catholic priest; Emma Olbrichová, Occupation: cook, working for catholic priest Karmaš; Ing. Rudolf Stano; Anton Kolárovič, Occupation: cook; Jozefína Macáková, Occupation: clerk; Anton Totka, Occupation: farmer; Štefánia Maceková, Occupation: family manager; Boris Travenc, Occupation: catholic priest, Mudr. Štefan Jablonický, Occupation: doctor; for the following reasons:

In the criminal case against Titus Zeman discussed at this court under the number 3TIII 114/51, it was "allegedly" proven that since 1950, paid agents of the CIC and the Vatican organized the illegal passage of reactionary (non-adaptive) clergy from Czechoslovakia to the Anglo-American-controlled part of Europe. They involved them in the activities of traitorous Slovak emigration directed against Czechoslovakia.

It is well known that foreign agents always count on the help of the domestic forces, among which they select their collaborators. These collaborators then fulfill the traitorous tasks assigned to them. The research revealed that also in the subject case some clerics were involved in the above-mentioned activities. Those clerics like Alfonz Paulen and his colleagues mentioned in this document "identified themselves" with the anti-social and anti-socialist policy of the Vatican state and they have conscientiously served this policy until now.

The above-mentioned collaborators were hiding and financially supporting the agents of the foreign intelligence service Titus Zeman and Ferdinand Totka. They were also supporting the organized mass smuggling of the reactionary clerics and their illegal departure.

Information about accused individuals:

I. in February 1951, Alfonz Paulen, a Roman Catholic priest, teamed up with František Buzek, one of the organizers of the smuggling of reactionary priests into a hostile foreign country. František Buzek had already been convicted in the meantime. According to his instructions, Alfonz Paulen helped to accommodate Leonard Tikl, who is also a Roman Catholic priest and who had been convicted in the meantime; in the house of Silvester Baričič in Malé Šenkvice. He knew that Leonard Tikl had escaped from the consolidation monastery and wanted to go abroad illegally. While Mr. Paulen was hiding the refugee, he procured shoes and clothes for him. At the beginning of April 1951, before the scheduled date of illegal departure, he informed Tikl about where and when he was to meet the agents Titus Zeman and Ferdinand Totka. And on the appointed day, he bought a train ticket for Leonard Tikl and escorted him to Trnava.

Accused recognize the extent of the search results and are therefore lawfully sued for:

I. In February 1951 Alfonz Paulen together with František Buzek, accommodated the Roman Catholic priest Leonard Tikl in Malé Čaníkovec (Šenkvice). They knew that Leonard Tikl was hiding from the security authorities and that he intended to emigrate abroad. Leonard Tikl also planned to participate in activities directed against the Czechoslovak Republic. Alfonz Paulen supported him materially and informed him at the beginning of April 1951 about the exact time and place for his illegal departure. He bought him a travel ticket and escorted him to Trnava. It can be said that he conspired with the aforementioned in an attempt to destroy the people's democratic state establishment of the republic guaranteed by the Constitution.

Minutes of the main hearing from June 21, 1952, at the State Court in Bratislava, in the criminal case against Alfonz Paulen contain following information:

I. Accused Alfonz Paulen states:

*** I understood the points stated in accusation, I only feel guilty in the matter of hiding pastor Tikl; however, I deny treasonous intents.**

*** I have known Buzek since about 1949, we have met during a confirmation ceremony in Pezinok. I know Tikl as a Salesian priest from Bratislava. In February 1951, when I returned from school, Tikl and Buzek waited for me at my parish office. Buzek asked me if I could accommodate Tikl for a short time. Neither of them informed me that Tikl escaped from Podolíneč monastery. I knew that Tikl was a priest and at that time priests were persecuted. Based on that, I could only assume that he was hiding as such. However, he did not inform me about specifics, and I accommodated him only as a cleric. I didn't know anything about his criminal activity. Tikl did not inform me about his plans, he certainly didn't reveal any information about illegal departure from the country. I couldn't accommodate him in the parish house due to lack of space. I personally accompanied him to house of Silvester Baričič, who had no children and was willing to accommodate him for a short time. I introduced Tikl to Mr. Baričič as my friend, and in my presence Baričič was not informed that Leopold Tikl had escaped from the monastery, nor that he was hiding from StB. After this visit, I have not met Buzek anymore. I did not receive any messages which I should convey to Tikl. It was agreed at the very beginning that Leopold Tikl would travel to Brodské. I visited Tikl at house of Mr. Baričič about 2-3 times. The reason for my visits was to bring him shoes and laundry. It is true that I bought tickets, for me to Trnava and for Tikl I purchased tickets to Brodské. I traveled to Trnava with Tikl because I needed to do some shopping there.**

* My attitude towards democratic establishment of our people is positive. I have always supported working persons. During my assignment in Kolpachy, during the so-called 'Slovak State', I performed the role of social officer in HSLŠ just to help people.

HSLŠ – Hlinkova Slovenska Ludova strana – political party in 1st Slovak Republic.

* I have signed the welcome speech for General Stalin

* I have signed the Stockholm peace resolution.

* I have signed the 'peace' mandate and I have also written an article in the Catholic newspaper about it in order support a hundred percent vote.

* I have not signed the 'KA' because I believe that the bishops are at the head of the church and have the right to decide on it. *(KA stands for 'Katolícka Akcia' – the aim of this activity was for communist party to take control over the catholic institutions)*

The chairman of the senate drew the attention of accused to the discrepancy between his current statement and the statement made in front of the ŠtB authorities, to which the accused states:

I have signed the minutes in front of the ŠtB officers, but pls. note that during the interrogation I was in such a mental state that I didn't even know what I was doing. Accused Tikl did not tell me his intentions, I did not know that he was going abroad illegally. When Tikl and Buzek visited me, I did not know that Tikl had already been sentenced in his absence for 3 years of prison time.

In the name of the republic

On June 21, 1952, the State Court in Bratislava issued the following

judgment:

- I. **Alfonz P a u l e n**, born on January 26, 1913, in Malé Bedzany, last residence in Veľké Šenkvice 164, Roman Catholic priest, currently in custody of the State Court in Bratislava,

.....

he committed

the crime of high treason according to § 78, section 2 of the Criminal Code and is sentenced for 11 (in other words, eleven) years of imprisonment, as the main punishment.

Furthermore, the accused is sentenced to a secondary punishment according to §47, §78, §section 4 of the Criminal Code to confiscation of his property.

Statements of fellow prisoners in relation to priest **Alfonz P a u l e n**

Dr. Andrej Dermek, Salesian priest and later Provincial of the Salesians in Slovakia stated:

“At the end of March in 1951, I have gone through a dramatic downturn in Podolíneč. One of our oratories František Búzek came to visit us at a monastery. He was a very hardworking and courageous person. He had a message for me and for Jožo Pavlík. The message stated that we should try to escape from Podolíneč and turn to Titus Zeman, who organized transits. Jožko Pavlík was supposed to help with those illegal

transits, and I was supposed to take care of the people already in Italy, as a foreign liaison. I would like to comment that a total of seventy clergymen escaped abroad in those days. Sixty of them were clerics, several priests, and some coadjutors.

We understood this message as an order from the main superiors. We later found out that it was not an order; however, the main principal promised Titus Zeman that they would do their best to help him in everything that would serve to save the clergymen. Perhaps Titus himself understood this promise of our superiors as their order. It surprised us, and the main reason for the surprise was the indiscreet way of informing us. Many of the inhabitants in Podolíneč knew about this message and it was not necessary. I hadn't intended to leave before, because I wasn't, and I am not an adventurous person.

However, we understood it as a help to our fellow brothers and the Church, and therefore we accepted it and properly prepared for it. But we couldn't prepare fully because we went into a big uncertainty, not knowing the route, nor the time and we didn't know what to take with us. It was not a problem to escape from Podolíneč, because the guards were a bit indifferent. It wasn't a big deal to get outside the walls at night. Therefore, I started this journey with Jožko Pavlík. First, we asked Don Valábek to bless our risky action and then we set off during the night hours. We couldn't get on the train in Podolíneč as we assumed ŠtB had their spies there. That's why we walked to the nearest village; I think it was Spišská Sobota. We boarded a passenger train there and we went to Poprad. Jožko Pavlík had some friends in Poprad. We had to change our clothes. Although we had our connections in the parish office there, it was more than certain that every parish office, especially this one, was closely watched by police. We took a little rest and left for the station.

As we boarded the express train, we were unpleasantly surprised to see that a police patrol was boarding the train as well. We didn't have any IDs, because all documentation was taken from us during the transfer to Podolíneč. We only had substitute confirmation paper stating that our personal documents were taken away as part of the exchange. We have boarded different wagons each. The plan was to go to Šenkvice to the parish office and meet our very good acquaintance Alfonz Paulen. Titus Zeman was a chaplain in this parish after he was expelled from Trnava. He started again as a chaplain even after the "concentration of the clergy", and then started that charitable and above all adventurous journey. These transfers of his colleagues abroad forced him to hide. At this point, I would like to mention that Alfonz Paulen was our really good friend, and I think he planned to join Society of Don Bosco. Apparently, our meeting had very serious consequences for him – he was imprisoned. I want to emphasize that he was an ailing person, and prison didn't improve his health condition. He was also with us in prison in Ilava, then in Mírov. I also know that he had a severe kidney attack in Mírov. He suffered a lot, because even though the prison doctor tried to be very helpful, the flexibility of the medical system there was miserable.

The doctor, also a prisoner by the way, contacted the warden and explained that patient should be transferred to the hospital as soon as possible. However, the pickup was postponed until the morning. The doctor also intervened that Paulen was transferred to Olomouc hospital because it's much closer than Brno. I will also mention one more information. Titus Zeman was so zealous that somehow he managed to get to the infirmary and ensured Alfonz Paulen could get confession. He also told me that he accepted pastor Paulen into the Congregation before his death. The warden ordered that the patient would be taken to hospital in Brno. Alfonz Paulen died on the way. He is most likely buried in the Mírov cemetery.

The expressway does not stop in Šenkvice, so we went all the way to Bratislava. We had changed the plan a little. We had stopped at the house of Mr. Stano, who was a relative of Jožko Pavlík. He was our great friend back in Michalovce."

* "We were waiting in the house of Ing. Stano, when Titus and Fero Buzek came to visit. From the current point of view, I think it was not a good idea, but it happened. The group began to gather there, and, in the meantime, Mr. Stano fell ill and it was necessary to call a doctor. It was foolish to call a doctor in a house full of aforesaid guests. At the end, we called Dr. Štefan Jablonický, he was brother of our colleague Viliam Jablonický. He arrived, attended the patient, and diagnosed something not serious. But I must mention that everyone suffered the consequences - engineer Stano, doctor Jablonický, as well as Fero Buzek. (Doctor Štefan Jablonický was sentenced to 1 year and 6 months for the fact that he did not report about this situation to the authorities immediately. During his visit in Ing. Stano's apartment, he learnt that

the Roman Catholic priests Jozef Pavlík and Dr. Andrej Dermek escaped from concentration monastery, and they were hiding from the security authorities. He was also aware that they intended to illegally get to a hostile foreign country with help of Titus Zeman. He was also sentenced for procuring medicines for František Reves). Ing. Rudolf Stano was sentenced to 10 years in prison for high treason.”

* Cruel ways of treating prisoners:

The way to manipulate the prisoner's disposition led through his absolute physical and mental exhaustion. By combination of physical and psychological abuse, the investigators could suggest predetermined statements to the victims. There were many ways to exhaust the prisoner: Night waking. A permanently lit powerful light bulb shining into his eyes at night and disturbing his sleep. Strict instructions were made on how to sleep - on the back with hands on the blanket. During the winter, the prisoner suffered from the cold in poorly heated or completely unheated prison cells. If he put his hands under the blanket while sleeping, or changed his position, the prison guard would wake him up. He would order the prisoner to do push-ups, squats, or to walk around the cell. Guards would make noise during the night or take the prisoner for night interrogations. During frequent or very long interrogations several rested interrogators would take turns with an exhausted prisoner. The prisoner would be asked to stand during long interrogations, or during his stay in a cell or he would be ordered to walk without a break during the whole night. After 24 hours of constant standing, swelling will form on the legs, caused by the extravasation of fluid from the blood vessels. The skin becomes tight and very painful. The blood circulation is disturbed, the heartbeat accelerates and can lead to collapse. Functionality of kidneys is damaged, and urine is not produced. The prisoner is suffering from terrible thirst. If he drinks, the water is not excreted; however, it increases the swelling of the legs. If people are forced to stand for several days, they develop a delirious state - loss of orientation, they suffer from anxiety, delusions, and visual hallucinations.

I consider it necessary to emphasize some facts about pastor Alfonz Paulen:

* At the main hearing, when the chairman of the senate drew the attention of accused to the discrepancy between his current statement and the statement made before the ŠtB authorities, the accused stated:

I signed the minutes in front of the ŠtB, but please note that during the interrogation I was in such a mental state that I didn't know what I was doing. It was a common knowledge that all the prisoners were abused in the above-mentioned way. This also explains why Father Paulen was in the described mental state.

* Dr. Andrej Dermek said about Alfonz Paulen that "he was an ill person". However, the truth is that A. Paulen's health was good in his adulthood. He was ill in the age of 14-15 when he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He was treated in the High Tatras, and he returned cured. This is evidenced by the document:

* Findings of the official doctor from 18.4.1936, with the result: HEALTHY

* VI. Military service (According to the evidence book): Taken to the army.

Military training postponed until 1937 No. 239437/36-6

On October 1, 1937, he joined full-time military service No. 315964/6/37

On 28.II.1938 he ended full-time military service no. 63111/o/38

* He never had only one kidney, as it's stated for example in the article "Justín Beňuška"

* During the Imprisonment or pre-trial detention, the prisoners could be sentenced for 'correction' – the stay in small cell, dark, damp, and cold. The prisoners were brought to 'correction' facility to confess something they didn't commit, or for various types of offenses or "misdemeanors" (learning foreign languages, falling asleep at the table, possessing a prohibited pencil, providing extra food to a fellow prisoner, etc.) During the 'correction' time, the convict had a radically reduced food ration (he only got

food every third day) and slept only on a hard bed - sometimes made of concrete, sometimes with wooden pegs sticking out of it. He either had no blanket or he was allowed only one thin blanket, through which he could feel the cold of the concrete. The cold was worse than hunger. He had to walk during the day, sometimes even 16 hours a day. In the dark, the prisoner kept hitting the walls. It was not uncommon for a prisoner to fall seriously ill in the 'correction' facility, which was also the case of Alfonz Paulen. The cruelest death was in solitary confinement, in absolute abandonment.

On January 19, 1954, Titus Zeman was punished to starvation in a cold cellar of Mírov prison. His friends Don Štefan Sandtner and Alfonz Paulen, parish priest from Šenkvice, were also in 'correction' facility with him. Pastor Alfonz Paulen got a kidney colic, and he suffered a lot of pain. Both Titus Zeman and Štefan Sandtner called for help, but no one heard them. Eventually, the entire prison knew about the critical condition of Alfonz Paulen. Don Anton Kyselý remembers that the Czech Salesian - coadjutor, Alfonz Kováč, shouted at the top of his lungs that pastor Alfonz Paulen needed medical help. When the guards finally opened the door, Titus Zeman and Štefan Sandtner had to carry pastor Paulen in their arms to the prison hospital. Alfonz Paulen asked to be accepted into the Salesian society then. Don Ernest Macák heard the words spoken by Father Paulen in front of Titus Zeman and Štefan Sandtner. He said: "As a priest, I thought about joining Jesuits. However, because I suffered so much with Salesians in the prison, I am asking for acceptance into your congregation. I want to die as a Salesian, as a son of Don Bosco under the protection of Our Lady of Help".

* Perspective of Dr. Andrej Dermek's towards Titus Zeman's acceptance of Alfonz Paulen to the Congregation.

After 1960 - after the amnesty - the question was asked whether Alfonz Paulen was a member of SDB? It was questioned if Titus Zeman was authorized to take the vows of the dying Alfonz Paulen and accept him into the Congregation of the Salesians of Don Bosco under the protection of Our Lady of Help. "Alfonz Paulen has asked to take religious vows, he and Titus Zeman had talked about this before. Therefore, Titus accepted his vows. After we were released from prison, Titus verbally confirmed it to me."

"According to ecclesiastical legal regulations, one could question all sorts of things, but death did not ask about our regulations, it did not give us the time to question things. The jurisdiction of death is wider than our regulations... It actually was a martyr's death!"

* Don Štefan Šilhár, Salesian priest (1932-2021) said about Alfonz Paulen: "If there was no Alfonz Paulen, there would be no Titus Zeman either!"

* Pastor Jozef Miklis served as parish priest of Šenkvice from April 4, 1960, to July 18, 1971. In 1971 he was transferred to the parish of Slažany by direct order of the Communist Party authorities. He wrote about Alfonz Paulen: "Priest following the Heart of Jesus."

* Testimony of Mons. Justín Beňuška, who spent the last night with pastor Alfonz Paulen: During the night of April 9, 1954, Father Paulen was with priest Justín Beňuška, who also came to prison hospital as a result of the three-week long 'correction':

"Around nine thirty in the evening, the door of the hospital room where I was lying opened. Doctor Kochan, also a prisoner entered the room. He was accompanied by the prison guards. I believe Dr. Kochan had used to be the head of surgery, I think in Varnsdorf. He asked me to accompany the pastor Paulen during the night. I went into Mr. Paulen's room, and I spent the whole night with him. He suffered huge pain, but he endured it bravely. I called the head doctor twice. He tried twice to unblock patient's urination system, but it did not help. It was decided during the night that in the morning the patient will be taken to the hospital by ambulance.

Meanwhile we prayed. He confessed. Early morning sweat came out, he turned pale, and then he was relieved (before death). In the morning doctor Kochan came again. He showed me some bruises on his body - a very bad sign. He called an ambulance; we took him to it on a stretcher and said our last goodbyes. As I was told he died in the ambulance before arriving to the hospital.

The wish of pastor Alfonz Paulen was to be buried in Šenkvice. This wish was fulfilled on January 14, 1995. The funeral ceremony was performed by the bishop of the Trnava Diocese, H.E. Dominik Tóth. Official and organizational requirements were supported by Mgr. Anton Priebera, the parish priest of Šenkvice. The exhumation of the body remains was requested by Ľubor Paulen, the nephew of Alfonz Paulen. Alfonz Paulen is buried near to Church of St. Anna in Šenkvice.

Priest Alfonz Paulen died in Brno on April 10, 1954. He was 41 years old !!!



P.S. Mother - loving, kind, patient with infinitely great hope in her heart - Anna PAULENOVÁ. Just like the mother of Jesus to whom she devoted all her life, she also accompanied her son on his calvary, which he started in Šenkvice. In prayers and with pain in her heart, she patiently waited for his return. The tenth day of April in 1954 ended this anticipation. She had already said goodbye to her son during a long agonizing silence when she last visited him in prison. Suddenly she was standing over his grave in a foreign city, in a foreign cemetery, where he was buried. She was accompanied by her daughter in law and her 16-year-old grandson Ľubor. The dead man, two women and a boy were accompanied by armed police officers. The mother did not give up her hope until her death. Her next milestone was the release of her son's fellow prisoners from prison. It gave her hope and strength that she could learn from them about her martyred son. When they were released from custody in 1960, her hope took a final form - she would hear about her beloved son. However, her hopes were not fulfilled. On January 8, 1969, she learnt from the news that Titus Zeman died. She said: "I have nothing to wait for! Virgin Mary, Mother of God, all my life I was devoted to you, and I begged you to die on a day commemorating you." In silence, she died anointed on December 8, 1969. She had not heard from any co-prisoner of her son, for whom he sacrificed his life.

It was compiled from archives and registry documents by Ing. Ľubomíra Žáková