

C Prokes, Albert J., World War II Letters, 1942-1946
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INTRODUCTION

Letters received by Reverend Albert J. Prokes, administrator of St. John Nepomuk Catholic Church in St. Louis, Missouri, from parishioners serving in the armed forces during World War II.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Albert J. Prokes Letters were donated to the University of Missouri by Rev. Prokes on 14 June 1961 (Accession No. 265).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Albert J. Prokes was born on 25 May 1902 in St. Louis and was a member of St. John Nepomuk Church. He studied at Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis and was ordained on 6 June 1926. A week later he started as assistant pastor at St. John's and on 16 May 1942 he became administrator of that parish. One month later he organized a group of parishioners called "The Home Front" who provided aid and comfort to the men and women of the parish in the service by sending them care packages and the monthly issue of *The Messenger*, the church newspaper. Eventually, the service men and women would also receive the *St. Louis Register*, compliments of The Home Front. Almost all of the 202 men and women on the parish's honor roll wrote back to Father Prokes and the Home Front to thank them for these gifts and to keep the people at home informed about their experiences in the military. Most of them were of Czech descent and twenty-one had resided in the Hessoun Orphanage in Fenton, Missouri, before entering the service.

Prokes was named pastor of St. John's in 1954 and appointed monsignor in February 1971. He retired from St. John's in 1972 but stayed on as pastor emeritus and as administrator of Most Holy Trinity Parish. He retired from Most Holy Trinity in 1976 after 50 years of service to the Church.

Prokes also served as the grand chaplain of the First Central Bohemian Catholic Union from 1950 to 1964 and taught religion at Notre Dame High School from 1955 to 1962. He died on 23 December 1979.

The minerals and gemstones he collected during his lifetime, many of which were sent to him by his parishioners serving overseas during the war, were donated to St. Louis University and the Sisters of Notre Dame.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Albert J. Prokes World War II Letters consist of letters, postcards, and a few photographs, which are arranged alphabetically by correspondent. These items document the experiences of the young men and women of St. John Nepomuk Catholic Church during the Second World War.

For the most part, descriptions of combat are spoken of briefly and in general terms. The

strength of these letters, instead, lies in the description of everyday life in the military- from boot camp to maneuvers to the front. They wrote of the importance of mail call, the weather, recreation on and off base, and their impressions of the people and places they visited.

And, with surprising frankness and honesty, these men and women frequently discussed their faith, fears, and hopes for the future. The very personal issues of religion and faith figure prominently in their letters because they were writing to their parish priest. They include descriptions of the churches and church services they attended throughout the world as well as descriptions of the religious attitudes and beliefs of the people they met in these places.

These letters are also unique in that the correspondents are all from the same church and neighborhood in St. Louis. In fact, many are even from the same family, as there are letters from brothers, sisters, and cousins, in addition to old school mates.

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