



## Father William Lawrence Hart The Fighting Parson

William Lawrence Hart was born on June 21, 1865 in Newcastle-On-Tyne, England. He was educated at St. Michael's College in Toronto, Canada and then attended Le Grande Seminary School in Montreal. He founded the St. George School for Boys in Montreal which became a model for these types of places in the United States. On January 10, 1898 when he was 33 years old, he caught a Grand Trunk Railway train and immigrated to America. He first lived and worked in St Paul, Minnesota. He organized "The Catholic Mission of St. Anthony Park" in 1908. This new, planned suburb had no options to attend church other than taking the train to St. Paul or Minneapolis. By 1912 they had a church of their own.

He then moved near Camp Funston, Kansas where he was a volunteer Chaplain. When the war broke out, he tried to enlist but he was already fifty-two and he was rejected. Instead he volunteered with the Knights of Columbus to serve as the Chaplain for the Missouri National Guard 140<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 35<sup>th</sup> Division. He traveled to France with this Unit that was involved in the Battle of Meuse-Argonne, considered the deadliest campaign of World War I. 26,000 lost were lost there and 120,000 more were injured in the Argonne Forest over the next several days. When all of the officers in the 140th were either missing or dead, Father Hart took temporary command of the unit. He assigned men to take the officers place and moved their unit ahead. For his bravery he received accommodation and medals from the United States and France. It is said that he is the only civilian in the history of the world that ever commanded troops in action.

In 1919 he was assigned as the head pastor of All Saints Catholic Church in Lakeville, Minnesota. In 1931, the church burned to the ground and Father Hart was tasked to rebuild. He died on January 6, 1953 at the age of 87. He is buried at Resurrection Cemetery in Mendota Heights, Minnesota where his headstone reads "Reverend Father Hart, the Fighting Parson."