

## Father Paul Zahler

Inducted January 28, 2005

Oklahoma Soccer Association's first steps toward the organization it is today were guided by a Benedictine priest from St. Michael, Minnesota. An athlete and scholar, Father Paul Zahler came to Oklahoma in 1950 to attend St. Gregory's and play high school sports. He returned to Minnesota to complete his religious training and achieved his ordination in 1962. Attracted to the Shawnee school, Father returned to St. Gregory's where he began teaching Physical Education, Psychology, and Child Development. He obtained a master's degree and a Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma during his tenure at St. Gregory's.

By 1964, Father Paul noticed that large numbers of international students were attending St. Gregory's and many expressed a desire to play a game called football that was not like the American version of that game. Gathering thirty players from countries such as Cuba, Bolivia, Mexico, Italy, and Thailand, Father Paul organized a game against OBU. Soon, he was setting up matches against Southeastern State, Oklahoma City University, and Phillips University and having success with his coaching although he had never played the game. Within three years, a loosely organized soccer program was developing with adult teams from Tulsa, Ft. Sill, Oklahoma City, and OU, at Casady High School in Oklahoma City in 1967. The Oklahoma Soccer League was born bringing adult, junior college, university, and high school teams together to provide a structure for soccer development. Father Paul was elected president of the league and would serve in that position for the next nine years. Aware that the league needed to be a part of the organized soccer world, Father Paul pushed to join FIFA and adopt a set of policies. By 1968, that goal was achieved although the official name of the organization was changed to Oklahoma Soccer Football Association. Using the guidelines from FIFA, Father Paul influenced the organization by promoting the concepts of unlimited substitutions and training of coaches and officials. By 1975, youth soccer was growing in several cities and Father Paul recognized that including youth in the organization was important. Meeting with representatives from Green Country and others, in April it was agreed to form new bylaws and change the name to Oklahoma Soccer Association. Father Paul appointed the first Youth Commissioners, Don Jones for Green Country, Tom Kelly for Frontier Country, and Nick Mickulai for Red Carpet to assist in starting youth soccer development across the state. Father Paul promoted the idea of training soccer moms to be coaches and that every child should play at least half of the match. Before leaving office, Father Paul oversaw the creation of a full time OSA office in Tulsa. Today, Father Paul is Founder/Director of the National Institute on Developmental Delays, an internationally recognized training center based at St. Gregory's author of Experience Quotient and Human Development and continued supporter of a game he adopted nearly forty years ago.