

Polish 'Santa Claus' Aids Japan's Poor

By ROBERT S. ZYWICKI

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, at least in Japan. And to top things off, he has relatives in Bayonne.

The Japanese personage of Santa is a Polish Franciscan named Brother Zeno Zebrowski, an uncle of Chester F. Zebrowski of 228 Avenue F. The Japanese government recently expressed their belief in the jolly giver of gifts by conferring a medal of honor upon him at a special ceremony.

Brother Zeno exemplifies Santa Claus in every sense. Since 1930 he has labored in Japan to alleviate the distress and sufferings of the poor, war orphans, the destitute and the unfortunate. For years he waged a one-man campaign in Japan's larger cities for prompt relief for the destitute.

The name further fits him because of his jolly nature and long white beard. Villages throughout Japan, particularly around Tokyo where Brother Zeno resides, celebrate Christmas whenever their "Santa Claus" visits, bringing food, clothing, medicines, and other desperately needed supplies.

The 79-year-old Polish brother has also received the nicknames of "father of the orphans," "the ragpickers' friend," and "the Polish Father Flanagan of Japan."

During World War II, when other foreigners were restricted in their movements and operations, Brother Zeno was permitted freedom of travel throughout the country.

For years Brother Zeno was the Franciscan mission in Maximilian Kolbe, founder of associated with Blessed Japan. Father Kolbe returned to Poland before World War II, leaving Brother Zeno to carry on the relief and rehabilitation work in Japan, which included the training of Japanese for the religious order.

Following the outbreak of the war in Poland, Father Kolbe was arrested by the Germans and imprisoned in Auschwitz. While there voluntarily took the place of a fello Polish prisoner who was destined for



BROTHER SANTA CLAUS — Brother Zeno Zebrowski, (center with beard) uncle of Chester Zebrowski of 228 Avenue F, stands with his fellow Franciscans and some Japanese children outside his monastery near Tokyo. The Polish brother, known in Japan as Santa Claus, was recently presented an honorary award by the Japanese Government for his 40 years of service to the poor and destitute in that country.

cremation. The beatification proceedings of Father Kolbe were begun in 1948. His elevation to sainthood is expected to be promulgated at the Vatican this year.

In July, 1969, Father Zeno was presented with a special medal of honor known as the Fourth Order of the Sacred

Treasure by the Japanese Government. The award, given for 40 years of social work in that country, received widespread publicity in Japanese newspapers and world-wide publications.

Chester Zebrowski said he met his uncle while on a visit to Poland before the outbreak

of World War II, and remembers him well. He said he continues to keep in touch with Brother Zeno.

Zebrowski is a local businessman, member of the Bayonne Parking Authority and has been prominent in Bayonne's Polish political and cultural organizations.