

## John Stephen Eckert, O.F.M.Cap. (1869-1923)

Born on April 28, 1869, John Eckert begins his schooling in the neighboring school. When he is ready to go to high school, he expresses a desire to become a priest in some religious order and his parents send him to St. Jerome's College at Kitchener (Berlin in those days), where he remains for six years. Here he makes the acquaintance of two members of the Order of the Capuchins, who conduct a mission in Kitchener, and decides to join the Capuchins. In the spring of 1891 John enters the community and begins his novitiate in Detroit, taking the name of Frater Stephen.



In 1892 he leaves Detroit for St. Francis' Monastery, Milwaukee, where he does his four years of theology and is ordained priest on July 2, 1896. In the years that follow, Father Stephen is appointed to the Sacred Heart Parish, Yonkers, then to Our Lady of Angels, New York, and to other parishes, where he serves as a pastor and does missions and retreats, mixing with all sorts and conditions of men so as to bring them the light of Faith.

It is while he is in Yonkers that Father Stephen conceives the idea of working for the conversion of the African-Americans. He suggests to his Community that they open a mission for the African-Americans in the south, but the General of the Order in Rome doesn't believe the time opportune, and the matter is dropped. A few years later, when he is stationed at Our Lady of Angels Parish, New York, Father Stephen meets Bishop O'Gorman of Sierra Leone in Africa who encourages Father Stephen in his project.

In 1913 he is delighted to learn that he is given charge of St. Benedict, the Moor Mission for African-American Catholics in Milwaukee. Father Stephen is the first resident pastor of the mission, founded in 1886. He begins by visiting the homes of his poor people: attendance at mass increases, two hundred and forty-six people are baptized, and finally a boarding school is built. On one of his missionary journeys he catches a cold which develops into pneumonia, and on February 16, 1923, he dies. Many remarkable favors have been attributed to the intercession of Father Stephen.

**LINK:** <https://www.ofmcap.org/en/>