

Fr. William Joseph JOYCE 64 USE PR

* February 19, 1933 Somerville MA

+ February 24, 1997 Bethel Park, PA

He received his primary and secondary education at Catholic schools in his hometown, where he proved to be a good student. Among his minor achievements we may mention that he learned to blow the trumpet at the Cambridge Conservatory of Music for one year 1949-50.

In 1950 he went to Cornwells Height for three years of study, being usually at the top of his class. On August 22, 1954 he made his vows at Ridgefield, CT. Going on to Ferndale, Norwalk CT, for senior seminary studies, he earned a B.A. and a B.D. and was ordained there on June 4, 1959. While still in Ferndale, he showed his ability in journalism and began publishing articles, a feature that stood his in good stead later in life when a steady stream of articles flowed from his pen.

After his pastoral year at Duquesne University and some summer appointments, followed by a few months in the Washington community, he received his assignment as assistant at St. Peter's Claver Church, in Charleston SC, in late 1961. He worked very hard there, especially in the High School, youth's activities and as director of Neighborhood House in a slum area. The bishop also put his writing talent to good use by making him editor of the *Catholic Banner*, the diocesan newspaper. In his work he became also familiar with African-American leaders aiming at justice and equality for their people.

Having made many friends among the local clergy, he arrived at the conclusion that the stability of location enjoyed by these priests would be a great help to him in his efforts to become a good priest himself. So he petitioned the Holy See to allow him to join the diocesan clergy. The reply he received, however, was negative; he "should persevere in his vocation" as a religious order priest. It was a wise decision, for when in later years he went over the list of diocesan priests whom he had known well, he saw how many of them had given up their priesthood in the decade following Vatican Two.

When Pope Paul VI issued the *Humanae Vitae* encyclical in 1968, Fr. Joyce was one of the twenty-four priests in the diocese who endorsed the one hundred and seventy-nine American theologians and professors who took issue with the condemnation of artificial contraception. (Let us recall that the disagreement was worldwide among theologians and even among bishops and that even in the Vatican newspaper *Osservatore Romano* the document had been referred to as a provisional answer.) Feeling that Fr. Joyce had been very much behind the protest in his diocese, the bishop dismissed him from his editorial position, but allowed him to stay on in his pastoral function.

Meanwhile the St. Peter's Parish had been integrated with the White St. Patrick's Parish in 1967 and Fr. Joyce became even more active in social concerns of African-Americans. In April 1968 Black hospital workers went on strike, demanding better pay, an end to discrimination and a union contract. Three days of mass demonstration against the two largest hospitals were held and he became their leader. They had secured a permit for a five minute period of prayer in front of one hospital. Andrew Young, one of the Rev. Ralph Abernathy's chief lieutenants of the southern Christian leadership Council, also took part in the demonstrations and made certain that it remained a peaceful affair. When the five minutes were up, the chief of police ordered them to disperse, they refused to do so and forty-five of them were arrested, including Fr. Joyce.

The struggle continued for three months, but ended with the victory of the hospital workers; they secured the right to a union contract as members of AFL-CIO. In 1971 he went to Wilkes-Barre PA as guest speaker at the victory rally of hospital workers employed at Mercy Hospital. He delivered a rousing speech and received a standing ovation.

After some ten years in Charleston, he served briefly at Arlington VA, learned Spanish and then in 1972 was transferred to Puerto Rico, where he began five years of Hispanic ministry at San Juan Bautista parish in Orocovis. Here also he was just as much concerned with the social well-being of the people as with their spiritual life. He demonstrated that graphically one day when he forcefully arrested a young man who made it a habit of driving recklessly through congested areas, endangering lives, and sued him in court. Soon after the culprit, who had no license, did not have a car either.

It was with regret that the bishop saw him leave in 1977 and he returned to the mainland on a kind of sabbatical and to take care of a chronic affliction. He then became director of the Province's office of Justice and Peace and with his flair for writing produced a steady stream of papers dealing with the issues of the times.

Two years later he was posted to the mostly African-American Holy Family Parish in Inkster, MI. For five years he devoted himself there with his usual enthusiasm both to his parish duties and to the people of the town. In 1980 the State's House of Representatives passed a resolution paying tribute to him and his parish for being a vital force of Christian concern for the entire Inkster area.

He became Chief Chaplain of the Inkster Police, earning recognition for his meaningful contributions to humanity by his compassion, wisdom and strength from as far away as the Premier of Ontario at the International Conference of Police Chaplains. Both city and county once again commended him for his imaginative approach to social problems when in 1984 he was transferred to Pittsburgh as director of prenovitiate candidates at Laval House.

As this assignment left him enough free time, he also continued the graduate studies in communications which he had started at Marquette University and earned an M.A. in 1986 at Duquesne and then also a M.A. in liberal arts. His chronic

medical problem, however, flared up again and in January of the following year he entered St. Luke Institute in Suitland, MD. After his discharge he assumed part-time work as director of Bethel Park. As such, he edited the provincial newsletter.

When in 1988 the bishop of Charlotte NC requested an assistant for the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Monroe, he was chosen for the post as associate to its pastor, Fr. Edward Vilkauskas. Once again, he rendered very good service there and it was with great regret that the parishioners learned of his transfer to Holy Ghost Prep in Cornwells Heights PA, two years after his arrival: "We are all closer to Jesus for having known Fr. Bill Joyce."

His stay as a teacher at Cornwells did not last very long. He was then in his late 50s and the switch from parish work to teaching proved to be too strenuous. In June 1991 he returned to Bethel Park as assistant superior of the community. After the sudden death of Fr. Gary Burns in 1994 he still served for one year as associate pastor at Holy Spirit Parish in Millvale PA and then went back to Bethel Park.

There the doctors diagnosed cancer of the esophagus. When the offending organ was removed, it was too late; the cancer had already spread to other organs. He continued to remain cheerful and active until a few weeks before his death. The final article he wrote was "How the liturgy helps the bereaved," published in *The Priest* issue of November 1996. Death came to this talented and zealous priest a few days after his 64th birthday. Interment took place in his family cemetery plot in Tewksbury, MA.