

Fr. Francis Michael PHILBEN 75 USA TZA * July 17, 1918 Boston + January 20, 1994 Pittsburgh

He did his High School and College studies with the S.V.D., but withdrew from them while still in temporary vows. With their high recommendations he then entered the Spiritan novitiate in 1942 and made his vows at Ridgefield on September 8, 1943.

He had made very solid studies with the S.V.D., his college credits included not only philosophy, but also Greek, Hebrew, German, French, astronomy, biology, chemistry and geology. All he still needed was theology, which he did at Ferndale. He was ordained there on September 26, 1946.

One year later he sailed for the Kilimanjaro vicariate in Tanganyika. He taught there for two years at St. James Seminary in Kilema Chini and then served for four years as an assistant at Mengwe till 1954, but we have no details about his work. Returning to the U.S.A., he was retained as assistant mission procurator till in 1956 he went to Duquesne to organize and direct its newly-founded Institute of African Affairs.

In 1958 he served as an assistant at the African-American St. Mark's Parish in Harlem, NY, until one year later he assumed a similar position at Holy Spirit Parish, Opelousas, LA.

It was a tumultuous time in that state, for the issue of equal rights for African Americans was reaching the boiling point. He sided squarely with them and took part in Martin Luther King's Freedom Marches.

In 1962 we find him at Portsmouth, RI, as pastor, but one year later he went to St. Emma Military Academy for African-Americans in Powhatan, VA. He served there as superior and director of the school till its closing in 1972. He then returned to Portsmouth, but only to preside over its return to the diocesan clergy.

He was then already suffering from a throat affliction that required frequent dilatation of the esophagus by a Boston specialist. That was why he remained in Rhode Island as pastor in Little Compton. Soon cancer of the vocal cords added itself to his woes. Though the doctors could keep it in check, he lost the use of his voice and had to resign in 1975. He had done great work in Rhode Island and both bishop and provincial expressed their gratitude to him.

He was then assigned to Trinity hall at Duquesne University. Speech therapy and the use of a new electronic device made vocal communication possible again, so that he could become superior of the Washington, DC, house of the Congregation in 1977. Here also he presided over the closing of this community two years later. Transferred to Duquesne University, he served there in the Public Relations and the Alumni Office for several years doing excellent work. He was tireless in visiting the sick and consoling the bereaved families of alumni all over the Pittsburgh area.

Transferred to the Vincentian Home in late December 1993, he died there of congestive heart failure. Interment took place at the community cemetery of Saint Mary's, Sharpsburg.