

Fr. John Ridpath Schlicht 80 USA MEX

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At the age of 14, he entered, as a diocesan student, the Capuchin St. Fidelis Seminary, Herman, PA, to continue his high school studies and two years of college (1925-31). He proved to be a very good student, but one day he got into some kind of trouble with a teacher and was advised to leave the seminary.

For six years he then worked successfully in the business world and appeared to have a bright future there. But the desire to become a priest came back and he resolved to try again if he could find a place where God wanted him. Then in the summer of 1937 he got to know the Holy Ghost Fathers and what he read and heard convinced him that his vocation lay in their institute.

At the age of 26 he began his novitiate at Ridgefield, CT, where he could pronounce his first vows on October 21, 1938. Going to Ferndale, CT, for his senior studies, he was ordained a priest there June 18, 1943. His first assignment took him in 1944 to Duquesne University; he finished his graduate studies there and earned an M.A. For 16 years he taught history. In 1956 he turned his attention to the many ethnic groups in the city and in the state of Pennsylvania who wanted to preserve their culture and share it with others. He organized 18 different groups of them to produce an annual Pittsburgh Folk Festival in one common location. The first of these festivals was held in the now-demolished Syria Mosque. He remained the Festival's director until his teaching career ended in 1960.

In that year he switched to pastoral work, beginning with the small integrated St. Edward's parish in Powhatan, VA, and then one year later at St. John's, Tucson, AZ. Having made his apprenticeship in this form of ministry, he became in 1964 pastor of the African-American parish of Our Lady of Sorrows in Moreauville, LA, and four years later in New Iberia's similar parish of St. Edward in the same state. He took care not only of the spiritual wants of his people but also of their material needs. Appalled by the squalid living conditions of the poor, he secured a federal grant for the construction of 100 low-rent apartments with from two to four bedrooms on a 10-1/2 acre tract. It was a proud day for him when in 1971 he could cut the ribbon to the beautifully landscaped complex.

When in 1972 the Congregation opened a new mission in Mexico among the neglected Huasteca Indians, Father volunteered for it and began to study Spanish and, a little later, the Tenec language of some Indians. Some 60 stations were entrusted to the Spiritans there. Despite his age, he plunged into the strenuous work that kept him going day and night.

Deteriorating health forced him back to the States but, not wishing to spend his recuperation period in idleness, he served again in Louisiana in the African-American parish of St. James, Alexandria. Two years later he could return to Mexico.

In 1980 he realized that this type of work had become too much for him and accepted ministry at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Indio, CA, a Mexican American parish. But even that less-demanding task proved too much: "I no longer have the physical and mental energy" for a responsible role in a parish, he wrote to his Provincial Superior. When even the limited service of a chapel for college students in Natchitoches, LA, was beyond him, he went into retirement.

Following a car accident in 1985, he was moved to the Lafon nursing home in New Orleans. Two years later, at the request of his family he was transferred to the Vincentian Home in Pittsburgh, so that they could be closer to him. Suffering from a multitude of ailments, he died there of pneumonia. Interment took place in the Spiritan community plot of the St. Mary's, Sharpsburg, PA, cemetery. Throughout his life he earned high appreciation from his grateful superiors for his competence and zeal. He gave himself wholeheartedly to whatever task was assigned to him.