

FR. Joseph F. RENGERS 84 U.S.A.-East and-West
*September 23, 1913 Sharpsburg PA

+ March 3, 1998 Pittsburgh PA

He was born on September 23, 1913 in Sharpsburg, PA in a family that saw two daughters enter the convent and two sons become priests in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Young Joe went to the Spiritan junior seminary in Cornwells Heights, near Philadelphia, in 1927. He made a very good impression, but in 1930 he withdrew intending to remain a layman. Soon, however, he realized that he had made a mistake and obtained permission to return to Cornwells in 1931. After finishing two years of college, he went to Ridgefield CT, for his novitiate and made his vows there on August 15, 1936. He did two years of philosophy at Ferndale, the Spiritan Seminary in Norwalk CT, and then was sent for theology to the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1938. World War Two forced him to return to Ferndale in 1940 to complete his studies. He was ordained there on June 20, 1941 and graduated with a B.A.

His first appointment in 1942 sent him to St. Mary's Church in Detroit MI as an assistant. It was the beginning of a long list of over twenty assignments he would receive during his life. The high number, however, should not be seen as a sign that he was unsatisfactory or restless where he went. On the contrary, he was highly regarded everywhere and with his ready smile and exquisite kindness to all greatly beloved. The reason for his frequent assignments was that he was always ready to go without fuss or excuses when his superiors were faced with the task of finding someone in emergencies and being sure that he would be the right man for the job.

From Detroit he went to St. Emma Academy, Powhatan, Va in 1947 and three years later to Duquesne University in 1950 as chaplain; ten years later to Holy Ghost Parish in New Orleans, then in 1961 to St. Joseph's Parish in Conway AR, to Sacred Heart LA, in 1963 as pastor; to Ann Arbor MI, as a staff member of the Spiritan junior seminary in 1965, followed by another year at Duquesne University in 1966, two years at St. Francis de Sales High School in Chicago in 1967, assistant at St. Joseph's Bay City MI, in 1969; three months at Holy Family Parish in Inkster, MI in 1971; then back to Bay City until in 1975

he went again to Chicago for vocation work in the Midwest for four months. Later in the same year he was transferred to St. Christopher's Parish in Tiverton RI first as assistant and a few months later as pastor. In 1977 he became pastor at St. Anthony's Church, Millvale PA, until in 1982 he was sent back to St. Mary's Church in Detroit as associate pastor, followed by similar appointments to Sacred Heart Church, Emsworth PA in 1983 and St. Mary's in Sharpsburg PA in 1988. Officially retired in 1989 at St. Anthony's Church he continued to serve on a limited scale, including an interim appointment as pastor of St. Mary's, Sharpsburg, in 1992. Then back to St. Anthony's. He stayed there after the merger of this parish with St. Ann's when the name of the combined congregations became Holy Spirit Church. Meanwhile he had celebrated the golden jubilee of his priesthood in 1991, but continued his ministry, presiding at funerals and weddings, visiting the sick, etc.

"When the end comes," he used to say, "I hope it will come quickly." It did. On returning from bringing Communion to a sick person on March 2, 1998, his car struck a concrete barrier and then a utility pole. Presumably because the distance was only small, he had not fastened his seat belt. Severely wounded, he was taken to Allegheny General Hospital, where he died the following day. Internment took place in the Spiritan plot of the parish cemetery of St. Mary's, Sharpsburg, alongside the grave of his brother, Fr. George Rengers.