

Fr. William J. HOLMES 85 IRELAND USA

* April 2, 1909 Clashabee, Murrow, Co. Cork

+ March 8, 1995 Pittsburgh

Willie, as his family called him, was born on April 2, 1909, at Clashabee, Murrow, in the County of Cork, the son of a pious family. He received his primary education at local schools and then attended a business college in Murrow till 1927. He then migrated to the U.S.A. and worked in the accounting offices of the New York Central Railroad while also continuing his business administration studies in night school, both in the New York area and later in Cincinnati, where he was moved at an undetermined date.

By 1935 he felt called to give a different direction to his life and enrolled at St. Mary's College, Kentucky, to prepare himself for the priesthood, studying Latin and philosophy. In particular, he was moved by the need for priests ministering to people of African descent. This led him to consider joining the Spiritans. Armed with many glowing recommendations from priests who knew him, he applied and was accepted. "I am extremely pleased and happy," one of them wrote, "to testify to his religious and excellent character...He has always been a model youth--remarkable for his devotion to his studies and to every duty, especially his religious duties."

Paddy as he was universally known with the Congregation, would indeed constantly show those characteristics of faithfulness and dedication to the tasks assigned to him. He would also devote his life mainly to people of African descent, but not always in direct pastoral ministry. Much of his time would be taken up by keeping the financial administration in perfect form in a Congregation mainly devoted to the service of Blacks, whether in the U.S.A. or in Africa itself.

Professed on September 23, 1939 at Ridgefield, he graduated from the Spiritan Senior Seminary in Ferndale, Norwalk, CT, with a B.A. and a B.D. in 1942. He had been ordained there on June 20 of the preceding year.

Assigned temporarily to assist the Provincial Treasurer in the summer of 1942, he performed so well that he was at once named his assistant. Then, in 1954, he took charge of the Treasurer's office, with full responsibility for all the painstaking accuracy that function implied, and showing the local bursars throughout the many parishes the Spiritans then staffed among African-Americans and other people from East to West how to keep records, present budgets and account for expenses.

From 1959 to 1963 he was superior and director of the St. Emma Military Academy for African-Americans in Powhatan, VA—then, the only such academy in the U.S.A., with an enrollment of some 300 cadets from many states and abroad. Situated on an 1800 acre campus as a self-contained small town with its own electric plant, many workshops, a store, agricultural facilities, dairy and beef cattle, piggery, chicken farm, etc., plus numerous dwellings for personnel, the place was not an easy one to run, but he did it well.

Transferred to Ferndale in 1963, he served there as treasurer, and from 1967 on also as superior until in 1973 he was assigned as an assistant to the Holy Childhood's director. Three years later, he became again Provincial Treasurer for three years.

In 1979 we find him as an associate pastor at St. Mark's African-American parish in Harlem, New York. As such, he also ministered at Harlem Hospital, where he gave special attention to AIDS patients. His final assignment took him to a less hectic position as associate in St. Ann's, Millvale, PA.

His retirement years were spent in Bethel Park, PA. He could still celebrate the golden jubilee of his ordination there in 1991, but then the Parkinson disease from which he was suffering began to degenerate his mind and body. He died in a nearby hospital on March 8, 1995.