

In Memoriam

 redemptorists.net/departed-details.cfm

Fr. Charles Mallen: extraordinary mission preacher

Redemptorist Father Charles Mallen, an indefatigable mission preacher and retreat director, died Sunday, Aug. 30, at St. John Neumann Residence in Timonium, MD. He was 90 years old and had celebrated the 70th anniversary of his profession of vows earlier in the month. He died in his sleep, surrounded by confreres, including his brother, Father James Mallen; a longtime friend and co-worker, Sister Carmella De Costy, S.N.J.M.; and more than a half-dozen nieces and nephews.

The Wake Service is scheduled for Wednesday, Sept. 2, at 7 p.m. in the main chapel of Stella Maris, the Timonium nursing home in which the Redemptorists occupy a wing. The Funeral Mass will be offered there Thursday at 11 a.m.; burial will be Friday, Sept. 4, in the Redemptorist cemetery at Esopus, NY.

Father Mallen, born in Corona, NY, on June 8, 1919, was the first of four sons born to Charles and Elizabeth Temme Mallen. He was raised first in Our Lady of Sorrows Parish and then in Our Lady of the Cenacle Parish in Richmond Hill. He attended the local public elementary school, and graduated from Xavier High School.

Father Mallen noted in his curriculum vitae that the brothers' first contact with the Redemptorists came during August vacations in Saratoga Springs, NY, where a great-uncle was a racetrack supervisor. The two oldest boys, Charlie and Jim, got into the habit of serving the morning Mass at St. Clement Church, staffed by men of the Baltimore Province. (The third Father Charles Mallen, C.S.S.R. brother, Thomas, had died in infancy and the fourth, Joe, was still a toddler.) Eventually, the three brothers ended up studying at St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA. Father Charles made his first profession of vows in 1939 and his final profession in 1942. After completing his studies at Mount St. Alphonsus, he was ordained there to the priesthood on June 18, 1944. Unlike his brother, Father James, who was sent to serve in what is now the Province of San Juan, Father Charles was sent South to what is now the Vice-Province of Richmond. Both Redemptorists remained in their missionary areas, Father Charles serving largely as an itinerant parish mission preacher and Father James serving in pastoral work. The youngest brother and the Redemptorists came to an agreement that his vocation was not to the congregation. After serving in the U.S. armed forces, Joseph Mallen married; he and his wife, Joan, subsequently raised nine children. The first priestly assignment for Father Charles was to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Tampa, FL, where he served from 1945 to 1952. He was then assigned, from 1952 to 1954, to St. Gerard Church in Ft. Oglethorpe, GA. Afterwards, he became a full-time mission preacher, based at St. Alphonsus Villa in New Smyrna Beach, FL. In 1959, he continued his preaching ministry while based at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Opa-Locka, FL, until 1986. Richmond's Vice-Provincial Superior, Father Jerome Chavarria, said that except for the two years in Georgia and the five years at the Villa, "every place he went was named for Our Lady. They worked well together, those two."

Father Chavarria, who before becoming Vice-Provincial spent a lot of time on the road to preach missions, said: "Wherever you go throughout the South, no matter how out-of-the-way the place, if you see a picture of Perpetual Help, you know that Father Charlie was there to preach. As a missionary, he holds the record for the most parish missions preached in the South." Father James Mallen pointed out that his brother also preached missions in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Father Mallen was unmatched in "love of and enthusiasm for the priesthood," Father Chavarria added. "He was a spiritual director for many, many priests, a wonderful shepherd, a strong leader. He was magic around the pulpit and he left a wonderful legacy."

The gift of his priesthood was recognized beyond his congregation. Archbishop Edward McCarthy of Miami appointed Father Mallen to head his then newly-established Ministry to Priests Office. He continued in that service until the Diocese of Venice was formed in 1984 and a longtime friend, Bishop (now Emeritus) John Nevins, asked him to serve as Vicar of Religious and director of continuing education for clergy. He also asked

him to establish a diocesan retreat center in Venice.

With nothing but a plot of land to begin with, Father Mallen and Sister Carmella, who had served as principal of Our Lady of Perpetual Help School in Opa-Locka, set about creating a retreat center named, of course, in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Ground-breaking was held in 1995 and the center opened the following year with two villas and a conference center. The St. Joseph Chapel was added in 2000.

"He had the vision and we partnered with him; his spirit will prevail there," said Sister Carmella. "We're going to keep the mission going and keep the dream alive" with the support of lay volunteers who refer to themselves as "Father Charlie's Angels," she added.

Father Mallen also was devoted to promoting vocations and, for many years, worked with Father James Dowds and Father Philip Dabney in presenting discernment retreats, some for high school and college students, and some for men already established in a career who still felt drawn toward religious life. "He was a distinguished and classy priest and religious," said Father Dowds. "He was the priest with the cheerful face and, on that horrible weekend when a young man died, he was our rock -- for the staff and retreatants." Father Dabney noted that Father Mallen "could speak to anybody, and his talks were always right on the money. The older men were impressed and drawn to the Church because of how he lived his vocation; and he had a wonderful way of weaving stories to deliver the message to the younger ones. He prepared his talks well and you could tell he wasn't pulling out old stuff and rehashing it. He showed so much empathy in listening to them (the retreatants) and he would open doors for them. He was very encouraging of their vocations."

To Father James Mallen, "he was a great brother and my best friend. Every year we'd take our vacations together." He appreciated his brother offering so many guided retreats for priests, to which he would invite theologians to give talks. "He himself was a great preacher and storyteller," he added. "He always had a great love for the Blessed Sacrament."

After suffering the first of two strokes, Father Charles was assigned to St. John Neumann Residence, then in Saratoga Springs, NY, in 2007. He remained with that community when the residents were moved to their new location in Timonium earlier this year.

Benedictine Sister Joella Szatkowska, who got to know Father Mallen in Saratoga Springs, said she always knew where to look for him: "He was such a prayerful man. He was usually in the chapel, praying the rosary or with his breviary, or just sitting quietly with the Blessed Sacrament." Although he suffered from crippling arthritis and needed a wheelchair to get around, and also from pulmonary heart disease and the aftermaths of the strokes, "whatever came, he accepted, he embraced it," Sister Joella said. It was hard for a man who had done so much to become inactive, but he embraced that too, she added. "He was a very good man, a very good priest and member of the congregation," she said.

In addition to his brother, Father Mallen is survived by his widowed and now remarried sister-in-law, Joan McGuire; nine nieces and nephews and 20 great-nieces and -nephews.