

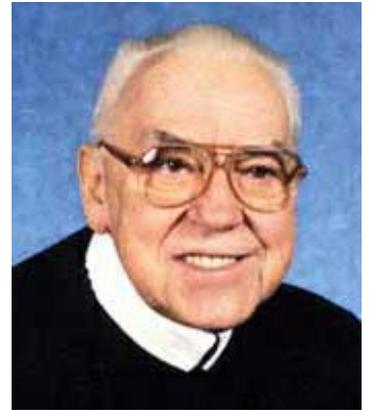
In Memoriam

Rev. Charles Fehrenbach, C.Ss.R., memorable mentor dies at 96

Redemptorist Father Charles Fehrenbach, who taught and mentored many of the confreres of the Baltimore Province, died February 6 at St. John Neumann Residence in Saratoga Springs. At 96, he was the most senior confrere of the Province.

A wake service will be held Thursday, February 9, at St. Peter the Apostle Church in his native Philadelphia. The Funeral Mass will be offered there Friday at 10 a.m., with Father John McGowan as homilist.

"He was a father to so many of us," Father McGowan said. "He was well known and loved by us and also by the diocesan priests of Erie." His was the longest line of penitents waiting to speak to him in confession at St. Mary's Seminary in North East, PA, and he was the one who was always interested in your family news and remembered to ask about a sick relative, Father McGowan added.



Father Fehrenbach, the son of Charles and Anna Briem Fehrenbach, was born in Philadelphia May 17, 1909, the oldest of four children. He announced to his parents when he was in kindergarten that he was going to be a priest and he never wavered from that determination ~ not even when he led his siblings in a religious procession through their house and the broom he hoisted in place of a banner swung out of his grip and crashed into the dining room chandelier.

After finishing his grammar school studies at St. Boniface School, he was accepted at St. Mary's Seminary and continued at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY. He later earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in German Language and Literature from The Catholic University of America. He made his first profession of vows in 1930 and his final profession in 1933; he was ordained to the priesthood June 23, 1935.

After completing his studies, Father Fehrenbach was assigned to St. Mary's Seminary, where he served as registrar and taught from 1942-1959. It was there that his love for his own vocation began to stamp itself on the youngsters just beginning their preparation. Father Patrick McGarrity, who was 13 when he met Father Fehrenbach, recalled that the priest studied the photographs of each entering student so as to be able to greet him by name on the first day. Father Fehrenbach was very popular both as a professor and a confessor, Father McGarrity said. "He was a human magnet - intelligent, funny, serious, wise and the cleverness of his Latin prefaces...!"

Father Carl Hoegerl, one of the first of "the Bach boys" as the proteges were called, reminisced about those Latin prefaces too. Combining ecclesiastical Latin and made-up English-Latin words, Father Fehrenbach could produce them on request at Redemptorist gatherings, especially when a witty tribute was appropriate.

"He was understanding and sympathetic and gave good advice," Father Hoegerl said. "He never talked down to you and he was genuinely interested in you." Father Fehrenbach continued his mentoring long beyond a confrere's formative years, being always available to listen over the phone or reply to a letter. "He was my spiritual director for 42 years," Father Hoegerl said.

Father Fehrenbach also made himself available for special projects of the Congregation, providing help with translating a critical edition of the works of St. Alphonsus and an analytical index for the Redemptorist Constitutions and Statutes.

While he loved teaching and formation work - he was named rector of Holy Redeemer College in 1970 - he also took to parish ministry. In 1959, he was appointed to Holy Redeemer Church in Manhattan. He served as rector at

St. Michael Church in Baltimore (1964-70) and at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Manhattan (1972-1978). His next assignment was to St. Peter the Apostle Church and St. John Neumann Shrine in Philadelphia (1978-95).

One of his nieces, I.H.M. Sister Marian Christi, said that her uncle loved the whole of his priestly ministry and enjoyed being at the shrine especially because of his love for the saint and the opportunity to meet so many pilgrims. "He loved meeting people. When my grandmother would send him to the deli, it would take him two hours to come back. He would have someone's whole life story in the first half-hour of meeting," she said. When the nieces and nephews were small, Father Fehrenbach's schedule at St. Mary's fit in with their school holidays, she said, and he would spend a lot of time with the children, taking them to the zoo or a playground, making up songs for them and playing the piano for family songfests. "He was very present for us," she said. When Sister Marian Christi made her profession of vows, Father Fehrenbach spoke at the Mass and when other nieces and nephews got married, he officiated at the weddings. He was there, too, to baptize the grand-nieces and grandnephews.

"He loved to be in the middle of a crowd," said Father John Hamrogue, another confrere who met him at St. Mary's Seminary. He not only enjoyed time with his family, but also with the priests of the Diocese of Erie, where he was well known and appreciated for helping out with Masses, preaching, and teaching special Lenten courses in the parishes, Father Hamrogue said. "With the community, he was also a great celebrant for Redemptorist life and traditions; he became part of the tradition himself. He was very sociable, an outgoing person, leading us in the old traditional songs," Father Hamrogue added.

Father Fehrenbach served as eulogist for many of the confreres and preached nearly 100 special homilies for professions, jubilees, parish anniversaries and funerals.

His gift for being present to people continued as his own health began to fail and he moved to St. John Neumann Residence in 1995. Father Arthur Gildea, who served for two terms as rector there, said it was particularly edifying to see him with his ailing friend from childhood, the late Father John Guiniven. "I'd watch him standing at the side of his buddy and praying at his bedside. He was a kindly, gracious man and helpful to everybody," Father Gildea said. Father Fehrenbach, who was "a consummate leader of conversation and festivities," lost his hearing completely about three years ago. Still, Father Gildea said, he was always present at Mass and novena devotions. "You could see in his eyes he was yearning to be more active, but then there was a peaceful acceptance," Father Gildea added.

"He was a very prayerful man, a great man to have in community," Father McGowan, noted. "Everybody has a story about him. He was a wonderful fellow and we're going to miss him. He was always there."

Father Fehrenbach is survived by a sister, Mrs. Madeline King of Philadelphia, and several nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.