

Saint Joseph Church

P.O. Box 189

Muskogee, Oklahoma 74402

(918)687-1351

July 12, 2010

Obituary for Rev. Herman J. Foken (1916-2010)

Fr. Herman Joseph Foken was called to eternal life on Sunday, July 11, at the age of 93. Known as a man of few words, a compassionate heart, a gifted photographer and a strong supporter of Catholic schools, he brought the gift of Jesus Christ to others for more than 67 years as a Catholic priest.

Born on September 2, 1916, in Cincinnati, Ohio, he was the third of nine children of working class German immigrant parents, William Foken and Magdalena (Hilsendgen) Foken. Two of the children married and had their own families. Another remained single and fourth died in infancy. The five other children entered into religious vocations; three of the daughters became Sisters of Charity, one son became a brother in the Congregation of the Holy Cross; and Herman became a priest. In Cincinnati he attended St. William grade school and Edler High School and received a Bachelor of Arts from St. Gregory Seminary.

His original intent was to be a foreign missionary with the Maryknoll Fathers. While a student at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Norwood, Ohio, he was recruited to join the Glenmary Home Missioners, which focused on evangelization in the United States.

Ordained a priest on April 17, 1943, he first served as a priest in rural Ohio. Fr. Foken came to Oklahoma in 1946 and was the associate pastor of St. Joseph church in Tonkawa. The following year he left Glenmary to become a priest in what was then the Diocese of Oklahoma City-Tulsa, and was sent to Holy Cross church in Wagoner. From 1947 to 1962 he dedicated his life to building up the Catholic presence in a five county area. Coming to Muskogee in 1951 as pastor of the Church of the Assumption and assisted by only one or two other priests he also served the churches in Wagoner, Webber Falls, Haskell, and the Porum and Crekola missions in Muskogee County. During this time he was the founding pastor of St. Brigid church in Tahlequah (1948), St. Francis Xavier church in Sallisaw (1953) and St. John church in Cookson (1959). In a period before an interstate highway system, he drove an estimated 35,000 miles a year to serve the people in these locations.

He was the pastor of Corpus Christi church in Oklahoma City from 1962 to 1971 where he shepherded the racial integration of the congregation and its school. From 1971 to 1981 he was the pastor of St. John church in McAlester. There he worked with the area priests and laypeople in the Kiamichi Missions ministry. Returning to Muskogee in 1981, he was the pastor of Assumption and Sacred Heart churches and over saw their joining together to form St. Joseph church in 1992. He played an active role in the Cursillo retreat movement, Beginning Experience of widowed and divorced Catholics, prison ministry, and ecumenical work with other churches. He was the pastor of St. Joseph until

his retirement in 1995 and remained pastor emeritus of the church until his death on Sunday. Since 2002 he had lived at the Franciscan Villa Retirement Center in Broken Arrow.

His parents and siblings William Jr., Bro. Vincent, Ralph, Betty, Sr. Martha Louise and Sr. Dolores, preceded him in death. He is survived by a brother, Joseph, and a sister, Sr. Clare, both of Cincinnati; his nephews Vincent Foken of Amberly, Ohio; Bro. Edward Foken, CSC, of Notre Dame, Indiana; Jim Foken of Eagleville, Tennessee; and Richard, Robert and Thomas Gutekunst, all of Cincinnati; as well as the parishioners of St. Joseph church in Muskogee, and his brother priests of the Diocese of Tulsa.

A special thanks to the administration, staff, doctors and nurses of the Franciscan Villa in Broken Arrow, St. John Medical Center and to the Good Shepherd Hospice for their compassionate care of Fr. Foken.

A vigil service will be held on Wednesday, July 14, at 7:00pm at St. Joseph church in Muskogee. A reception will be held afterwards. The funeral Mass will be on Thursday, July 15, at 11:00am, also at St. Joseph. The burial will be at Greenhill Cemetery in Muskogee.

In place of flowers, etc., donations in memory of Fr. Herman Foken can be made to St. Joseph Catholic School, 323 North Virginia, Muskogee, Oklahoma, 74403.