

Remembering Father Joseph Plummer



The first of four children, Father Joseph Richard Plummer was born on November 14, 1955 at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Houston, Texas. For a short time the Plummers lived in Houston's Fifth Ward^[1] before moving to Kashmere Gardens^[2].

Joe, known by his family and friends as "Ricky", attended Our Mother of Mercy Parish and elementary school. Later his home parish was St. Francis of Assisi where he was an altar boy. He was a cub scout for a short time. His high school years were at St. Pius X High School located near W. Tidwell Road and N. Shepherd Drive.

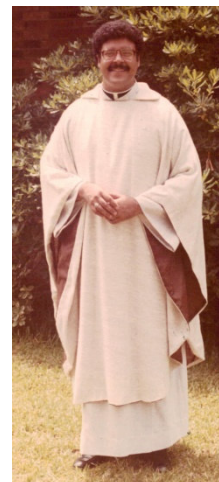
In 1971 the Plummers moved to Oak Ridge located northeast of I-45 and Rayford Road. The Plummer's home parish became St. Edward's on Spring Stuebner Road. Joe still wanted to attend St. Pius instead of the local high school. He convinced his parents to allow him to do so and he drove his mother's new Buick Electra every school day. This was their only car at the time.

During his years at St. Pius Joe learned to play the drums and was active in St. Pius' concert band. This was the period in Joe's life when he learned to cook. He became fairly famous for his great cooking.

After graduating from Pt. Pius in 1974, Joe spent seven years studying at St. Mary's Seminary and obtained a degree from St. Thomas University. Joe was an avid volunteer and actively coordinated many of the diocesan youth ministries. He participated in the Explorer '77 program at the seminary.

Fr. Joe was ordained on May 8, 1982 and celebrated his first Mass at his home parish, St. Edwards. His first assignment was associate pastor at St. Benedict the Abbot Parish located near Almeda Road and the South Sam Houston Tollway.

Beginning in 1984, Fr. Joe's second assignment was Parochial Vicar at Christ the Good Shepherd Church where he spent the next three years. Joe was very happy there and endeared himself to everyone who interacted with him. One of his duties was spiritual advisor to CGS's two youth groups. He loved the youth and attended every activity and sports event he could. He traveled a lot to many countries including to Jerusalem and to Rome to meet Pope John Paul II.



He was asked by Bishop Joseph Fiorenza to become a pastor at another parish. Fr. Joe always told the Bishop that he was happy where he was. He felt that becoming a pastor

with all of its associated administrative duties would distance him from direct contact with the parishioners.

Bishop Fiorenza was patient with Fr. Joe and acquiesced to his wishes. However, in late 1987, the Bishop ordered Fr. Joe to become pastor of St. Philip Neri Parish located on Martin Luther King Drive near the South Freeway and Airport Boulevard. So in early 1988, Fr. Joe took on his first pastoral duties at St. Philip Neri. This was an extremely destitute parish and the parishioners were leaving in droves to find more prosperous parishes. Bishop Fiorenza felt that Fr. Joe was the priest to reverse the trend.

St. Philip Neri parish was so poor that they could not afford to pay their pastor. They fed and housed him. The rectory's carpet had to be removed and the concrete floors were left bare. Once some friends were dining with Fr. Joe and noticed his socks showing through his soleless shoes. They immediately took him to a store and bought him new shoes.

Fr. Joe persevered and parishioners began to return to the parish. The parish held a bazaar and raised about \$25,000, which was quite a lot for this poor parish. Fr. Joe was elated and felt that the parish was changing for the better.

After about eight months Fr. Joe became ill. Whether he was ill before his trip to San Francisco or became ill during the trip was never ascertained. It was an illness from which he never recovered. Fr. Joseph Plummer returned home to his Lord and Savior on October 30, 1988, just short of his 33rd birthday.

At Christ the Good Shepherd parish a memorial service was held. The church sanctuary was lined with the candleholders we use for Christmas. There must have been about 1200 adults and youth in attendance as there was standing room only. The service and eulogy were very moving.

In 1992, when Council 10872 was formed, the council was dedicated to Fr. Joseph Plummer in loving memory of the priest who endeared himself into the hearts of so many who knew him.

[¹]The Fifth Ward is considered a historical district just northeast of downtown Houston. It is bounded by the Buffalo Bayou, Jensen Drive, Liberty Road and Lockwood Drive.

[²]Kashmere Gardens is situated northeast of Loop 610 and Highway 59 between an industrial area and a rail corridor.

Author: Brother Jim Johnson, based on conversations with Cliff "Black" and Irma Plummer, Fr. Plummer's parents

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