

Fr. Siegfried O. ECKERT 85 GERMANY NGA USA

* May 8, 1909 Honau, Baden

+ August 24, 1994 Pittsburgh

The youngest of eight children born to his parents, he entered the Congregation's junior seminary at nearby Donaueschingen, near the Swiss border, in 1921 and studied at the local gymnasium. On April 12, 1932 he made his vows at Heimbach and in the final year of his theology studies at Knechtsteden he was ordained there on April 4, 1937.

Assigned at first to Makurdi in the Benue region of Nigeria, he was attached to the Onitsha vicariate early in 1940 because this bishop wanted to make use of his expert musical talents in his cathedral.

Then World War Two began in earnest and the British authorities rounded up all German nationals in Nigeria. He and over thirty confreres were first interned locally. In November 1940 they were added to some 1,500 other German prisoners of war, most of them sailors and soldiers, and sent on a one month long voyage across the Atlantic to internment camps in Jamaica.

Despite all efforts of Fr. George Collins, then the U.S.A. Provincial, they remained behind barbed wire until January 1947. Fr. Collins then at last was able to receive nineteen of them in the U.S.A. They proved to be hard-working and zealous confreres, who were a credit to the splendid formation they had received in the German Province.

In April 1947 Siegfried was appointed assistant pastor at Notre Dame, Chippewa Falls, WI. He served there with great distinction until 1960. His musical expertise made him much sought after to enhance liturgical celebrations and organ concerts. When this parish was abruptly taken away by the diocese, he went to St. Joseph's, Bay City, MI, becoming its pastor in 1969. He served there for fifteen years and earned the bishop's gratitude for his selfless dedication to that parish.

In 1975 he was assigned to the African-American Holy Family Parish, Inkster, MI. He ministered there with his usual zeal "over and above the call of duty," satisfying not only his parishioners, but also earning the appreciation of the City of Inkster as "an outstanding citizen" who "served as an inspiration" to the people.

Three years later he became pastor of St. Mary's, Sharpsburg, PA. By then he was seventy-one years old and no longer in the best of health. In 1980 he had to restrict his activity to a convent chaplaincy in Danville, PA, while still helping out as much as he could in neighboring parishes. Once more, he was congratulated and thanked by the bishop for "his marvelous service and brotherly assistance."

As his infirmities increased, he retired in 1987 to Bethel Park, PA. He could still travel to Germany to celebrate his golden jubilee in that year. After several operations, including a quintuple coronary bypass and an amputation, he died of a heart attack and diabetes. His confrere Fr. Henry Lemmens was devotedly with him every day throughout the two weeks of his final illness. Interment took place at the Sharpsburg community cemetery.

Siegfried left behind the reputation of being "one of our finest priests," a congenial confrere and a joy to have around. During all these years no one ever saw him angry and never did his wit make people angry at him.