

Father Joe Chapter 1 – Appointment In his own words...

I was ordained into the priesthood in 1945. I spent my first five years as an assistant pastor at large parishes in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1953, I was sent to a little village 40 miles east of Cincinnati. The village, and its surrounding area, had been settled by Irish and French Catholics; and the area was thriving as a Catholic community. I was to help the aging pastor at the church, and also be the chaplain at the boys' boarding school on the edge of the village.

On my first morning there, I went over to the academy and offered Mass. After Mass, as I was eating breakfast, Sister Superior came in and said that she had bad news. We were going to shut down the academy. I looked downcast and said, "Sister, that is terrible news." But inwardly, I was saying, "Gloria! Alleluia!" I thought back to Cincinnati I go, but that was not to be. God had other plans for me.

Archbishop Alter had asked me to stay there to help the pastor at the Valley Village Church and also to administer three mission churches in the surrounding area. To the south and east there was an area of about 130 square miles in which only about one percent of the people were Catholic. There was a little church there, and an old three-room farm house – literally falling down. This was located on 40 acres of farmland on the edge of the Village. About 100 men, women and children would attend Mass on Sunday. To the west was an area of about 100 square miles with a small Catholic church located at a crossroad with an old cemetery nearby and about 125 people attended Sunday Mass. To the north was about 50 square miles with an eyesore brick church with a cemetery next to it. About 150 people attended Sunday Mass.

When I was growing up, I always lived in a large parish and attended Catholic schools. Even as a seminarian I always thought that missionary work was traveling to a foreign land to preach the good news of the Gospel and to build churches. I had no idea there were areas in our own country, in the United States, large areas in which there was no priest to plant, *cultivate* or nourish the faith. God's people are scattered around like that, and they need shepherding as well as do the large flocks in the cities. I was happy with the appointment, excited by the challenge, and ready to do the work of the Lord.

I began to make my rounds on Sundays. I would leave the rectory and travel several miles to a mission, open up the place and set up for Mass. I would hear anyone who wanted to go to confession. I would offer Mass, talk with the people and lock up. I would then take off toward another mission and do the same thing. I went off to a third church, and after the last Mass, somebody usually invited me to dinner. It was refreshing to sit down with parents and children at the table, usually with pan-fried chicken and lots of gravy. It was *very* rewarding.

It was usually mid-afternoon when I returned to the rectory, but I would have enough energy left to drive to Cincinnati and spend the evening with my family. On my way back, I would stop at Tiny's in Milford to get a Popsicle to keep me awake during the last country miles. Little did I know that I would be doing this for 14 years! These *proved* to be the best years of my priesthood.

Now I am in my 84th year of life, and in my 57th year in the priesthood. I am retired from administration. I still help with Masses at the little churches in the general area of these missions and often meet many of my old parishioners. They bring back many memories of those 14 years.

I thought I would jot down some of my experiences and share them with others. Maybe it will help the people to know how good God was to me and how he was a good shepherd to his people growing up in the wilderness, a barren land, without benefit of Catholic neighbors, and choice times to attend Sunday Mass, Catholic schools or a priest at their call. Maybe it would help the Catholics in the city to know how their brothers and sisters live the same faith in the deserts of our own diocese.