

Long Biography of Kenard Joseph

Kenard Joseph was born on July 22, 1953. He was the middle of the five children of Marguerite and Walter Tuzeneu. It really seemed fitting that being the middle child it was he that decided to become a priest. Was it that being a middle child he was able to have the perspective of all sides and that led him on into the priesthood? The year that he was born was also the year that the family moved into their house on 42 Fulton Avenue in West Long Branch.

Growing up it seemed like he was a very happy child. It wasn't that he was a class clown, but he had a few incidences that had to make you chuckle. Two of them come to mind. One time when he was in first grade he got stuck in his seat at his desk. The class was lining up to go out at recess. His teacher looked around and asked, "Where is Kenny?" Kenard Joseph stood up at his desk with the chair stuck around his waist. Apparently, he had put his coat on and then slipped between the rungs of the back of the chair getting the chair stuck as he had his coat on. Then there was the time in seventh grade, most likely, when one evening for some evening function the class was back at school. The class was in their classroom waiting for the time to come onto the stage in the school auditorium. He was buying his time by doing parallel bar 'gymnastics' between two desks and slipped and hit his nose on the floor. It isn't certain whether he got a bloody nose or not. To this day he still has kind of a crooked or bent nose due to that stunt. He never went to the doctor, but undoubtedly he might have broken the nose and not realized it. Looking back on the incident later as he was entering the seminary for the priesthood, he remarked that it was God's way of taking him from the dating world and into the seminary. To earn extra money for college his first and only job was mowing lawns with his younger brother, Paul Leon. They started cutting lawns in high school together and all told had about 20 yards that they were maintaining at the height of their landscaping career.

Kenard Joseph attended Monmouth College, now Monmouth University, on a full trustee scholarship. He along with his two younger siblings, Paul Leon and Jean Anne, all attended on a full trustee scholarship. An interesting side note was that he commuted to classes by bike as Monmouth was only a mile from the house. He got his BA in philosophy before attending St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. Initially he was a math major at Monmouth, but switched to philosophy as it was a better preparation for entry into the seminary. He first had thoughts of becoming a priest back in elementary school, and the desire continued to persist all through high school. Upon being ordained a priest for the Diocese of Trenton in 1979, he received his Masters in Sacred Theology. It was also in 1979 just six months before being ordained a priest that his Mom died so she unfortunately did not get to see him ordained as a priest. However, she did see him ordained as a Deacon a year before at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. A footnote to Kenard Joseph's ordination to the priesthood was that his Mom was

a devout Catholic and his Dad, who was Baptist, did not become Catholic until the age of 87. Kenard Joseph was ordained to the priesthood on December 1, 1979 by the late Bishop George Ahr in St. Mary's Cathedral in Trenton.

He said that his favorite moment in the seminary was one of the times some of the family visited him in his stay in the seminary. Kenard Joseph was showing them around the seminary and they happened to come to the basement. His Dad saw some tire tracks on the floor and some car tires along the wall of the basement. His Dad said he knew what they did for fun and proceeded to roll a tire across the basement floor. At that precise moment one of the professors walked around the corner and caught his Dad rolling car tires across the basement floor. You have to know his Dad to understand the humor of the situation. Kenard Joseph's Dad didn't break any laws, but he was one that kind of bent the rules or circumvented the rules. So his Dad was doing what he always did when the professor caught him rolling the tires.

There were two other incidences about Kenard Joseph around his time in the seminary that kind of reflect his personality. As a priest he has a gift for preaching homilies as well as a great compassion and understanding of his congregation flock. However, his organizational skills are not necessarily lacking, but can stand some improvement. It's not that he is not organized; it is just not his strength.

One incident reflects his approach to his organizational skills. This happened in regards to him balancing his checkbook. He took a casual approach to recording his postings in the check register. He got his checking account statement and asked his Mom to help him reconcile the statement. After some time trying to make sense of what he recorded, his Mom had to give up and told Kenard Joseph that go with what the bank has as its ending balance and go forward from there. Apparently, he hadn't recorded everything that he wrote checks out for or subtracted every check amount from the totals. So to this day James Anthony kind of teases him about that and if he needs help balancing his checkbook.

The other incidence kind of reflects his compassion for people. One Christmas his Mom decided that Kenard Joseph should have a nice bathroom robe for the seminary as the dorm rooms and the bathrooms were at opposite end of the hall, and his Mom thought it would keep him warm walking back from the bathroom down the long, cold hallway. After Christmas and Kenard Joseph went back to the seminary, his Mom never heard him mention that he used the 'robe', so as not to upset his Mom one weekend trip back home in the winter, Kenard Joseph stopped the car when he was almost home, put on the bathroom robe, and when he got home walked in the front door wearing the 'robe' showing that he did use the robe and how great it was.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Kenard Joseph was an associate pastor, now called parochial vicar, at Star of the Sea Church in Long Branch (now called Christ the King) for six years. During this first assignment, his main duty was as hospital chaplain to Monmouth Medical Center. Then in 1986 he was transferred to St. Mary's of the Lake in Lakewood where he was also a parochial vicar, and remained there for another six years. On April 26, 1992 he was installed as pastor of St. Mary's of Barnegat and St. Mary's of the Pines in Manahawkin. He has been there ever since.

Kenard Joseph felt blessed to be the pastor of such a vibrant and growing parish with a wonderful community spirit. Since coming to St. Mary's, the parishioners have started Ken's Kitchen, a St. Vincent de Paul Society, and built a Garden of Peace behind the church, along with a beautiful chapel for Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Along with four other parishes, St. Mary's was involved in the establishment and construction of All Saints Regional Catholic School, now called St. Mary's Academy. In March 2007 he was able to realize the dream of building a new beautiful church, St. Mary of the Pines, followed by a new Parish Center and Religious Education Center in 2010. In March 2008 he was elevated to Monsignor, a titular honor, but an honor none the less. It is also fitting that it was one of the last times that a parish priest had the honor of being elevated to Monsignor as it is honor that has been since dropped. In addition, there has been a wonderful spirit of fellowship and cooperation with the other church congregations in the area. He is open to new ideas and hopes the parish will continue to grow in many ways to serve the Lord and the community. Since coming to St. Mary's he has also visited patients at Southern Ocean Medical Center and served on the pastoral board. Kenard Joseph, or Msgr. Ken as he is affectionately and reverently referred to by the parish, is perhaps best known for his hilarious jokes, much to the chagrin of his good friend, 'Murphy'.

Kenard Joseph is particularly proud that St. Mary's is a twinning parish which happened shortly after St. Mary's 75th anniversary. St. Mary's sister parish is Holy Trinity in Zroobwe, Uganda. This relationship has grown as St. Mary's parishioners have opened their hearts to help this struggling parish to greatly improve their Church and their lives. They have completed the building of their most special project -- their very own secondary school and are continually finding ways to nurture it and keep it flourishing. In the third world, education is the key to the future. It is both exciting and heart-warming to watch this sister parish grow. Through it all, Father Vincent has been a special friend. What an incredibly holy and wonderful priest! He has visited St. Mary's several times and each visit has been most special. He has been embraced with so much love. It has been a privilege to visit him in his home a few years ago and most recently with a visit in 2023.