

# From Portage farm boy to college president



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The Rev. Joseph M. Horning was a Randolph farm boy who grew up to become a priest and a college president.

To both vocations, he brought a quick mind, a sense of devotion and an abiding faith in God that sustained him through the challenges he faced.

And, when he died at the age of 39, those who mourned him paid tribute to a gifted and humble man who accomplished a great deal in a career that was cut short far too soon.

Born Nov. 28, 1871, in Randolph, Joseph Horning was one of 10 children — nine sons and one daughter — born to Elizabeth and Nicholas Horning. He grew up on the family farm and began his education at St. Joseph School in Randolph. "At a very early age he gave evidence of rare educational ability," the Kent Courier noted in a biographical sketch.

After completing his elementary education, he attended Randolph High School for one term before setting forth on the rigorous path that would lead him to the priesthood.

At the age of 14, he was one of the first students admitted to St. Ignatius College (the forerunner of John Carroll University) shortly after the Jesuits began the school in 1886. He studied there for six years, graduating with honors in 1892, then completed three years of seminary training before entering the Jesuit novitiate at Prairie du Chien, Wis., in 1895.

His studies for the priesthood took him to Valkenburg, Holland, where he was ordained in 1906. After a period of pastoral work, he returned to Prairie du Chien, where he took up his duties with the Jesuits at the Col-

lege of the Sacred Heart.

The college, founded in 1880, was a Jesuit-run boarding school for boys and a preparatory institute for those studying for the priesthood.

When Father Horning was named vice president of Sacred Heart in 1907, he joined a staff of 20 faculty members who taught classes and ministered to the spiritual needs of 200 boys and young men. "He gave up all outside worldly interests and consecrated his life to the work of educating young men for the priesthood," the Courier reported.

Father Horning learned of his appointment as president of the college, at the age of 37, while vacationing with his family in Randolph in 1909. His tenure as president saw a period of considerable growth at the college, including the erection of two major classroom buildings.

The school gained a reputation as an institution with "a million-dollar faculty." Its youthful president gained a reputation, too, as an energetic administrator, who brought an "unfailing sense of duty" to his job as he nurtured the school.

His energy masked a frail constitution, which left his health in weak and delicate condition. Taking ill in July 1911, he said Mass for the last time at Sacred Heart, then traveled to nearby LaCrosse, Wis., to seek medical treatment.

Diagnosed with various internal disorders, he was found to be suffering with acute peritonitis and further treatment was futile. He died on Aug. 4, 1911, after a three-day illness.

An account in the Catholic Universe, a diocesan newspaper, paid tribute to Father Horning as an exceptional man of "unaffected kindness, humility and charity" whose "scholarship, executive ability and prudent conservatism were the distinguishing marks of his administration."



The Rev. Joseph Horning, a Randolph native, began his preparation for the priesthood when he was 14 years old.

According to his superiors, Father Horning realized that he was dying when he left Sacred Heart. "He was resigned and died a happy death," they told his family.

The Portage County farm boy turned priest-college president was buried in Prairie du Chien.