

The Rev. John P. Markoe, S.J.

It was a short fifty years ago that the West Point soldier became a Jesuit.

The Rev. John P. Markoe, S.J., classmate of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Gen. Omar Bradley, left military service three years after graduation from West Point Military Academy to enter a more personal kind of service. He entered the Society of Jesus. More specifically, he entered the Society of Jesus and became one of the earliest leaders in the field of racial justice. Last Feb. 15, Father Markoe marked his 50th year as a Jesuit at a Golden Jubilee Mass celebrated with his brother, the Rev. William Markoe, S.J., and priests from the Creighton University Jesuit Community. Father William Markoe also has been a Jesuit for more than 50 years.

The following evening, Father John Markoe was honored at a testimonial dinner at which the Most Rev. Harold Perry, Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, was the speaker. Bishop Perry is America's only Negro Catholic bishop. He received an honorary degree from Creighton during the visit. A faltering heart, which has caused Father Markoe to be hospitalized frequently, has curtailed his physical presence in Omaha's Negro community. This means only that now his friends come to him. When his health permits, he can be seen in the halls of the Administration Building in quiet conversation. Occasionally, on balmy days, Father Markoe and his visitors move out to the front steps. Father Markoe, a former Creighton mathematics instructor, helped organize the DePorres Club in Omaha, an inter-racial troupe dedicated to the advancement of racial relations. In 1946 Father Markoe led the first "sit-in demonstration in Omaha, or perhaps anywhere, when he and members of the DePorres Club, including several Negroes, entered a downtown restaurant and refused to leave until they were served.

Said Bishop Perry concerning Father Markoe: "He was and is a shepherd of souls and a shining light among pioneers ... but he was more than that. He was a leader who gave leadership.

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