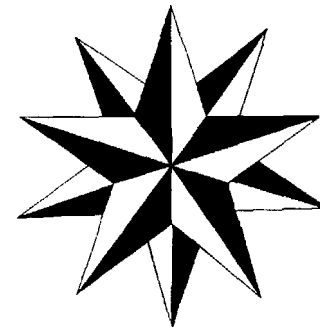


A SHORT ACCOUNT

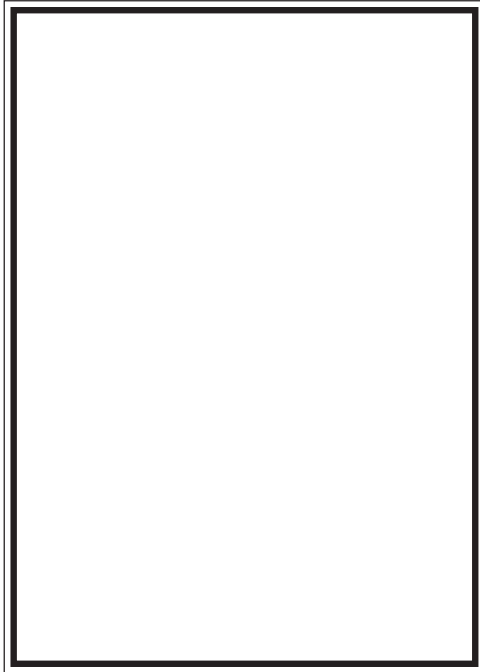
OF THE LIFE

OF

**Brother Rene Ferdinand Clerc, F.S.C.
(Basil Raphael)
1936 - 2000**



SIGNUM FIDEI



TOUR OF DUTY

- 1956 - Scholasticate, Santa Fe, NM
- 1957 - St. Michael's High School, Santa Fe, NM
- 1958 - Scholasticate, Santa Fe, NM
- 1959 - De La Salle High School, New Orleans, LA
- 1961 - Cathedral High School, Lafayette, LA
- 1964 - La Salle High School, San Antonio, TX
- 1967 - De La Salle High School, New Orleans, LA
- 1969 - Antonian High School, San Antonio, TX
(Director)
- 1971 - Cathedral-Carmel High School, Lafayette, LA
- 1972 - Sangre de Cristo, Santa Fe, NM
- 1972 - St. Paul's High School, Covington, LA
- 1978 - De La Salle High School, New Orleans, LA
- 1982 - CIL, Rome, Italy
- 1983 - House of Studies Community, New Orleans, LA
- 1988 - Mullen High School, Denver, CO
- 1992 - Cathedral High School, El Paso, TX
- 1996 - Magnolia Community, Lafayette, LA
- 1997 - Christian Brothers School, New Orleans, LA
- 1998 - Rummel Community, Metairie, LA
- 1999 - Magnolia Community, Lafayette, LA
- 2000 Died on February 13

Brother René Clerc, FSC
1936 - 2000

One of the scriptures that was very dear to **St. John Baptist De La Salle** is found in the Book of Daniel 12:3: “**Those who instruct many to justice shall shine like stars for all eternity.**” What is a star? From a scientific point of view a star is any of the luminous or self-luminous heavenly bodies seen as points of light in the night sky. Open up the **Bible** and the definition changes completely. The stars are servants of the “**Lord of Hosts.**” It is at the call of **God** that they shine forth. If, like the moon, they preside over the night, it is because **God** has assigned them this function. Does not **God** choose those who will instruct others in the ways of justice? Does not **God** call his servants? Do not the stars reveal their Creator? On Sunday, February 13, 2000 at 4:30 p.m., **Brother René Clerc** who was a Christian Educator for 43 years passed away after a long illness. His life, like the stars in the heavens, revealed our Creator, **God.**

René F. Clerc was born in Triumph, LA, on May 27, 1936, the son of the late **René F. Clerc Jr.** He is survived by his mother, the former **Catherine W. Evasvich**; his brother, **John S. Clerc**, his sisters, **Clare C. Hingle**, **Grace C. Cognovich**, **Jane C. Mayo**, **Natalie Clerc**, **Patricia C. Jackson**, **Elsie C. Gipson**, and numerous brothers-in-law, nieces and nephew.

When **Brother René** was fourteen years of age his father died. One of the goals that **Brother René’s** mother had for her children was a good education, so they could take care of their needs and be independent. It was as a boarder at **St. Paul’s School** in Covington, LA that **Brother René** became acquainted with the **Christian Brothers**. He graduated from **St. Paul’s** in 1954 and received the **Habit** of the **Christian Brothers** on December 7, 1954 in Lafayette, LA. After **First Vows**, **Brother René** traveled to Santa Fe, NM

for his collegiate studies at **St. Michael’s College**. His first teaching experience was at **St. Michael’s High School** in Santa Fe, NM in 1956. **Brother René** has left an account of that experience and the **Brother** who helped him in his classroom management:

“I was assigned to **St. Michael’s** as my first community. **Brother Ferdinand Jenschke** was the Sub-Director.

Because of questions of enrollment, I was not told what my assignment would be or given a classroom or keys until right before spiritual reading the day before school began. Right after supper, I met with the other eighth grade teachers to divide the students.

The only textbooks in my classroom were a religion text and a speller. I was sitting in panic at my desk at about 8:00 p.m., when **Brother Ferdinand** came over to check on me. At once, he helped me find some textbooks in the attic, and helped me organize my day. After school, he noticed I was not in the dining room having coffee with the Brothers. He came looking for me. I was in shock in the community room. I felt the day had been awful.

I remember him telling me that either I or the students were going to run the class, and that if the students were going to run it, I might just as well leave now.

He showed me how to plan and organize my lessons in meaningful segments, and gave suggestions about activities and assignments. He found a well organized math program (**Strathmore**) and had it ordered for me. During

the year he was always there if I needed help, suggestions, or encouragement.

This endeared him to me in a very special way, especially after I felt more comfortable with my classes. This endearment was especially true when I realized that his sophomores were leading him a merry chase.

I don't think I'll ever forget this caring, loving, observant man who took me under his wing and helped me so much. I was too ignorant and proud to realize I had no idea what was going on."

Brother René heeded the advice of **Brother Ferdinand**, took control of his classes and became a strong teacher.

After a year at **St. Michael's**, **Brother René** returned to college to continue pursuing his B.A. in English which he received in 1959. During teaching years, **Brother René** taught in nine **Christian Brother Schools** in the New Orleans - Santa Fe Province. **Brother René** pronounced **Final Vows** on August 15, 1961. In 1968, **Brother René** earned an M.A. in English from **Highlands University** in Las Vegas, N.M. In addition, after completing courses at **Loyola University** in New Orleans, LA, **Brother René** became a certified high school Guidance Counselor in 1984.

Brother Jeffrey Calligan, who lived with **Brother René** at **St. Paul's** in Covington, LA, and **De La Salle High School** in New Orleans, LA, remembers:

"Like all of us, **Brother René** was a unique mixture of gifts and limitations. He could be hard on others, but never as hard as he was on himself. He was gifted with a personality that ran

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the gamut of ups and downs. He was an athlete and a chef. He loved the gentleness of music and literature and was a fierce competitor on the field and in the stands.

When I remember **Brother René**, I remember our days at **De La Salle** in my early career. Those were the 60's which stood solidly on a monolithic vision of religious life as it began and which saw the ad-

vent of the winds of the Holy Spirit blowing everything into a creative melee. When things became difficult, I would see **Brother René** at the door of my room late in the evening. "Let's go get something to eat," he would say, and we were off to the local pancake house for an anticipated breakfast of pancakes covered in strawberries and six different kinds of syrup. That mighty feast being accomplished over a conversation that was heartfelt, we both went home pleasantly convinced that things would be better the next day and somehow they were!

In the 70's I shared community with **Brother René** again. This time at **Saint Paul's** in Covington. **Brother René** was prefect of the senior boys and I had become the Dean of Resident Students. We looked lovingly at the young men in our boarding sections, trying to keep a step ahead of them.



*La Salle High School
Community Bar-b-que,
San Antonio, TX, 1967.*

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There were no pancake houses in Covington in those days, just a late conversation in the lounge appropriately punctuated with the latest Mexican food from a late night run to a fast food place in Slidell.

And my last time living with Brother René was when I moved in 1988 into our House of Studies as the Auxiliary Visitor and took over the direction of our residents. We were a small community. Brother Michael Livaudais, our Director,



*Football Practice
Antonian High School
San Antonio, TX, 1971*

handled the conglomerate well. Brother René, always the consummate chef, prepared many wonderful meals for us while also performing the task of Counselor at De La Salle High School.

In the years to follow, we met from time to time as circumstance permitted. It was always a warm reunion. We were Brothers and friends. Brother René's health continued to decline with time and the last time I saw him, some weeks before he died, he was

sleeping after his traumatic operation in Lafayette.

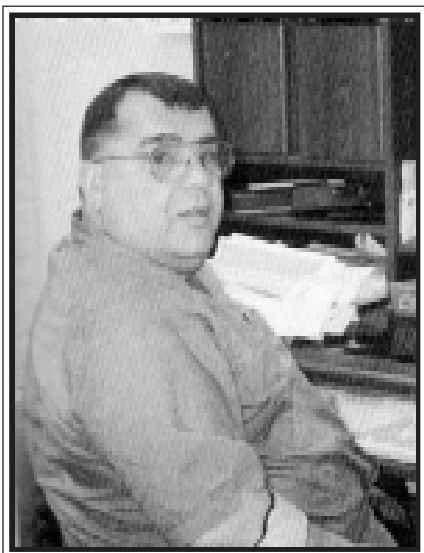
As I look back on the years we shared, I recognize a man of good heart. He loved his work and he loved the young men he dealt with. He loved being a Brother.

Brother Alphonse LeBlanc, who was stationed with Brother René in El Paso, TX, gives the following remembrance:

“Brother René and I shared a number of common interests. Fortunately and unfortunately one of them was food. During his stay at Cathedral in El Paso, TX, he was in charge of the kitchen. Brother René was a terrific cook. He enjoyed cooking for the community on special occasions. He also prepared Louisiana specialties for faculty and students on special occasions. When I first came to Cathedral, I asked if he needed any help with the shopping and I offered to help cook on weekends when the cook was off. He enjoyed the help with the shopping and companionship. Brother René was a man of many stories and quick wit. He really worked hard to please the community. We made two trips on Saturdays. First we went to Sam's for the bulk shopping. He had made the list the night before so we were well prepared. We regularly filled the large flat cart with the provisions. We then headed for home, unloaded the groceries and went out for lunch at Schlotsky's. After lunch we “made groceries” at Furr's for produce and smaller items. After putting up those groceries and taking a rest, one of us would cook supper. Some nights the community just went out to a restaurant or

brought take-home from Popeye's. Saturdays were fun and we enjoyed each others company.

I said that it was unfortunate that we liked food, because neither one of us could afford to carry the weight we did, especially Brother René. Being diabetic, Brother René really suffered from the terrible effects of this disease. His health was a constant concern of the community and Brother René endured a lot of suffering as a result of the diabetes and the craving for food it produced. Of major concern was Brother René's heart. He underwent a triple bypass operation in 1996. It was a miracle that he survived. The heart seemed to heal, but the surgery wounds in his legs took a long time to heal and in the meantime, he wanted to be about working in school and the kitchen. Throughout, Brother René suffered depression and guilt over his lack of control. Eventually, his health was such that he was asked to leave Cathedral and go to Lafayette to build up his health.



In the School, Brother René and I worked in the counseling department. He was a trained counselor and very professional. He kept up with many trends in school counseling. He was very proactive in his approach. Brother René was really a very good counselor

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with the students, very effective with high school students. He worked well one-on-one and with groups. Brother René ran a successful program for peer counseling. He was my mentor in many ways. When Dr. Richard Albin retired, Brother René stepped up into the college counseling area. He was a person of many resources. Again, Brother René showed me many important aspects of college counseling. He generously shared much of his treasury of materials.

I enjoyed my times with Brother René and I have many fond memories of him. He made great contributions to the community and the apostolate. Unfortunately, his health problems made great demands. Brother René suffered much physically, but he suffered more in his desire to please, to be a good religious, and a good educator. I personally miss him a lot.”

During the latter part of 1998 and most of 1999, **Brother René** lived in the community of Brothers associated with **Archbishop Rummel High School** in Metairie, LA. His health began to decline as a result of poor circulation in his right leg.

Brother John Fairfax gives the following remembrance:

“All during this time, the affection of his family for him was obvious. He was frequently visited by his sisters. On occasion, they came by and drove him to their homes for visits and to Buras to visit his mother. He regularly telephoned his mother and she called him. It was painful for him at this time to find that she was beginning to suffer with problems of remembering, and he would have the same conversation over and over with her.”

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In August of 1999, he was moved to **De La Salle Christian Brothers** in Lafayette, LA. to await admission to the hospital for the physician to amputate his right foot which was in terrible shape due to diabetic complications.

In a letter dated September 14, 1999, to family members and friends, **Brother René** wrote:

“My life has come full circle, so here I am, back where I started my religious life after I was graduated from high school in 1954. This is a tranquil, holy place where God seems to be everywhere. This whole area is ‘hallowed ground’ known as *Seminary Row* because our closest neighbor is the Diocesan Chancery Office and Bishop’s residence (it used to be Immaculata Minor Seminary). Next to the Chancery is Our Lady Grace Carmelite monastery.

Hopefully, following surgery, my health will improve enough so that I can become involved once again in some aspect of our apostolate of education. As I look back on my forty-five years as a Brother, God has been good to me, and I cherish memories of family, students, parents, and friends who have been a support and encouragement in Santa Fe, New Orleans, Lafayette, San Antonio, Covington, Denver, and El Paso. My life is immensely richer because of my association with you and your children.

Thank you for that. Please keep me in your prayers.”

Brother René spent the last six months of his life in **Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center** in Lafayette, LA. During that time a series of medical problems weakened his health. On the afternoon of February 13, 2000, he went into

cardiac arrest and passed away at 4:30 p.m.

The **Mass of Christian Burial** was held at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 17, 2000, at **De La Salle Christian Brothers** in Lafayette, LA. The decorations and homily reflected the Lasallian Theme: **“Those who instruct many to justice shall shine like stars for an eternity.”** (DNR, 3) In his homily, remembering **Brother René, Brother Clarence Fioke, Visitor**, said: **“If we really believe this scripture when you look up into the night sky you should be able to see Brother René’s star. It should be very big and bright.”**

St. La Salle said:

“They will shine indeed in the midst of those they have taught, who will eternally bear witness to the great gratitude they have for the valuable instructions of their teachers, whom they will regard as the cause, after God, of their salvation.” (M T R 16, 2)

A high school friend of **Brother René, Mr. Gordon Bilterwolf**, on the night after the funeral wrote:

“When I returned home on Thursday night, I looked up into the heavens to see that bright René star.”

Burial took place at **Christian Brothers Cemetery** in Lafayette, LA.

By: Brother Louis Welker, FSC
Director, De La Salle Christian
Brothers Lafayette, LA

