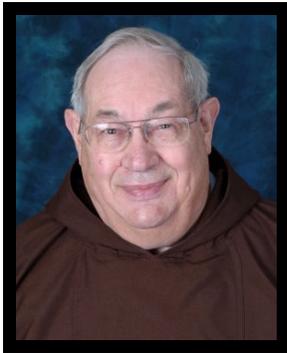


Neerology

Silas Baumann
1925 - 2013



Silas Gerald Baumann was born on May 8, 1925 in Wausau, WI. His family later moved to Sheboygan, WI. His parents were Alfred J. Baumann and Gertrude (Martini) Baumann. They had five children: Daniel, Virginia Papa, Silas, Gerald, Barbara Goeden (Herb); and Clarence. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and the decline of the rubber industry the family moved to Sheboygan WI. In Sheboygan his father began anew in the furniture industry specifically with the R-Way Corporation. Silas was in 5th grade when he began school at Holy Name Catholic School followed by four years St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary for high school, where he was very involved in student activities. During these years he was attracted to the Franciscan life and spirit and to decide to join the Capuchins.

Silas entered the novitiate in Huntington IN in September 1924. He made his first profession in 1944 and perpetual vows in 1947. He studied philosophy at Mary Immaculate, Garrison NY and theology at St Anthony in Marathon WI. He was ordained to the priesthood by John Tracy of La Crosse in St Mary Church, Marathon, on September 5, 1951. He spent another year at Marathon together with his classmates before his first assignment.

Silas spent his first three years of priesthood assisting at Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Calvary WI. During these years he also studied at Notre Dame University in Indiana and received a Master of Science degree in chemistry. He became a member of the teaching staff of St. Lawrence College in Mt. Calvary and spent many years as teacher of chemistry and physics.

Silas was a very active participant in the life of the faculty and student body. As part of the formation program he spent some years as a prefect in the dormitory and study hall. As a spiritual director he also became involved with the Third Order of St Francis (now the Order of Franciscan Seculars or OFS) on the Hill. He also spent some time managing the bookstore and assisting in the finance department.

After nineteen years at St. Lawrence he served the province in a variety of ministries. He spent a year at Monte Alverno Retreat Center, Appleton, followed by ten or more years in Detroit. There he was part of the post-novitiate formation team as well as spiritual assistant of the Third Order. During this time he also assisted in the front office ministry at St Bonaventure Friary.

Silas always kept himself abreast of developments in theology and spirituality through continuing education. In 1992 he took a sabbatical at the Institute of Theology and Spirituality in California. This served him well in the following years as he spent time in the House of Prayer in Madison WI followed by a year of pastoral ministry at St Francis Home for the Elderly in Fond du Lac, WI.

Silas always had a special interest in Franciscan studies. He spent several summers taking courses at St. Bonaventure University in St. Bonaventure NY. This prepared him well for his final years of ministry before retirement at St Fidelis Friary in Wisconsin. He continued as the spiritual assistant of the Secular Franciscan fraternities in Fond du Lac, Menasha and Appleton. The Secular Franciscans appreciated his ministry. He was very dedicated and even produced a formation manual and other important documents for the novices and fraternity members.

Marion Rife of Kaukauna WI noted that while she was on the OFS Council for the St. Joseph Fraternity in Appleton she appreciated how well he related to them at their fraternal gatherings. "We admired and respected him. He could always be counted on to provide great insights in our discussions and focused us on the assigned topic of conversation. What I found remarkable was the way he guided us to the proper conclusions rather than revealing it to us."

Sally Gerarden of Menasha reflected: "He was the kindest person and always willing to work with any of us. At our gatherings for Mass, funerals, weddings and even anniversaries, he was always present and cheerful. He will be missed as our spiritual leader. What a wonderful example he gave us in following in the footsteps of St. Francis."

Peter Bekkers of Greenville WI noted that Silas was always very spiritual and upbeat. He shared with the Franciscan Seculars his vast knowledge of the life, spirit and writings of St. Francis and St. Clare. When sharing that Franciscan spirit there was always a sincere depth of respect and appreciation.

Bob Damon, a friend and computer specialist, worked with Silas and recalled him as "a logical thinker and detail oriented. We became great friends working on numerous

computer and photographic projects. He had all the tools and the drive to complete a task needing only minimal professional assurance."

Friars also considered Silas a quiet, humble brother and always interested in our lives. Myron Kowalsky, former provincial minister (1984-1987) noted: "He was a faithful friar, a faithful teacher, a faithful minister for God's people. His presence was felt but not overbearing. He was admired by students as an intellectual giant even though some admitted he never came across in his presentations as a ball of enthusiasm. He was a caring person, a man of conviction, and followed through on his convictions...a true brother in a calm and silent way."

Werner Wolf did not know Silas in his early years as a friar, but came to know him when they were both on the staff of St. Lawrence Seminary. "I found him quiet, reserved but a deep thinker," Werner remembered. "He would reflect on my questions and if not at the moment, but later would have a concise summary to my questions. As a teacher, I listened to the appraisals of his students and faculty members. He was a demanding teacher, strict with his grades as to their achievements in the sciences. His interest in the lives of the students depicted a different side of Silas. He was a person interested in sports, the Brewers and Packers, fishing, handball and very involved in basketball. He was even the varsity basketball coach several years. He always enjoyed his summer vacation with his family and fishing buddies."

Silas did influence students in their vocational choices. Joachim Strupp indicated: "I was a student when the newly-minted Fr. Silas joined the St Lawrence faculty. He taught us physics and chemistry. I remember him as being very quiet and serious. Once in a while there would be a flash of humor. To say that he wasn't a dynamic teacher would be an understatement. Yet he was one of the friars who influenced me to apply for the Capuchin novitiate in my senior year. He and the self-giving of other friars inspired me."

Michael Zuelke remembered "how hard Silas worked on his talks and homilies. He must have attended almost every preaching workshop the province provided. He would heartily participate in the practice sessions and was open to critique with a gentle smile. Other friars may have wished that he had more life in his voice when he preached, but one could never fault him for lack of preparation as he always had something of value to communicate."

Silas had a characteristic calmness and steady manner. Ron Smith remembered an incident when he lived with Silas at Boston Boulevard in Detroit: "Silas was home alone one afternoon. A man came asking to use the phone 'to make a phone call.' No sooner

had the man entered the friary when he pulled out a gun and pointed it at Silas and wanted all the cash in the house. Being home alone, Silas in his calm and logical manner looked into the chamber of the gun pointed at him and noticed it was loaded. So he took the man around the house slowly gave him some cash he found, probably in his room ... and all the while urging the man to leave before the other friars would come home and the robber would be in trouble. He did succeed in persuading the man to leave."

Ron Smith also remembered how, as provincial (1978-1984), he noticed how faithful and obedient Silas was. He was a regular contributor in community life, and loved his ministry with the Franciscan Seculars. He also noticed how much of a competitor he was in playing cards or dice. He recalls how Silas would spend much time in meditation and contemplation on the side of the building and many times in chapel.

Brian Braun noticed: "Silas was always interested in what I was thinking when he saw me. He would approach me in his whimsical way to pull things out of me. He struck me as a man who was always on the search for new thought, even if he did not agree with you."

Silas was a man of definite views and opinions. Many found him difficult at committee or community meetings. Rarely would he change his mind on controversial issues. As a teacher he was very strict in his grading procedures even if faculty members disagreed with his assessments. He would bounce back and not harbor grudges. Yet he was also a very private person in many ways.

Silas was especially sensitive to the friars at health care facilities. Timon Costello, himself a stroke victim, appreciated how Silas would come on some Mondays and take him out for a meal. Silas' final years were spent at St. Fidelis Friary, an independent living community for friars in the Appleton area.

Matthew Gottschalk described Silas as a quiet, studious and introspective person who had the ability to incorporate his learning into his classes, homilies and conversations. His intellectual curiosity made him a compulsive reader and sharer of ideas with his students and confreres. Silas also absorbed well the values and implementation of the documents of Vatican II.

Gerry Pehler recalled a charism of Silas that many people observed but never commented upon: his interest in protecting the environment. Silas was committed to renewing the earth with the beauty of trees: their ability to absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen provided cleaner air as well as shade for the friars. While he was Detroit and during his retirement years in Appleton, he planted trees and berry bushes all as

part of his Franciscan love of God's creation. This reflected well the spirit of Francis in a quiet and contemplative manner echoing the Canticle of Creation.

John Celichowski, provincial minister, noted in his funeral homily that, "Silas spent the final chapter of his life as a lesson for all friars remaining behind. After he was experiencing renal failure and knew that kidney dialysis would follow, he opted to let nature take its course." He did share his condition regularly at community meetings and was not afraid to die.

Gerry Pehler, local minister of St. Fidelis Friary, assisted Silas before retiring his final evening. He prayed with him and assured him that he would check with him later. An hour later, Gerry did so and found that Silas had passed peacefully to his reward.

Silas Baumann died on the evening of June 2, 2013. He is buried in the Capuchin Cemetery in Mt. Calvary. May he rest in peace.

— *Werner Wolf*