

Neerology

Mark Carrico
1956-2013



On a sweltering hot night in a southern Missouri barroom it was going on midnight when a lean fellow came in wearing work boots, jeans and a dirty t-shirt. He walked right over to the bar where he lifted up a lady, slung her over his shoulder and walked out with her kicking and screaming the whole way. I saw the whole thing from the bandstand and just kept singing. That was my job. Of course, that was before I was a Capuchin (Vocation Update #150, January 29, 2008).

While it was not exactly the same as St. Francis of Assisi in his *Testament* describing his life in sin, the bitterness he felt in seeing lepers, and how he learned to embrace them and thus “left the world,” Mark Carrico’s vocation was formed in the smoky, beer-stained crucible of “cowboy bars in Montana...dives in Southern Missouri...[and] showrooms in Las Vegas.” Life on the road had its pleasures (some of them wholesome), but it left him wanting something more. He found it as a Capuchin Friar.

Mark was born in Terre Haute (Fr., “high ground”), Indiana on January 14, 1956 to William (Billy) Dean and Bettie Alice (Dalgarn) Carrico. He was the second oldest child and the only boy. The family eventually settled in Huntington, Indiana. Mark’s father was a plant manager for the publisher of *Our Sunday Visitor*. His mother worked for many years for a telephone company.

Mark grew up in a loving Catholic family who regularly practiced their faith. After graduating from Huntington North High School in 1974 and working in various factory jobs, however, Mark decided to “hit the road” and thus began a number of years making a living as a professional musician. In doing so, he gradually drifted away from church, more from the inertia of itinerancy than from anger or indifference. “It was,” as he described it, “a nomadic existence that was never dull.”

However, it could also be a lonely life. “Christmases,” Mark recalled, “consisted of a phone call to Mom and Dad and watching TV in a motel room. Being a stranger

everywhere I went, I began to grow old and lonely.” It was thus that he returned to Huntington, got a job, bought a house, and reconnected with family...and church.

He attended a “Mercy Day,” a diocesan-sponsored event at his local parish to welcome back those who had, for whatever reason, left the practice of their faith. After talking with his parish priest, Mark began to learn more about Catholicism and got more involved in parish life. He was a lector, taught CCD to fourth graders, was elected to the parish council, and generously shared his musical talents at parish festivals.

During this period, Mark began to consider the possibility of a religious vocation. Perhaps not coincidentally, he also had a couple of serious health episodes and began to confront the reality of living the rest of his life as an insulin-dependent diabetic. As his life became more tenuous, it also became more precious to him; and he wanted it to mean something more. In his initial inquiry to the Capuchin Vocation Office in August 1990 he wrote: “The volunteer work I have done at St. Mary’s (CCD, lector, etc.) have (sic) provided me with my most fulfilled and happiest moments in my life. I would hope that some of the things that I have learned through these experiences would be of some value to the order and our church.”

Mark went on:

I don't expect the religious life to be an easy life. But I do have a sincere desire to serve our Lord by being of service to his people and our church. The apostolate of serving “the rejected of our society” is and always has been appealing to me. I am willing to submit my life to our Lord's will and, if his will is that I serve as a religious, then I am doubly blessed.

Over the next 23 years, Mark would not only experience that double benediction, he would be an instrument of the Lord’s blessing for his Capuchin brothers and the people he served in various ministries. First, however, he had to make it through initial formation. After spending a brief time as a resident candidate at the Solanus Casey Community in Milwaukee, Mark moved to Yonkers, New York for Postulancy, which was then a collaborative program between the Province of St. Joseph and the Province of St. Mary.

As an older candidate and later a friar who could sometimes be set in his ways, Mark chafed at times at the formalities and evaluations that are part of the initial formation process; but he never regretted the experiences. Reflecting on an evening he spent on the streets of New York with the ministers from Covenant House, Mark wrote:

I never felt endangered or threatened above and beyond the natural fear the environment offers, but seeing children involved in that type of activity [the sex trade] on the streets of NYC in the wee hours of the morning is very unsettling and unnerving. So much more than I had anticipated. I'm sure you know what I mean. Talk about a "Sunday Morning Coming Down!!"

These and other encounters reinforced Mark's desire to serve the poor and marginalized. After completing his novitiate at St. Felix Friary in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin Mark made his first profession on the Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1993. He spent the next several years in Detroit and Chicago, where he completed his bachelor's degree at Loyola University and worked part-time as a jail chaplain. He made his perpetual vows on August 9, 1997.

Although he sometimes professed a lack of confidence as a student, Mark received excellent grades throughout his undergraduate studies and later in obtaining a master's degree in counseling and addiction studies from the University of Detroit/Mercy. He was known as a fine writer and an exacting proof reader. His red pen and later his use of the "Track Changes" feature in Microsoft® Word were legendary.

After working as a licensed counselor in Detroit for several years and also having the opportunity to combine his vocation with his passion for motor racing as a chaplain to the Championship Auto Racing Team (CART), Mark accepted appointment as the executive director of the House of Peace (HOP) in 2003. During his tenure, the ministry expanded its programs and underwent a multi-million dollar expansion.

Mark's devotion to serving those who are poor was rooted in a profound respect for human dignity. He wanted people with disabilities to have access to services without being carried down the stairs. He wanted those who needed clothing to have choices and to experience being able to select what they wanted or needed rather than having it handed to them. He wanted boxes of Thanksgiving food to be enough for a real family feast.

If Mark was passionate about serving those who were poor and suffering, he was even more passionate about serving the needs of his Capuchin brothers. He served six years on the Board of the St. Labre Indian School Educational Association, which gave him several opportunities each year to travel to Montana. He loved the Big Sky Country. He was elected to two terms as a member of the Provincial Council (2005-2011) and generously responded when called upon to serve as the director of the Office of Pastoral Care and Conciliation (OPCC).

Mark's counseling background and attention to detail served him and the province well as OPCC director. However, the job also took its toll on him emotionally. The "Sunday morning coming down" he had experienced years before while traveling on the streets of New York in the Covenant House van became an almost daily part of his life as he led the province's efforts to prevent and deal with the consequences of sexual abuse and other misconduct committed by some of his brothers.

In 2009, with the capital campaign for the House of Peace nearly complete, Mark asked to step down as executive director. Two years later, coming to believe that the province would be better served by a lay person in the role, Mark also gladly handed off the leadership of the OPCC to someone else. In both cases, his successors were women. In his more light-hearted moments, Mark fancied himself "a ladies' man" and could readily turn on the same charm that he honed as an entertainer. But underneath it all was a profound respect for women and for the contributions of the laity in the mission of the church.

In 2011, Mark was asked to succeed the estimable Larry LaCross as local minister of St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit. In addition to the day-to-day work of managing a large house connected to several ministries and hosting hundreds of guests throughout the year, he also had to look after the needs of the sick and elderly brothers. Mark diligently carried out these tasks, and he was also fun-loving and compassionate.

At the same time, he struggled to take care of his own health, and the combined effects of his diabetes, weight, and years of cigarette smoking eventually took their toll. On November 4, 2013 Mark was visiting another friar at Beaumont Hospital in Grosse Pointe, Michigan when he collapsed in an elevator from a massive heart attack and died. He was 57 years old.

Mark Carrico never got the opportunity to celebrate his silver jubilee as a Capuchin. Indeed, not long before he died he confided to his mother that he did not expect to live very long. However, during the time he was with us he enriched the lives of many as a friar and a minister. As fellow friar Matthew Gottschalk so eloquently described him upon his retirement as executive director of the House of Peace, Mark was a "faithful leader...kind counselor...[and] delightful friend."

In applying for perpetual vows, Mark wrote to the provincial minister, "I hope you will never regret accepting my vows." It is unlikely that anyone who was blessed to know, work with, or have Mark Carrico as a brother ever had such a regret.

He is buried in the St. Bonaventure Monastery Cemetery in Detroit.

—*John Celichowski*