

Neerology

Michael Drobnicki
1946 - 2018



Michael was born on 29 October 1946, the son of William and Lawrencia (née Majchrzak) Drobnicki. He has two siblings: his sister, Deborah McNamee of Grosse Pt. Woods MI and his brother, David, of Bellingham WA.

Michael's elementary education was split between two Catholic schools: St. Elizabeth and St. Raymond in Detroit. He graduated from St. Raymond School in 1960. After graduating from Patronage of St. Joseph High School in 1964, he attended Sacred Heart Seminary for a year. He also did course work at a junior college for two years from 1965-67. During this time he also worked at the Detroit Tank Plant.

He was invested as a Capuchin novice in 1968 at Sacred Heart Friary, Baraga MI. Michael continued his formation at the Capuchin Seminary of St. Mary in Crown Point IN from 1969-72. He also did course work at Calumet College of St. Joseph in East Chicago IN during this time. He spent the following year at St. Francis in Milwaukee WI, and studied at St. Francis Seminary. He also pursued CPE accreditation at Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison WI. After making a 30 day interprovincial Capuchin retreat in New Hampshire, he professed perpetual vows in 1973 at St. Lawrence Seminary, Mt Calvary WI.

Michael did recruitment ministry at St. Lawrence Seminary from 1973-75. He then moved to Detroit, where he served on the provincial vocation staff and the pre-novitiate team from 1975-1979. His outgoing personality enabled him to relate well to young people interested in either the seminary or the Capuchins. He was on staff at Queen of Angels Retreat Center in Saginaw MI from 1979-1984, and again from 1992-1995. Michael's role included ministering on youth retreats and helping with maintenance. He was always very attentive to the retreatants, knew many by name, and became life-long friends with some of them. Michael tended to gravitate to people who were most in need, either emotionally or physically. One person attending his funeral noted that Michael had helped her through her bout with cancer by calling and talking to her everyday. His generosity and hospitality built a lot of bridges with those around him.

Michael also spent a year in pastoral ministry at St. Anthony Parish in Fargo ND from 1984-85. He especially liked working with the youth and assisting with meal preparation in the school.

Michael was always interested in self-improvement and spent three summers at Notre Dame University doing course work. He also attended St. Norbert College in DePere WI for four summers. For three of those summers he was a part-time staff person and relished serving the educational community. He would greet guests of the college and provide tours of the area. This included contact with the Green Bay Packers and the Packer Hall of Fame. He delighted in talking about the times that he had meals with the Packer players and joined them for weight-lifting. This caused him to switch allegiance from the Detroit Lions to the Packers! Michael noted that he enjoyed many perks through this service, but that it was indeed "good ministry."

Michael served in internal ministry at St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit for 28 years until his retirement in 2016. He filled a variety of roles including staffing the switchboard, assisting in the Mission & Development Office, and ministering in the Solanus Center. He was a very kind friar, and never said anything bad about anyone. Michael was a patient man who could engage a variety of people with compassion and thoughtfulness. His brother-in-law commented that Michael reminded him of Mother Teresa in the way that he approached life. Specifically, he did small things with great love. In a lot of respects, Michael was a simple, humble man with a big heart.

During many of his years at St. Bonaventure's, he had his own health problems. However, this helped him identify with those in need and lead him to work as a care giver for Bon Secours/Beaumont Home Health Care of Grosse Pointe MI. He would call on his patients in their homes and assist them with daily activities. This ministry covered a period of about five years. This was unique for Michael, since this was a field generally filled by women. However, men were in great demand, and Michael was happy to fill that role. He enjoyed visiting with people and was always cheerful and upbeat with them.

Later on much of his ministry involved chauffeuring friars and guests to medical appointments, taking them on shopping trips, or assisting them with household chores. He was also the primary driver for trips to and from Metro Airport. He noted that he made over three hundred trips to the airport in a single year! He also was involved in front office ministry in imitation of his predecessor, Solanus Casey. Additionally, he served for a time in the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, assisting with clerical tasks and helping the guests. While Michael could be stubborn, he was also kind and gracious to guests and visitors. He was very good with people, and he showed a real interest in what was going on in their lives. Michael was a very active and proud member of the Holy Cross Council of the Knights of Columbus. He enjoyed going to the meetings, assisting with their activities and achieving the status of a 4th degree Knight.

Michael's later years were challenging from a health perspective. He was hospitalized with hydro-cephalus, which ultimately led to brain surgery. His diabetes also resulted in the amputation of some toes, which made mobility difficult. In addition, Michael had chronic kidney disease for many years. During a two year period he lived at Riverview Health and Rehab Center North. Michael enjoyed living there, since he could visit the patients, welcome new patients and even call bingo twice a week. One of the friars told the story of a woman that Michael visited who could not talk, but who could sing. He would visit and she sang to him and he to her.

Throughout these years of failing health, Michael maintained a cheerful attitude, enjoyed socializing, and made many friends along the way. His final year of life was spent at St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton WI, in assisted living where he received hospice care. His health during his final years was a cross that he embraced with fortitude and patience.

Michael died peacefully on 16 January 2018 at St. Fidelis Friary.

~ David Schwab