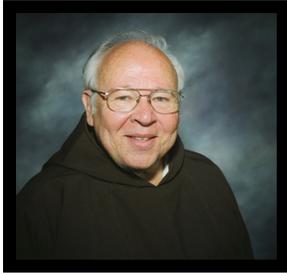


# Neerology

## Gilbert Francis Hemauer 1938-2016



Gilbert Hemauer was born on May 14, 1938 in Stockbridge, Wisconsin, on the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago. His parents were Gilbert Hemauer and Veronica Leitner. Gil was the second oldest of eight children; his older brother Donald died of drowning while saving a little girl's life. He attended grade school at St. Mary's Catholic School in Stockbridge, and then entered St. Lawrence Seminary, only 18 miles from Stockbridge, in 1952. His intention was to become a diocesan priest, but the influence of the Capuchins at St. Lawrence led him to enter the Capuchin novitiate at Baraga, Michigan in 1956. Gil's clericcate days were spent at St. Felix in Huntington, St. Mary in Crown Point, and St. Anthony, Marathon. He was ordained on Thanksgiving Day in 1964, and celebrated his first mass at his home parish in Stockbridge. 1965-66 found him at St. Francis in Milwaukee for the pastoral year. During this year he worked with Matthew Gottschalk in the inner city black community, his first taste of minority ministry.

Gil's first assignment was to teach biology at St. Lawrence Seminary. He pleaded with the provincial, Gerard Hesse, to change this assignment, saying that he wanted to be a priest, not a biologist. But the provincial was insistent, and Gil went to the University of Arizona in Tucson for two years. Besides taking 16 semester hours of science courses, he also served about 30 hours a week as a hospital chaplain in exchange for room and board, served as weekend chaplain at an Army base 80 miles away, and spent three hours every Sunday evening with Mexican-American students!

With a new provincial minister in office, Gil repeated his request to be assigned to a ministry other than teaching. The provincial agreed, and Gil spent a year in vocation work, after which he was assigned to Hill High School, St. Paul, Minnesota as a religion teacher and counselor. Gil was happy with his ministry there, but after a few years tensions developed in the Capuchin community of six friars and he asked to be reassigned. His next stop was Appleton, Wisconsin, where he became spiritual director for three fraternities of lay Franciscans, assistant pastor of St. Joseph Parish, was in charge of a city-wide religious education program, and served on several diocesan boards. He also found time in summer sessions to obtain a religious education diploma in 1971 and an MA in religious studies from Detroit University in 1975.

In the summer of 1972 Gil was invited to Montana to conduct a survey for the Capuchin friars ministering on the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Reservations regarding the state of evangelization and catechesis on the reservations. After receiving his report the friars voted to

accept his recommendations, and Gil was invited to serve as director of religious education for all the parishes and schools on both reservations. So Gil moved to St. Labre in June 1973, and Montana remained the focus of his ministry until his retirement in 2008. While at St. Labre Gil established a religion research center focused on cross-cultural religious studies and inculturation. He saw his role as searching out the sacred with the Native American people in a mutual framework of respect, recognizing the Good News within each culture. In 1976 he was appointed pastor of St. Labre Parish. During his time at St. Labre some tensions developed with friars and staff. Gil thought that people were not moving fast enough in implementing his proposals, and others thought that he was moving too fast. In 1977 his ministry at St. Labre came to an end.

During his years at St. Labre Gil became involved with the Tekakwitha Conference, which became perhaps his most significant and enduring contribution to Native American ministry. The Tekakwitha Conference had its beginnings in 1939 when Aloysius Meunch (bishop of Fargo, ND) invited missionary clergy and laity from North and South Dakota and Minnesota to a meeting to discuss ministry among Native Americans. 26 clergy and three native laymen attended. The following year the group decided to call themselves the Tekakwitha Conference. The group continued to meet yearly, with attendance averaging around 40. In 1977, for the first time, the conference invited a number of Native clergy, religious and laity. The group voted to establish an interim task force to plan a comprehensive reorganization. Gil served as chairperson. The conference was opened to Indian laity, and by 1980 attendance had grown to 650. Beginning in November 1977 Gil spent six months in Washington, DC working with Paul Lenz, director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. In August 1978 Gil became president of the Tekakwitha Conference.

Also in 1978 he became pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Medicine Lake, MT with its four mission parishes. He trained 25 lay ministers to serve in these five parishes. In 1980 he was asked to serve as full-time executive director of the Tekakwitha Conference. The national office was established in Great Falls, MT, with office space provided by the diocese. He stated that his goal was "to promote the emerging voice, presence, identity and leadership of the Catholic Indian community, and then step aside so that they could speak on their own behalf." Promoting Native leadership was an important goal for Gil.

Through his work with the Tekakwitha Conference Gil had the privilege of meeting John Paul II on five different occasions. He considered these encounters a blessing and a grace. The first was at a White House reception for the pope in 1979. Gil was instrumental in having Indians represented at this event. While waiting on the White House lawn for the pope to arrive, Gil enjoyed chatting with Marlo Thomas, Phil Donahue and Colonel Sanders!

In 1980 he attended the beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha in Rome, and in 1987 the canonization of Katharine Drexel. Gil was able to concelebrate the canonization mass with the pope and hundreds of other priests.

In 1986 the first World Day of Prayer was held in Assisi. Gil invited John and Burton Pretty on Top of the Crow Tribe to represent the Tekakwitha Conference at this gathering, and accompanied them to Assisi. Gil was moved when the pope recognized the Native American delegation. In his reflections on this event Gil wrote, "I am committed to share the strength and hope that I have received by participating in this day of prayer. I shall continue my prayer and fasting and work to create pathways of peace."

As a follow-up to the World Day of Prayer Gil founded an organization known as "Pathways of Peace." In the name of this entity he raised funds and disbursed grants to various individuals, particularly for training in substance abuse counseling, which he saw as a critical need for Native Americans. Pathways of Peace continued until 1993, when the board of directors voted to disband, and the remaining funds were transferred to St. Labre.

In 1987 Gil wrote to the pope inviting him to the Tekakwitha Conference to be held in Phoenix AZ that summer. He was thrilled when the pope accepted. He was deeply involved in the planning for the event, and welcomed the pope on his arrival in Phoenix. During his visit the Native Americans shared signs of reconciliation: the peace pipe and cleansing ritual of water were performed and the pope was given an eagle feather.

By 1989 Gil was ready to turn over leadership of the Tekakwitha Conference to a Native American, and Anthony Milone (bishop of Great Falls-Billings) appointed him one of three vicars general of the diocese and moderator of ministries. During this period he chaired the diocesan planning committee and initiated a diocesan planning process.

During his years in Montana Gil was blessed with several close friends who enriched his life. He had gotten to know June Cech during his time in Appleton, and when he came to Montana in 1973 she came to serve as his secretary and all-around assistant, and remained with him during the rest of his time in Montana. She died in Miles City in 1999 while Gil was pastor there.

Gil also had a close friendship with Emmett Hoffman. They worked closely together during his time at St. Labre, and also took vacations together. Gil also had good friends in Robert Casey and his wife Thelma Rose of Great Falls. It should also be mentioned that Gil was a gracious host and an excellent cook, and always enjoyed cooking for the friars and others.

Gil suffered from alcoholism, and during the 1970s his drinking increased steadily. When the provincial and several other friars came to meet with him in 1981, he readily agreed to go to treatment at Guest House. He was faithful to his recovery program for the rest of his life.

In 1993 Emmett Hoffman retired as director of St. Labre Indian School, and Gil was asked to take over as interim CEO and director of development. The board of directors believed that Gil had the leadership qualities, administrative abilities and sensitivity to Native Americans to oversee a difficult transition. He served in that capacity for three years.

In 1996 Gil was asked to serve as pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Forsyth. Then in 1998 he was appointed pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Miles City. He served there until 2008. During that time his health declined, and he decided that he could no longer continue in active ministry. So he retired to St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton, where he enjoyed community life, working on puzzles, and playing cards. After long years of pastoral ministry, he was content to slow down and enjoy retirement. Suffering from congestive heart failure, he entered hospice care several months before his death. He died on August 7, 2016, and is buried in the Capuchin Seminary at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin.

At the time of his golden jubilee Gil summed up his life as a Capuchin as follows:

As I reflect on those past 50 years as a Capuchin and the past 69 years of my life, it's like looking at a mosaic with many different facets. Each piece of the mosaic represents a multitude of experiences, opportunities, and blessings. I trust and believe that a loving and merciful Father can look at the whole picture and appreciate and understand how each piece tells the story of my life as a Capuchin brother. . . .

The past 50 years have been filled with many shared blessings, joys, sorrows, challenges, struggles, successes and failures. With love and gratitude for these past 50 years as a Capuchin friar and with anticipated faith, hope and love for each new piece of the mosaic as it evolves and unfolds in the future, I leave myself and all my brothers and sisters in the hands of the Great Master Architect of all creation and each of our mosaics. *Oremus pro invicem!*

~Randolph Graczyk