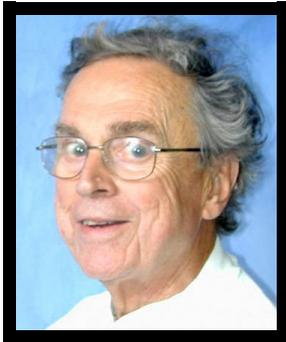


Neerology

Simeon Keogh
1921-2007



Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that “In every society some men are born to rule and some to advise.” Nelson Mandela said “By ancestry, I was born to rule.” That was certainly true of Simeon Keogh, for he admitted that most of his life, more than 30 years, was spent as a local minister. He did not *rule*, however; but was a jovial and a well-liked local minister.

William Michael Keogh was born in Toledo, Ohio, on 7 October 1921, the same year the Ohio Theater was built which was the largest neighborhood theater in the country with forty-one indoor movie houses, and became a historic place in 2006. His parents were Medard Keogh and Sarah Hebbeler. He attended St. James grade school and three years at St. John’s Central Catholic High School as well at St. Desales College in Toledo, and one year at St. Joseph’s College in Collegeville, Indiana, before joining the Capuchins. In his youth he suffered from rheumatic fever which later resulted in a heart condition. Simeon was invested at St. Felix Friary, Huntington, Indiana, on 23 February 1944, and made his first profession the following year. He studied at Mary Immaculate Seminary in Garrison, New York, and continued his studies at St. Anthony Seminary in Marathon, Wisconsin, where in his first year he became ill and went to Huntington, Indiana, to recuperate. On the 24 February 1948, he made his solemn profession, and a year later on 3 June 1949, he was ordained.

His first assignment was St. Felix Friary, Huntington, Indiana, which was not challenging because of his heart condition. He was secretary to Solanus Casey and confessor to Victory Noll Sisters. Otto Bucher was a novice at that time and Simeon was his confessor, whom he found a blessing. In 1958, Simeon was appointed local minister at St. Anthony Seminary in Marathon, Wisconsin, where he admitted that “life began there.” He instilled a new spirit into the community inviting the faculty to Monte Alverno Retreat Center for a meal and party. Mark Stier, who was director of clerics, said that “these have been the happiest years of my life.” A cleric who had a severe accident with a car was determined not to drive again. Simeon went to him and said, “Get the keys to the car. We’ll go for a ride,” which enabled him to continue driving. Otto said that Simeon added a friendly and community spirit to the house doing some creative things during the Christmas break.

In 1958 he was appointed vicar and director of retreats at Queen of Angels Retreat Center in Saginaw, Michigan. Three years later he went to St. Benedict Parish in Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

as local minister and pastor. In July 1967, he was appointed local minister and assistant pastor to George Henseler. Jim Leary shared his recollection while Simeon was pastor at St. Joseph, Appleton, Wisconsin from 1969-1970. With George Henseler's sudden death, Simeon was asked to become the twenty-sixth pastor of St. Joseph Parish. Unlike the previous twenty-five German pastors, he possessed a refreshing flair of an Irishman and embodied a new style of leadership which reflected the influences of Vatican II. His greatest gift and legacy were his more casual, brotherly, leadership style, ushering in a new era and helping to break down the traditional customs, roles and distinctions between clerics and lay brothers. Simeon brought joy and animation to the community and he never shied away from things he enjoyed: rug hooking and baking.

As loveable as he was, Simeon enacted the changes dictated by Vatican II. It was not easy for parishioners to accept some of the changes, but he moved forward to embody them. He turned the altar to face the people, and most of the communion rail was eliminated, although a few rails were kept for a while. The presider's chair was arranged to face the people, and the tabernacle, after a lengthy discussion, was moved from the high altar.

Abandoning Latin for the vernacular really woke up some people. Guitar Masses were a bit scandalous for some, but exciting for others. It was a time of great upheaval in the church, but was there a better friar to deal with all that than our beloved Simeon?

In 1970 he went to St. Francis Friary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was appointed chaplain at Trinity Hospital in Cudahy, Wisconsin, which put him in close contact with his sister Kay who was very dedicated to him. In 1977, he became local minister at Trinity Chaplain's Residence. Otto recalls that he had quite a collection of tropical fish in several tanks.

In 1980 he was asked to be local minister at St. Conrad Friary, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he was involved in provincial ministry and as a formation director. Ken Smits admits that his fondest memories of Simeon are as local minister and host: one who was calm and easy-going, a person of few words, gentle and accepting. He was an unobtrusive presence that was welcoming, and Ken always felt comfortable with him. Otto also had him as local minister here, and considered him an ideal Capuchin who worked hard, despite poor health, and was an active community member with a spirituality that kept him going.

1987 brought him into retirement at St. Felix Friary, Calvary, Wisconsin. John Celichowski remembers two things that impressed him about Simeon: his generous service and spirit of hospitality. When John was a novice at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin, Simeon often—and quite literally—went out of his way to ensure that the friars and our guests felt at home. It was not unusual that a member of the community in the kitchen would usually state, “Oh, looks like we're out of (name of the food product)” and moments later we would hear the dyspeptic diesel rumble of Simeon's VW Rabbit as it headed toward the grocery store in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

In 1992 he continued his retirement as local minister at St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton, Wisconsin. He admitted that it was a large community to take care of because residents arrived in fairly good health, but gradually needed more attention. He spent most of his time taking friars to doctors. Simeon said that the expenses were high but not extravagant, and gladly accepted the money received from the Green Bay Diocese which was offered to retired religious. A needlepoint picture of the Virgin Mary with two cherubs, which took him ten years to finish, hangs near the front door of St. Fidelis friary.

Seven years later he returned to St. Felix Friary at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin, as a retired member of the formation community where he celebrated his 80th birthday along with 60 of his Capuchin friends who came to honor him on this festive occasion. In June 2004, his sister Kay wrote a letter to Dan Anholzer, provincial minister, asking him to have Simeon live with her instead of a nursing home, so she could monitor his medications and afford him a proper diet. Dan assured her that Simeon didn't need a nursing home, but would live with his brothers in community and receive the care that he needed. In 2004, he came back to St. Fidelis Friary where his health gradually diminished. He died on 31 December 2007, and is buried at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin.

— Richard Hart