

Neerology

Cyrus Toschik
1920-2013



Cyrus Toschik was born on December 15, 1920, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to George and Catherine Toschik. He was baptized January 2nd at St. Anne Parish and was given the name Jerome John.

Cyrus was the seventh of ten children, with six brothers and three sisters. The oldest sibling became Capuchin Paul Toschik, who ministered and died in Guam.

As Cyrus grew up, his family came to experience economic hardship. Young Jerome's dad began the George E. Toschik Sporting Goods store in 1925. The business began well, but when the depression hit in 1929, demand for sports equipment began to suffer. The family struggled to maintain their livelihood. Finally, in 1940, the business went bankrupt, and George found employment with a New Deal program called the Works Progress Administration.

Through all these years of poverty, the Toschik family barely managed to make ends meet. At times, they had to move from living space to living space. Conditions were Spartan, with orange crates being used as cupboards, and curtains dividing kitchen area from living area. At times, the only hot water that was available came from a double burner hot plate.

For his primary education, Cyrus went to St. Ann, St. Elizabeth, and St. John Nepomuk parochial schools. His high school learning took place at Messmer, a school that then enrolled about 900 students.

After graduating from Messmer in 1938, Cyrus found a job at a garage with Studebaker. He worked in the paint and body shop. It was a fortunate time for him because the Depression did not offer many jobs. Doing well in the painting department, Cyrus was promoted to a being a mechanic changing spark plugs and distributors. "My next older brother, Edward, also got a job after graduating from High School. We turned a larger part of our salaries over to our father."

When World War II broke out, Cyrus was drafted. So he enlisted in the Coast Guard and served there for three years. During basic training, he was sent to diesel engine school in Brooklyn, NY, for three months. In those war years, the Coast Guard policed the east coast looking for submarines. After heavy storms, the mines were often displaced, and part of his ship's duty was to re-arrange the buoys. The ship he was on also escorted ships arriving to their docks. His

assignment was in the engine room where he served with the title of MO. MM. 2nd Class. Cyrus said that he liked this tour of duty.

Cyrus did not like the type of lives many of his buddies in the Coast Guard were living, however. He did not want to compromise his faith. This faith direction in his life began to sharpen in time, and after his tour of duty in the Coast Guard, Cyrus began to think of his vocation.

He first corresponded with St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee. They asked if he had Latin. Since he did not, he was told he had to wait and first learn this language.

During this waiting time, he remembered a previous contact with the Capuchins. He had made a retreat at Monte Alverno Retreat Center in Appleton, Wisconsin when in high school. There he came across a brochure for St. Lawrence Seminary at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. At first, he thought the Capuchins were too strict. But now he decided to contact Gerald Walker who then invited Cyrus to come to St. Lawrence.

So in 1946, Cyrus went to Calvary and forgot about St. Francis Seminary. Having already graduated from high school, he was placed in the special class. He liked his time there and did pretty well in his studies. Math and languages were not his top skills, but he did much better in literature and history.

In the spring of 1947, he formally applied for admittance into the Capuchin Order of the Province of St. Joseph. In answer to a question on the application form, dated April 21, 1947, "Why do you wish to become a religious?" he gave the answer, "because I desire the complete sacrifice of the religious life."

Gerald Walker, in his letter to the provincial minister (July 13, 1947) recommending Jerome to be accepted into the order, said, "Like his brother, Fr. Paul, Jerome Toschik is an excellent character and a good candidate for the Order. . . . He is a very pious young man . . . truly a man of principle, above all human respect."

On August 31, 1947, Jerome John Toschik was invested with the Capuchin habit. He took the religious name of Cyrus and began his novitiate as cleric novice at St. Felix Friary, Huntington, Indiana.

The following year, on September 1, 1948, he made his simple profession and moved to Mary Immaculate Seminary in Garrison, New York, to continue his education. After a year of study there, he decided that continuing to study for the priesthood was not his calling. "I found adjusting to the studies quite difficult. So after a holy conference with Fr. Provincial, I was given permission to join the Capuchin brothers in the Detroit novitiate house."

Cyrus entered the brother's novitiate in June 1949 at St. Bonaventure's in Detroit. Since he had already made the cleric novitiate, there were some privileges for him. He was assigned to the kitchen and there he worked with Leo Wollenweber for four months. After they made him head of the kitchen, Cyrus put his heart and soul in his ministry as if it were a labor of love.

When Cyrus completed his novitiate in July 1950, he remained in Detroit and continued to work in the kitchen as cook and instructor.

Cyrus committed his life to Christ fully in his perpetual profession on September 17, 1951. Shortly after that, in October of 1951, he was directed by the provincial minister to move back to St. Felix Friary in Huntington where he continued his cooking ministry and did the buying.

After five years at St. Felix, Cyrus was given the obedience by the provincial minister to move to St. Joseph's Friary in Appleton on December 18, 1956. His new role was to help Arnold Sauter in maintenance and as sacristan. Kenneth Barnes was local minister, and asked Cyrus to also do some of the cooking.

After three years, Cyrus told Gerald Walker, the provincial minister, that it was just too much and he needed a break from the long hours. So, on May 24, 1960, Cyrus traveled to Sacred Heart Friary in Baraga, Michigan, which at that time was the brother's novitiate. He cooked there for five years for approximately 27 people; Don Brody was the novice director. In addition to cooking, he became instructor for the candidates in the kitchen.

During this time, Cyrus began to experience eye trouble. His doctors found that he had cataracts and wanted to operate on both eyes at the same time. Cyrus was hesitant, however, and put off any surgery.

On January 8, 1966, Gerard Hesse, the provincial minister, asked Cyrus to move to Crown Point, Indiana to cook for St. Mary Seminary, the house of Philosophy. The work load there was much heavier with about 75 or more people to feed. After ten months of this demanding labor, Cyrus asked to give up cooking, and he was changed to maintenance.

On November 10, 1967, Cyrus moved north again to Baraga to take over the kitchen and become assistant instructor of the novices.

By this time, Cyrus eye problems were becoming serious. He moved briefly to St. Felix in Huntington in August 1970, and then up to St. Francis Friary in Milwaukee on August 30 of that same year. There he had one cataract surgery performed. A year later the other eye received the same procedure. But scar tissue developed in this case and his vision in this eye was not good.

On May 20, 1971, Cyrus moved to the new St. Anthony Retreat Center at Marathon. Within a year, he was again elected to cook. But this time he went away to school out East with Francis Mary and John Kocian to enhance his culinary skills.

During his ministry at St. Anthony's Retreat, Cyrus' brother, Paul, became very ill. The friars in Guam invited Cyrus to come to visit his brother. The provincial minister, Ken Reinhart, encouraged Cyrus by letter (February 19, 1989) to fly down. But when Cyrus called his brother, Paul was too sick to even speak on the phone. Paul died shortly after on February 24, 1989.

A year later, Cyrus was being seriously bothered by his left eye which was always watering. He was sent to Madison where the doctors thought new technology could help. He was offered the opportunity for a cornea transplant. Apparently, Cyrus at first felt he could not consent because of the expense. It was only the encouragement of Ken Reinhart that convinced him to go ahead: "First, let me express very clearly that you should have no deep regrets about this expenditure that is being imposed on the province. Be assured that you are following God's plan in this matter. You have given many years and fantastic service to the province over the years and it is our responsibility and privilege to assist you in whatever way we can in the care of your health. This is certainly a reasonable expenditure and a reasonable need for you to clear up the vision in your left eye" (Oct 15, 1990). Cyrus had the surgery and his vision improved.

Cyrus's final assignment to ministry was at St. Anthony's and lasted 24 years, the longest of his Capuchin career. But now he was 74 years old and was getting tired. Arthritis was setting in. Back problems were showing up. It seemed his body was wearing out and he felt it was time for full retirement.

In his letter requesting this new status (February 9, 1995), Cyrus expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be part of a retreat ministry that grew from its very beginnings. But he also noted that he had become exhausted and that his health was beginning to limit what he could do for this ministry. He thought it was time to enter a more contemplative way of life with greater emphasis on prayer.

In a return letter to Cyrus (February 22, 1995), Jim Zelinski thanked Cyrus for having "served all these years in your various assignments." And Jim agreed with something Cyrus said: "You are not retiring; just changing jobs. Your contemplative life will be very important for the province as your active one was for all these many faithful years." In a follow up letter to Cyrus (April 17, 1995), Jim thanked Cyrus' for the many years of service at St. Anthony, helping to turn it "from a 'thriving clericate' into a thriving retreat, spirituality center."

So on March 11, 1995, Cyrus moved to St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton to begin his life not only of full retirement but also of greater prayer and contemplation.

During his stay at St. Fidelis, he was afflicted with shingles. "It was the worst suffering I ever had," he said. Even after shingles had gone, a residue of pain continued.

Cyrus loved to tour the outdoors of neighboring Monte Alverno Retreat Center. When his mobility began to decline, he was given the use of a motorized chair. He could often be seen by

the staff at Monte Alverno zipping down the pathways of the property there was well as the cemetery of St. Joseph.

In July, 2009, Cyrus fractured his hip. He was moved to St. Paul's Home in Neenah for rehabilitation. St. Paul's home, however, turned out to be his final residence here on earth. Over the next four years there, his condition gradually weakened. He died in hospice care on May 9, 2013.

The Liturgy of Christian Burial was celebrated at Monte Alverno Retreat Center on Tuesday, May 14, with burial at the Capuchin plot in St. Joseph Cemetery.

As we look back on the life of Cyrus Toschik, we see a quiet and hidden life, wrapped in humility. In his funeral homily for Cyrus (May 14, 2013), the provincial minister, John Celichowski, noted that Cyrus was never comfortable with change and with the turmoil in the world and in the church. "He often found it all hard to understand and accept. But Cyrus possessed something that helped him to keep it all in perspective: humility. . . . It allowed him to see God, others, and himself in their proper perspective."

John Kocian, a close friend, remembers Cyrus as a quiet, contemplative friar, who followed a strict form of poverty and simplicity. Cyrus ate sparingly, though he loved to indulge in an occasional slice of pie. John noticed in Cyrus a strong sense of obedience, always ready to take on tough kitchen assignments when asked, cooking for large groups of friars, getting the meals ready at the scheduled time.

In his letter supporting the admission of Cyrus to the novitiate (July 13, 1947), Gerald Walker expressed trust "that Jerome's deep desire for perfect Capuchin life and his ardent singleness of purpose will lead him with God's grace into an excellent Capuchin." We have every reason to believe that Gerald's faith in Cyrus was on the mark.

On one of the forms Cyrus filled out about his life contained the following question: "What would I like to be said about me?" He wrote, "Semper Fidelis." He then added his own translation, "(He was) always faithful." The fidelity that Gerald Walker foresaw certainly was lived out in Cyrus' life. It is a fidelity we can admire and imitate as we remember him.

— Adrian Staehler