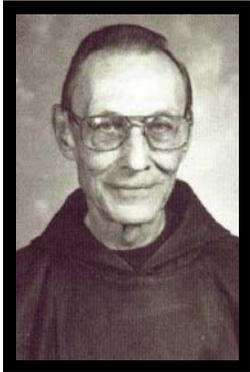


# Neerology

**Baldwin Beyer**  
1926-1999



After attending Baldwin's funeral in Twentynine Palms, California, on 6 January 1999, Tony Scannell reflected: "Just got back from a tremendously inspiring wake and funeral for Baldwin. The wake took place in a standing-room only church. Parishioners were invited to offer some thoughts, memories or stories about Baldwin. The response was instantaneous, and tremendous: one outpouring after another, even from former parishioners at Palm Springs who came, about how Baldwin had brought a dead parish back to life, what he did for children — even a little ten year old boy spoke — and a variety of praise and admiration for countless acts of service and ministry. It was moving."

I hope the following account will be able to capture for us something of our Capuchin brother, Baldwin Beyer. His story came to an end on 2 January 1999; it began in Chicago, where he was born, 30 April 1926. He was baptized Martin Frank Beyer on the following 16<sup>th</sup> of May in the Church of the Annunciation. Helen Wozniak, his mother, had come from Poland; she married Casimir Beyer of Chicago in 1923. Baldwin was always proud of his Polish heritage and on occasion would utter a number of Polish words. Some have said they were cuss words; I thought at times they were fervent aspirations! The little boy was 3 years old when his parents divorced and he and his one sister, Lorraine, who was 6 years old at the time, did not see much of Casimir after that.

In 1939 their mother married Charles Dwyer who worked for the *Detroit Free Press*, so the family packed up and moved from Chicago to Detroit. After Charles Dwyer died, Helen entered marriage once more in 1947 with Glen Hanes, and that lasted 31 years until Helen died in 1978; Glen died in 1982.

After moving to Detroit, Martin was part of the scene at St. Aloysius Church downtown, where Al Deimel was pastor, and where he made his First Communion. He was confirmed two years later by Stephen Woznicki at St. Vincent's Church, located down near the ballpark.

Looking over Martin's elementary school records, you see he attended public school: 4 years in Chicago and 4 years in Detroit. Then there were 2 years of high school in Detroit at Western H.S., 2 years in the Seraphicate of Garrison, New York, followed by a final high school year in St. Lawrence Seminary, Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. Martin was disappointed, understandably, when required to repeat one of his high school years, but he did so.

As for his academic grades in high school, there were A's and B's in Detroit, with B's and C's after that throughout his seminary years: he pursued philosophy at Capuchin Seminary of Mary Immaculate, Garrison, and theology at Capuchin Seminary of St. Anthony, Marathon, Wisconsin. For his college years he received a bachelor's degree with scholastic philosophy as

a major, and for his theology years, while no formal academic degree was given, a master's level equivalency in sacred theology would describe it.

On 2 March 1945, Martin was invested with a brand new Capuchin habit by the provincial minister Clement Neubauer in Huntington, Indiana, and was called "Baldwin" for the first time. A religious name at that time was given, not chosen. He didn't seem to mind a life-long nickname of "Breeze"; he often used it for his signature. The class invested on that day with him numbered 19 in all. Because the Second World War was still going on, and the local draft boards were searching for eligible young men, seminarians were kept in school through the summer months. This resulted in overlapping classes of novices. For part of year of 1945, the walls of St. Felix Friary in Huntington were bulging with 40 cleric novices. Novices rarely left the grounds of the friary, so a lot of in-house activity needed to be provided. Baldwin had musical talents which he contributed generously.

Along with 14 other Capuchins, Baldwin was ordained in St. Mary's Church, Marathon on 27 August 1953. Between then and the time of his death in 1999, Baldwin's 45 years as a Capuchin priest reveal a variety of assignments. He served in the parishes of St. Elizabeth in Milwaukee; St. Joseph in Appleton; a new parish in Chicago as administrator; Our Lady of Solitude in Palm Springs, California as associate pastor; and Blessed Sacrament parish in Twentynine Palms, California as administrator — his final assignment. The time spent in these parish assignments totals about 15 years. Baldwin was known to turn his hand at baking, often to the happy surprise of his confreres and others.

For the 30 years of ministry outside of parish work, Baldwin spent a few years at St. Francis Brothers School and St. Lawrence Seminary, Mt. Calvary as a teacher of religion and music director; 4 years in Huntington as teacher of the Victory Noll Sisters and spiritual director of Secular Franciscans; 3 years at St. Bonaventure in Detroit where Baldwin was chaplain to no less than 20 different nursing homes and nearby hospitals!

The specialized ministry, however, for which Baldwin received wide acclaim was in the field of alcohol and drug rehabilitation and counselling. He left behind a stack of certificates he received which include: a) University of Utah School of Alcoholic Studies; b) Michigan certificate as social worker; c) Michigan certificate as addiction counselor; d) Michigan Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse counselor; e) National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse counselor; f) Clinical Pastoral Education — first unit — Harper Hospital in Detroit; g) USCC General Health Care Facility chaplain; h) National Association of Catholic Chaplains, and others.

Between the years, 1986-1989, Baldwin took charge of the organization and counselling at Jefferson House of the Capuchin Community Center in Detroit. Prior to that he served as alcoholism counselor in Michigan for one year in the County Health Services of Midland, and for eleven years in Gladwin County where he was also the direct services supervisor of Human Aid, Inc.

A wonderful recognition was given him by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislature of the State of Michigan in 1994. It read:

Let it be known that it is with great respect for his unselfishness in reaching out to others, especially in helping people at the crossroads in their life, that we are proud to honor Fr. Baldwin Martin Beyer. As he is recognized for his exceptional work by the Mid-State Substance Abuse Coordinating Agency, may he know of

the respect harbored for him by so many, especially by those who enjoy a more full and meaningful life as a result of his sacrifices and compassion.

In his demanding task, Fr. Beyer utilizes not only his extensive educational preparation, but also his deeply rooted personal commitment for other people, each one of whom he considers a brother or sister ... It is clear that Fr. Beyer's deep faith in God and his trust in the inherent worth of each person, represent a life's commitment which is most remarkable and which constitutes a model all of us should seek to emulate in our own lives..." I'm sure Baldwin was very moved by this glowing tribute.

Baldwin's health, it seems, was always a major concern — not only at the end where the cause of death is listed as "carcinoma in right lung - metastasis to the left." His sister, Lorraine, older than Baldwin by 3 years, told me that she was the healthy one and her little brother was the frail one. She used to step right in when needed to physically protect her little brother!

His medical history shows measles early on and an appendectomy in 1944; undulant fever that same year; myocardial infarction and undulant fever in 1957 followed by 2 months of convalescence; another coronary attack in 1959, when his liver also showed impending cirrhosis; a nervous breakdown with seven weeks of institutional care that same year; removal of a section of his stomach due to ulcers in that period, and kidney stones requiring lithotripsy (3x) in 1995.

Undoubtedly the biggest health battle Baldwin had to win was to maintain sobriety, and this he did, though it took several new beginnings. Over a period of 20 years, from the early 70s to early 90s, he submitted himself to the following alcoholism rehabilitation programs: a) Sacred Heart Center in Detroit; b) Guest House in Lake Orion MI; c) Guest House in Rochester MN a couple times; d) Servants of the Paraclete in Jemez Springs NM. We might think of the mountain climber who attempts to reach the summit of Mt. Everest; though several attempts failed, he finally succeeds. God rewarded his perseverance. For through it all Baldwin comes to understand perfectly what others were suffering and he was able to assist them so effectively.

One day in 1994, Baldwin received a very affirming letter. "I wish to take this opportunity" the hospital administrator wrote, "to thank you for your endless commitment to the chaplaincy program at Desert Hospital. When you suggested that you would be available to take calls for all our Catholic patients twenty-four hours, seven days a week, I could not believe my ears. Yet during this past year that is exactly what happened ... Thank you sincerely" (Signed) Dolores Siegman.

From Palm Springs, a group of Ministers of Service wrote to Tony Scannell the provincial minister in 1995: "We, the Ministers of Service of Our Lady of Solitude Parish, have benefited from the outstanding contribution of Father Beyer. He has motivated, instructed, and encouraged us by calling us into the Lord's service ... We appreciate Father Beyer's loving help and want him to stay. He has inspired us to formulate our ministry. We wish to share with you our manual, a copy of which is included." "Respectfully yours." 19 parishioners added their signatures.

Shortly afterwards, Tony Scannell wrote to Baldwin who was observing 50 years as a Capuchin.

We have known each other for many years going back to the minor seminary and all through Capuchin life. During these 50 years you have assumed many heavy

responsibilities after your studies on the part of the province. I want to thank you for all of that. I learned of your organizational skills in particular when you were helping us prepare for a chapter and helped us to form a very effective process for handling resolutions and proposals. Since then I have been sent your magnificent "Manual for Ministers of Service" for the parishioners of Our Lady of Solitude in Palm Springs. I can see you haven't at all lost your organizational touch nor your talent for producing paper! It is wonderful that so many people are expressing gratitude to you for the wonderful work that you are doing ... Let me add my own thanks and congratulations to you at this celebration time. I hope you will take enough care of yourself, perhaps put a little more calories on those bones, so that we can all enjoy you for another 50 years.

Even though Tony Scannell got carried away when he wished Baldwin another 50 years, Baldwin did stay with us another 4. Now in the Communion of Saints, we trust fully, he shares life eternal!

*Written by Jogues Constance*