

Neerology

Andrew Daniels
1950 - 1995



Born: 9 September 1950
Invested: 17 August 1969
Perpetually Professed: August 1976
Ordained: 20 May 1978
Died: 13 May 1995

In a 1995 *Michigan Catholic* article Barbara Dakoske, HVM, said the following about Andy Daniels: "He was an energetic, vibrant person, and his preaching was the greatest, marked by the heart-felt stories he would tell." She also said that Andy introduced African-American art into the parish, and "in his person he brought an African-American presence," which had helped the parish attract more new members from its community.

"He got the children involved with the readings and the parts of the mass. Most of them aren't Catholic, but they sure know the mass," she said.

"He was just loved by everybody," Dakoske continued. "His vibrancy was what really came across; he brought you into it. The way he celebrated Eucharist was really whole-hearted."

The comments shared by Dakoske could be echoed by numerous people who knew Andy. Dakoske did an excellent job of summarizing what many people thought about Andrew Daniels. He had energy to spare which he put into numerous projects and dreams. All who knew Andy could easily remember how he could add life to an otherwise boring conversation with a story. At the end of the tale odds were that everyone listening would be rolling with laughter! It also is important to know the special place that Andy held for daily liturgy. Whether he celebrated at one of the many parishes around the Midwest that he served, with a group of students at St. Lawrence, or in a formation house, Andy saw the liturgy as a vital part of who he was as a religious.

How do we remember such a person – simple, yet complex? Many of his Capuchin brothers in reflecting on Andy talked about “the man” and the effect of his personality on all who came into contact with him. He was a person who loved life, people, laughter, and organizing things. One of Andy’s best friends, Daniel Anholzer, described Andy as “a person who could enlist people to do stuff that they didn’t know they were doing until after they were doing it!” Another close friend, Daniel Fox, said that Andy “was an operator par excellence! He was ‘busy’ and could get into places that no one else could.” This ability to be friendly and charming would serve Andy well in his life as a Capuchin.

Andy Daniels grew up in Detroit, Michigan in the 1950s. One of the neighborhood kids was the internationally known singer Diana Ross. Probably without knowing it, this early ability to be next to people of fame and greatness — either by coincidence or luck — would follow Andy for the rest of his life. Throughout his 25 years in the province Andy traveled, and served many leaders of the church and even got a letter from Coretta Scott King (widow of Martin Luther King), sending regrets about not being able to attend his solemn profession.

Andy entered St. Lawrence Seminary in the early 1960s. Andy’s elementary school training was given by the Felician Sisters, so Andy *had to learn*. He was eager and ambitious about education, which would lead him to being a lifelong student. Studies did not come easy to Andy according to brothers who were classmates, and this was a constant challenge throughout his life, but it did not stop him from pursuing and completing a post-graduate degree in educational administration, and to eventually begin doctoral studies. One of the things remembered by brother Capuchins was Andy’s gift of speaking Polish, which he demonstrated with pride. This was somewhat rare for an African American, but was also one of the many gifts that Andy had which helped him to make contact with people. The Felician Sisters were instrumental in converting Andy to Catholicism and to an eventual vocation to the priesthood. It is significant that when Andy became a convert in the sixth grade, the rest of his family followed! It was observed that Andy “knew more as a convert than many lifelong Catholics about the tenets of their faith.”

Friendship was probably the most important thing in life for Andy, and one of his best friends was Daniel Anholzer. He traveled many times to Dan’s home in Kimberly, Wisconsin to visit the Anholzer clan and share holidays. Francis Voris and Daniel Fox, other close friends, simply said that “Andy changed the town of Kimberly. He brought color to an otherwise segregated town and he did it with his kind and unassuming manner.” While growing up during a time of racial turmoil and insensitivity in the country, Andy’s heart allowed him to turn the other cheek more times than could be counted when hurtful things were done to him. A particular situation was remembered when a UPS man called him “burr head.” While hurt and embarrassed by the remark, he would not be denied the ability to use his life to serve the Lord. His charm would disarm you, and his personality as an extrovert allowed him to break traditional boundaries.

While Andy was committed to “home” he also loved to travel to new places and to meet new people. He was very involved with the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, and although he was never elected to a national office, was one of the most faithful members in attending the yearly conference. In addition to traveling to the conference each year Andy also encouraged other black religious men and women and students in studies to attend the convention. He felt very strongly about the need to support and nurture minority vocations and wanted to do his part in making sure that there was a future for others.

In reviewing Andy’s life it is easy to focus on some of the obvious things: his love of travel and food, shopping, people and laughter. It is also important to know and remember that he was a man who suffered with weight control and with feelings that he was sometimes misunderstood by others. Those close to Andy knew that he would have loved to someday be ordained a bishop. At the same time, Andy was very comfortable in working with primarily poor and minority people.

Despite the fun and joyous sides of Andy’s life in the order there was also another part of him that few ever saw. A native of Detroit, Andy had a family that could best be described as *dysfunctional*. In addition to having an alcoholic mother, and other family members who were in prison, or challenged with other problems, Andy was seen as the anchor of the family, and ended up being the person that all members ran to in times of trouble. Friends remembered the late night telephone calls from family — always asking a young friar in formation for help. Despite the sometimes tremendous strain and pressure of attempting to hold his family together as he studied for his own vocation many miles away, Andy never complained. As noble as it was his refusal to “complain” would eventually lead to his death. The jubilee trip to Rome with Dan Anholzer and Dan’s parents in August 1995 was to be a time of celebration, but Andy was already sick at the Detroit Airport when the journey began. What was planned as a “dream trip” to a special place would prove to be the last journey in Andy’s short life. Despite the urgings from his friends, Andy insisted that the trip proceed. He resisted seeking medical help until they reached Rome, but died while on the way to the hospital from “system poisoning.” Rome was a place that Andy loved, and tragically, he saw very little. But, as Dan Anholzer reflected, “it was the most appropriate place for him to die.”

Andy Daniels was a simple man who accomplished many things. We will not see him being given honors or awards, and there will probably not be any books written about his life. In fact, what will probably happen is that his life will remain a memory in the hearts and minds of many individual people. At his funeral anyone who listened to the many former students and friends who spoke could easily see that this was a person who had made a difference in his time on earth. He touched many students who attended St. Lawrence Seminary and was a positive influence in the lives of countless men and women who had an opportunity to be in his life. A nephew, Paul Daniels, read the following at Andy’s funeral:

*Now it's time to say good bye.
God needed a special angel*

*so who am I to question why?
You educated, elevated and motivated
young minds.
The world would be a better place
if we had more of your kind.
Wherever you went
Hearts were touched; from the start
you pulled lives together
when they were falling apart.
With heavenly wings,
my beloved uncle Andy does fly,
and for now it's time to say good-bye.*

*Written by Robert Smith
(in consultation with Daniel Anholzer, Daniel Fox and Booker Ashe)*