

Neerology

Carl Pulvermacher
1926 - 2006



Gerald John Pulvermacher was born to Hubert Pulvermacher and Cecilia Lenerz on February 27, 1926 in Marshfield, Wisconsin. Gerald was the sixth of nine children. He attended public school in Marshfield for his first four years and Catholic School in Bakerville for the next four years. In 1940, he decided to follow his two older brothers to St. Lawrence Seminary, Mount Calvary, Wisconsin for high school.

By this time his family had moved to a farm in Pittsville, Wisconsin. His parents farmed their whole life. Gerald grew up working on the farm together with his brothers and sisters.

During summer vacations Gerald would work on neighboring farms as a hired hand and as a cheese factory laborer.

In the summer of 1944, Gerald decided to follow his two older brothers, Lucian and Pius, into the Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order. He was given the name of Frater Carl. Eight years later their youngest brother, Omer (Claude), was also received into the order. In 1945, Carl made his simple profession at St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana and moved on to the house of philosophy at Mary Immaculate Monastery in Garrison, N.Y.

It was in Garrison that Carl made his perpetual profession on July 12, 1948. In 1949 he graduated and moved to St. Anthony Friary in Marathon, WI for theological studies. Studies never came easy for Carl, but he kept plugging away and was ordained by John Patrick Treacy on September 3, 1952 at St. Mary Church, Marathon WI. He received faculties in June of 1953 and was assigned to St. Labre Indian School in Ashland, MT.

His primary areas of ministry were in teaching religion at St. Labre Grade School and High School. He was also given pastoral ministry at Birney Day and Birney Post. The former was primarily a Native American settlement and the latter was made up of white ranchers, teachers and ranch hands. He lived at the mission at Ashland and occasionally would stay overnight for a day or two at Birney Day.

The students at St. Labre knew him as "Father Fix-it." Whether it was a lawn mower, motor or watch that was not working properly, Carl would know how to get it to work again. Fintan Schaub, who worked as a maintenance man and caretaker at the mission, would often turn to Carl in his needs. Capuchin Fabian Fehring, who was just a year

behind Carl in studies said of him: "The Native American people loved him. His simplicity of spirit, his humility and patience endeared him to many. He touched the hearts of many and his influence on them was real and lasting."

It was during his years at St. Labre that Capuchin Emmett Hoffmann decided to purchase a plane for the mission. It was a used Cessna 170. Emmett got his license but then lost it because his blood pressure was out of control. Carl longed to fly the plane. He went to ground school and sometime later he got his license.

Before he even got his license, his instructor released him for a solo flight. Carl loved to fly. Unfortunately, the plane's engine blew a piston. For most people this would have been a time to panic. For Carl, however, it was an exciting challenge! The rugged conditions of Montana were not ideal for an emergency landing; but in a move that amazed even more experienced pilots, Carl landed the plane between two irrigation ditches. No wonder he earned the nickname "Cowboy in the Sky!" He always felt he could do almost anything with the plane. A few years later he was reported to the FAA for flying the plane beneath the electrical wires during the building of Yellowtail Dam. Carl never talked about that.

In 1965 the Diocese of Great Falls (later Great Falls-Billings) asked the province to take over the Crow Reservation which was made up of Pryor, St. Xavier, Crow Agency, Lodge Grass and Wyola. The parish at Hardin and all these missions were staffed by the Jesuits. Carl was asked to head this effort by serving as pastor at St. Xavier Mission, which had a boarding school. Alphonse Heckler was appointed Pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Hardin, while Fabian Fehring lived at Hardin and took care of Lodge Grass, Wyola, Crow Agency on the Crow Reservation, as well as Busby on the Cheyenne Reservation. Fr. Brown, S.J. remained at St. Charles Mission in Pryor, MT.

When Carl went to St. Xavier there were only 17 children in the boarding school, which was staffed by three Oldenburg (IN) Franciscans. They thought of closing the school; but within two years Carl raised the enrollment to 117. The bishop was so impressed that he offered Carl the money to put up a new metal classroom building. It contained four classrooms, an office, a library, and a small gym.

Carl was a real spendthrift. He did ask St. Labre to cover the salaries of the sisters, dorm supervisor and cooks. On a few occasions he asked help with the heating bills. For the most part, however, he covered the costs from the meager funds he could raise and from the profits of bingo games in the little parish. On one occasion he picked up sugar beets that dropped off trucks in the Big Horn Valley and asked the cooks to make soup out of them for the kids.

Fabian Fehring shares the story of going to California with Carl and his brother, Carl Fehring. Carl had a new van but he did not get air conditioning. To save money they did not stay at a motel or in campgrounds. They would sleep in the van at some convenient spot and then go to the rest room at some service station to brush their teeth,

wash up and shave. When they complained about the heat in the Mohave Desert Carl soaked three towels in cold water and told them to wrap them around their necks. "It works as well as air conditioning," he assured them.

Another friar remembered going to the Big Horn Mountains with Carl. The other friar wanted to stop and eat. Carl said that they would have a picnic. When they reached the mountains, Carl opened the hood and took two cans of pork and beans he had wired to the manifold of the car. He chuckled and with a gleam in his eye told the other friar, "Hot lunch!"

With the construction of the new classroom building a little pressure was taken off of the old brick building that served as the student dormitory, kitchen, dining room, and study hall, as well as the living quarters and chapel for the four sisters. One night the cooks and sisters complained about a gas smell in this building. Carl said he would check it out after supper. It was February 26, 1968 and since it was a beautiful warm Montana evening Carl allowed the children to play outside in honor of his birthday. The sisters went into their chapel for evening prayers. Carl went into the basement where the gas smell was the greatest. He checked around to see what he could find.

It is not certain what happened. Perhaps Carl lit a match, as he was accustomed to doing; or maybe there an electrical spark from the old wiring. All that is certain is that there was a huge explosion that left hardly a brick upon another brick. Nothing was left of the three stories. The sisters crawled out over the bricks where there used to be a door. Miraculously, no one was seriously injured, though they were all covered with plaster dust. One child was hit by a piece of glass that required three or four stitches.

Several Capuchins were driving back from a basketball game in Hardin. They could see the red sky from the fire and joked that it probably was "St. X" burning down. Once they arrived at Crow Agency, they discovered that it was indeed the case. They rushed over to find out that Carl had been burned on his hands, face and posterior. Like the sisters, he had crawled out over the bricks and was otherwise unharmed. People reported that Carl was fine and would be back to the mission later that evening. That was not to be the case.

The next day Emmett Hoffmann and Larry Ablor went into Billings to purchase a modular home for the sisters and stopped at the hospital to see Carl. It was quite a shock: his face was swollen so much that he could not see; he had huge blisters on his face and around his mouth; and he was in severe pain. After Emmett took one look at him he had to walk outside for air. He did go back for just 30 seconds or so to promise Carl that he would receive the best of care.

Within another day or two the friars had made arrangements for Ted Kramer to fly Carl to St. Mary's Burn Center in Milwaukee. His first days there he was in excruciating pain as they cleaned the Vaseline-type treatment from his wounds. After that he was given

an almost light plaster-like treatment on his burns that took the pain away immediately. He was there for a little more than a month.

In late spring 1968 Carl was able to return to St. Xavier. But new problems developed. When the new order of the mass was established by Paul VI, Carl had a very difficult time accepting it. He could not accept Vatican Council II and referred to it as a “bogus council” and the new Mass as invalid. He would say the new Mass in English but quietly say the words of consecration in Latin. He would say weekday Masses in Latin using the old rite. When his superiors told him that he had to say the new liturgy or else resign, he chose to resign.

Thus he was transferred to St. Anthony Retreat Center in Marathon. He spent most of his time working in the various shops and helping with dishes on a daily basis. He was very content to do the manual labor but was uncomfortable when he was asked to take weekend help-outs or to do chaplaincy work at the Wausau hospital.

In 1972 he contacted the provincial minister and said that he was interested in going to Australia to help the Italian Capuchins working there. He had heard that the church of Australia was very conservative. After his transfer, he met some traditional Catholics who wanted to have the Tridentine Mass. Carl obliged by having clandestine Masses in their homes. Again Carl was confronted by the provincial minister, local minister and community in Australia to stop saying the Tridentine Mass or to leave. It was 1974. Carl chose to leave but decided to travel through Europe on his way back to Wisconsin. He had met Archbishop Lefebvre in Sydney and now he met him again in Europe. He also met Fr. Bolduc. He agreed to help Fr. Bolduc in Dickinson, Texas.

Carl returned to the USA and spent time in New York at Garrison and with former classmates. He visited his parents in Pittsville. He met the provincial minister, Lloyd Thiel, on the streets of Hilbert, Wisconsin and told him that he was leaving the province to work with the Society of St. Pius X. Carl moved to Dickinson, Texas. It served as a base of operations from which he would go on 7-10 day Mass circuits. A typical schedule would be Sunday at Dickinson, San Antonio on Monday, Dallas on Tuesday, New Orleans on Wednesday, Kansas City on Thursday, etc.

While working with the Society of Saint Pius X, Carl was instrumental in starting the *Angelus* magazine. He served as managing editor, did the printing, and wrote a column entitled “Ask me.” Carl recalled, “I got to be known by thousands of people from all over through my column. I also printed several books and pamphlets, using my skills learned from working in the print shop in Marathon.”

While he worked with the Society of St. Pius X, Carl claimed until his dying day that he was a Capuchin Franciscan. He wrote to Lloyd Thiel: “I wear my habit, rosary and sandals. I try to live my vows as well as I can in my circumstances.”

In another letter to Lloyd on May 6, 1976 Carl stated: "I am determined to never leave the true Catholic faith into which I was baptized, confirmed and by the grace of God ordained a priest of Jesus Christ. I do not plan to abandon my vocation of being a Capuchin Franciscan....As soon as sanity returns and we have a Catholic organization again, I will gladly return." Lloyd responded by saying, "I recognize that you do need to follow the dictates of your own conscience because it is on this that you will be judged by Almighty God."

Over the years Carl attempted to stay in touch with each of our provincials. In 1984 he contacted then provincial minister Myron Kowalsky requesting the new indult to say the Latin Mass. After conferring with Donald Wiest, Myron responded that only bishops could grant permission to celebrate the Latin Mass in a particular place and for particular times and circumstances.

In 1991 Carl was transferred to Davie, Florida by the superior of the St. Pius X Society. While there he was in charge of four parishes. Gradually that was reduced to three parishes and then two. Carl got in touch with Cecil Clarke, a friar from the St. Mary's Province, who had retired in Florida. He would go to Cecil regularly for the Sacrament of Penance.

As recently as May 2004 Carl wrote to Dan Anholzer, provincial minister: "I would like to be on good terms with my province and the Capuchin Order. Of course, I know that I am in a most unusual position at this time. I still consider myself a Capuchin, wear the habit and sandals and keep the rule and vows to the best of my poor ability."

On June 4, 2004 Carl again contacted Dan Anholzer and informed him that he had lymphoma and was in a hospital in Florida. He reported that he seemed to be on the mend; and he also mentioned that he had Medicare and a supplemental insurance to take care of expenses. Carl continued to provide the Mass for his two parishes in Florida.

In January of 2006, however, Carl fell and broke his arm. The following month he was asked to return to Dickinson, Texas. In his spirit of poverty he brought only himself, his habit, a rosary and a briefcase. He was placed in hospice and had four home nurses who cared for him. He was no longer able to say Mass but he could be observed raising his hands several times a day as at the consecration. It was the best he could do. On April 24 he went into cardiac arrest. He received the Sacrament of the Sick and spent his last five weeks in the Intensive Care Unit.

Carl Pulvermacher died on May 29, 2006, holding a rosary in his right hand and a crucifix in his left. On June 7, 2006 the bishop of the Tridentine Rite offered a solemn high Mass for him. Carl is buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery, Dickinson, Texas.