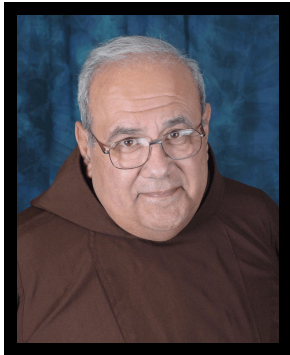


Neerology

Vincent Reyes
1923 - 2010



Born: 3 October 1940

Invested: 21 March 1961

Perpetually Professed: 21 March 1964

Entered Eternal Life: 26 June 2010

As the provincial minister, John Celichowski, said at the funeral, Vincent Reyes was a natural advocate for the poor and powerless. Whether it was the Capuchin Soup Kitchen (CSK) in Detroit, the emergency ward at Christ Hospital in Chicago, among migrants, or the youth at St. Claire, Michigan, he liked to “tell their story,” as he always said. It was in telling those stories that he showed others the value and dignity of each person he met. This continued in more recent years as Vincent had our senior friars chronicle their lives in a video and oral history project that would enable their stories to live long after each of them had gone.

Vince's great love was photography. He had been shooting pictures since he was a kid, but in recent years he worked with photographers from *Detroit Free Press* and the *Detroit News*. These affiliations gave him contact with many nationally acclaimed photographers in the country. It also gave him access to photographers who would donate their photos to the Soup Kitchen to raise funds for the poor. This venture was called “Visions of the Sacred.” In 2001 he and some fellow photographers came up with the idea of an online photo auction to benefit the CSK. Vincent noted, “We’ve fed more than 22,000 people with the money, and one-fourth of them were children.” “Visions of the Sacred” included photos from all over the world — some were famous, but each told an important story.

Later he authored a book entitled *My Name Is*, a collection of photos and stories of some of the visitors to the Soup Kitchen. Each powerful black and white image included a caption written or told by the guests, who shared something about themselves and their personal journeys. He reflected, “Every story begins the same way — ‘My name is...’ — because a lot of people don’t realize that the homeless have names.”

Vincent was born in Gary, Indiana to Castulo Reyes and Mary Baiz Reyes. He was baptized Chester Joseph (but was thereafter always called Joseph) at Our Lady of Guadalupe, the mother church of the Mexican American community in Chicago. He was the oldest of five siblings. His family life was happy and supportive. His father worked in the steel mills of Gary, Indiana while his mother stayed at home with the children. He attended Assumption Grade School. Vincent said that his first grade was really a Polish school, and when he came home speaking some Polish his father thought it would be better if his Mexican-American son would spend less time on Polish and more time on English; so he took Vincent out of that school and put him into Evans Elementary, a public school. His high school years were spent at St. Francis Brother's School, Calvary Station.

Bob Udulutsch taught shop at the brother's school and described Vince as very likable and lovable, attracting people by his contagious optimism and joyful enthusiasm. He had a real zest for life. Bob also said he remembered Vincent as a student in shop class "where he clearly had no business being!"

Vincent was, as Bob indicated, likeable, optimistic, joyful and enthusiastic about many things, but nothing more than his latest big project! Over more recent years he usually tried to get me involved in one of them. He came up with many great names for these projects and was usually able to get people involved in them. He would say, "Michael I have this great idea for a project and you could do this!" I would reply, "I have enough to do right now!" Vincent especially got people involved in doing things for the poor.

In recent years he was pastoral director of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. As he remarked: "In 1998 I walked through the doors of the soup kitchen in Detroit for the first time. My flock was to be the hundreds of people the soup kitchen serves every day. With that in mind I made it a point to join them at breakfast and lunch whenever possible. You get to meet a lot of people that way...you get to hear a lot of life stories as well. I came to see it what it really was...a great privilege."

Some of the projects he worked on came from his table conversations with the CSK guests. One project, "My Name Is" ended up as a book. Four photographers from the *Detroit Free Press* donated their time, skills and talents, and along with Vince took 150 pictures of people who walked through the soup kitchen's doors. Time was spent interviewing them to understand their daily struggles and for them to have a chance to tell their stories.

They usually *wanted* to talk so that their stories would not be forgotten. Vincent said that sometimes they would let the people talk longer about their lives, troubles and

some of the terrible choices that they made. These conversations made a deep impact on Vincent and seemed to motivate him to find ways to help them through his many talks or, in more recent years, through his fund raising efforts in the development office.

Before he worked at the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, Vincent was a chaplain at Christ Memorial Hospital in Chicago. From the late 1980s through most of the 1990s he worked in the emergency ward, a place that he described as "organized chaos." He tended to families whose children may have been victims of violence. Vincent said that being with the ER staff was an adrenaline-pumping experience. Few words were used: people spoke in short sentences, often with little more than a nod. They learned to do the "dance" of tending to victims of trauma as well as their families.

Vincent followed the patients to the next step. At the end of his shift, he wrote a report on what the day was like, often difficult and long. He kept these writings over the years and intended to put them into a book entitled, *Report from the Floor*. The copy was being proofread when Vincent died; and that work has continued posthumously. When he was offered the opportunity to serve as a chaplain at CSK, he was ready to leave the hospital. He loved the ER but had grown weary of the tensions, long hours, and daily madness.

Reflecting on his ministry as a hospital chaplain, Vincent recalled:

If there are people who wait for death, there are also people who wait for life. There are many forms of life...or maybe more accurately, there are many ways of experiencing life. For most of us life is a matter of peaks and valleys, highs and lows. Good things happen and are enjoyed, sadness occurs and is endured and sometimes, life merely "is."

From 1984-1988 he had a variety of experiences. He spent time in Nicaragua, Bolivia and Mexico in studies, improving his Spanish and getting a better sense of his family's origins. He was the director of the province's candidacy program for racial and ethnic minorities on the North Side of Chicago. That program ended in 1987. Vincent also spent a year in the vocation office.

From 1973 thru 1984 he was part of the youth retreat team at St. Clair, Michigan. If anyone had a gift for sharing the joyful enthusiasm of our Capuchin charism with others, especially young people, it was Vince. Maybe that is why he lasted so long at St. Clair Retreat House: it was a beautiful place that provided him with the opportunity to do important work with youth. It helped that he also enjoyed the community there. He always said that he would not mind going back to retreat ministry.

Nine years before his life and ministry at St. Clair, Vincent was just getting out of formation at Marathon. Before St. Clair he spent three years at St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana, where he worked in the laundry and also in the migrant apostolate. The province has had few Hispanic friars, and Vince seemed to be the perfect person to work in that ministry. While his Spanish was far from wonderful, he felt a link to the people and their difficult lives.

Vincent spent two year at St. Joseph Parish in Saginaw before Huntington. St. Joe's, at the time, was a predominantly Spanish-speaking parish. When Vince went to Dan Anholzer's funeral there in May 2010, people came up to him and remembered him and his work there. It seems that each experience built on the work that had been done. Before Saginaw and right after he made his perpetual vows, he was a student campus minister and youth worker for a couple years in Appleton, where he was stationed at St. Joseph as sacristan. I met him at Marathon and he was what I needed to "lighten" up after Crown Point. He was fun to be around and always encouraging to me. He even showed me the proper way to drink tequila with the salt and lemon. It was far too much work!

In all of our lives one experience builds upon another. It is also true with Vincent Reyes' life. One relationship after another propelled him onward into the future. His experiences with youth, migrants, or a hospital emergency ward gave him an appreciation for the difficult life one has as homeless and hungry. Vincent tried to show the value of each of their God-given lives through his encouraging words, photographs, and efforts to make their lives better.

What more can we say about his Capuchin life? Vincent was not perfect—none of us are—but he generously shared his talents and his joyful enthusiasm to help others.

— Michael Gaffney