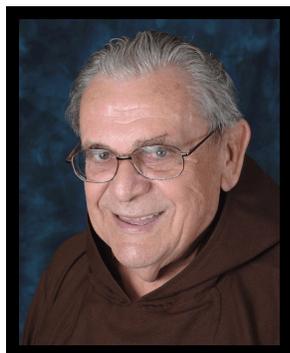


Neerology

Lloyd Thiel
1930 - 2010



Vincent George Thiel was born on 7 July 1930, the son of Matt and Jeanette Schmidt Thiel. His parents owned a small dairy farm in the St. John community near the village of Hilbert, Wisconsin. He was welcomed by four older brothers, Cyril, Melvin, Eugene and Harold. Three years after his birth, a sister Alice was born and the final sibling, Leon entered into the world in 1943. The family exhibited the traditional virtues of thrift, honesty, hard work and a deep Catholic faith. The characteristic German quality of *Gemucklikeit* exhibited itself in their family and community social gatherings, where card playing and a glass or two of beer were always welcomed.

Vincent received his grade school education in a two room parochial school at St John. He reflected that maybe his call to be a priest came in an unusual way. As his pastor was giving out report cards, he looked very angry when he saw the Vincent had two Ds. His fourth grade teacher, an Agnesian Nun, came to his defense and said Vincent told his mother he was going to be a farmer and therefore didn't think he had to study. The pastor abhorred the image of the "dumb farmer" and really bawled him out. The frightened student then deduced that if he had to study, he might as well go all the way and become a priest. But he also admitted that an equally compelling reason was that he really did not like doing farm chores. When he was in eighth grade, Alvin Auer, his pastor, recognized Vincent's desire to go to the seminary. Throughout that year, he took the time to teach the future seminarian Latin during the lunch periods.

The day that he was taken to Calvary to begin his studies at St. Lawrence College, 3 September 1944, was a traumatic one for him and his parents. One day earlier, his mother and father were informed that their son Eugene, an officer in the United States Air Force, had been declared missing in action. His plane which was serving as a transport carrying gasoline to the Chinese Allied Forces from Burma had been shot down. It was only after the end of World War II that the wrecked plane was found. The bodies of the entire crew were buried in a common grave at a veterans' cemetery near St. Louis. The several times Lloyd visited Eugene's resting place evoked a profound and deep emotional response.

Because Vince (he loved to sign his name in florid handwriting as V.G. Thiel) had already studied Latin, he excelled in that subject throughout his life. During his junior Calvary year, the administration made him the keeper of the keys, a very responsible position of locking and unlocking the various doors at the seminary. As a senior, he was placed in charge of

the student canteen, which was then located in the basement of the Laurentianum. Any profits made from its sales were destined for the foreign missions. Unfortunately because of poor student management the previous year, it had lost money. Under the guidance of Lawrence, the new manager closely supervised the venture. The canteen showed a tidy profit during his tenure. He always enjoyed relating the way his mentor taught him how to form a hollow scoop for a double-dipped ice cream cone. Because of his managerial skill, he earned a nickname that would be politically incorrect today but at the time was an acknowledgment of his financial acumen: "Thielstein." Although he lost the name, he never did lose his keen financial insight.

The summer after graduating from Saint Lawrence, Vincent entered the Capuchin novitiate at Huntington. On the day of his investiture, 31 August 1948, he received the name Lloyd. He was a member of the largest provincial novitiate class up to that time, numbering thirty-one. After professing simple vows, he spent three years at Garrison, New York. The division of the province necessitated his return to Huntington where he made his solemn profession and completed his final year of college. Four years of theology were then spent at Saint Anthony Seminary, Marathon WI. Studies were no problem for him. He enjoyed a friendly game of cards, especially Sheep's Head and Scot. While in New York, hiking was a popular choice. He participated in sports. His favorite was handball, which transformed into racquetball when he returned to Calvary as a teacher.

The young frater was a skilled carpenter and together with Lester Bach engaged in many 'building projects' during the cleric years. Bertrand Scully utilized these talents during the construction of the dam at Garrison. Lloyd thought that his association with building things would lead to the fulfillment of his request to go to the missions. As an active participant in the Mission Society, he helped create and produce the annual mission plays that its members enacted for the local parochial grade school children

Together with his classmates, Lloyd was ordained a priest on 10 October 1956 by John P. Treacy, bishop of the LaCrosse Diocese at St. Mary Church, Marathon, Wisconsin. He was told that his request to go to the missions would become a reality after finishing his fourth year of theology. However when the initial assignments were given in June 1957, no member of the class was sent to the missions because a difficult problem involving the bishop and provincial had arisen. Therefore, he was sent to Mount Calvary "for one year" to teach and continue his mission preparation. He was allowed that summer to go to Detroit to study Spanish at the Berlitz School of Languages.

As was customary in the days before North Central accreditation, with the grace of obedience and the power of the priesthood, new faculty members were asked to teach whatever positions needed to be filled. So Lloyd began teaching geometry without any preparation or qualification. After a time he found himself teaching Latin. In the early sixties, he first took a graduate summer course at Fordham College and then was granted a year's study at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In June 1963, he received the master of arts degree in classical languages, with a major in Latin.

His proverbial “one year” at Calvary extended to a total of sixteen years. When he came to St. Lawrence the school had just finished the building of St. Mary Hall and was engaged in raising funds for the new chapel, then St. Anthony and St. Fidelis Halls. Crispin Weinberger headed the building fund drive and quickly recognized Lloyd’s exceptional talents and disposition to engage in this work. It was a happy marriage. With his enthusiasm and ability to enlist student helpers and meet the public, Lloyd willingly and successfully threw himself into various aspects of fund raising.

The last major project was the construction of the present chapel and the friary. Lloyd was a member of the building committee. During the early stages of construction, the local minister resigned. Rupert and his council appointed Lloyd to become local minister of the Capuchin community and to carry out the project. He was also appointed head of the Development Office.

In order to avoid the provincial chapter occurring in the same year as the general chapter, the provincial authorities had decided to have the former in January rather than June 1973. As local minister, Lloyd was a delegate. He was very surprised when, after the “straw vote” for provincial minister, another friar approached him and told him that he was high on the ballot and may be elected provincial minister. Lloyd later confessed that he did not sleep that night, asking the Lord what to do.

In reality, he was in second place, with the provincial vicar just one vote ahead. The latter was a talented younger person with provincial administrative experience. He had many supporters but also an equal number who did not favor his candidacy. In the pre-election discussions, his opposition searched for another likely candidate. Lloyd’s name surfaced. He was well-liked by all, a capable local minister and considerate person. In a sense he fulfilled that old maxim of electing a superior that would be “smart, but not *too* smart, healthy, but not *too* healthy, and holy, but not *too* holy.” As a student at Calvary, Lloyd had acted in two plays — Lawrence’s famous “Passion Play” and the drama “Everyman.” The results the following day, 4 January 1973, gave him the opportunity to relive those roles. The delegates elected him their provincial minister on the third ballot, which was a run-off between him and the provincial vicar.

Lloyd himself frequently remarked that he was the most unprepared person who ever assumed that office. His only assignment outside the houses of study had been at Mount Calvary. He was local minister for less than three years and had never been a provincial “definitor.” (It was during his first term of office that the name was changed to “councilor.”) He knew little about any ministries beyond Calvary.

During his five-and-a-half years as provincial minister, a major task was to reaffirm the justice and peace thrust adopted in 1971 and also to establish the House of Prayer. The problems of the aging friars and health care investments, adopting a new financial policy and the promotion of continuing education needed to be addressed. He concerned himself with the issues of chemical dependence, team ministry, the norms for accepting “white”

parishes, and he presided over the sale of the Crown Point seminary facility to the Hyles-Anderson College. Less successful were the sanguine hopes of having a successfully functioning EVAC—Evaluation and Accounting Council.

Lloyd was not well acquainted with the work and needs of many of the friars when he was elected. As a result, he made concern over personnel assignments a definite characteristic of his years as provincial minister. He was — and remained during his entire life — a “people person.” At times this caused difficulties with his personnel director. The number of friars during his two terms in office decreased from 378 to 326. He mused that, “It had always been hard for me to realize that I actually helped more brothers leave the order than welcome new members.” During the provincialate years, he had to write up many requests for dispensations from religious life and the priesthood. He said he came to realize that he could just as easily have written one up for himself. That he chose not to do so was in his words “my real ‘solemn vows.’ ”

In July 1978, following the completion of his service as provincial minister, Lloyd pursued the “house of prayer” experience under the direction of Werner Wolf. In August 1978 he assumed the directorship of the Capuchin Community Center (CCC) and also became part of the pre-novitiate team at St. John Capuchin Fraternity in Detroit. In 1981, when the St. John property was razed, he moved to the Gratiot Capuchin Fraternity and then in 1986 to the Boston Boulevard Community.

It is interesting that he has always been associated with the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. In reality, the name had been changed to the Capuchin Community Center several years before by Austin Schlaefer. Only after Lloyd left the directorship did it again return to its old title of the CSK. As provincial minister, Lloyd had been exposed to the absolute need of working more with the poor. He had witnessed the injustices against them and was determined to struggle for greater equality among people. Since he felt comfortable with fund raising and public relations, he eagerly embraced his new assignment.

Lloyd enjoyed his years as director. He was a friend not only with presidents of companies, other important business people and members of the media, but also with the many persons who supported and/or used the facilities of the CCC. The benefactor list increased dramatically. An addition was made to the soup kitchen itself to house the new computer system and an expanded counseling and development staff.

His zeal involved him in other ventures. He was partially responsible for the beginning of the Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit. This organization in turn helped start the national association of food banks called America’s Second Harvest. He also recognized the need to provide shelter and services to the homeless in the greater Detroit area. This led to the establishment of the Coalition on Temporary Shelter (COTS) in 1982. In order to begin its operations Lloyd used the benefactor list of the Capuchin Community Center for its first appeal mailing. He remained an active board member for many years.

Lloyd enjoyed his work as fund raiser and writing letters. He stated that if there were any symbol that would summarize much of his work, it would have to be a Dictaphone. He felt that the thousands of letters he had dictated touched more people more effectively than he could ever have done with his preaching.

In January 1993, because of a contemplated reorganization of the Capuchin Community Center, Lloyd was offered a full year sabbatical. It was his original intention to serve fifteen years. Nevertheless, he graciously accepted the offer and found the time extremely helpful. It consisted in the Notre Dame Continuing Education Program, a full unit of CPE at St Luke's Hospital in Milwaukee and the Overseas Bible Study Program offered by the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

His ministry as chaplain at William Beaumont Hospital began in January 1994. He found the experience most satisfying. At the same time he chose to continue his custom of following up on those people who designated the Capuchins as recipients of memorial contributions at the time of a loved one's death. He made it a point to attend the wake, expressing the sympathy and prayers of the Capuchins and thanking the family for designating the memorial contributions toward Capuchin ministries.

While at Beaumont, he celebrated his fortieth anniversary of ordination. The jubilarian wrote that "I enjoy just being a priest, offering support and encouragement and not having to be involved in any form of administration." Lloyd noted that it was not too common to celebrate 40th anniversaries, but found celebrations sources of encouragement and renewal. He continued to enjoy other celebrations, e.g. his fiftieth as a priest and his fiftieth and sixtieth as a Capuchin, and a retirement party in 2005.

Perhaps the celebration in his honor that was the most gratifying was the party given by Good Shepherd Parish of Lincoln Park. Throughout his years in Detroit, he assisted on weekends first at Sacred Heart in Roseville and later in his life at Good Shepherd. When his declining physical condition made it impossible for him to do further external pastoral work, the Lincoln Park Parish hosted a farewell party in his honor. He was amazed by the attendance and found it emotionally challenging to hear how his preaching and example had such a positive influence on so many. He knew that he had effectively touched people with his many letters and his "one on one" conversations. But he never thought that he did so with his homilies and Sunday presiding at the liturgy.

Lloyd not only worked hard but also balanced his activities with periodic vacations. For many years he spent some time each winter as a guest of the Pat Giffer family in Florida. The extended Ahee family invited him to be their "chaplain" on their excursions. He and his classmate, Campion Baer, vacationed together biannually since the time he was local minister at Calvary. They visited forty-eight states, eastern and western Canada, and made several trips into Mexico. When walking became more difficult, instead of using starred locations in the AAA guidebook as points of interest, they settled on visiting the theaters in Branson MO and finally Stratford on the Avon, Ontario. In what Lloyd termed "the lighter

side of my ministry,” he also became a chaplain on cruise ships thru his membership in the Apostleship of the Sea. He sailed from ports in Texas, Alaska, California, and Florida.

In early 1998 Larry Abler was chosen to lead the proposed Solanus Center building project. In April he sought help to raise funds for the new center. By May 1999, a professional fund-raising organization had made a financial feasibility study. It predicted that the province could raise only \$5 million of the then-estimated \$8.5 million needed to build the center. This prompted the provincial minister and council to approach Lloyd for help. Donors said they knew him and would cooperate with him. It had been the wish of Lloyd to serve as chaplain at Beaumont until his retirement. However in August 1999, the Provincial Council asked him to set up a combined development office to be a fund-raising service office “for the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, the Capuchin Mission Association, the Seminary Guild, The Solanus Guild, Provincial Fund Raiser, and the Solanus Center Campaign, while also acknowledging the gifts and donations that come to St. Bonaventure Monastery.” The council noted that, “You are the most well-known Capuchin to many of our benefactors.” One Detroit newspaper dubbed him “the face of the Capuchins in Detroit.”

By July 2000 over \$7 million had already been pledged. The goal was then raised to \$13 million as the renovation of St. Bonaventure friary was added. Working as a team along with dedicated lay help, Larry and Lloyd were a key element in the successful completion of the project. Less successful was the goal to have the new development office be put under one umbrella in charge of the fund raising for all the above-mentioned Capuchin ministries. The shift in thinking needed on the part of the individual ministries never fully took place. It is still not a reality, three development directors later.

Lloyd was chagrined when the administrative assistant he hired was suddenly terminated by the action of the provincial minister and council. Shortly afterward he accepted the option of resigning. On 30 March 2004, the council informed him that he was granted “full retirement status, effective immediately.” “Retirement is kind of hard to fully accept,” he remarked. “It’s like you’re not needed anymore.” He then returned to Beaumont Hospital on a part-time basis. In March 2008 his weakened physical condition forced him with tremendous regret to submit his letter of resignation from that ministry.

One problem that Lloyd struggled with throughout his life was weight management. A friend once suggested that he should write a book comparing the various diets he tried during his lifetime and how all of them failed. Lloyd wrote that some people viewed him as “weak willed,” but there was more to it than that. Part of his problems seemed to be genetic and part was related to the nature of his assignments. Not only was he very popular with many friends who loved his jovial company, but he also had to meet often with potential and actual benefactors. Much of this business took place over dinner.

Werner Wolf relates the incident after Lloyd had been given the advice to park at the far end of the lot when going out to eat. On the next occasion they went out together, Werner followed Lloyd’s advice. As Lloyd got out of the car, he joined his hands characteristically

behind his back, and with multiple puffs uttered: “You didn’t have to take it so seriously!” In his last years at St. Bonaventure, the community became accustomed to the Sunday breakfast menu Larry LaCross prepared called the “3-2-1.” It consisted of three eggs and toast for Lloyd, two for Malcolm Maloney and one for Leo Wollenweber.

Lloyd frequently mentioned that as his father grew older, he gradually lost the ability to walk. He feared the same for himself. It was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Several visits to the Beaumont Grosse Pointe Hospital because of congestive heart failure finally resulted in a prolonged stay at an area convalescent home. As he grew weaker, Lloyd had the opportunity to reflect upon his pilgrimage through life. He knew the end was near and looked forward to his entrance into the new life in Heaven. Since his condition was rapidly deteriorating he was brought back to St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit for his last week on earth. He died there peacefully on 19 September 2010.

During his ministerial life, he had made the request to be buried in Detroit. During his final illness, however, he asked his local minister Larry LaCross if that could be changed. His wish was to have his final resting place in the friars’ cemetery at Mount Calvary. Two funeral Masses were held, giving his friends and family in both states the opportunity to pay him tribute. After his funeral at St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit, his body was transferred by hearse to Mt. Calvary by his long-time friend Patrick Giffer. A second Mass also celebrated by John Celichowski was offered at the St. Lawrence Seminary chapel—“the chapel that Lloyd built.” The two classmates immediately following him in seniority, Campion Baer and Kenan Siegel, conducted the final commendation at the grave side.

Fifteen years before his death, in March 1995, Lloyd was asked to fill out an autobiographical information form. One of the questions posed was: “What would you like to be said about you?” He replied: “I would hope that it can be said that I was a very compassionate individual who was ready and willing to listen to others and then try to put into concrete reality some of their concerns.”

How fortunate we were to have had Lloyd in our midst, a brother and friend who so aptly summed up his own life. May he rest in peace. +

— *Campion Baer*