

Neerology

Eugene Wolf
1927 - 2012



Eugene Paul Wolf was born October 18, 1927. He grew up on the family farm near Allenton WI. He attended grade school at SS Peter & Paul School, Nenno WI. Eugene was the fourth oldest of five boys born to Martin and Mary (Mueller) Wolf on the farm in Nenno near Allenton. The Wolf family was part of a hard working community of farmers. His father & mother supported the five boys on an 87 acre farm.

This was the heritage Eugene was born into—a farmer and fourth of five. Clem, Wilmer, and Albert followed in the family tradition as farmers. Eugene went to the St. Lawrence Seminary, Mt. Calvary WI after grade school and Bernard (later Werner as a Capuchin) followed him into the seminary and the Capuchin way of life.

His father was a gentle, hard-working man, well dressed, who enjoyed playing cards, and socializing with relatives and friends. He was a good farmer, who was well respected in the community. His mother was a prayerful woman and a great provider and heart for the family. The Wolfs were always the first to do things and were always where the community or church was at or needed. They knew everybody in the community. There were few enemies, many friends and relatives.

Eugene first came to know of the Capuchins through friars who helped in the parish during the summer months. They inspired him and he went on to St. Lawrence Seminary for high school. He entered the novitiate of the Capuchin Order in 1946 at St. Felix Friary, Huntington IN, receiving the name Martinian, and after Vatican II returned to his baptismal name, Eugene. His college years of philosophy took place in Garrison NY and theology, at St. Anthony Friary, Marathon WI. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1954 at St. Mary's Church, Marathon.

After completing theology, Eugene was assigned to the faculty of St. Felix Seminary, Huntington IN, which later became St. Mary's Seminary in Crown Point IN. With enthusiasm he taught social ethics and served on the staff from 1954-1974 training an entire generation of Capuchins in the social encyclicals of the church, labor issues and family economics. His educational credentials included a master's degree in Catholic social thought as well as a master's degree in library science from the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

Some of the highlights during his time of studies in Washington D.C. included attendance at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy, standing in line for nine hours to view the body of the deceased president, and being present for the famous Martin Luther King speech, "I Have a Dream."

After 1975, when St Mary's Seminary was discontinued, Eugene trained for pastoral care and served as chaplain of St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac WI, until 1986. Later he served in the front office ministry at St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit MI followed by chaplaincy for the School Sisters of Notre Dame at Mt. Calvary until illness brought about retirement at St. Lawrence Friary, Mt. Calvary. During these years he kept himself abreast of developments in theology, pastoral care and the life of the church participating in summer workshops both in Washington D.C. and St. Norbert College in DePere WI.

Eugene then happily retired, participated fully in the prayer and social life of the friars at St. Lawrence Friary, Mt. Calvary, keeping up with current events, and spending much time in the library and other areas of interest. He took advantage of continuing educational opportunities provided in the area and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. In 2011 he retired to St. Fidelis Friary and Senior home in Appleton WI. His health declined while at St Fidelis. Congestive heart failure and kidney failure led him to be assisted by hospice care until he passed away on August 26th, 2012 at nearly 85 years of age.

It was amazing how many from all over the world literally sent emails and communications of what Eugene meant to them. These came from all the stages of his life. Myron Kowalsky, former provincial minister, summarized well what Eugene's life meant to him: "I will always remember him as one who was a very prayerful individual who was very caring and had such a wonderful laugh that was spread among the brethren. He was a man who was very interested in what others had to say and also willing to share from his vast knowledge."

Lester Bach, who was on the staff of the house of philosophy at Crown Point, shared how Eugene kept him sane during those years. "He would usually be the last one to leave the evening recreation period. He could go on talking together with people like Champion Baer and me for hours sharing stories from his experiences and wealth of knowledge. He helped me with special talks at my adult education classes. In those days he didn't take himself too seriously and always enjoyed a good sense of humor." Eugene also assisted Carmel Flora with the migrant Hispanic community ministry and consequently this outreach introduced him to the Spanish language.

After the Crown Point seminary closed, he prepared himself for hospital ministry at St. Agnes Hospital, Fond du Lac by taking four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). He spent more than ten years ministering as a hospital chaplain. These were the years of changing patterns in pastoral care. He was hired to be director of a team of pastoral ministers. In many ways he was more of a bedside pastoral priest than a director of a pastoral program with a staff of five. He was asked to be an administrator; however, he was not prepared for it. After some years there was division in the department and an outside evaluating committee recommended that Eugene be replaced. In many ways this event wounded him and plagued him inwardly for the rest of his life. In his final months of illness he shared his anguish with Werner, his brother, by asking him: "Why was I really fired?"

Patricia Weidman, CSA, who was on his staff during those years visited with him and shared in writing the following with him to ease his anxiety. "Eugene: You provided fine sacramental ministry and ethical consultation. I don't recall any challenges to your sacramental ministry. Your sacramental ministry was excellent. You came when you were called day or night without

grumbling. You were consulted on ethical issues. You were let go because of leadership and administration...The administrator...wanted a director who could pull the staff together.... You were better at sacramental ministry and ethics than at uniting the department staff. May you be healed of the hurts and reassured of the effectiveness of your ministry. You provided fine pastoral care. Be at peace. You were respected, effective and appreciated.”

This response calmed Eugene and he no longer surfaced the issue. He appreciated Patricia’s summary and asked that it be put into his file, which the local minister did. However, his spirit was wounded after his removal from chaplaincy.

Matthew Gottschalk expressed well Eugene’s development and growth in life:

I first met Eugene Wolf in 1941 as freshmen in St Lawrence Seminary High School. It was the beginning of World War II. The war dominated our education, our values, and even ultimately our religious life. He was a serious student, a likeable friend and a conscientious observer of his religious faith.

During these years Eugene suffered a bout of rheumatic fever and was forced to withdraw from academic studies for one year. Upon his return we spent the next 8 years together. He had an amazing memory along with a spontaneous sense of humor helping him to ease tensions with laughter. His insights into teachers and fellow students were helpful but never cruel. Eventually with additional studies and omnivorous reading, Eugene broadened to include politics, social studies, and global struggles for freedom and equality.

During his teaching years his students appreciated his insights, listening ability, and compassion. He spent many hours in counseling and spiritual direction with the students. Not only did he obtain a master’s degree in Catholic social thought, but also studied summers at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. and obtained his second master’s degree in library science.

It was amazing to hear of Eugene’s impact from the students he had in class and in formation. Through their responses of sympathy and memories they indicated the influence he had on their lives while teaching at St. Felix Seminary, Huntington, and St. Mary’s Seminary, Crown Point IN. Upon hearing of Eugene’s passing, Michael Crosby remarked: “It’s because of that man that I am involved in what I now do. He imbibed in us an interest in social issues especially with regard to justice and peace.”

Similar comments were made by his former students of the Crown Point era: “I remember him as the teacher of Social Philosophy. The one thing he taught me was that the family was the foundation of society. I never forgot that.” “He was always enthusiastic and dedicated to the concepts that he taught and their impact on society. Hard to forget an individual like that! He certainly has had an influence on my life.”

“I was a ‘challenge’ in those days, but he and Mark Pesch, more than any others, showed me remarkable patience and understanding.”

“Martinian [Eugene’s religious name] was always a favorite and knew how to ‘tell it like it is’ – lots of teachers kind of come and go but he was a standup/standout prof.”

“Few professors could bring sociology to life like he did. He will be remembered for this by many of us all for his holiness and simplicity of life, so characteristic of Capuchins.”

“I remember as a student he never made me feel ‘dumb,’ but when your answer was not quite right or you were going in the wrong direction with your thoughts he always drew you into the right direction calmly.”

As part of his teaching Eugene used to take his students to the steel mills in nearby Gary IN. In fact, he became acquainted with the steel mill administrators as well as union leadership. One Labor Day weekend he was asked to speak at the annual Labor Day celebrations of the Gary steel workers.

Ron Smith reflected that as his spiritual director Eugene “was a good listener and always gave the impression that he very much wanted to understand what I was trying to share, no matter how trivial. He had good insights into friars and could always give a positive viewpoint or add positive notes about individuals with whom he may have had difficulties.”

He added, “Eugene had a certain logic which he followed in his own spiritual journey of faith. He tried to keep clear in his own mind what the central truths were about the faith (as in the creed) and to live by them. I remember his having me read about sanctifying grace and its importance for all of us who follow Jesus and Francis. He also had a deep faith in the sacramental life of the church and the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice and banquet meal. His deep love for the church was obvious that he requested that the ‘Apostles Creed’ appear on his funeral remembrance card.”

Ron Smith also noted that “at some point in his life, it seemed that some fear took over because of some bad experience or inner pain. This robbed him of that external joy which was so characteristic of him in earlier years. I think he began to come back to that spirit of appreciation, thanksgiving and joy in his later years.”

Joachim Strupp remarked how eager he was in continuing his education. The two of them went together to many of the workshops or programs provided by the province or by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and Green Bay.

His niece, Linda Luka reflected her generation’s thoughts by sharing that “Eugene was a complex man. I only truly understood this a few years ago. As a kid, he really seemed smart, with a great warm and loving smile. His laughter assured me he was a Wolf, along with his love for good food, a beer, polka music, and sheep head.”

“He impressed on me a love for family gatherings, no matter how chaotic they were. He appreciated all the family parties, traditions and quirks. He treasured the little ones, and made me aware of our strong family ties. Although he loved to use” one-on-one conversations” as teaching moments, he was a good listener as well. His sincerity and devotion to God was never

in question to us. His calming, quiet presence was reassuring, along with his appreciation for our hospitality as family. His homilies were always well thought out and sometimes deep as well.”

Another niece, Ann Selk, noted that Eugene as “a very learned scholar and extremely intelligent man but to us he was an ordinary guy filled with laughter, caring and deep sense of spirituality instilled by Grandma and Grandpa Wolf.”

His final ministry before his retirement due to health issues was as chaplain to the retired Notre Dame Sisters at Mt. Carmel Convent on the opposite hill to St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary. He celebrated Eucharist with them each day, confessions and counseling as needed. Maxine, local superior, reflected how dedicated he was serving them for so many years. He enjoyed having breakfast with the sisters and they were amazed at the topics he could bring to conversation. The sisters spoke highly of him for his gentleness and compassion.

Ron Smith also shared: “Love of learning and reading is an obvious gift that Eugene possessed. It was like “the tank was never full.” He was always feeding messages especially of theology and spirituality. Even the movies he watched toward the end seemed to fit a more serious purpose of our mission on earth and a high sense of morality that was his. When he was able, visits to the Blessed Sacrament were standard part of his daily routine.”

During the final years of his life he not only prayed the entire four volume set of the Roman Breviary faithfully, but also joined it to keeping up with his knowledge of the different languages. He prayed the entire Office for vocations to the Capuchin Order and for the ministries of the church. He rotated the short antiphons and responses of the breviary in English, Latin, Spanish, German, French and Greek. The language dictionaries were on his desk.

In his final year Gerry Pehler was his Local Minister. He noted:

Providing assisted nursing care to Eugene for over a year at St. Fidelis Friary afforded me the opportunity get to know him. Not a day went by when Eugene would always say something he was grateful for, whether a good deed done for him by me, other staff members or one of the friars. A grateful heart allowed him to see his life as a gift of God.

From his childhood experiences on the farm, his love for his parents, siblings and family gatherings, his seminary days, his reception into the Capuchin Order, his ordination as a priest, his studies in Washington, his teaching days at Crown Point, Indiana, his well versed knowledge of social studies, church history, moral theology, or just simply being with other friars in community settings brought much joy and satisfaction to him.

A genuinely kind man, Eugene was not one to speak ill of others, but instead affirmed and appreciated the good of the person(s) even when their perspective may have been different from his. Gratitude for Eugene was the door to live life in a positive, holistic way, no matter what challenges he faced. It brought much healing and peace to his life and others. The nursing staff was in awe how he shared his life with them and his willingness to accept his condition and needs.

Eugene and Werner did not live near each other until the last eight years at St. Lawrence Friary in Mt. Calvary and then the final two years at the senior retirement home in Appleton. Eugene was thrilled that they could both come to St Fidelis together. He was most appreciative that he could remain at St. Fidelis under hospice care until his death on August 26th, 2012. During the last full day of his life he told his brother at three different times: “I give my soul to Jesus Christ.”

A large number of people attended his wake and funeral at St Lawrence Seminary Chapel. He is buried in the Capuchin Cemetery in Mt. Calvary. He left us all with an inspirational legacy and memories.

— *Werner Wolf*