

Useful Tips for Necrology Writers

1. Necrologies should aim to be 4-5 pages, single-spaced, in length, more if the friar held some position(s) of responsibility.
2. It helps to use a variety of sources for your research and to focus on the various phases of the individual's life, not solely the last few years of his life. Sources include the provincial archives, relatives (a list is usually available from the Communications Office), friends, parishioners, classmates and friars, especially those who lived with the friar. Any copies of information or documentation sent to you for research into the friar's life should be returned to the Archives or destroyed (i.e., shredded – not simply thrown away).
3. A general overview of what the contents/perspectives of a necrology include:

- **Pre-Capuchin Days:**

Parents' names and occupations, birthplace, siblings (e.g., number and placement), parish (especially if it was a Capuchin parish), setting (urban, rural). How he is remembered by his relatives. Did he attend St. Lawrence in Mt. Calvary? How did he come to know or be drawn to the Capuchins? If he attended college prior to joining the Order, where did he go, what field did he study? If he held a job before joining the Order, what did he do and where did he work? Was he affiliated in any way with a seminary or another religious congregation or province? If the pastor steered him to the Capuchins was the pastor a Calvary alumnus or a Capuchin himself? Did he ever serve in the military? Was he recognized for any particular achievements civilly, religiously, scholastically or militarily?

- **Early Capuchin Years:**

Trace his years in initial formation. Where did he spend his formation years? While for many there are no particularly outstanding interests, for some they already wanted to be missionaries, etc. Is there anything in his years of initial formation and seminary training that stands out as a link to his future or as worthy of particular mention?

- **Professional Years:**

When and where did the friar make perpetual profession? When and where and by whom was he ordained? For the necrology-writer's sake, chronologically plot out the friar's assignments (place and specific ministries – his personnel record might only say parish priest, but under that general umbrella he may have spent 40 years as spiritual assistant to the SFO – not an insignificant fact!), and then fill in the particulars (this may not be the final form of the necrology, but it helps to organize things and helps insure that important facets are not missed). For each of his assignments, was there anything in particular about the friar that stands out? Was he remembered by the friars or people for some particular ministry or by his style? Are there any anecdotes that typified the friar? Do you see any patterns between the friar's assignments or style or personality traits? Is there something that gives a certain cohesion to this person's life, e.g., a common theme worth mentioning?

- **Leadership Roles:**

Did the friar exercise some leadership role(s): in the Order, the Province, in a Parish, in a Local Fraternity, or in some religious, civil or other organization? If he was a local minister,

provincial councilor or provincial minister, what was achieved during his tenure in office – physically (buildings built or closed), plans and policies established, etc.? Similarly, if he belonged to a commission or other body, did he have a special role in anything of importance in the life of the province, order or local community? If he was a preacher or teacher, or had some other expertise (drug counseling, cooking, etc.), these should all be included, as well as anything particularly striking about the role this friar played. Did he receive any recognition of note, e.g., honorary degrees, etc. Did he author books?

- **His final days:**

What were the circumstances of his final years and days? Where did he die, and were there any notable circumstances surrounding his death and dying? Where was he buried?

- **Sensitive Areas:**

Not everything needs to be included in the person's necrology. The necrology is a record that will follow the person literally for generations to come. There are, however, some challenges (e.g., addictions) that individuals face that have taught them valuable life lessons and that changed them for the good. These can and often should be included. Besides including these as a tribute to the human growth of the individual and the working of God's grace, they also can inspire future generations to face their own challenges and to courageously work through them, or at least to grapple with them. Not everything, however, serves that purpose and serious consideration should be given to not including those that do not. In all things, however, you should leave the deceased person his dignity.

Accusations of abuse are an especially difficult area with which to deal. Extremes are to be avoided. Undoubtedly the friar did some good in his lifetime. He should neither be demonized nor canonized, and judgments as to his guilt or innocence should be avoided. In cases that were especially public, a necrology can make reference to a pall that hangs over the memory of the individual.

- **Other pitfalls**

Humor can be a useful writing tool to illustrate a point in a necrology, but the focus should never be to make light of a person's life or to get a laugh. Necrologies should always be truthful, but they must also be tactful and sensitive. What you choose to highlight of a person's life, and how you articulate it is of utmost importance. No one should be remembered as being "not very skilled". Recalling incidents that took place during the novitiate year usually don't serve very well in the necrology of a friar who lived 50 years in the Order. A person is more than just his assignments and ministries, try to capture something of his personality, character, spirituality, etc.

- **Purpose of the Necrology**

A necrology is a written testimonial and remembrance of a person's life that will be kept forever. In spite of the hard work it requires, it is a privilege to be asked to "have the last word" by writing a friar's necrology.

A necrology is not the same thing as a biography, neither in scope nor in length. A necrology succinctly captures how a person will be remembered by future generations. Writing a necrology requires repeated revisions in determining how best to memorialize a person's life, and doing that in a relatively short space. Lastly, remember Luke 6:36 [be compassionate].