

Neerology

Roger Veik
1943 – 2019



“Doc Abts” was summoned on Wednesday, August 11th, 1943, to deliver the third son of Rynilda (Nilda) and Antony (Tony) Veik in their home on the north side of Humphrey, Nebraska. Not sure, but Tony was likely summoned to walk the six or so blocks from the Ford and International Harvester dealership and garage where Tony was the ace mechanic. Nilda’s first cousin, “Auntie,” was probably engaged to take the three year old, Norman, and the one year old, Alan, to the south side during the birth which took place in the kitchen of the family home. Humphrey was that kind of town on the prairie in Nebraska – small and cozy (less than a thousand population), serving the surrounding farms of the country’s “bread basket,” full of extended family, barely one professional for each area of service for healthcare, legal services, funerals, and other civil servant functions. The little town was very homogeneous ethnically (primarily Austrian-German), and religiously (Roman Catholic). St. Francis Church towered over the south side with its tall steeple and four-faced clock, continuing to this day to be the time keeper for both the locals and the farmers miles away. The church with its adjoining school, a K-12 Catholic parochial school, dominated the academic and religious formation then, as it still does today. Rog and his older brothers, unlike the other service professions in town, were served by full communities of Franciscan Friars and Franciscan Sisters.

This was the cocoon nurturing Roger’s first seven years of life. It was a cradle of strong family relationships and institutions, especially religious ones, to situate him for his future vocation to Franciscan religious life, along with its ministries of service to the institutions that called his gifts forward. Roger joined scores of men and women who point to this same cradle as the birth place for their Franciscan religious vocations. In those days, a large percentage of the 8th grade class from St. Francis School either went to the Franciscan minor seminary in Westmount, IL, for high school, or to Colorado Springs CO, to prepare to join the Franciscan Convent.

In 1951, with Rog in second grade, Tony and Nilda moved the family to a farm in Wisconsin, the first of three farms before they landed an economically viable one in the Madison Diocese. Shortly after the arrival of the family in Wisconsin, Mary Ann was born, the first of Roger’s three younger sisters. Rosemary was born four years later on a different farm; Charlene was born four years after that on the farm from which the family would retire.

Tony and Nilda were always very solicitous about the education, and especially religious formation opportunities, provided by the communities where they chose to live. Maybe it was the experience of four different grade schools and sets of neighbors that helped shape Rog’s tendency to dominate social conversations, and maybe contributed to his strong religious and political views that he was not shy about expressing.

Roger followed his two older brothers on the path to become a Capuchin friar. He entered St. Lawrence Seminary in the fall of 1956. He did not experience as much homesickness as his older brothers as he was very familiar with the surroundings and had the companionship of a brother

each step of the way. He graduated from St. Lawrence in 1961, and joined the Capuchins for novitiate in Huntington IN, on September 1st of that same year. Rog continued his studies for the priesthood in Crown Point IN. He professed his perpetual vows on September 1, 1965, with his two brothers as assisting ministers at the Mass in Crown Point IN. He continued his theological studies in Marathon WI, and was ordained to the presbyterate on September 12th, 1969. He completed his theological studies at the Catholic Theological Union, Washington DC.

Roger was assigned to prepare for formation ministry which was undergoing major shifts structurally and ideologically. Formation teams were formed and trained. The stress on the formators, the program and content, as the primary agent of formation, was shifted to the individual. Roger moved to Chicago where he completed a degree in pastoral counseling from Loyola University in preparation for joining the novitiate team.

In the fall of 1973 Roger joined the novitiate team in Huntington IN, where he served until 1979. He was appreciated for having an unusual intuitive gift of assessment regarding the novices. This was a trait that several friars in later years have attributed to their ability to complete their formation and continue with their Capuchin vocations. "If it were not for Rog intervening on my behalf I would not still be a Capuchin," several would say.

Roger inherited the office of director of formation for the province in 1976. Rog directed the office from St. Conrad House in Milwaukee for three years. Managing the director of formation office was not Rog's forte. A world of policy and files was far removed from the personal relational pastoral ministry and preaching where Rog excelled. Rog became restless and unhappy with his relationship to the office and the ministry. He sought a geographical solution. It reminded family members of Rog's dad who suffered much of the same at roughly the same age. Rog talked of a new book just published: *Blue Highways*, as Al helped him pack up his car and trailer for the long drive to Montana. Rog was on more than a physical/geographical journey.

Looking back, this may have been a window into Rog's developing psyche, and indeed, spirituality. Could it have signaled a path that included some deep suffering? Part of it at least included a struggle with living up to the expectations of others, especially authorities, and a personal sense of failure and sensitivity to rejection and comparison. Clues about what was going on internally and spiritually may have been revealed by the authors and books that lined his shelves that made their way into his preaching and sermons. For example, every work by Henri Nouwen could be found among his things. A good part of his spiritual quest became the project of moving his pain into suffering for the sake of spiritual growth. This theme would be a large part of his life from here until his final hour on this earth.

In June 1982, Rog pulled into Colstrip MT, with his Ford Fiesta and trailer (trailer hitch reinforced by Tony at the farm in Waterloo as he passed through to say goodbye for now). Rog was appointed pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish to replace Wally Balduck who volunteered for mission ministry. His time in the parish were healing for both Rog and his flock. It was a good fit, and Rog's pastoral skills and preaching gift went a long way for the good of all. As sometimes happens, the good word got him noticed by the local Bishop, Thomas Murphy, of the Diocese of Great Falls – Billings Montana. The bishop requested of the province that Roger be assigned as vicar for priests for his diocese. Rog was reluctant having experienced a certain

comfort level in parish ministry. At the urging of provincial leadership he stepped up to the position.

Rog moved from Colstrip into St. Vincent Hospital housing in Billings MT. His residence, a side-by-side apartment reserved for the bishop when he would serve the co-cathedral in Billings, became Rog's residence until he moved back to Wisconsin in 2014. This location enabled Rog to serve as part-time chaplain to the hospital, serve the local college and university, as well as, spiritual assistant to the Secular Franciscans. Living in the most populated city in Montana at the doorway to Yellowstone Park, Rog became a most sought after host to family and friends on a get-away to Big Sky Country. Rog maintained strong acquaintances with travel agents, gate agents at the airport, owners of cottages in the surrounding mountains and parks.

He also surrounded himself with strong and loyal supports from local and professional friends in Billings.

Rog served as the vicar for priests from 1987 – 2008 during the tenure of two bishops: Thomas Murphy, and Anthony Milone. When Milone was replaced by Michael Warfel he chose to use a different structure to serve his priests, thus concluding Rog's service in that role. Rog brought significant background to the ministry: training in counseling psychology that prepared him for provincial formation work and his intuitive assessment abilities assisted with intervention situations that are the purview of every vicar for priests; his experience as a Capuchin formator, pastoral experience as a parish priest, and relationship as a peer with the diocesan community made him a sought after fill-in and respite priest for countless parishes and pastors; his Capuchin status as a religious enhanced his abilities as a spiritual director and more objective and confidential outsider. While Rog was uniquely resourced for the task, the context and nature of the ministry took a big toll. The confidential and sensitive nature of the ministry alongside of a uniquely independent presbyterate made it a very lonely task. Rog's own view was that it predicated and fueled his chronic immune disease, limited scleroderma. Rog struggled with this progressive health condition, and it reawakened some of the previous struggles with stress, isolation, and anxiety.

Rog sought early retirement as his energy and health condition entered new progressive phases with scleroderma. After some time, continuing to provide help-outs and limited assistance with hospital ministry and as spiritual assistant to the Seculars, it became clear that it was time to return to Wisconsin where he could fully retire with a support system.

Rog's friends and his sisters and brothers helped to pack up his things and return to Wisconsin in November 2014. Rog's sister Char and her family welcomed Rog into their home. While Rog's health condition created many limitations, he continued some priestly presence to the communities served by Al. As was the case so often in his life, when social space was occupied by Rog, he became the magnet in the room. Many parishioners were attracted to and seemed to relate to his suffering and vulnerability. Rog later moved into the House of Peace with his brother Al where he was grateful to share daily Mass and community prayer for the last year and three months of his life.

Roger died of influenza complicated by scleroderma on March 22nd, 2019. His funeral was celebrated on April 1, 2019, at the chapel of Saint Lawrence Seminary. Friends and family came from great distances and diverse prayer communities, Nebraska, Montana, Georgia, to join

Rog's Capuchin and nuclear family to celebrate his life. On Wednesday, May 22, 2019, members of Rog's close friends and family joined with some of his local Capuchin brothers to commit his body to the earth in the Capuchin Cemetery at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin.

~Al Veik