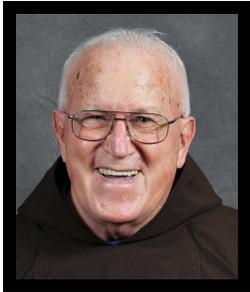


Necrology

Lester Bach
1931-2020



Lester Bach was born in Sherry, Wisconsin, on 15 October 1931. His father was Frank Bach and his mother was Amelia Long. He came from a family of two brothers, Clarence and Vernon, and two sisters, Florence and Ann. He attended St. Kilian Grade School in Blenker, Wisconsin, and St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin. He was invested with the Capuchin habit on 01 September 1949 and ordained a priest on 04 September 1954.

Lester seemed to be a private person when it came to his family and seldom spoke about experiences in it. His life, however, during seventy-one years in his Capuchin family was varied and fruitful. One of his early assignments was to St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana, where he was a confessor for the novices, was involved in teaching ministry and ministered to the Secular Franciscans, the beginning of which proved to be a long history of involvement with the latter. In 1961 he became an instructor at the Brothers' School in Calvary Station near Mt. Calvary, and in 1974 became its director. He ministered as a chaplain, was on staff at the house of prayer, and in 1981 was elected to the Provincial Council. By 1987 one could find him working as part of the formation team for the province. Upon termination of this ministry, Lester served on staff for Food for the Poor Inc. He then joined the staff at Queen of Angels Retreat Center in Saginaw, Michigan.

Lester's ministry with the Secular Franciscans merits special mention. Marie Amore is 90 years old and a Secular Franciscan. She referred to Lester as her "friend and mentor for many years" and upon request wrote the following about him for this necrology:

Our order, like yours, has experienced many changes...Lester followed the leadership of Ulric Buening. Later the Capuchins selected Lester as a provincial spiritual assistant to the Secular Franciscans. He recognized that a unified method of formation was necessary for the Third Order, since each province in the US accomplished it using different sources, methods and teachings. He decided to dedicate his talent for writing to the formation of Secular Franciscans. He authored at least nine published books on formation for the order. There are many of today's professed brothers and sisters whose formation includes the books of Lester Bach.

In 1978 the secular order, thanks to the approval of Paul VI, was blessed with an updated rule of life. This became a learning period for both the Third and First Orders. There was considerable conflict when the organization of secular fraternities changed from the friar provinces to geographic regions. The first order friar was no longer the father director but was called a spiritual assistant. Lester supported this process by his books and his experience. He wrote two books to educate spiritual assistants on how to

serve in life giving union with the brothers and sisters of the OFS. Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis)

Later he was appointed for the Capuchins of the US as their representative of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants which is a part of the National Secular Franciscan Fraternity. Lester wrote for our national fraternity newsletter, (*Tau USA*) He attended national meetings and events. He gave many retreats and parish missions. He was a popular speaker at events and addressed the International fraternity when it met in Hungary. We came to know him as one of the dedicated friars who fostered the ideal of life-giving union among the first and secular orders of Franciscans.

As an itinerant preacher one of Lester's more favorite themes was healing and faith. He was ahead of his time in that sometimes he appeared at these preaching commitments accompanied by a laywoman who would assist him in giving presentations. Interspersed with his ministry of preaching and the Secular Franciscans, he sought to reach out to the poor and hurting. One of the challenges of the friars living on an expensive estate on Lake Monona in Madison was to reach out to the poor in the area. They partially achieved this by making the friary a meeting point for Meals on Wheels. People would arrive in their cars at the friary to meet a food van. Here they received hot meals in insulated bags and distributed them to the homebound. The friars also opened up the main floor of the friary without cost to those in training to be professional counselors. They assisted those who were hurting and the poor whose financial situation would inhibit such service. Lester helped to facilitate these happenings. Not one to waste time, he filled in the gaps of his day by writing two published books: *Catch Me A Rainbow* and *Take Time For Sunsets*.

In 1981 Lester made a sabbatical at Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California. Upon completing the year he wrote that it provided particular insights into himself and community, elements that bespeak a kind of "conversion," as he referred to it. He mentions "how much energy is used in living community." Here he grew in appreciation of solitude saying: "The need for quiet, reflective solitude are, in my mind, a call that gifts community." He expressed how lonely he felt living in California away from the province and how he experienced "frustration and anger when people wouldn't answer letters and cards I sent." In his own words: "It was three months of tough growth that gave a new sense to Lester." It seems social relationships were important to him, even though later in his life this may not have been always apparent.

Lester had a creative side to himself. He enjoyed carpentry as a hobby and saw a particular expertise in the works produced. The friars, however, may have thought differently! But it seemed good therapy for him. And if he may have failed in the arena of carpentry, he compensated for it in his writings and ministry.

While at San Damiano in the latter years of his life, he preferred to eat at restaurants for lunch rather than prepare something at home. One of his favorite cuisines was Italian pasta. He cherished it so much he could put an Italian in rapture and simultaneously embarrass anyone who loved "schnitzel"!

When asked to manage the house finances, he did it his way rather than follow the JP Morgan guidelines of the province. So much for tasking older friars with new tricks! Nor did he want singing at the Divine Office and celebration of Eucharist. When he sang he was no Pavarotti by any means. But neither did he croak like a frog. You would think that with a name like "Bach" there would have been some kind of musical strain in those genealogical genes!

In his latter years Lester found change difficult. Small things like moving a chair in his room so as to be in conversational mode with him would emit an angry response from an obviously disturbed psyche. One of his final transfers to St. Felix Friary better exemplifies his difficulty with change. After some forty years of gracious free rental hospitality from the Norbertine Fathers, the community of San Damiano in Madison dwindled to three friars, the youngest being 79 years old. This prized estate covered the length of three football fields on Lake Monona in the city, the envy of every passing eye and almost a bigger distraction in the city than the University of Wisconsin's football team. The Provincial Council, in following the pastoral plan of the province, decided to close it. Lester was one of the three friars still living there. He strongly resisted the move and his procrastination would make a snail look like an Olympic runner. However, he did succumb to it when he saw carpentry tools and other objects he valued packed up for the missions in Nicaragua. He quickly snatched choice items from this collection and the next day saw them on a relative's pick-up truck with his personal belongings headed for his new assignment!

Like so many of us, Lester had his idiosyncracies. These may have bordered on being eccentric. But they were not sufficient to blight the good he did or tarnish the compassionate person he was. God works through all kinds of personalities. And the Capuchin Order is part of this picturesque kaleidoscope of salvation where one finds saints and sinners, greatness and smallness, pleasant and not-so-pleasant people living side by side with each other, struggling to be a brotherhood of love and living the gospel in service to God and neighbor. In this dynamic plethora of mess and mass of humanity, salvation marvelously occurs. It is here that one does not search for personal achievements of the individual but for the miracle of grace of God. Each person is that miracle. And no one can take that from him. Or from God. Lester remains one of those many miracles of grace in the Province of St. Joseph. And because of this, we are blessed to have had him for a brother.

And God must have agreed. He went "gracefully" to the Lord on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 02 Feb 2020, and was buried at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin.

~ William Mario Frigo