

# Neurology

Walter Balduck  
1935-2021

Our brother, Wally Balduck, was born August 21, 1935 into a family of 11 children. Wally's father had physical limitations and was unskilled in any particular trade. Wally explained in a little autobiography he wrote in 1973 that his father had many jobs and often was unemployed, so his family knew the meaning of asking for welfare help and awaiting packages at Christmas. But he explained that the family had genuine happiness. He himself started selling the *Detroit Free Press* at age 10 and he continued until he was 16 when he began work at the bank.

He mentions in the same little autobiography that his life at home prepared him well for large community living. Interestingly, in many of his ministries throughout his life (in Montana later in Nicaragua and as a retired friar in Arizona,) he ended up living most of the time alone. Maybe after living in a large family, and large fraternities during formation, he welcomed a bit of solitude in his life. But even when his ministries occasioned his living alone, he was always fully engaged with the nearest Capuchin fraternity and was always a very fraternal presence. He was the kind of brother who would make fresh bread or a meal for the friars. He loved playing cards, and if you wanted to go fishing, he would never say no.

Wally entered the Capuchins in 1966 and made his final vows in 1971. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1973. A year after his ordination there was an article in the *Detroit Free Press* entitled "A long search: he finds himself as a priest." The article speaks of Wally as a native Detroiter who first tried working in a bank, then as a substitute teacher in Detroit's elementary schools, next as a reservation clerk (for Northwest Airlines, on which he flew free for many years) and then into the army where he was based in Germany working in army security. He was hoping to get out of the army but his release coincided with the Cuban Missile Crisis and, because of the sensitive nature of his job in intelligence, he was obliged to remain in the army until that crisis passed. There are some great stories from Wally's time in Germany, including one about the bed and breakfast owner who drew up his bath and expected to stay there and help him in it.

Having entered the Capuchins at an older age, his peers in formation came to simply call him "Grandpa." And he returned the gesture by calling all of his peers "Junior". His ministries included teaching at St. Joseph's in Saginaw during his formation, as a deacon at St. Elizabeth's in Milwaukee, and then serving in Montana, Central America, and Arizona.

From the time of his diaconate, he was always a creative preacher. He often times leaned back into his teaching mode and used visual aids. One homily he gave for a provincial solemn vows celebration early in his ministry still remains engraved in this author's memory: he spoke of the danger of wealth and pulled out a clear pane of glass and a silver can of spray paint. He explained how with the clear glass you could see others: you could see the sky, you could see the earth. Then, with a little bit of silver on it, all you see is yourself.

His preaching so attracted people that in his ministry at Colstrip, Montana, when the Lutheran Church across the park from his parish church lost its pastor, the congregation asked if Wally would come and preach at their celebration on Sundays. So for a year, until they hired a new pastor, Wally trekked across the park each Sunday after Mass in the parish and preached to the Lutherans. When the Lutheran bishop came to hand over the parish to the new pastor, Wally was there to hand it over!

Working with rural communities in Nicaragua, he was also loved because of his preaching. Once at an outdoor Mass because of the heat and large crowd, in a homily on Zacchaeus, he actually climbed a tree and preached from there.

The rural communities he worked with in Nicaragua were often taken advantage of by business people who would charge exorbitant fees for something as simple as a box of matches. Wally decided on his visits to teach them *responsible capitalism*. He would bring matches and other articles that they would often times need and sell them cheaper than the local business people, explaining to the those attending the Mass that if you charge too much for what you want to sell, you only sell one or two items a day. But if you sell them cheaper, you'll sell more and you'll make more money. People were so enthused by the articles he brought that one person once asked him for his shirt, and he actually took it off and sold it to them.

Indeed, our brother, Wally, could sometimes feign being grumpy, but he had a heart like a marshmallow! He always gave his all and was filled with wonderful wit. Even if he could seem to be whining about things, nothing ever really stopped him....though arthritis came very close. He suffered with it most of his Capuchin life. In the end, however, it was cancer that the Lord used to call him home. He was lovingly cared for in hospice by the brothers at St. Bonaventure in Detroit. Wally died on March 19, 2021, the feast of the province's patron, St. Joseph, and is buried at St. Bonaventure's.

~Lawrence Webber