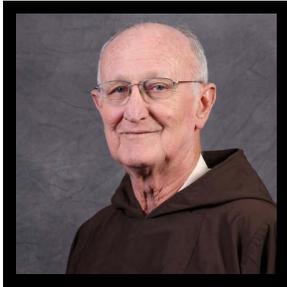


Nota bene: The Province of St. Joseph acknowledges that a small number of friars have had credible allegations of sexual misconduct levied against them. An investigation of the friar memorialized below concluded that he falls into that category. The province is committed to bring healing and hope to all those who have been harmed by one of our brothers, and to create a safe environment in all of our ministries.

Necrology

1938-2021



Walter (Mel) Hermanns was born at St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin to Herman and Alma (Nett) Hermanns on April 15th, 1938. He was the second oldest of four children. He had an older sister, Mary Ann and two younger brothers, Frank and Peter. All of them passed away several years before Mel. He often mentioned that he was a baby at St. Agnes hospital with Dan Crosby, since their birthdays were only a day apart. Mel grew up on a dairy farm in the Johnsbury – St. Peter area of Wisconsin. The family belonged to the parish in St. Peter.

Wally decided to go to St. Lawrence Seminary in 1952. He stayed there for all of high school and for one year of college. During this time his father had a very serious heart attack. Wally would go home to help with the farm work and frequently took classmates along to help with the work. A number of his classmates remember those times fondly.

During that first year of college, I (Larry Abler) mentioned to Wally, “I’m thinking of going to the Capuchins.” “Me too” he said. “Let’s do it.” It was only a matter of a day or two when one of us contacted Ken Smits. He said: “I’m thinking about it too.” Thus the three of us, together with five other classmates, joined the order after fifth year at Calvary. All of us boarded the train in Milwaukee, Plymouth or Green Bay, Wisconsin. We had a feast on the all-night trip to L’anse, MI. We had fried chicken, brownies, lots of cookies. Mel and I brought two six packs of Pabst Blue Ribbon. We got off the train in Pembine, WI to re-stock with two more six packs. We made our novitiate in Assinnins, MI. Mel could hardly wait to get out of novitiate and back to the “real world.”

Mel made his first vows on September 1, 1958 at Assinnins and perpetual vows on September 1, 1961, at St. Anthony’s in Marathon, WI. He was ordained to the priesthood on November 26th - Thanksgiving Day, 1964. After the customary pastoral year at St. Francis in Milwaukee, Mel was assigned to the vocation team with Nick Widhammer. He spent most of his time recruiting in the Michigan and Indiana area. He also served on the post-novitiate team from 1975 to 1981. From ’77 to ’81 he also served as local minister of St. Bonaventure. Following those years, he spent a few years as an itinerant preacher. In 1986 he was appointed pastor of St. Elizabeth’s Parish in Milwaukee. He continued as pastor until 1993. After a nine month sabbatical leave, he returned as part of the team at Monte Alverno. After a few years at Monte Alverno Mel returned to his first love: inner city ministry. He became the pastor of Gate of Heaven Parish in Chicago.

It was here at “the Gate” that Mel excelled in ministry. He loved the people and they absolutely loved him. He went through some difficult years at “the Gate.” He was forced to close the school due to financial difficulties. Fortunately, he was able to lease the school to the Public school system. He was also able to house Cap Corps members there for a number of years. One night after a commotion he found a man shot to death on his front lawn. He also had a bullet hole through the trunk and out the fender of his car. He kept the holes in his car as kind of a symbol of pride. During his years there he was able to develop a very good Gospel choir. Each year he would bring the choir to Wisconsin to sing at a couple of the Masses at Holy Family Parish in Fond du Lac, especially at the St. Peter Site that was Mel’s home parish.

During his years at “the Gate” Mel semi-retired. He remained pastor on a part-time basis. It was during this time that Mel became serious about golfing. During the summer months he would try to get out at least once a week.

In 2012 Mel retired to St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton. For about five years he served as vicar of the community. It was here that he began to take his golfing very seriously. Every Tuesday morning, he would travel to Hickory Hills in Chilton to golf with a group of seniors who called themselves “The Old Farts.” Many people would tell me how much they enjoyed having Mel as part of the group. One time a few of the people complained that it was too cold to golf. But they said, “there was Mel playing in his shorts.”

In the winter months his sisters-in-law would invite him to come, Faye to Florida and Rosie to Arizona. Mel would spend his days there swimming and golfing. He always looked forward to these “get-aways.”

One of the highlights of Mel’s year was taking his family, nephews and nieces and their families to Pickeral. He would often have 30 people there. They would spend many hours playing cards, swimming and going for pontoon and boat rides – oh, and 18 holes of golf every day! The family had the scary experience of being there when the severe storm came through knocking the electricity out and taking down many of the trees. Fortunately, the buildings survived without any serious damage. The cottage was without electricity for more than a week. Mel was kind of the “glue” that held the family together after the death of his sister, Mary Ann Goebel. His nephews and nieces always invited him for their holidays and parties. Mel would always be present. If there was a card game going on, and there always was in the Hermann’s family, Mel would be in the middle of it. For his 80th birthday the family rented the community center in Marytown and the place was filled, even though it was the worst snowstorm of the year. Mel came right on schedule and drove back to Appleton the same night. He did tend to be a little “cheap” and spending money on a motel seemed a little extravagant.

Mel certainly did enjoy life, but no story would be complete without talking about his spiritual side. Mel was a very reflective person. I traveled with Mel a lot. I tend to be an early riser. But every morning I would get up, Mel would be there with a cup of coffee, the bible and a spiral notebook. This would be a sacred time for Mel. He was faithful to it every day. His family also shared that this would be the case every morning they were together at Pickeral. Mel would share his journaling with his spiritual directress and counselor, and then destroy the notebook.

Mel experienced a cold in early December of 2020. He did go to a doctor, but was sent back home on oxygen and was told that he would probably have to be on oxygen for a month or six

weeks. His health did not improve. At 2:00 AM on Christmas Day he was taken into emergency at Appleton Medical Center. He was found to have several blood clots in his lungs. He was tested there and found to have Covid 19. He spent nearly three weeks in the hospital. Finally, he was released to a rehabilitation center. In less than a week he woke up with a very rapid pulse and very high blood pressure. He was rushed back to the hospital by ambulance. They took an x-ray of his lungs and found that that his lungs had been destroyed by the virus. One of his doctors commented that it was impossible for him to live even with oxygen.

On January 24, 2021 Mel died peacefully with Dave Funk, O.F.M. Cap and his sister-in-law, Faye Hermanns present.

~ Lawrence Abler

Regretfully, the province received credible allegations of sexual misconduct against Mel Hermanns, at which time he was immediately removed from active ministry, and was transferred to St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton WI where he spent his remaining years in prayer and penance.