

Neerology

Kieran Hickey
1921 - 2016



In the 1970s, when more friars were leaving the province than new candidates entering, Kieran expressed a deep sense of abandonment. That sense reflected much of the experience of his youth.

Raphael Francis Hickey was born and baptized at his home in Nortonville, a small town near Edgeley ND, the youngest of six children of a struggling poor family on March 13, 1921. His roots, however, are in Sheboygan WI where his mother was born, and Van Dyne WI, where the Hickey clan lived.

When Raphael was born his parents were running a butcher shop in Nortonville ND. A few years later they had moved to Litchville ND where they ran a restaurant. He reports that his mother had a very difficult life as his father was alcoholic. At age seven, Raphael lost his mother to a burst appendix, a severe blow to his father and to all the children which broke up the family. Raphael and his next oldest sister ended up with their grandparents, and then back to Medina MN to live with their oldest sister for one year. With the depression crash of '29 his oldest sister lost everything and Raphael went to live with his uncle, his mother's half-brother. By this time Raphael had been in four different schools in four years and had to repeat fourth grade at his new residence in Jamestown ND, a convent boarding school in Valley City ND, run by "mean, non-Christian" French nuns.

Those two years at the boarding school were miserable for him. Food was lousy, weekends were extremely lonely, and despite his age, he had not been prepared to receive his First Communion. Finally, on May 1st, 1933, at age 12, he received communion – a significant day for him.

In 1933 another attempt was made by his oldest sister to pull the family together and Raphael and his next oldest sister, Dorothy, were moved in with his newly married brother, Gerald, in Jamestown ND. Finally he attended the same school, St. John's Academy, for four years in a row. But his living situation was again miserable, with beatings from both his brother and his sister-in-law. That deeply affected him for life with a very low tolerance for fighting and arguing. He escaped some of the abuse by hiking and scouting, able to get away from it all temporarily. The sisters at the school were a good influence on him for life.

During these formative years Raphael missed his father deeply and felt a deepened sense of abandonment, as his father had little to do with the children, and never visited. Tragedy again struck for Raphael near the end of his ninth grade when he and his sister were literally thrown

out of his brother and sister-in-law's house. He found lodging with friends for the remainder of the school year and was soon taken in by his uncle. As a result of the cruel treatment at the hands of his brother and sister-in-law, Raphael struggled for a lot of years with not wanting anything to do with them. He admits he felt very un-Christian.

At the rectory in Edgeley, Raphael lived and worked till he finished high school in the public high. He was deeply influenced for the good by his uncle, a dedicated, zealous, self-giving spiritual priest. His uncle had initiated perpetual adoration in the parish and Raphael would spend hours before the Blessed Sacrament, growing in his love for Christ

Near the end of his high school years, Theophilus Riesinger preached a mission at the parish and a spark was lit in the heart of Raphael. He decided to be a Capuchin. He approached his uncle, a diocesan, with some anxiety but found him open and accepting, encouraged him to go into his little chapel and pray, telling him that whatever God wanted, he wanted...".some of the best advice (notes Kieran), that I received in all of my life." So he contacted SLS, was accepted as a "special" student for the sake of learning Latin and Greek and, despite poor marks but with the influence of Lawrence Merten, was accepted into the novitiate.

Capuchin life in those days was highly regimented and Raphael (now Kieran) was shocked by some of the practices: rough austerity, Capuchin sheets, the institutional way of serving food, soup served in a dish pan, discipline and culpa. Surely his rough upbringing helped prepare him to endure such difficulties, and he made first profession after what turned out to be a very happy year under Raymond Demers.

These were the World War II years and life at Garrison (1942-1946) was miserable and oppressive. The students were exempt from the draft and very cloistered, kept out of the public eye. He found the director of clerics cold and mean to him, and the professors unhappy being there. Also he found little help in growing into manhood from faculty or counselors. He struggled with his identity, knew he was loved and didn't know why. He suffered from an inferiority complex. The dominant spirituality of the time, with emphasis on self-defacement and humility lest one become proud, served to reinforce his poor self-image.

During all his years at Garrison he received only one brief visit from a relative, his uncle. That deprivation was a purifying experience that drove him to a stronger commitment to Christ. He readily professed perpetually with his class in 1945.

By comparison to Garrison, Marathon was paradise. He found the faculty there more human and approachable, was visited by his sisters, and was inspired by the older students and being ordained to the priesthood. He was active in the Mission Society, studied Spanish on the side and was preparing to go to Nicaragua. "I came to the conclusion that the greatest sacrifice I could make would be to leave everyone and everything for the sake of Christ."

Kieran was ordained by Bishop Tracy of LaCrosse on June 3rd, 1949 and celebrated his first Solemn Mass at his uncle's parish on Monday, June 6th. It was one rare occasion when his entire family including his father, were together. The day before, Pentecost, he offered Mass at the chapel of the Sister Servants of Christ the King who were seeking a new location at the time. Kieran suggested SLS, and eventually they located there as cooks in the seminary. Pentecost had become a special day for Kieran and he increased in his devotion to the Holy Spirit.

Returning to Marathon, he finished his studies, taking weekend Masses in parishes without being allowed to preach (no faculties yet). He enjoyed the contact with the people and began to grow into ministry. Chapter of the province convened as he concluded his studies and he expected to go to Nicaragua, but no one was sent that year. Instead Kieran was assigned to St. Michael Parish in Brooklyn after spending the summer at Marathon doing parish help outs. The large city parish was a little intimidating, but he grew to love parish work and the people. At the end of one year there he was approached about going to Guam, but he flatly turned it down.

With the split of the province in the offing and Kieran being one of the few "expendable" friars available, departure ceremonies for Guam were celebrated at St. Michael's on January 16th, 1951. After a brief visit with his sisters in bitter cold Minneapolis MN, he arrived in Guam on February 8th, 1951, totally missing Ash Wednesday. Few things about Guam appealed to him: he felt like he was just filling in for others at the village of Toto, Agana; the climate was warm and humid; housing was rudimentary; rats and mosquitos abounded. He ministered at the hospital and found some satisfaction there even though the Chamorro language was totally foreign to him. When the province divided in February 1952, Kieran made an attempt to be transferred to Nicaragua, since Guam became the responsibility of St. Mary Province. His attempts were met with caution, from spiritual advisors in the order, and even his oldest sister, to be careful to follow God's will. He rescinded his request and told the provincial he would stay in Guam because it seemed the Lord wanted him to be there.

Thus continued 19 years of busy, fruitful ministry that included parish ministry, teaching, construction of churches and friaries, and perhaps most significantly, Capuchin administration. In 1955 he was assigned to the first of four terms as superior regular, though he was the youngest Capuchin on the Islands. Those four 3-year terms were broken up with a three-year term as counselor to the new superior regular, Antonine.

Once he got over the shock of being assigned superior regular, Kieran devoted himself to the care and concerns of the friars and he readily won their favor. He grew into the superior regular job with the loving aid of Alvin LaFier. Kieran became seasoned and felt confident in the job despite it's difficulties, not the least of which was dealing with Bishop Apolinnaris. Despite being a Capuchin, the bishop treated the friars like step-children, being intent on establishing a native diocesan clergy. Kieran, on the other hand, was devoted to the order and the well-being of the friars which often clashed with the bishop. His diocesan priests were his fair-haired children who could do no wrong.

Kieran loved parish work and people genuinely loved him. This period of his life was very happy and fulfilling for him. He was truly burning the candle on both ends for many years with little time for reading and reflecting. He would notice his tiredness only when he would return to the States for his triennial home visit, but would return to Guam refreshed. Besides overseeing the building of churches, schools and friaries he served as a commissioner of the Guam urban renewal program. His influence helped develop Sinajana into a city with paved streets, sewers and running water. He spent a lot of time and energy on rebuilding after Typhon Karen had wiped out most everything.

When Vatican II neared its close in 1966, drug and alcohol problems of Bp. Apolinnaris surfaced. Kieran found himself, as superior regular, in the unhappy position of having to deal with whether his ministry of the sacraments (e.g., confirmation) was valid. Beyond that the bishop's condition left the implementation of the Vatican II reforms without leadership so Kieran worked to help the friars get updated.

About this time Kieran got involved with the Japanese Peace Memorial, a delicate undertaking as many people carried bitter feelings towards the Japanese. Gradually he was part of founding the South Pacific Peace Memorial Association, to honor the Japanese buried on the Islands and to foster good relations between the two now allied nations. And when the Cursillo Movement was introduced to Guam, Kieran gradually became active in promoting it and working with the teams. For him this was a transforming experience that emotionally freed him up. He actually became in charge of the movement on Guam until he left in 1970.

One of Kieran's final forays with Apolinnaris was to confront him about his deteriorated health, and asking him to resign and turn the diocese over to someone who could take care of it. Kieran, after begging and pleading with the bishop to resign, got him to ask for an auxiliary by letter to the apostolic delegate and to Rome. Eventually, when the listing came out as to a new bishop, the first name on the list was Kieran's. It is not clear why he wasn't chosen to be the new auxiliary, but it seems the diocesans were strongly against him for being too pro-Capuchin.

In 1968 Kieran was asked to give up the pastorate of nearly 12 years at St. Jude in Sinajajan. He began to spend a lot of time and energy with the Cursillo Movement, starting a school for leaders and teams for presentations. He helped out as needed at parishes on weekends and helped teach high school girls at Notre Dame High. With a variety of personnel conflicts going on, Kieran was experiencing a lot of pressure and lack of support of the friars there. Post-Vatican II updating and renewal was going on; Fulgence ended up in the hospital with an emotional breakdown; Kieran felt blamed for what was going wrong.

When he finally went to temporarily take the place of a pastor on Wake Island, he realized how much tension he was under and could no longer take the strain. He felt terribly rejected by the Capuchins and began reading rejection into many small incidents. He spent nearly four therapeutic weeks at Wake Island, wrote a letter to the friars about his intentions to leave Guam, and continued on from Wake Island to Honolulu to the States. He had volunteered to

help Lawrence at St. Michael Hospital in Milwaukee, and arrived there early March 1970 after a visit with his sisters in Minneapolis.

This was early March 1970. Several Guamanians were students at SLS, so Kieran visited them and in the course of several conversations was convinced to join the college team there which turned out to be a tremendous source of growth for him. Kieran provided counselling and spiritual direction as well as teaching a religion class, and involved himself in the activities of the students. He drew well on his vast pastoral experience and also found time for reading and updating. Through the students he also got himself involved in the Charismatic Renewal which was again a broadening experience for him.

Kieran returned to Guam in 1974 to celebrate his silver priestly jubilee and was able to bring some closure to his ministry there as he had left so abruptly. Back at Calvary he brought his past experience to Marriage Encounter at the Hill and again in Detroit, a ministry he truly enjoyed and from which he grew in his own self-awareness and worth.

Detroit was his next assignment in 1975 when he helped establish the pre-novitiate program there. He continued on that staff after he was elected provincial vicar at the chapter of early 1976, the beginning of three painful years. He found the council meetings discouraging and depressing, always dealing with crises with many friars leaving the order. During this time he began to help conduct workshops with Marty Pable on "mid-life" and, once off the council, was assigned to our house of prayer in Madison which he gradually found to be a great blessing. Those four years gave him the opportunity to get in touch with the contemplative part of our Capuchin life. He spent a lot of time in prayer, took weekend help outs and gave directed retreats and spiritual direction, plus developing his talent at cooking. He also helped with the yearly House of Prayer Experience(H.O.P.E.) during the summers.

After four growthful years at Madison, which included another trip to Guam for the establishment of the vice-province, as well as a visit to Saudi and Italy, Kieran was assigned director of Monte Alverno Retreat Center, taking over from Bill Alcuin. Again he used his vast experience and many skills in improving the physical plant, building up the clientele by expanding on Bill's recruitment program and introducing weekday programs as well as introducing or continuing special retreat weekends such as AA. Computers were just being introduced at the center, another learning experience.

Kieran had typically thrown himself into his ministry and after 10 years was beginning to realize he needed a change. His health needed attention and he underwent surgery for cancer in his large intestines from which he completely recovered.

About then St. Fidelis Friary was on the horizon and Kieran served on the maintenance committee for its construction, retired from Monte Alverno and moved to St. Fidelis when it was completed in 1992. He was led to believe he would be part of the staff and felt slighted when he was simply by-passed. He ended up with no jobs there and grew spiritually by having

to “let go.” Gradually he would spend two days a week in Manitowoc as chaplain at the hospital and confessor to the Franciscan Sisters. Also, due to his time and many contacts from Monte Alverno, many came to him at St. Fidelis for spiritual direction.

After the chapter of 1993 Kieran traveled again to Guam to celebrate his golden religious jubilee with friends there. He had left more than 20 years earlier and found the return experience gratifying and rewarding, seeing some of the fruit of his 19 years there in Capuchins who had been his altar boys. He had many lifelong friends among the Guamanian people. Some of them had moved from Sinajana to San Diego where for nearly 20 years he annually returned to celebrate the feast of St. Jude with them.

Kieran continued his ministry of counseling and spiritual direction at St. Fidelis Friary and then at St. Mary’s in Kaukauna where he moved in 1996. With winter driving a problem he resigned his ministry in Manitowoc and began helping as needed at St. Paul Home in Kaukauna, only a few blocks away. He began to find chaplaincy there stressful and decided to terminate that ministry too.

During these years at St. Mary’s, Kieran lost all of his family members: Dorothy and Gerald in 1997 and Mabel in 2001. Kieran never reconciled with his brother Gerald, and was alienated from Dorothy’s son as well. He now was very much alone but buoyed up by his many friends and admirers. Thus the numerous celebrations in his honor were exceptionally supportive and healing: his golden priestly jubilee celebration on Guam in 1999; the 100th anniversary celebration of the Capuchins coming to Guam in 2001 and the annual St. Jude Fiesta celebrations in San Diego which he attended faithfully.

Kieran provided us with a lengthy portrayal of his spiritual journey. His earliest experiences of religion centered around the Eucharist, developing a relationship with Jesus. He celebrated his first Mass on Pentecost Sunday and that was the beginning of his devotion to the Holy Spirit, experiencing the power of the Spirit working through him. Each Pentecost was very meaningful to him.

His spirituality was greatly influenced by the faith of the Guamanian people, their acceptance of trials, suffering and death. Also in Guam his spirituality took a more human turn with his involvement with the Curisillo which broke down some of the emotional barriers he had built up around himself. And when back in the States he found his spirituality growing through his spiritual direction of college students especially with those involved in Charismatic Renewal. That further helped Kieran break through emotional barriers and feel comfortable praising God, giving new energy to his praying of the psalms and reading of Scripture. His involvement with Marriage Encounter and Capuchin Encounter further opened him up to himself and God working through him. So as he ministered and prayed during his four years at the House of Prayer in Madison and his 10 years at Monte Alverno; he found God touching and healing his deepest scars of loss, anger, abandonment and prejudice. He had come to see how God had taken care of him and he was at peace.

Finally Kieran reports two events of his life that deeply impacted his spirituality: his trip to Assisi where he came to a deep appreciation of his Franciscan vocation; and a guided trip to the Holy Land which enfolded the Scriptures for him and gave them new meaning and life, "probably the highlight and the greatest experience of my life."

When Bob Udulutsch retired from St. Mary's in Kaukauna in 2006, Kieran moved back to St. Fidelis Friary to continue his "retirement." He spent long hours in prayer and reading; he continued counseling and giving spiritual direction; he also took up candle and rosary making and supplied rosaries and candles for sale at Monte Alverno Retreat Center. Gradually, as his health declined, he reluctantly gave up both and gave his resources to others. He spent his years at St. Fidelis, very faithful to prayer and to community activities, including evening rummy and a glass of wine. Finally, when his health failed to the point where he needed more professional help, he was moved to St. Paul Elder Care Services and shared a room with Matthew Gottschalk. He faithfully accompanied the friars on their weekly visit to St. Fidelis for noon social and meal. His long-standing wish was to die at St. Fidelis, but as the end drew near he even let go of that, dying peacefully at St. Paul's on October 3rd 2016, aged 95. Funeral services were held at St. Joseph Church in Appleton. He is buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Appleton.

~ Mel Hermanns