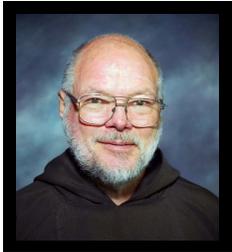


Necrology

Charles Robinson
1942-2020



Charles Robinson was the son of John and Margaret Robinson. He was born in Helena, Montana on Feb. 2, 1942. His father died when he was 17. He had one brother, Bill Robinson, and a sister, Audrey Ledgerwood. At the time of Charlie's death his mother was 101 years old.

In 1948 the Robinson family moved from Helena to Warm Springs, Montana. Charlie attended Lincoln Grade school in Anaconda and graduated from Anaconda High School in 1960. He became acquainted with the Capuchins at St. Labre, and Capuchin Emmett Hoffman encouraged him to attend St. Lawrence Seminary, where he studied for two years in the college program.

Charlie entered the novitiate in 1962, and was perpetually professed in 1967. He was ordained on Holy Thursday, March 26, 1969, at St. Helena Cathedral by Raymond Hunthausen of Helena. The newly ordained Capuchin priest celebrated his Mass of Thanksgiving a few days later at Pullman, Washington, where his mother was living at the time. It took place at 6:15 am on Easter Sunday at an Easter Vigil Liturgy!

Charles Robinson's first assignment following his ordination was to the faculty and staff at St. Lawrence Seminary. During his time at SLS, Charlie was a religion teacher, dormitory supervisor, class advisor and spiritual director. Many alumni of St. Lawrence remember that Charlie always had an open door. He would brew a pot of tea and offer it to eager students. One alumna described him as interesting, interested and always faithful.

Many St. Lawrence alumni recall Charlie as a master of pageantry and oratory. Attending his liturgies and hearing his homilies was always an adventure for the student congregation—whether it was throwing a large snowball during the homily or swinging the censer with abandon. However his sermons were never frivolous and always had a point. When the occasion demanded it, Charlie could preach with empathy and an understanding of his adolescent congregation that was powerful and moving. After the death of Kevin Fendt, a senior in the class of 1976, Charlie preached a homily that helped the student body deal with the sudden and tragic death of a popular classmate.

In 1980 he returned to his home state of Montana and was stationed at St. Labre for two years, serving among the Northern Cheyenne. His next assignment was St. Charles Parish, Pryor, on the Crow Reservation. After five years at Pryor, he became pastor of St. Dennis Parish, Crow Agency, where he continued to minister among the Crow people until his retirement.

Charles spent 27 years as pastor of St. Dennis and St. Xavier Mission, St. Xavier MT. In addition to his ordinary pastoral work he taught religion one day a week at Pretty Eagle School at St. Xavier. He was faithful in taking communion to the residents at the hospital and senior care center at Crow Agency. One of the chaplains at a Billings hospital mentioned how impressed he was by the long hours Charlie would spend at the bedside of dying patients. He also was

spiritual assistant for two Secular Franciscan fraternities in Billings and was faithful to their monthly meetings. He celebrated Mass regularly for a group of women in Billings and went on several pilgrimages to Medjugorje with them.

During his time in Pryor, Charlie was adopted by the late Rose Turns Plenty, and this meant a lot to him. After his adoption he was given a Crow name, Dúhpaawachiash ('Fights Twice') by Irvin Sings Good. Rose had thirteen children and numerous grandchildren, and Charlie kept up with all of them. Even after he returned to Wisconsin, he would keep in touch with the Turns Plenty's and others on the reservation and would ask the Montana friars how various ones were doing.

Charlie was involved in Crow culture and spirituality. He took part in the sun dance, three days of fasting and prayer. And the sweat lodge was a big part of both his ministry and his prayer life. He would drive around the area looking for the smoke that meant someone was building the fire for a sweat, and he had a knack for showing up at just the right time. He always had several towels in the back seat and would smell them to see which one was the cleanest! That's the one he would use. At the sweat people still share stories of Charles and his various escapades. Many recall baptisms where he would drench the baby and everyone nearby with lavish amounts of water!

Hospitality was a virtue that he valued and practiced to a high degree. His door was always open, literally. People came in and out all day long—taking showers, doing laundry, watching TV, or just drinking coffee and visiting with him. He would often offer his guests something to eat, smelling the dish to make sure it was still edible before putting it in the microwave!

His house had a large room for meetings and other gatherings with a TV, a small kitchen area and dining table, and a washer and dryer. There were several extra bedrooms, several couches, and three showers. People were welcome to stay overnight or even for a few days or weeks or months. Occasionally he would get up in the morning and find someone asleep on the couch and he would have no idea who the person was! During Crow Fair several of his adopted relatives from Pryor would stay with him, and many others would come to take showers. Everyone was welcome.

Charlie's house and both his churches were filled with statues, pictures, and other "treasures." He also had a large collection of antique vestments of all colors that filled his sacristy. There were no blank spaces on his walls. The provenance of these items was sometimes questionable, appropriated from the attics of motherhouses, rectories, and churches. His philosophy was, if it's not being used, I can use it. Before he died, he said that one of the things he wanted people to remember about him was, "I stole statues."

One time when he was teaching at Calvary I visited him in Missoula, where he was attending summer school at the University of Montana. He was staying at the Jesuit rectory there. I helped him carry out several items from the rectory while the young man with me kept watch in the hallway to make sure that no Jesuits were coming!

Charlie was a collector, but he was not a hoarder. He also gave away a lot of treasures. If you saw something of his that you liked, there was a good chance that he would tell you to keep it.

Charles was a man of prayer. The religious objects that he collected were all reflections of his spirituality, his devotion to the Mother of God and various saints. He had a small chapel in his house filled with icons and other holy pictures. When he prayed morning and evening prayer he would invite whoever was in the house at the time to join him. In addition, he celebrated Mass daily in the church for a small group of people.

Charlie was regular in participating in Capuchin community gatherings. He always wanted to know what the latest news was from the province and had a number of friars back in Wisconsin and Michigan that he would call frequently.

Toward the end of his years at Crow Agency Charles experienced a variety of health problems and in 2014 he retired from active ministry and moved to St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton, and from there he went to St. Paul Home, Kaukauna. He died on September 1, 2020 of Covid-19, and was buried in the Capuchin Seminary at Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin.

~ Randolph Graczyk, with assistance from Gary Wegner