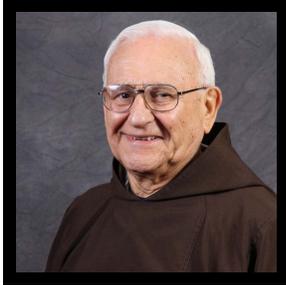


# Necrology

Werner Wolf

1932-2020



Werner “Bernard” Wolf was a herald of joy, cheerleader for family and friars, an evangelizer before it was fashionable and Capuchin to his bones. As flawed as any friar, who experienced his own highs and lows in life, throughout it all Werner exhibited an authentic exuberance that was both infectious and appreciated.

Born Bernard George Wolf in Allenton Wisconsin in 1932, he was the youngest of five boys. Years later he would deploy this birth order as a way – in the words of one niece – to “commiserate” with all the youngest in the family. It also may be one of the fonts for his mentoring instincts with students at St. Lawrence and young Capuchins at various stages of their emerging vocations. A graduate of the high school he would later serve for 18 years, he entered novitiate in 1950 where he received the name “Werner” – appropriately Germanic. His college years began in Garrison, New York. As they coincided with the division between the Detroit and New York province, he finished college in Huntington, Indiana. This meant that he spent a few years living with Solanus Casey who was assigned to the same community from 1946-1956. Theology followed in Marathon, Wisconsin where he was ordained a presbyter in 1958. The following year he took a pastoral year in Milwaukee.

Werner’s first assignment was his alma mater, St. Lawrence Seminary, where he would serve in various capacities for 18 years (1960-1978). These were wonderful and difficult years for him. In his own autobiography he admits that he continuously moved from one task to another: from dorm prefect to dean of discipline, from director of spiritual formation to vice rector, even directing one of the seminaries fall plays. Reflecting on that completely new experience, he writes “it did not seem to faze me.” Little did. While this student of his and many others idolized him – my own class of 1966 even named our class basketball team the “Wolf-Pack” and designated him our “traveling trophy” because he accompanied us so often – he wrote that “work among teens is a quite thankless job.” Yet, he continues: “It is amazing how I kept growing spiritually.” During those years he acquired – with some difficulty – a graduate degree in special education from Stritch College. He describes his years at St. Lawrence as a happy experience of “workaholism:” completing evening dorm checks, coordinating work crews, checking in with the Capuchin community late at night with a beer, plowing snow, and doing virtually whatever he was asked. While he marveled about he survived - saying the Divine Office every day, contributing to the life of the friars and fulfilling his increasing responsibilities - the richness of his Capuchin commitment comes through when he writes: “I always worked well under the direction and request of superiors.”

While at St. Lawrence Werner became involved in preaching retreats for women religious – an experience that would prove invaluable in years to come. Maybe even more noteworthy was his engagement with the charismatic movement at this time. This would profoundly impact Werner’s spirituality, manifest in his eventually emblematic greeting (in person and in print) PRAISE THE LORD! It was also during these years that he was instrumental in birthing the Capuchin Associate program, which he directed. He moved with that program to Detroit where

he became the director of the pre-novitiate program which, in his own words, broadened his understand of church, Capuchin Order and world. Those formative years at St. Lawrence, expanding his breadth as teacher, leader, formator and preacher were played out in the unfolding years of his ever broadening ministerial service. While he admitted his reluctance to take on administration, he directed retreat houses at St. Anthony in Marathon (1989-1995), Monte Alverno in Appleton (1996-2004) and even after retirement was called back as local minister to his beloved St. Lawrence (2005-2011).

While many friars have grateful memories of Werner, the Wolf family heritage is no less important in this telling. Multiple nieces and nephew recall, with heightened degrees of affection and hilarity, how Werner was a favorite uncle. The stories of Werner crawling on his knees while grand nieces and nephews climbed onto his back for horsey rides, or tales of his chomping on artificial “snacks” created out of playdough that reduced the family and him to peals of laughter, remind us that Werner was beloved by many. One touching memoire from the Wolf family was his extended and unsolicited letter to nieces and nephews in the summer of 1991 in which he announces his pride for his extended family, promotes them to leadership for the next generation of the Wolf clan and, as he frequently did, reminds them of their holiness.

Werner’s commitment to his multiple families maybe best exemplified by his decision to move into the Capuchin retirement home (St. Fidelis in Appleton, Wisconsin) in 2011 when Eugene, his beloved older brother in birth order and religions profession, moved there. Although Werner was quite healthy, he chose to move into this facility for senior friars where Eugene died in 2012. At Eugene’s burial in the same cemetery in which he is now buried, Werner stood at the graveside after the final commendation and although the family and friars had moved up the Hill for a post-funeral reception, Werner would not move until “Eugene was safe in the arms of mother earth.”

Werner remained in Appleton after Eugene died, engaged in various temporary ministries and enjoying his two loving families. He began to show signs of dementia in 2017 and eventually moved to facilities that could care for him in his decline. He died on 21 October 2020. While future generations of his two loving families may not remember explicitly his great humor or exuberance, his deep faith or instinct for mentoring, those gifts live on in the family of origin that Werner graced for 88 years, and his family of choice that he blessed for 70 years. Praise the Lord, Werner; Praise the Lord.

~Edward Foley