

Neerology

Daniel E. Anholzer
1951-2010



Daniel Elmer Anholzer was the first child born to Robert Elmer Anholzer and Helen Jane De Leeuw in Appleton, Wisconsin on 18 July 1951. The Anholzers had been married nearly four years, so the news of the arrival of new life was an answer to prayers and they looked forward to their future baby with eager longing. He was named for a song being sung on the radio and truly his life was destined to fill our hearts with music.

The Anholzers lived in the small town outside of Appleton called Kimberly, originally a Dutch settlement. As in many of the towns in the Fox River Valley the paper mill industry was the locus for work.

Through the grace of God the Anholzer family grew to include three more children: Thomas Robert, Gary Andrew and Karen Kathleen. This small town family offered wonderful values of faith, love, acceptance and belonging coupled with simplicity and hard work. Perhaps the most beautiful way of understanding Dan's early family years is an insight offered by one of the parishioners of St. Joseph in Saginaw in evaluating Dan's ministry and service: "Everyone likes him. I know his parents and family; I know why he is a good priest."

Daniel's natural curiosity showed early signs of an alacrity of intellect combined with an innate ability for creative expression. There wasn't much that he couldn't do if he put his mind to it; and if it didn't work out as planned it was clearly someone else's fault! He loved his Dutch small town and would often remind all of us: "You're not much, if you're not Dutch!" Daniel attended Holy Name of Jesus elementary school in Kimberly where, as expected, he excelled.

He loved the outdoors and nature and with his artist's eye began collecting beautiful things. He loved to wander and explore and enjoyed picking asparagus by the railroad tracks as he dreamed of where those tracks might lead him. While he loved his hometown, he also knew that he would leave it. His father once confided that when Dan saw St. Lawrence Seminary at Mt. Calvary he said, "I know I'm coming here, no matter what." That resoluteness characterized Dan's entire life. He would always know where he was going and would get there no matter what... and blame somebody else if things didn't go as planned!

His departure for St. Lawrence Seminary in the fall of 1965 was a sad and happy moment for the family. The Anholzers left their first born in the care of the Capuchins at fourteen years of age. It was a difficult thing to do, but be certain of this: they didn't have much choice! Few today would imagine Dan as shy as a young man, but he was. He needed to assess things first and then decide.

During that time of assessment he was quiet and appeared non-involved. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

It was also that way for his friendships and for his future leadership style. Dan kept his cards close to his chest; but when he played them he did so to win. In this context, it is not difficult to understand his friendship with fellow freshman Andrew Daniels, an African-American from Detroit who became his best friend for life. They were inseparable at Calvary. Andrew's warm and outgoing personality and Dan's quiet, intelligently watchful accompaniment made for a dynamic duo. They were called "Salt and Pepper" not only for their respective cultural heritages but because their personalities were a perfect blend.

One of St. Lawrence's many blessings to the community in which it operates is its rich cultural diversity, even in the Germanic enclave of the Holy Land. This gift was not lost on Dan, who bridged the gulf between cultures more easily than anyone I have ever known. Andy's inclusion into Dan's friendship brought him to Kimberly to become a cultural ambassador. His ready smile and easy laugh were the best armor against fear and suspicion. Kimberly was never the same!

Kimberly came to Detroit too, when Dan became godfather to Andy's nephew and a life-long member of the extended Daniels family. Where others saw difference, Dan saw richness. The dream of the "Rainbow Parish" began early in Dan's life, and he swept us all along in his dream of what is possible.

With characteristic resoluteness Dan applied in 1969 to enter the Capuchin Community. On his application he explained his reason for wanting to become a Capuchin with uncanny clarity. "I want to be as good a Christian as I possibly can. I want to put on the crucified Christ and share his sufferings and joys with all my brothers as Francis did. I feel that I can best do this under the rule of the Capuchin Order and with the help and influence of my future Capuchin brothers." All of us witnessed the wonder of his joy; but only a few knew his crucifixions because he made the burden appear so light.

The steady response to his initial call was re-echoed in his petition for perpetual vows in 1976. "I believe my Father has called me to live the Gospel life in the Capuchin spirit and tradition," he wrote. "I don't know why—it will always be a mystery why he chose me—but I believe it is the only way I will ever be truly happy and at peace. I believe that after nearly seven years, I am ready for a permanent commitment. Not only am I willing but I long for it. I want to place myself completely in the Lord's hands."

Daniel wanted to go the Nicaraguan mission from the outset. He asked and was given permission to receive his diaconate in a small rural parish in the Vicariate of Bluefields and was ordained to the priesthood in 1980. He worked in the mission for several wonderful yet very stressful years. It was a time of revolution and change. He wrote in 1980 there were not many problems where he worked because the *campesino* (land worker) had everything to gain and nothing to lose. However, he registered a growing sense of wariness about what seemed to be the lack of conversion of each individual Nicaraguan that would be needed if a real Christian revolution was to occur. In his typically hope-filled way he said of his mission trip to the bush: "The mud may

depress me but the people make everything worthwhile.” It sounds like an appropriate epitaph for a ministerial life so wonderfully lived.

He returned to the States after a close brush with death that shook him to the core. The revolution had turned sour, and this saddened him beyond words. The former victims had become the new victimizers. He returned to the States in 1983, and he found solace in his work with fellow Capuchin Booker Ashe and his many outreach programs at the at the House of Peace in Milwaukee. I suspect this sojourn in Milwaukee amid the African-American community prepared him even more completely for the ministry at the “Rainbow Parish,” St. Joe’s in Saginaw, Michigan. It was with a great deal of reluctance and some anger that Booker gave his blessing to Dan’s departure for Saginaw in the summer of 1984.

The great love affair between the people of St. Joseph and Daniel Anholzer had its beginning with a team of three. Within the first year it was clear that Dan was the single and perfect fit. The people called forth his gifts in all the colors of the rainbow. He flourished as a minister and grew deeply in faith, hope and love. His first building project was not physical edifice but rather that of the Spirit. He called God’s people to be accepting, forgiving, loving, generous and empowering. He knew from his prayer life that a beautiful church building would one day reflect a beautiful faith community:

I pray that the new St. Joe’s will always be the same kind of church Our Lady of Guadalupe asked to be built on the plain below Tepeyac hill. A place where all are welcome, where all can come no matter the color of their skin, whether they are rich or poor, well dressed or in rags. A place where you know you will get a hug even if you will get one nowhere else, a place where all will feel they belong. A place where all will be listened to and understood no matter what language they speak, because here the language of the heart is spoken. A place where the cry of the poor will never fall on deaf ears...where the sick, the lonely, and the wounded can come and be healed and made whole. A place where those who seek to be first will make themselves last and those who want to be great, seek only to serve the rest.

In the midst of building that beautiful new church at St. Joe’s Dan was elected by his brothers to serve as provincial councilor and provincial vicar in 2002 and was shortly thereafter appointed by the general minister to serve as provincial minister. He was decisively re-elected to a second three-year term in 2005.

Daniel’s ministry to the province was manifold; but his greatest gift and blessing to the brothers was the challenge he leveled at the province to embrace our collaboration in ministry with lay men and women. He considered our partners in ministry to be a singularly wonderful blessing from God. This simultaneous challenge and blessing bore fruit in the special provincial assembly at Huntington, Indiana in 2007. His challenge was both prescient and prophetic, and his leadership paved the way for the ministry of the Lord to remain alive and active in the Province of St. Joseph.

His collaborative style of leadership extended to friars from other Capuchin jurisdictions. Dan led the efforts to begin the North American Pacific Capuchin Conference (NAPCC) novitiate, and he worked tirelessly to keep the project together when the almost inevitable growing pains and conflicts of such an effort threatened to tear it apart.

After a sabbatical which included an extended tour of China, Dan returned to his beloved St. Joseph Parish in Saginaw in May 2009. After just one year was suddenly taken from us doing what he loved: walking his three dogs after enjoying a meal with parishioners.

Daniel Anholzer died on 13 May 2010 at age 58. His wonderful smile, zealous enthusiasm, warm wit, and commitment to having a good time while accomplishing so very much in the name of the Lord are deeply missed.

— Daniel Fox