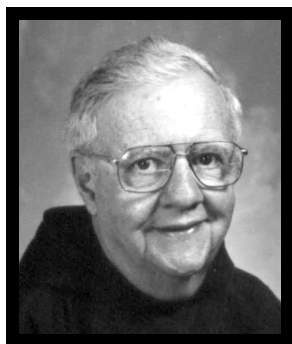


Neerology

Donald Brody

1920 - 2010



I came to St. Fidelis in 1996, and Donald Brody had been there for a few years at that time. Almost immediately I came to the realization of his very poor eyesight. At times he would preside at Eucharistic Liturgy and I noticed him struggling to read the prayer texts. I offered to type them out for him and with the help a computer and printer to print out the prayers using large type. When I checked with him I found it hard to realize how very large the print had to be enlarged to really help him. I also began to realize that he was only able to preside because he had memorized Eucharistic Prayer II as well as the other prayers. He did preside well without much hesitation in spite of his poor eyesight.

I recall that he and Anthony Thoma would spend many hours in the art studio. They had an able art instructor in the person of Hannah Garrett Taylor. In August 1999 they had a display of their art works in the Layton Boulevard Franciscan Sisters Mother House in Milwaukee. Don Brody displayed twenty-three paintings and Anthony Thoma displayed seventy-six.

Hannah Taylor wrote that when Don first started painting he had good eyesight and that as his eyesight deteriorated he seemed to become more interested in painting. She writes of him as “one of my most patient and caring individuals that I taught at St. Fidelis.”

I remember something else about Don. Every first Friday we would be a supper and at six-twenty the door bell would ring and several sisters from Saint Paul Manor in Kaukauna would come for confession. Don would quietly leave the table and go to hear their confessions. For several years Don would also travel monthly to Champion (Robinsonville) to hear confessions of the Carmelite Nuns.

Don was called upon many times as a confessor. His primary assignment from 1961 to 1964 and again from 1965 to 1967 was confessor for the novices at St. Felix Friary, Huntington, Indiana. He also had the responsibility of friary librarian during these years. From 1964 to 1965 he was assigned to St. Francis in Milwaukee and his primary responsibilities besides community living were confessor for priests and librarian.

Donald was appointed novice director for the brothers for a period of three years. Two years of which were in Detroit at St. Bonaventure's and the other year in Sacred Heart Friary, Baraga, Michigan. His classes with the novices included explanations of the Rule of St. Francis and of the vows based on Mark Stier's book on the vows. Once when the local minister, Alphonse Heckler, was sick Donald was appointed temporary local minister. The novices were happy with this as it meant better refreshments at recreation. Donald seems to have had special concern for

his former novices. In later years after Don had lost his eye sight and former novices would visit him, he would recognize them from their voices.

After completing his theological studies at St. Anthony Friary, Marathon, Wisconsin he was assigned to St. Francis Friary in Milwaukee as an assistant. He spent the next four years there. His next assignment was that of retreat director at Monte Alverno Retreat, Appleton, Wisconsin. This assignment lasted about six months and he was then transferred to St. Joseph Friary in Appleton as an assistant. In early summer 1956 Donald spent a month with the Trappists in New Melleray Abbey, Dubuque, Iowa.

If we consider the many different assignments that Donald had in years of active ministry we find that being an assistant to someone else was one of his more common assignments. At different times he spent about six years as an assistant at St. Joseph Parish Appleton. In addition to St. Francis and St. Joe's, he served as an assistant at St. Bonaventure (Detroit), St. Anthony (Saginaw), St. Elizabeth (Milwaukee) and St. Fidelis (Marquette, Michigan).

From August 1974 to June 1976 and again from August 1977 to July 1978 Don was a member of the core group and the House of Prayer.

Another area of ministry and possibly more significant was Don's work as chaplain in a monastery, convent or hospital, especially during the last ten years of his active ministry. He was appointed hospital chaplain early in his ministry for about six months at St. Michael Hospital, Milwaukee in 1956. He was also appointed hospital chaplain in Marquette from June 1971 until May 1972. He was assigned as chaplain to Notre Dame Health Care Center in Elm Grove, Wisconsin from September 1979 to August 1980 and then for the next two year at St. Francis Home in Fond du Lac.

Among the most significant assignments for Don was as chaplain to the Poor Clare community in Kokomo, Indiana and to St. Mary Convent in Rock Island, Illinois as well as to the Agnesians at Nazareth Heights in Fond du Lac and to the Franciscan Sisters at Holy Family Convent in Manitowoc. He was chaplain for the Poor Clare Nuns for a total of three years and a year for each of the others.

Colette writes of his ministry to our Poor Clare Sisters in Kokomo as being "truly brotherly." Don gave them monthly conferences on the Testament of Saint Clare, penance and the Franciscan spirit as well as on the Gospel and the lives of Clare and Francis. He manifested a deep devotion to the Eucharist in the Mass, benediction and forty hours devotion. Mother Miriam wrote of his ministry: "We all appreciated Fr. Don's Franciscan simplicity and his priestly reverence for all connected with the Blessed Sacrament. He was so faithful over the years in continuing his correspondence with us. We felt his brotherly desire that we flourish in our Poor Clare vocation."

After coming to St. Fidelis Don was chaplain for the Carmelites in Champion for a period of about six months to a year, and from April 1994 until April 1995 Don was chaplain to the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity in Manitowoc. It was during this time that his macular degeneration progressed to the stage that he was not able to continue his ministry. Doris

Jurgenson wrote of his ministry: "Father Don is much appreciated here by the young and old. His theology is sound and his homilies are very inspirational. One can often hear the sisters share with others what he said. He says Mass with reverence and is an excellent confessor. I can only thank God and Solanus Casey for providing us with a good, holy chaplain. I do hope his macular degeneration does not advance too quickly."

Don came to the Capuchins after graduating from the Crosier Preparatory Seminary in Onamia, Minnesota in June 1939. He was invested in the order on 26 August 1939 and received the name Senan; a name which greatly pleased one of the older Irishmen in his family who after hearing that he was given the name Donald at his baptism remarked: "Next, they will be putting kilts on the boy!" He made first profession on 27 August 1940 and his solemn profession on 27 August 1943.

Don was ordained on 4 June 1947. He celebrated his first Mass at St. Rita Church, West Allis, Wisconsin. On his ordination card he chose the passage from Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore, He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, He hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart."

Donald Brody was born in Cashton, Wisconsin on 13 June 1920. His parents were Eugene Brody and Elizabeth Quinn. Don's cousin Pat writes of Elizabeth: "She was a pretty, lively, and a well-liked lady." But tragedy struck Elizabeth at an early age. She contracted Addison's Disease and died at the age of thirty-two. Don was only six years old at the time and his sister, Betty, was two years old.

Don's father was working for the state at the time of Elizabeth's death and had to do a lot of traveling. Don and his sister were placed with their widowed grandmother Catherine Brody. Don's cousin Pat wrote of her: "Catherine lived in a rather large house. She had eight children and two of her youngest sons were still living at home. Catherine was youthful despite her age, was fun loving, and a great conversationalist. She had been a teacher at the little country school . . . and knew how to interact with children. . . . There were lots of visits by all the children and grandchildren . . . so Don and Betty had plenty of 'company.'" On Saturdays Catherine attracted visitors to sample her "pancakes, doughnuts, or apple pie."

During these years Don was also very close to his cousin James Patrick Brody (Pat). Although Don and Pat lived several blocks apart they frequently visited each other and seemed more like brothers than cousins. Pat had a coaster wagon which often served as transportation between the two houses. Don and Pat served Mass together at Sacred Heart Church, went sleigh riding together in winter and swimming in summer. Another person in Don's and Betty's life was their uncle Marty Quinn. He was always kind and generous to them.

Eventually Catherine Brody got too old to care for the large house and all of the children there. She gave up the house and moved to an apartment in La Crosse. Don was about ten years old at the time and Betty about six. Their father still traveled much with his job, so Don and Betty were placed with an elderly couple for a short time and then with their father's sister and husband. As happy as they were with their grandmother they were now unhappy living with these other

people. Betty mentions that they “were rescued from this situation” by an aunt of theirs. However, the next six years were anything but settled.

For a time Don lived with his father in an apartment in Wausau and Betty stayed with another of her aunts. Then they were placed in a good family home in Wausau and attended St. Mary Parish and school. Their father still traveled a lot, and this made it difficult for Don and Betty. As time went on Betty attended a boarding school, Edgewood, in Madison and Don lived with his Uncle Marty in Cashton. He had a year in the high school in Cashton before attending the Crosier High School (Seminary) in Minnesota. His Uncle Marty paid the expenses.

Don’s father, Eugene Brody, eventually left his job with the State of Wisconsin and began working for a brewery in Milwaukee. At one point he became the union leader for the “Brewery and Soft Drinks Union of America.” After a year at Edgewood, Betty would stay with her father in an apartment in Milwaukee. While Don spent most of the year living at the seminary in Minnesota, he spent summers and other vacation times with his father and sister in Milwaukee. When Don was about sixteen or seventeen his father remarried. He and his new wife, Kathryn Walker, then made their home in West Allis, just outside Milwaukee.

Throughout high school Don frequently spent his vacations visiting different churches in Milwaukee searching out his call to the priesthood. He was inspired by Stephen Eckert and that is part of his journey to the Capuchins. His cousin Pat wrote: “The first thing that should be recorded about Don is that from the very beginning, he wanted to be a priest and intended to be a priest. I knew from an early age that he would be. We had a wonderful, ideal pastor at our church. During the ten years he was at Sacred Heart [in Cashton] eight or nine boys went to the seminary.”

In an interview with Mary Hague, Wellness director for the province, on the occasion of his 70th religious jubilee Don mentioned: “I became drawn to the Capuchins by reading the life of the Servant of God, Stephen Eckert, Capuchin, in the book *The Herald of the Great King*, by Celestine Bittle, Capuchin. I knew from about the age of seven that I wanted to be a priest in a religious order. I was inspired by Stephen Eckert and his work in Harlem with African Americans. After reading his book I was interested in joining the Capuchin Order. I was attracted to the balance of the contemplative and active life that the order provided. ...”

Further reflecting on his life in the order he mentioned: “I entered the order on 26 August 1939 at the age of 18 and started my religious life at St. Felix Friary in Huntington, Indiana. It was a good experience and I was happy with my decision. In thinking back on my seventy years of religious life, the only thing I would do differently is that I would do it better!”

Reflecting on his ministry he noted: "I especially enjoyed my experiences at St. Joseph’s in Appleton and also at St. Francis in Milwaukee. The community of friars and the people made these assignments stand out in my mind. I served with Solanus Casey at St. Bonaventure's and also at Huntington and he also inspired me.”

After ordination Don spent vacations with his sister, Betty Goetsch and her husband, sometimes at their home near Boulder Junction, Wisconsin area and at other times traveling in their motor

home. Betty wrote: “Of course, we spent days viewing churches when he was here. He couldn’t pass up a church when we traveled.”

For his 25th Jubilee his family sent him to Ireland. In Ireland he stayed at a Capuchin friary and the friars helped him find the homes of relatives and of his grandmother Catherine O’Connell. They also located his great grandparents’ home and tombstone.

Together with a diocesan priest Don sponsored a pilgrimage to Lourdes, Fatima and Rome in 1981. In fact, they were in St. Peter’s Square on 13 May 1981 when John Paul II was shot. His sister wrote: “It was bedlam. It took all day to get back to the hotel.”

Don was one of the first residents at St. Fidelis Friary, which opened in 1992. In 1995 his sister and husband sold their home near Boulder Junction and rented an apartment in Appleton. It was during this time that Betty drove him to Champion (Robinsonville) monthly to hear confessions at the Carmelite Monastery.

Don and Betty also got together about once a week for a ride and/or meal. Betty remembered, “He liked to sit on my balcony and have a glass of wine with a few crackers and cheese...” I asked Betty how she saw Don as being most helpful to others. She replied, “I would say mainly by prayers. He was always praying.”

Betty recalled the following incident: “I had joined St. Pius Church when we moved to Appleton. It must have been during Lent when I stopped there to go to confession. There were long lines. I turned to a lady behind me in line and asked if she knew who the priest was. She said, ‘Fr. Brody.’ I took off for the next line! Then I thought, ‘Oh, she must think I don’t like Fr. Brody,’ so I went back to her and told her he was my brother and I’d never gone to confession to him. She responded, ‘Oh, I love Fr. Brody!’ A few years later I told him the story. He laughed and responded, ‘I had your penance all ready.’”

Most of us experienced Don as very quiet and unassuming. He was reticent, prayerful and gentle; gracious and neither emotional nor assertive. He was reflective and committed and appreciated community living. “His disposition remained sweet and his spirit grateful.” He was a kind and gentle person; patient and caring; friendly and considerate. Reynold Rynda spent a number of years with Don at the House of Prayer and remembers him as a: “sincere, prayerful, kind, even tempered, quiet, peaceful person/friar.”

Mary Hague wrote that Don “spent the last two years of his life at St. Paul Home in Kaukauna. His eyesight continued to deteriorate and his condition became frailer. He had constant pain in his neck and back from arthritis and he spent much of his last year in a wheel chair. The week before his death he asked for the anointing of the sick and then slipped into a coma.”

When his final days and hours seemed to be approaching one or more friars would stay with him during most of the day. His sister, Betty, was always there. Some friars would read to him at times and more often they would be offering prayers.

Born in Cashton on the feast of St. Anthony in 1920, invested as a Capuchin in August 1939, and ordained in June 1947, Donald (Senan) Brody passed to his eternal reward on 30 October 2010.

— Silas Baumann