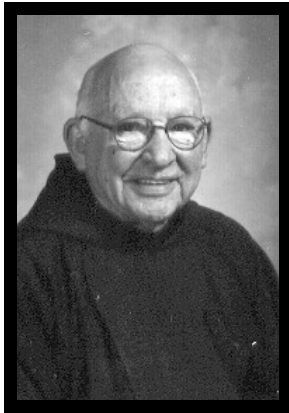


Neerology

Irvin Udulutsch

1920 - 2010



When a friar dies at the advanced age of 90, much of his life may be unknown to many of the friars, perhaps only his years of retirement and nursing home. A recent brief bio for a jubilee celebration omitted any reference to Irvin's 13 years at St. Lawrence College (now Seminary), arguably his most productive years. The following is drawn from autobiographical notes he wrote in his last years, from his brother — Capuchin Bob Udulutsch, and from the testimony of many of us who worked closely with him and upon whom he had a major vocational influence.

Wilfred Matthias Udulutsch was born on 19 February 1920, to Michael and Sophia (Flock) Udulutsch in the picturesque village of Norwalk, nestled among the hills of the driftless (unglaciated) area of western Wisconsin. He was the second of ten children in a devout family of daily home prayer and Mass. In grade school he took lessons in piano and violin. Deeply influenced by his uncle, diocesan priest Joseph Udulutsch, whose ordination he attended in Milwaukee in 1934, and whose first mass he served in St. John parish in LaCrosse, he informed his parents he wanted to go to the seminary. Alumnus Joseph arranged for his entry to St. Lawrence College, Mt Calvary, Wisconsin, in 1934.

At St. Lawrence he took piano lessons from Capuchin Henry Barth, played violin in the orchestra, and trumpet in the band. He came with diocesan intention, but gradually fell in love with the Capuchins. He writes of an agonizing struggle through prayer, soul-searching, and walking the "vocation path" through the woods, before deciding to join his classmates in the novitiate.

At Easter break he went home and blurted out his decision to his mother, who promptly dropped the plate she was holding, obviously distressed. From visits to St. Lawrence, she had not taken a liking to "dirty, smelly monks." This story became a family heirloom as the Udulutsch parents became part of the Capuchin family, reinforced through the entry of son Bob into the Capuchins 10 years later, for which, Bob relates, Irvin was a huge influence.

In 1938 he was given the religious name Irvin as he entered novitiate at St. Felix Friary, Huntington, Indiana. Raymond Demers was novice director, with Felix Ley as assistant and Irvin's spiritual director. Irvin reports that spiritually it was a good year. Since he was the only novice who played the keyboard, he became the community organist for sung prayer, a role he continued throughout his studies. He spent four years of college at Garrison, New York, professing perpetual vows in 1942. Capuchin Venard Kelly, in charge of music, took him on as student director. He also introduced Irvin to the *Motu Proprio* of Pius X on sacred music (1903) and other writings on the liturgical movement, which Irvin reports as having a profound effect on him.

In 1943, when he began theological studies at Marathon, Wisconsin, Mark Stier, director of clerics, asked him to finish a correspondence course in sacred music that Mark had begun. It included a two week summer course at Stritch College in Milwaukee offered by the Gregorian Institute of America. Mark eventually handed over most of his music duties to Irvin. He was also active as secretary and publishing in the *Round Table of Franciscan Research*. He wrote on the kingship of Christ according to St. Lawrence of Brindisi, and on the doctrine of the Mystical Body, a comparison between St. Bonaventure and Pius XII. He was ordained in 1946, and began his first assignment in 1947 at St. Lawrence College.

He had enough to do. He handled the whole music department, including classes, choir, Glee Club, band, orchestra, and piano lessons. He taught a liturgy course in the college department, and provided music instruction at St. Francis Brothers' School at Calvary Station. Over the years he developed great skill in forming a *schola cantorum* (for Gregorian chant) and a male chorus, providing characteristic leadership, energy, and enthusiasm. All the while he was imparting formation in the burgeoning liturgical movement in the Catholic Church. He also earned a bachelor's degree in music through the Gregorian Institute in Montreal, Canada.

One of his premier achievements came about when the tradition of a seminary Passion Play was handed over to him by Lawrence Merten. He developed a cantata on the *Seven Last Words* (later published by McLaughlin and Reilly) with narrative parts adapted from the Latin chant, and original choral parts, including a closing anthem "We Adore Thee." The music is polyphonic in style, very expressive, a considerable advance over the square Singenberger style still much in vogue. It was well received, and went on tour in several Wisconsin cities. In 1952 it received its largest performance at the Milwaukee auditorium, with sixty Catholic school students in acting parts, and a positive review and photo in the *Milwaukee Journal*.

He continued to publish liturgical music throughout his years at St. Lawrence, as well as private arrangements for the choir. In his later years at St. Lawrence, with the choir,

he produced "Hymns for the Home", long play records of music for Advent/Christmas and Lent/Passiontide, a very demanding achievement for both Irvin and the choir. And every year the choir smiled when he hauled out "Willie Take Your Tiny Drum" for the Christmas season, referencing his baptismal name. Through all those years, the choir was in many ways the public face of the seminary outside the campus.

He began attending the National Liturgical Conference in 1948, and subsequently became chair of the Midwest Seminary Music Educators Association. He was a contributor to a newly formed liturgical magazine called *Musart*. He networked with musicians such as Elmer Pfeil (St. Francis Seminary), Theophane Hytrek, SSSF, Theodore Marier, Eugene Lindusky, Francis Scholz (organist at St. Joseph Parish in Appleton), and many others. He taught summer school at Loras College in Iowa, eventually also at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He made his teaching services available to many communities of religious women. The thread through all of this was not only liturgical music, but the development of the liturgical movement and active participation in the liturgy, and its practical implementation in schools and parishes.

One of the characteristic images of Irvin, as one came into *schola* or choir practice, was of him sitting at the piano, a pencil clenched in his teeth, working out a new choral arrangement or accompaniment at the piano with his stubby fingers. One of his constant projects was the development of new liturgical music. His accomplishments eventually led to his selection as one of the major editors of a new hymnal, *Our Parish Prays and Sings*, published by Liturgical Press, which was the first liturgical hymnal in the United States organized primarily around the liturgical year and the sacraments rather than popular devotions. This hymnal became the template for other Catholic hymnals; it sold over a million copies. Some of his hymns, whether original or translated text, melody, or both melody and text, are still reprinted in hymnals. (The 1990 version of the *Collegeville Hymnal* still listed 7 acknowledgements.) His translation from the German for "O God, Almighty Father" passed into the general repertoire (appropriately used at his funeral).

Most of Irvin's composing efforts were directed to developing vernacular hymns for the liturgical year and the action of Eucharist, anticipating the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. From these efforts he developed a privately published *Choir Manual* for St. Lawrence College, which served the student body well for many years. Imitating European developments, he introduced the *missa recitata* into seminary life, which consisted of a low mass, with vernacular hymns, and choral recited prayers summarizing the action of the Eucharist while the Mass was read in a low voice by the priest. This was pushing the vernacular about as far as it could go at that time, however, not without controversy.

In 1956, Irvin was chosen as an American delegate to the First International Liturgical Conference in Assisi, a watershed moment in the liturgical movement, and the first gathering providing for extensive international interchange. It was expected that several ready liturgical reforms (married diaconate, more vernacular in sacraments, etc.) would be announced at that time, but Pius XII, old and sick, contented himself with a radio address from Rome clarifying doctrinal aspects of the liturgy. These reforms had to wait until Vatican II. But Irvin came back with renewed vision, particularly from accounts of what was already being done in some countries of Europe. (This writer, as fifth year student music director, was overly challenged to substitute for him during September of that year.)

Probably the best testimony to Irvin's Calvary influence comes from many of his former students: Capuchins, diocesan priests, deacons, and lay people who later engaged in liturgical leadership in their parishes and dioceses. Their strongest affirmation is that they were ready when the liturgical reforms came about following Vatican II. Irvin had prepared them for such changes through formation in the principles underlying the new liturgy. That was his great gift.

Another testimony is the cascade of Capuchin musicians and liturgists directly influenced by Irvin and then influencing others. With Venard Kelly as an early influence upon him, Irvin began a parade of people influencing and inspiring one another: Giles Soyka, Myron Kowalsky, Ken Smits (Irvin was chief sponsor of his graduate education in liturgy), Peter Kutch (whose music education outside the seminary Irvin fostered), Edward Hagman, Bill Cieslak, Edward Foley, and Michael Bertram. In all his teaching years he shared generously with student and friar assistants, enabling them to develop their talents, sometimes quite unexpectedly when he had to take a last minute Sunday help-out. He organized the first meeting of a provincial liturgical commission (modeled after dioceses) in 1968, which still endures and has made a lasting contribution to provincial celebrations, initial formation, and in other ways.

Irvin's last years at St. Lawrence became more difficult. The school was changing and the demands of choir upon students were harder to maintain. The planning of the new chapel (1958) found him at loggerheads with other friars. (Compromises and mistakes were etched in brick and mortar, stone and wood; the new chapel lasted only twelve years, becoming an auditorium when the present chapel was built.) In 1960 the provincial minister, Gerald Walker, asked him to become professor of liturgy and music for the theology students at St. Anthony in Marathon. He found this difficult, experiencing it as going from a larger post to a smaller post.

But Irvin became more qualified for this position through summer school at Notre Dame University (1961-1967), obtaining a master's degree. He learned from some of the best European scholars in liturgy, and handed on this learning to the students of theology. He also had the challenge of preparing students for the shift from Latin to English in the celebration of liturgy, which he did well. He relied even more upon students (like this writer and Peter Kutch) to manage the music program. He was also faculty adviser for the *Round Table of Franciscan Research*.

In 1967 he was elected a definator (the term later changed to "councilor") with Rupert Dorn as provincial minister. He was given the task of organizing the renewal process in the province, leading to a special renewal chapter (in two parts) in 1969. He threw himself into this task with his customary energy, setting off an endless round of committees, meetings, and papers. The renewal process turned out to be long and difficult, with implementation stretched over many years.

There was speculation that Irvin would be re-elected at the chapter of 1970, perhaps even given the newly created post of provincial vicar. But a much enlarged group of electors had other concerns about younger representation (former friar Allen Gruenke) and representation from brothers and minorities (Booker Ashe). Rupert Dorn was easily re-elected but was given the highly unusual result (Rupert calls it "weird") of a whole new slate of councilors. Irvin placed well in a number of the ballots, but did not get re-elected.

He was bitterly disappointed. Shortly after chapter he invited the author (in between studies in Canada and France) to go with him on a private retreat at the provincial cottage near Westboro. The days were spent in quiet, the evenings in long discussion as he poured out his soul. My recollection is that he needed to get things out of his system before he could move on. In addition, both of us proved we were not very good cooks. This retreat was a good preparation for his next challenge.

In 1970 he was appointed to an expanded position of director of formation in a time of great change, with residence at St. Francis Friary in Milwaukee. He was part of the process of closing St. Anthony Seminary, Marathon, and moving the friar students to St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee. He took over organization and funding of continuing education, and established it on a system of budgeting and banking. (This writer can testify to what an improvement this was, after going broke the year before in Paris when requests for funds from a local friary of our province were not answered). In those years there were more friars in graduate degree programs than ever before or since (18 in 1970), as a response to the call of outgoing provincial minister Gerard Hesse in 1967.

Irvin also solidified the team system of formation directors at all levels of formation. He concluded a long discussion of the appropriate age for entering novitiate with the establishment, with Al Veik, of a pre-novitiate in Milwaukee in 1972. With Werner Wolf he developed a Capuchin Associate Program for graduates of St. Lawrence College. (The full scope of formation responsibilities and progress at that time can be found in comprehensive reports on the provincial formation program in the *Messenger*, Nov. 1970 and Jan. 1973.) Those were busy and energetic years for Irvin, who stood up well to the challenge of change in laying good foundations for the future of initial and ongoing formation. Keith Clark, who succeeded him as direction of formation, testifies to a smooth transition, with philosophy and structures of formation well in place.

In 1975 Irvin began his pastoring years at St. Elizabeth Parish in Milwaukee. This was a challenging multi-cultural inner city parish, still undergoing change and diminishment. He also continued pre-novitiate involvement. He coordinated the transfer of the former parish convent into St. Conrad Friary as a Capuchin residence.

In 1978 he faced up to his addiction to alcohol and went for treatment to Guest House, Rochester, Minnesota. The writer visited him there (disclosure, also scouting it out for himself, which came two years later, and Irvin returned the visit). I found him on the front drive trying to re-master, with some difficulty, the art of riding a bicycle. He seemed to be at peace. In later years we shared now and then on our continuing experience of sobriety.

Irvin's time at Guest House was followed by many years of parish ministry, interspersed with sabbatical time and semi-retirement. He was an associate pastor with Jerry Higgins, Capuchin, at St. Jude in Mahtomedi, Minnesota from 1979 to 1984. Upon leaving St. Jude, he was given funds for a trip to Europe to complete his work on a family history. He visited the family places of both his parents and was able to trace members of his family back to the late 1500s.

From 1984 to 1988 he was associate pastor at St. Patrick Parish in St. Paul. After a sabbatical year at St. Anthony Retreat Center, he became administrator of Sacred Heart Parish, Spruce WI, and St. Wenceslaus parish in Klondike (1989-1991) in the Green Bay Diocese. After a year of semi-retirement at St. Anthony Retreat Center, he became pastor of St. Agnes Parish, Callon (outside Wausau) from 1992 to 1995. His last pastoral assignment was as associate pastor with his brother Bob at St. Mary Parish in Kaukauna (1995-2006).

This writer touched base with him from time to time during those pastoral years. Irvin always had something to share about his latest initiative in the liturgy and the administrative life of the parish. Pastoral ministry energized him and he never stood still. Life was always unfinished; there was more to do. In several of his assignments, he was also spiritual assistant to Secular Franciscans, a post to which he brought his usual

dedication. Spanning many years, he served on the liturgical commissions of the dioceses of Milwaukee, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Green Bay.

One of the highlights of his last years was being invited, as a 1946 ordination “classmate” of John Paul II, to concelebrate mass with John Paul II in the pope’s own chapel during his 50th year of priesthood (1996). This left a lasting impression upon him, and was one of the favorite stories of his last years.

In 1995 he suffered a heart attack, which slowed him down and prompted the move to be with his brother Bob in Kaukauna, where he proved an able associate. In 1998, as a complication of diabetes, his lower left leg was amputated, and he was fitted with prosthesis. He managed this limitation quite well.

In 2006 his weakening health called for transfer to St. Paul Home in Kaukauna for the rest of his years. During that time his interests narrowed; attempts to bring up things from the past did not interest him. He renewed and revived a devotional life and was dedicated to concelebrating daily Mass. He was generous in providing sacraments to other residents when called upon. At the same time he maintained a steady resistance to some elements of his own health care. He was somewhat stubborn to the end. Alert till just a few days before he died, he suffered an invasion of infection which his weakened condition could not survive. He passed away on 11 December 2010, at St. Paul Home.

A unique feature is that a special casket was ready for his body, made by his brother Bob in previous years. Bob began this project as a casket for himself, but secretly hoped it could be for Irvin. With the help of friends, it was a labor of considerable wood-working skill and challenging complexity, adorned in Franciscan manner on the theme of Franciscan joy and poverty. (Bob has a special brochure on the casket.)

Irvin’s wake service was held at St. Fidelis Friary on 14 December, with Ken Smits presiding and inviting testimony from the participants. Some parishioners from Kaukauna remembered him well. His funeral liturgy was celebrated at St. Joseph Parish Appleton, on 15 December, with John Celichowski, provincial minister, presiding, Bob Udulutsch and pastor Jim Leary concelebrating, and Bill Cieslak preaching. He is buried in the Capuchin cemetery at St. Lawrence Friary, Mt. Calvary.

Irvin was a person of great initiative, drive and vision. He could set out a project and see it all the way to the end, and he could inspire others. The other side of these gifts is that sometimes he could be quite stubborn in his positions, whether right or wrong. He also had a capacity to argue strongly in favor of his positions, especially with those who worked closely with him. At the same time, he was in countless ways the soul of the liturgical movement for many whom he touched and trained. May he not be forgotten.

— *Ken Smits*