

## Obituary for Friar Robert Leonhardt O.F.M. 1926 – 2018

Our ninety-one-year old Father Robert Leonhardt was born in Davenport, Iowa, on December 21, 1926, to Henry and Monica (Houar) Leonhardt. The family moved to Chicago where Bob attended Mt. Carmel High School and served in the U.S. navy from 1944 – 1946 as an aviation, (radio and radar), electronics technician. Returning to Chicago and attending the Illinois Institute of Technology, he earned his B.S. in Electrical Engineering in 1950 and was hired by IBM in their engineering maintenance department.

Life as a Franciscan was drawing him. On July 4, 1952, he received the habit as a novice and the religious name, Hildebrand. Bob received priestly ordination on June 24, 1959, and began his final year of theological studies in Teutopolis, Illinois. His pastoral year was in Quincy, Illinois. In June 1961, he was assigned to teach mathematics at the newly opened Padua Franciscan High School in Cleveland, Ohio. Then began Bob's work in Missouri parishes.

The first was in Washington, as an assistant at St. Francis Borgia Parish and as an instructor in the parish high school. He was appointed the guardian of the friary from 1966 – 1969. He served in the same office during his following three years in St. Louis, at St. Anthony of Padua and its high school. He was transferred to Our Lady of Angels Seminary in Quincy, Illinois, to be a director on the formation council. During those same years, (1972 – 1979), he guided St. Joseph Parish on the edge of Quincy. Bob always had a strong interest in working in the South among African-American Catholics.

He enjoyed more than twenty five years working in northern Louisiana. He came as administrator for St. Francis Church in Calhoun, while also fulfilling the duties of chaplain, counselor and instructor at Louisiana State Training Institute, the youth prison and reform school for boys. Bob was delighted to be spiritual director at their Teens Encounter Christ program. For six of those ten years he was the friars' guardian and then vicar for three more. Though he left briefly, he would return.

It was time now to learn to ski. That came during his move north to Petoskey, Michigan's St. Francis Xavier Church. Their new pastor of two years introduced the Teams of Our Lady program to nurture married couples' spiritual growth. He benefited from a 1990 sabbatical before returning to Louisiana and West Monroe's St. Paschal Church. In describing his impact, a July 1993 Knights of Columbus article stated: "[Fr. Robert] has revitalized the parish's Marriage Encounter, RCIA, Youth and Teams of Our Lady programs and has reorganized the parish pastoral council. He has also charge of two mission churches." The Knights in Louisiana chose him as one of their six "clergymen of the year" and made the awards in their fourth degree assembly. After his eight years as pastor and guardian, from 1998 – 2006, he came to serve as pastor of St. Lucy Parish in Hodge, Louisiana. He was attached to St. Thomas Friary in Ruston, Louisiana, from 1998 – 2006.

If one was serious about the faith, social issues needed to be on a parish's agenda. Illustrative of Bob's style was the March 1985 diocesan workshop, at which the parish leaders joined Bob. Catholic Community Services addressed the assembled 80 participants from its 19 parishes. Presenters first reviewed the scriptural roots of our social ministry and how the various documents offered teachings supporting such a ministry. Then they went on to the practical: "where we embrace our responsibility to care for and serve, while continuing to grow and develop our abilities." The participants chose priorities for their own

parish communities. They left with such ending comments as these: “Now we need to address the how.” “Here are some other topics that would be helpful to address...” “The fire has been lit; let’s see that it doesn’t go out.” Bob was one to follow up and not let the fire go out.

Bob would enjoy another ten years in another southern state, Texas. At Crowley’s St. Maximilian Kolbe Friary, this 79 year old was said to be semi-retired. There, he helped with supply ministry given consistently before difficulties with his health. However, there was that final year before Crowley and what happened according to the public record!

We open the July 2005 issue of Louisiana Road Trips and learn the striking details. They involved his 4280 mile road trip from Monroe all the way to Montreal, Canada, and riding back home via the Adirondack Mountains. His brother, Fr. Lou, and a friend, could verify the trip made by bouncing Bob on his 2003 Honda Silver Wing 600cc motor cycle. Yes, and along the way there were friendships made over the last 46 years in mid-west parishes – friendships to renew and stories to exchange, stories and reasons to be grateful. The trip took almost three weeks. And an addendum was needed: “he has logged over 16,000 miles in the last year and a half.” Didn’t Bob enjoy Louisiana! He could ride his motorcycle there year round. But then again, a number of times Bob did return to Petoskey for some wintertime skiing. Some time during his priestly busyness this friar also used his pilot’s license.

In 2016, Bob moved to the Blessed Giles community in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. It was finally time for Bob to retire, not only because of his age, but also because of declining health.

Several years before moving to Manitowoc, Bob was diagnosed with a blood disorder called myelodysplasia. His bone marrow was not able to produce normal red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. Bob entered hospice in early February knowing he needed more care. He willingly moved to St. Mary’s Nursing Home and died there on the evening of February 18th. His brother, Fr. Lou, and the Guardian of the community were with him.

His brother, Fr. Lou, was the presider and homilist at the Mass of Christian Burial. Fr. Lou began his remarks with the words: “Let it be known that I have another family saint in heaven.” After military honors, Bob’s remains were interred in the friars’ plot at Calvary Cemetery in Manitowoc.

In your kindness, please consider making a donation in memory of Fr. Robert Leonhardt, O.F.M., to the development Office of the Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart. Please send your charitable contribution to:

St. Anthony of Padua Friary, 3140 Meramec St., St. Louis, Missouri 63118-4399