

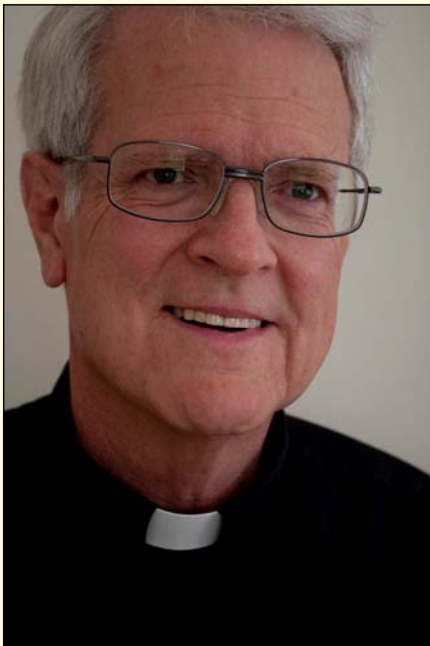


IN REMEMBRANCE: William J. Parker, C.Ss.R.

Beloved Fr. Bill Parker, a gifted scholar, teacher and preacher who influenced his Redemptorist confreres and generations of students with his love of Scripture, died on April 22 at St. Clement Health Care Center in Liguori. After a courageous battle, he succumbed to the cancer that was diagnosed in 2011.

William Joseph Parker was born on June 2, 1946 in Omaha, the third child in a family of eight brothers and sisters. He grew up in Holy Name Parish staffed by Redemptorists and attended the parish elementary school, where the Servite Sisters liberally planted the seeds of a religious vocation. By the eighth grade when he thought he wanted to try a religious vocation, he thought that Redemptorists were the only kind of priests there were. He followed his two older brothers to St. Joseph's Preparatory College in Edgerton, WI in 1960. His brothers left the seminary, but he remained until his senior year. Plagued by doubts, he went home and finished school in Omaha.

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Cover: Fr. Bill Parker (*center*) with General Consultors Fr. Juvy Andrade (*left*) and Br. Jeffrey Rolle during visitation at Desert House of Prayer.

Above: The self portrait Fr. Bill submitted for use on his remembrance card.

He felt drawn back and returned to the seminary, where Fr. Dan Lowery helped in his discernment. He greatly admired Fr. Lowery, not only for the way he conducted himself, but also for his abilities, his honesty and his compassion. Fr. Bill frankly admitted that he questioned his vocation and struggled with that decision his entire life.

He was readmitted to the formation program and professed vows on August 22, 1970. He professed perpetual vows on August 20, 1972 and was ordained to the priesthood on June 21, 1973.

Fr. Bill always felt that he was called to be a teacher. That seemed to be confirmed when he was asked to teach Scripture at Mount St. Alphonsus in Esopus, NY. In preparation, he began studying Semitic Languages and Biblical Studies at Catholic University in Washington, DC. That background also helped form him into a gifted preacher. Five years and two Master's degrees later, he returned to Esopus and began teaching the Old Testament and Hebrew in the seminary. He made life-long friendships with several other faculty members, notably Fr. Harry Grile, Fr. Steve Palmer, Fr. Frank Jones, Fr. Jim Wallace and Fr. Jack Dorf. "We were the 'Young Turks,'" Fr. Harry remembered. "We had a nice camaraderie and really enjoyed each other's company." Fr. Bill taught Scripture until 1984, when dwindling enrollment prompted the Redemptorists to close the seminary.

He was assigned to St. Alphonsus Parish in Chicago, where he served in 1984-87. It was a challenging transition, but he found a mentor and an exceptional example of pastoral ministry in Fr. Jack Willett. When Fr. Bill was assigned pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Wichita, he truly felt that he was called to be a parish priest. He loved the people in a way that he had never felt before, and he realized that he was equipped with a variety of gifts to help them grow in their faith. His heart was fully immersed in his ministry, and he was happier than he ever thought possible.

Fr. Bill influenced and helped form many students while he served as Director of St. John Neumann House and adjust professor at St. Louis University in St. Louis in 1992-96. He spent a year at Villa Christi Retreat Center in Wichita, and impressed retreatants with his insight and knowledge of spirituality. People from all walks of life were attracted to his easy manner, practical wisdom and wonderful sense of humor.

When doubts about his vocation resurfaced at the end of 1996, he took a leave of absence. After a year, he returned and was embraced by his hometown parish. He joked that the elementary school "still smelled the same" after all

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after all those years. He served Holy Name Parish until 2001, when Fr. Harry brought him in to help as Editorial Director at Liguori Publications. A gifted writer and scholar, Fr. Bill was a valued staff member who eventually served as the Editor-in-Chief position for *Liguorian* magazine.

Fr. Bill was asked to serve as director of Desert House of Prayer in Tucson in 2008. He said that he knew nothing about contemplative prayer, but the three years he spent in the desert was the most extraordinary experience of his life. After a time, living in silence and practicing centering prayer brought forth a very strong awareness of the presence of God in his life. He was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2010 while he was in Tucson, but he said that those years there were the most life-giving. "God loves us and continues to invite us to grow. If we can just let God be a part of our lives and let go of fear, extraordinary things happen. I have seen them," he said. "I do not understand it, but I believe, now more than ever before, that God's love is way more than I will ever comprehend, even when I feel most alone."

Fr. Bill joined the Liguori Mission House community in 2011 to be closer to medical specialists in St. Louis. Despite continuous medical treatments, he continued to study Scripture and generously shared his time and talents. He wrote for *Liguorian* magazine and served on the Editorial Advisory Board, and celebrated Masses and led retreats for the Redemptoristines. He moved to St. Clement Health Care Center last October when his health began to falter.

Fr. Bill modeled a life of integrity, compassion and kindness. He said that he tried to live each day with gratitude, and was delighted with the surprising gifts that God gave him each day. Surely he now knows that he chose the right path, and he is resting in eternal peace.

Submitted by Kristine Stremel, with contributions from Fr. Harry Grile

Funeral Arrangements

OMAHA

Vigil

Monday, April 28 – 7:00 pm
John A. Gentleman Mortuary
1010 N. 72nd St.
Omaha, NE

Funeral

Tuesday, April 29 – 11:00 am
Holy Name Church
2901 Fontenelle Blvd.
Omaha, NE

A luncheon provided by the parish will be served at Holy Name Parish after the funeral liturgy.

LIGUORI

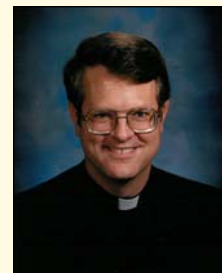
Prayer Service

Wednesday, April 30 – 7:00 pm
St. Clement Health Care Center
Liguori, MO

Funeral

Thursday, May 1 – 10:00 am
St. Clement Health Care Center
Burial will be at the Redemptorist Cemetery in Liguori. A luncheon will be served afterward.

Right: Fr. Bill Parker, pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Wichita in 1987. Below: Sr. Jan, O.Ss.R. and Fr. Bill at the 25th anniversary celebration of St. Clement Health Care Center on November 23, 2013.



Remembering Bill Parker

I first met Bill his senior year at our college seminary, Holy Redeemer, at Waterford, WI (*right*). It was the year the college opened, and my first year of teaching. I remember his bright eyes and ready smile. When he grinned, his smile was so wide that it almost covered his eyes. Bill was a bright, curious and questioning student. Later in life, when he taught Scripture, he combined those qualities with an empathetic connection to his students. I heard that he consistently received very positive evaluations from his students.

It seemed to me that wherever his life-path led – whether as a parish priest at St. Joseph Parish in Wichita or writer/editor at Liguori Publications or teacher at Mount St. Alphonsus Seminary in Esopus and St. Louis University – he was a pastoral minister. He finished his time teaching at St. Louis University just as I was moving from Director of the Desert House of Prayer near Tucson to become Provincial Vicar. During the subsequent provincial visitation at St. Alphonsus “Rock” community where he was a member, I asked Bill “out of the blue” if he was open to serving as my successor. Without hesitation, he said “Yes.” Even though Bill was always a little skittish around the desert “critters,” he entered fully into the unique contemplative ministry of Desert House. It was while there that he discovered that he had cancer. His long personal journey with this disease had alternate moments of joy and discouragement, but Bill continued to be as present to his partners in ministry and his family and friends as he could. He moved back to Liguori to do as much pastoral writing on Scripture as he could in whatever time he had left. He was never one to waste time. Those of us confreres, family members, and friends who have known and loved Bill (and experienced his gift of friendship) deeply miss his presence and grieve his passing, but we also celebrate this gifted man who was such a gift to us.

Dick Mevissen, C.Ss.R.

