

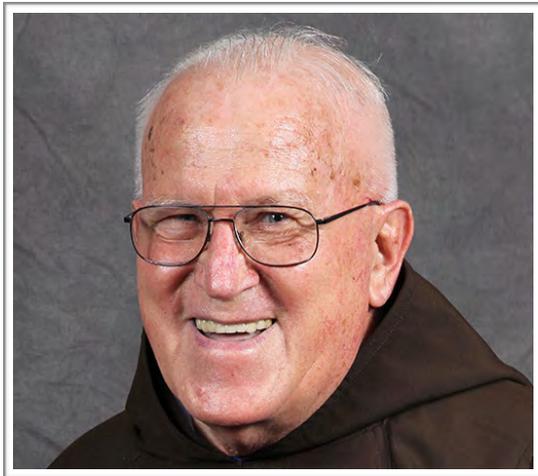
REMEMBERING FATHER LESTER BACH, OFM CAP.

He was the Bridge

by Sharon Winzeler OFS

With the death of Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap, Secular Franciscans lost a friend, mentor, author, spiritual assistant, and beloved friar on Feb. 2, 2020..

Fr. Bach is familiar to all Secular Franciscans as the author of formation materials, especially the spiral-bound text *The Franciscan Journey*, which is used throughout initiation, orientation, and candidacy.



Fr. Bach made his perpetual profession as a Capuchin in 1950 and was ordained in 1957. He began working with the Secular Franciscans in the 1960s. He served as Provincial Spiritual Assistant on the La Verna Regional Council, which covers Wisconsin and the upper peninsula of Michigan. Fr. Bach represented the Capuchins on the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants.

When he prepared to retire as Spiritual Assistant to the La Verna Regional Council about 10 years ago, he asked Lee Ann Niebuhr and Ed Voss to take his place. “Nobody could fill his shoes,” Niebuhr noted. “He was always active in the Region and he agreed to remain as Spiritual Assistant until Ed and I finished our spiritual assistant training.”

Fr. Bach served as a friar in Huntington and Crown Point, Ind., Saginaw, Mich., Madison and

Marathon, Wisconsin, and Chicago, Ill. On his 65th anniversary as a friar in 2015, Fr. Bach said in an article in *The Harvest News*, “During my entire ministry I worked with the Secular Franciscan Order as a spiritual assistant at various levels. I wrote several initial formation books as well as a commentary on the Secular Franciscan Constitutions. In 2000, the NAPCC (Capuchin provincials) appointed me to the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) on which I served for 12 years. These ministries have served me well and enhanced my Capuchin life. They were and are a source of my growth both personally and in various ministries. I thank God for my brother friars, for my family, for the warm relationships in my ministries, and for the gift of 65 years in my Capuchin vocation.”

Fr. Bach served the Secular Franciscans well, according to Niebuhr, who knew him since the late 1990s. “He was a man of the people and felt very comfortable among people in the secular lifestyle,” Niebuhr said. “He loved being with ordinary folks.” Niebuhr describes Fr. Bach as the good shepherd of his flock. “He always sought to be with the sheep. He was totally a man of the people.”

One of his strengths was facilitating dialogue rather than debate. “He was good at creating ‘and’ situations, not ‘either/or,’” Niebuhr said. “When discussions became tense, such as during a tough decision to remove a member from a fraternity, he would fall back and ask, ‘What is the most merciful way to look at this?’” she said. His answer would be “try to love her more.”

Fr. Bach also knew how to get people’s attention in a positive way. Niebuhr recalled a national gathering where everyone was standing around talking and it was past time to get started with the session. “Lester simply started singing a song that everybody knew. Eventually people heard and started singing, and slowly made their way to their

seats,” Niebuhr said. “He showed us that in times of turmoil, instead of simply continuing to sing your own song, you join together and sing one song with one another,” she said.

Fr. Bach valued Secular Franciscans and “glowed” when Niebuhr told him about recent initiatives discussed at a 2019 CNSA meeting in St. Louis that called for Seculars and Friars to work more closely together. “He glowed when I told him about it,” Niebuhr said, “and asked ‘How can we start this initiative in our Region?’”

“He was so instrumental in forming the seculars. It’s true that he wrote all those books. But Lester was the person and not the author when you talked with him,” she said.

The beauty of this man shone through, even during his final days in hospice, according to a conversation shared by National Minister Jan Parker, OFS. “He misses writing, and says his computer is broken, and those days are behind him now, but he is cheering us on, that’s for sure. He indicated that we should ‘take it from here’ and we should not forget that it’s ‘all about Love, which means it’s all about God’ and it’s ‘one and the same, you know.’” Jan added that she would never forget a homily by Fr. Lester, given at the 2012 Quinquennial, during which he called us to “*be the bridge.*” That phrase became a National OFS-USA theme the following year and is a phrase often repeated by Seculars throughout the country.



Fr. Bach is survived by his sister, Anna R. Gillis of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and numerous nieces and nephews, as well as his many Capuchin brothers with whom he lived, prayed and ministered for more than 70 years. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Feb. 10 at St. Joseph Church in Appleton, Wisconsin. He is interred at Holy Cross Cemetery in Mt. Cavalry, Wisconsin. Fr. Bach was a columnist for the *TAU-USA* and the *La Verna Vision*, a regional Secular Franciscan newsletter.

Fr. Bach was a prolific writer and authored many books on Secular Franciscans and spirituality, including:

Giving Life to the Words (2014). A spiritual commentary on the OFS General Constitutions

Franciscan Family Connections (2007). Training book for spiritual assistants to the Secular Franciscan Order

Capturing the Spirit of Francis & Clare (2007). Ongoing formation book for the Secular Franciscan Order

Seeking a Gospel Life (2008). General book on the spirit of Francis and living the gospel vision

Take Time for Sunsets (1975). Reflections on Franciscan Spirituality

Catch me a Rainbow (1990). Formation book for Secular Franciscans

Called to Rebuild the Church. a spiritual commentary on the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order (1997)

Where Bible & Life Connect (1998). Reflections for Spiritual Directors

Catch Me a Rainbow Too (1999). Book for initial formation

Come and See. Authored with Teresa Baker, OFS (2001)

Life-Giving Union (2003). His revision of an updated text for spiritual assistants

Pick More Daisies (2004). Ongoing formation for Secular Franciscans

Take Time for Sunsets (1975). Reflections on nature’s beauty

Where Bible and Life Connect: Reflections of a Spiritual Director (1995)