

Midwest Bits and Pieces

April 1, 1992

BROTHERLY LOVE FULFILLS OLD FRIEND'S LAST WISH

Seventy years of life fit in two suitcases.

"That's all he had," John M. Rupcich said. "Brother Warren."

When Warren Shea, a widely known Catholic religious brother needed help recently, Rupcich, a local businessman dropped everything and went after him in a private jet plane. Rupcich helped carry Brother Warren and his suitcases into the plane.

Brother Warren had given Rupcich life, and Rupcich gave him a wish. His last wish, which turned out to be an airplane ride.

The two men met in 1960, when in effect a judge sentenced Rupcich to Brother Warren. Shea was a brother at St. Charles Boys Home here.

"Fifteen years old," Rupcich said. "I had hung around with a lot of punk kids. Stole cars, 47 of them. And committed burglaries."

He uses two words to explain how he, a master car thief, grew up to become a vice president of Tri City National Banks and an executive vice president of NDC Inc. and Mega Marts, which owns nine Pick'N Pay stores.

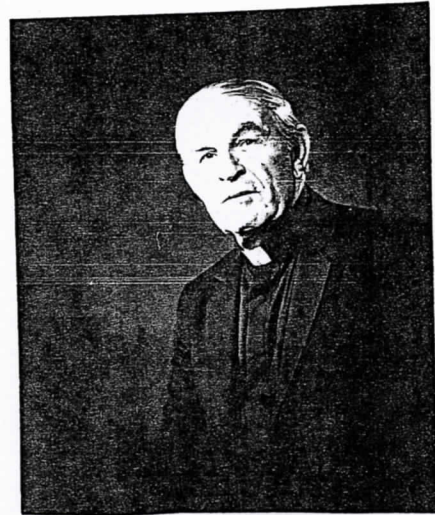
"Brother Warren," he said again, with tears in his eyes. Whenever Rupcich mentioned Brother Warren, he had tears in his eyes.

In 40 years of work with problem boys at St. Charles, Brother Warren turned around hundreds of lives, Rupcich, 47, said.

"Brother Warren is like a father to me," he said. "Many of the group of kids I grew up with ended up spending their lives incarcerated. Had I not had Brother Warren to straighten me up, I don't know where I'd be. I certainly wouldn't be here."

Brother Warren gave his boys all the rules they could handle. "He whacked me around a couple of times, when I used foul language, when I had no respect for authority," Rupcich said.

But Brother Warren also shared the boys' problems, helped them build go carts, bought them airplane models to work on, got them involved in skits to entertain nursing home residents and introduced them to stability and sanity and love and discipline and - most importantly - the best race car drivers in America, who were friends of the good brother.



"He always took one or two of the boys to the Indianapolis 500, and he took me one year," Rupcich said. "Twenty years later he took my son."

When Rupcich was shown the front door after more than two years at St. Charles, Brother Warren didn't lock him out. "He has been involved in my life for more than 30 years," Rupcich said. "Every major decision. He's been there for my kids' baptisms, first communions, marriage, did the eulogy at my father's funeral, and for my mom's heart surgery. Brother Warren was there. To my (five) kids, he's like a grandpa."

Two years ago, Brother Warren retired to Phoenix, where his retirement included "visiting every shut-in, every elderly person, everyone he could," Father Eugene O'Carroll said. O'Carroll, pastor of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Phoenix, said Brother Warren also spent this so-called retirement serving "dinner to the homeless and street people."

Ten days ago, Rupcich received a call that Brother Warren had been hospitalized and was dying of colon cancer. By the next morning, Rupcich was in Phoenix. So sick, so much in pain that he couldn't move, Brother Warren whispered to "Rupcich that he wanted to play a practical joke on some relatives, who were visiting him that day. "Here he was, a man who couldn't move, and he's trying to think of a practical joke," Rupcich said. "When I was at St. Charles, he was always playing jokes, picking up dead fish at the lakefront or carp and putting them in the suitcase of a brothers who was going on vacation." When the two men weren't laughing about the past, they were crying.

"If you had a wish, Brother Warren, what would you want to happen" Rupcich asked. Referring to the headquarters of his order of Holy Cross, Brother Warren replied, "I'd like to go back to Notre Dame. I'd like to die there."

Brother Warren could not fly by commercial airline to South Bend, Indiana, so when Rupcich returned to Milwaukee last week, he rented a private jet at a cost of more than \$11,000. A business that wants to remain anonymous paid \$5,000, and Rupcich and Dave Uric, chairman of the board of Tri City and NDC, paid the rest.

As Rupcich and his son, Brent, 15, helped carry Brother Warren toward the jet, Brother Warren started crying. Here was a man who had been poor all his life. Who had two suitcases of belongings. And he was being carried along a red carpet that had been rolled out of the plane. (Taken from the "Milwaukee Sentinel", March 3, 1992).

BROTHER DAVID FITZGERALD PHOTO SHOWING

Brother David Fitzgerald held a showing of his photographs of Ireland March 16-30, 1992, at the Maddux Theatre Lobby of Incarnate Word College in San Antonio. The showing was titled: IRELAND: The Emerald Isle.

BROTHER JAMES MORONEY

Brother James Moroney wishes to thank everyone who supported him with prayers and cards while he was in the hospital. Both surgeries were successful and he is on his way to recovery. He plans to return to Holy Cross College in the fall.

ASH WEDNESDAY, 1992

Whatever happened to Lent?
Whichever way did it "went"?
Like the hairshirt and scourge,
Fire, brimstone and dirge,
Lent went into sad banishment.

But is this loss worth a fight to restore?
Or would one be just a quaint bore?
Ah, but if your neighbor you aid,
Then you've got it made:
Just add prayers, a few alms--nothing more.

-Brother Remigius Bullinger, CSC

BROTHER ARTHUR GOHL FEATURED IN FLI NEWSLETTER

(The following article appeared in the March issue of "The Sun", the monthly newsletter published by Forever Learning Institute.)

There was almost total silence in the room except for the faint sound of pens scratching on paper -- no, it wasn't monks meticulously copying priceless manuscripts -- it was just FLI students laboring over their assignment for the day in Brother Arthur Gohl's Friday morning Calligraphy class.

Brother puts his students at ease with a lively sense of humor and many wonderful stories of his experience in teaching. "Calligraphy is Fun" is the motto posted on the classroom wall.

Before he entered the Congregation of Holy Cross Brothers 25 years ago, he had already acquired experience as a calligrapher, cartographer and engineer while in the military. He holds a degree in Industrial Education from the University of Minnesota. He is also adept in plumbing and building, and is self-taught in computer technology.

Brother has a varied background of teaching. Before entering the Brothers of Holy Cross, he taught weaving, stitchery and knitting to blind girls. As a Brother he has instructed delinquent children in arts and crafts, electronics and ceramics for 23 years at St. Charles Home in Milwaukee. At some time in his life, he also taught astrology and zoology.

BROTHER JERRY'S JAIL MINISTRY

"As I watch people on the outside look for jobs and being thrown out of their apartments because they can't pay rents, trying to get food for their kids, there is this small miracle involved in being *here*," Brother Jerome Schwabe, C.S.C. tells seven somewhat bewildered inmates in a morning Bible study class at the Ventura County Central Jail,

"Is this guy for real!" spreads across their seasoned street faces. But the speaker is undaunted.

"It's not where you want to be, and it's not where I want you to be," he says with a different tone. "But at least you have some peace. You're not going through the rat race that many people on the outside are going through."

"So, in a way, it really is almost like a small miracle."

Brother "Jerry," as he's known to the inmates as well as the staff at the concrete and glass Ventura facility, is leaning his 5'9", 200-lb. fire hydrant-shaped body on a table in front of seven mostly Hispanic young men sitting in deskchairs. Some have Bibles. Others are taking notes. They're dressed in pail blue-green, loose-fitting uniforms that make them look more like hospital interns than drug dealers, burglars and wife beaters.

The 63 year old former principal and missionary has the manner and look of a college coach urging his team to come back from a 36 to 0 first half. His words come in jerks and spurts. His sentences are animated by waving hands and arms.

He also has a bulbous nose only W.C. Fields could appreciate as well as not-so-carefully parted silver hair. The collar of his shirt rides outside a black crew-neck sweater. He's wearing dress slacks and shoes. Hanging around his neck is a plastic laminated photo ID plus a silver cross.

"You guys have a good one today," he throws out before leaving the third-floor meeting room. "And pray for me."

On his way to visit an inmate named David, a heroin addict who's asked to see him, he jokes with sheriff deputies in the hallways and control centers of the high-tech jail. He waves to men standing behind thick glass partitions in their almost self-contained modular small-group living quarters.

After three years as Catholic chaplain at the jail, he knows the procedures that keep this place safe and secure. Turquoise electronic doors open and close as he moves among the jail's eight quads holding 850 men and women.

At 10 a.m., he walks into Interview Room 1 on the jail's fourth floor. A handsome Hispanic man with cropped hair and a tattoo on his upper left arms waits at the table, hands folded in front of him. After a short prayer, Brother Jerry asks, "Have you heard from Patricia at all?"

"No, not this week," the inmate reports.

"When are you getting out of here?"

"I should get out by the 26th of next month. She gets out July 4th."

"Great!" says the chaplain through a smile. "You taking me out for ice cream?"

"Yeah. Yeah. Sure, Brother Jerry."

The Holy Cross Brother tells a long, rambling Catholic joke about free will and more responsibility. We can't just lazily sit back and say God's going to do it," he finally observes.

Chaplain and prisoner discuss an ex-inmate who's currently going through a Christian drug treatment program.

"I would love you to be up there at Live Again Ministry", Brother Jerry urges softly, "I really would. Three months up there is probably going to give you a 60% chance of staying out more than usual."

"But it's your choice," he adds matter of factly, "not mine."

The prisoner asks for the address. The two men bow their heads and pray.

David goes back to Section I, while Brother Jerry heads for the quad's control center to see Grace Brown, a service technician. "I need a hug," he declares. After they embrace, he says, "You look so rested, so relaxed."

"Well, actually, I'm very bruised," she says. "I went skiing. I crashed about three times. Fell off the ski lift. But it was a fun challenge."

"I'm so glad you got away," he says.

Brother Jerry closes out his morning at the Ventura County Central Jail over coffee in the small second-story cafeteria. He chats with Head chaplain Bill Glaser before sitting at a table with Deputy Jerado Gomez. He congratulates the 25-year old Santa Paula native on his marriage the previous weekend.

"It does me a lot of good to know that he's here," Deputy Gomez admitted later about Brother Jerry Schwabe's presence at the jail. Everybody thinks the chaplains are just here for the inmates. But I think Brother Jerry has demonstrated he's here for all of us."

The great majority of people in here need someone to talk to," he stressed. "But we can't really sit down and talk to them. For one thing, we don't have the time. And it really wouldn't be our place. It would be a conflict of interest because we're trying to maintain security. So a chaplain is perfect for that."

Sgt. Gary Cook, Ventura County Jail services supervisor, described chaplains as a good "custody management tool" to lessen tensions that can erupt at any time in today's overcrowded jails and prisons.

"People who are in custody are upset and not feeling good about themselves," he explains. "When they've got someone to talk to, an outsider who's not going at them and saying they're bad, it really means a lot.

"A social worker can sometimes help. But a religious authority will probably be of more help. Many times a person who's upset, once he's spent some time with somebody like Brother Jerry, will become a model inmate."

"It makes your job so much easier."

David, in fact, has become a model prisoner. But when he was first locked up in Ventura County Jail, he was still detoxing from his heroin habit.

"I started out not feeling very spiritual," the young man admits. "But through his presence, his talking - his good advice - I came around.

"Every week we have a good one-on-one conversation. It never fails. I'll be down and out, and I need Brother Jerry to get that spiritual high again. It's like my dose of the Holy Ghost."

When Brother Jerry does individual counseling in the seven jails, juvenile halls, and work camps throughout Ventura County, he never asks inmates why they're locked up. He doesn't want to know their crimes, because he doesn't want to make any preconceived judgments about them. Instead he lets prisoners -- whether they're embezzlers, murderers, or car thieves -- set the tone of the session.

"But mostly they do talk about explaining what they did and why," he reports. "A lot of it is relationship: relations with their families, rejections from their wives and lovers, worries about their kids. Basically, they have a lot of anger, a lot of hurt.

"Some do try to con. They need money for drugs or something. Or they try to send something outside through you. But I set certain basic rules. I took that manipulation as personal before. But I realized if I'm going to live really what is the basis of detention ministry, which is unconditional love, I need to accept them for where they are.

"My favorite phrase from the Bible is to be as simple as a dove and as wise as a serpent," he confides. "And I need to be both when I'm talking to not only inmates, but also staff."

When Brother Jerry goes to jail, he's trying to give prisoners hope that other people can still love them in spite of their criminal offenses. Such unconditional approval, he insists, is required of Christ's followers.

He sees himself as a listener in a Big Brother subculture where orders literally determine an individual's waking existence. He thinks he's a witness, viewing himself as a humanizing force in a locked world where inmates are all too often dismissed as subhuman miscreants.

The Church and Catholics, he points out, are not immune from such middle-class prejudices. "Too often, I have found that religious people tend to preach, and I prefer to listen," he says. "Preaching they hear all the time. They need to be listened to. They need to be challenged. They need to know that there's nonjudgmental acceptance.

"There's a need -- instinctively and spiritually and psychologically -- to respond," he says. "And in each case, it's totally different. The excitement is in that; the difference of each situation."

The Holy Cross Brother believes he's also a presence to jail supervisors and deputies. "Sometimes we are just tolerated by some; others really welcome us," he says. "If they accept me with open arms, great! If they don't, I've got to go with the flow."

He gets frustrated that he's not helping more prisoners build up their self-esteem so they can see they're not basically bad. He gets frustrated when prisoners he's worked with come back to jail four, five -- even six times -- because they didn't do what they should have done to straighten out their troubled lives. "And sometimes the frustration is the lack of an understanding by society, especially religious people," Brother Jerry admits. "We tend to see the jail and not the person in the jail. We just see the building and all these blue uniforms. We don't see that these are human beings.

"But for me, there's also the joy of reaching out to a group that's rejected by society," says the man who's been a religious for over four decades, who's spent 14 years with lepers along the Amazon River in Brazil. "I've always felt called to work with the alienated, the marginal people." (Article taken from Los Angeles Archdiocesan paper, THE TIDINGS, January 30, 1992.)