

SCJ NEWS

a newsletter of the U.S. Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart

June 2010

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Fr. Michael van der Peet, well loved teacher, retreat director and confidant of Mother Teresa, dies

Following complications from a stroke, Fr. Michael van der Peet, SCJ, died April 21. He was 85.

Fr. Michael would probably be the first to say that no one person's life is more important than another's. The work of a quiet parish priest, or a brother doing ministry with the elderly, is just as important as a person whose life and work often put him at the center of attention, both within

Donning a hard hat, Fr. Michael van der Peet pictured at the 2009 ground-breaking ceremony for Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake.



his community and in public media. However, Fr. Michael certainly made it easy to share the significance of his life with others.

Professed in 1946 and ordained in 1953, Fr. Michael once joked that he “joined the family business.”

“Of my mother's family, there was a brother who was a Trappist Monk, another who became a religious brother and a sister who became a nun,” he continued. “Three of my father's cousins were SCJs.”

From the time he was a small child Fr. Michael assumed that he would be a priest. When he was 12 he told his father that he wanted to go to the minor seminary. Since one of his father's cousin's was the rector of an SCJ seminary, the choice as to where to begin his studies was an easy one. At 13 he entered the SCJ seminary in Bergen op Zoom, Netherlands.

His studies came to an abrupt halt in 1940 when World War II reached Holland. “The seminary was forced to close,” he said.

Fr. Michael returned to his hometown and waited for the seminary to reopen. But the war escalated. In 1944, Dutch men between the ages of 16 and 34 were ordered to report to German munitions factories. Knowing that such work almost meant certain death (the factories were the first targeted by bombers),

Fr. Michael spent time in hiding to avoid German troops seeking men for the factories. He talked of dressing as a woman to pass through military checkpoints during a move between “safe houses”

“Actually, I fluffed myself up quite nicely,” he said when remembering the story.

When Holland was liberated Fr. Michael returned to the seminary.

After ordination, Fr. Michael hoped to be a missionary in Chile. But his provincial superior decided that he could be better used in the United States where the young U.S. Province was in need of seminary instructors.

“I arrived, unable to speak English, on loan to the U.S.

Province for five years,” he said. However, the language barrier didn't last long. After a year at St. Joseph's Indian School Fr. Michael was at Divine Heart Seminary in Donaldson, Ind., teaching Latin, French and music.

“I really fell in love with the United States,” he said. It wasn't long before he asked the Dutch provincial superior if he could transfer to the U.S. Province.

“‘Are you happy there?’” he asked me,” said Fr. Michael. “I said ‘yes,’ and then he told me in Latin, ‘Where you feel at home, that is your fatherland.’ I've never regretted my

“May we all find
the peace of
God's
greatest gift:
reconciliation”

Fr. Michael
van der Peet, SCJ



In recent years Fr. Michael became well-known for his friendship with Mother Teresa. He is pictured above with her and some of her sisters following a retreat he gave to Mother Teresa's community. Because of his friendship he was asked to go to Rome in 2002 and work on the commission that prepared Mother Teresa's cause for beatification. On the right he is pictured in St. Peter's Square just after the 2003 beatification ceremony

decision."

Fr. Michael said that he lived his first dozen years in the United States as a "hidden priest. I spent all of my time in the seminary; teaching during the week and leading the choir on the weekends. I wasn't able to get out and help a lot at the parishes. But I was always happy in the seminary."

A new chapter

In 1964 he attended a retreat similar to the "cursillo" experience. The retreat opened a new chapter in Fr. Michael's life.

"I was quite vocal during the retreat and at the end, the head of the retreat team asked me if I would preach at the last Mass," he said. "After that Mass we talked; he told me that I had a real gift for retreat work."

A year later, another retreat director told him the same thing. This time Fr. Michael listened and started to learn about and direct retreats himself.

"I never disliked teaching, but once I got a taste of retreat work I be-

came very restless in the classroom," he said.

In 1970, Fr. Michael moved out of the classroom and into full-time retreat ministry. Along the way, he explored a variety of retreat experiences including several weeks in a cloistered community in Europe.

"I had a hard time keeping my mouth shut," he laughed when recalling the experience.

He became a popular retreat director, especially with women's religious communities.

Meeting Mother Teresa

In 1975 Fr. Michael took a brief vacation to Rome. It was there that another chapter in his life began.

"I was standing at a bus stop in Rome and saw Mother Teresa with another sister," he said. "I didn't want to disturb her but I decided it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. I introduced myself and asked her if she would pray for me."

"Father, I would be happy to," she said. "Will you pray for me?"

It was the beginning of a close relationship that lasted until Mother Teresa's death in 1997. Their friendship included regular correspondence, and retreats given to Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity.

"She once told me, 'You know and understand our spirituality, that's why I keep in touch with you,'" said Fr. Michael. "That meant a lot to me, to know that she felt that we were on the same wavelength. Of course, that doesn't mean that I am as holy as she, but she felt that I did understand who she was and what she was about."

Because of that sense of understanding, Mother Teresa often confided in Fr. Michael, sharing some of her doubts and concerns in her letters. It was a sign of the famed woman that few saw.

And it was because of that friendship that Fr. Michael was asked to go to Rome in 2002 to work on the commission that prepared Mother Teresa's cause for beatification. On October 19, 2003, he had VIP seating at her beatification ceremony at St. Peter's Square.

A parish priest for the first time

After years of full-time retreat ministry, Fr. Michael became a parish priest for the first time at the age of 62. In 1986 he was named pastor of St. Matthew's parish in Houston. "It helped me to really appreciate what most of my brothers in priesthood do," he said.

He remained there six years before taking a year to study and work in Mexico and Chile. Back in the States he returned to Houston, where he helped at SCJ parishes for three years before giving retirement a try. He spent a year with the SCJ retirement community, took a year away to help with the novitiate community, went back to the retirement community, but then decided that he needed a more active retirement.

In 1999, at the age of 74, Fr. Michael went back to work, serving as a spiritual director at Sacred Heart School of Theology.

He remained active in spiritual direction until he suffered a stroke in February, 2010.

Reflecting on my life...

On Ash Wednesday, 2008, Fr. Michael van der Peet wrote the following reflection which he asked to be shared following his death.

When you are in your eighties, you often think of your mortality. It is never far away. There are moments of fear at the thought of separation from so many loved ones, but those moments are only scarce and so I can honestly say that I do not feel depressed. I have always been a very religious per-

son of simple faith. I feel that Jesus' love has always surrounded me from birth. He is simply the air I breathe and in spite of my sinfulness, I know Him to be the great Treasure of my heart.

There was much hidden ugliness in my life and it has been the source of much pain and humiliation for me. Of course I was sensitive to the praise and admiration of people and yet, I was not allowed to be carried away by it because in my heart I knew my many weaknesses and failures and how much I was living on the mere mercy of my beloved Lord. I have very much been the child of His compassion and have come to know how unconditional His love for us is. As I had printed on my ordination card, "In heaven I will forever sing the compassion of the Heart of Jesus."

I am often in awe at the thought of how happy my life has been; it has been pure gift. Even from a merely natural point of view I have been extremely fortunate. I was born in a loving family. Our parents were poor when we grew up, but they loved us very much and gave themselves totally for our happiness and wellbeing. My Mother used to say, "Two things make us the happiest family in the world: our faith and music" and so there was "true fear of the Lord" and there was always music.

I always wanted to become a priest and dreamed of being a saint some day. I have come to know that this is a life-long process and I feel that I am only a novice in the business of holiness, but I also trust that Jesus' goodness and patience will see to it that some day in the future I will love Him totally. I might have to wait until the moment of dying and pray that I may die in an act of perfect love of God.

I owe my religious community more than I can ever tell anyone. I have always treasured my SCJ community both here in the U.S. and in Holland. They have been more than just fair to me: I have always had that wonderful feeling of belonging and I can say that I have always been a

happy team player. Of course, there were problems and disappointments as well, but we must be realistic about the human condition. Forgiveness and reconciliation are integral to human life because we all are weak and in need of compassion.

I have always been happy with my ministries over the years. First there were the 15 years of teaching. When I asked for a switch — quite persistently — it was not out of dislike for my work — but out of a great urge to preach the Word of God, and so, in 1970 I entered full-time into retreat work and into the House of Prayer Movement. This ministry meant very much to me and became a source of light and life — and I should add — of love. I have come to know hundreds and hundreds of God's children through it and they have been a real sacrament to me as I hope to have been for them. I have always loved the saying, "We are going to be saved in clusters."

I love life more than I can express and I look at life as only the top of an iceberg. I am thinking here of St. Paul's words in Romans, "I consider the sufferings of the present to be as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us." "And it has not even come up in the human mind what God has prepared for those who love Him." It is in this light that I have come to understand that even the most desperate situation in life has been touched by the precious

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Blood of Jesus and therefore is not beyond redemption, and as such is an integral part of the redemption of the universe. With all the violence, poverty and blatant injustice around us today, I rejoice in the thought that there is a loving and just God who even beyond death will have the last word and set things straight, wiping the tears away from the wounded, the poor and the afflicted.

While I am writing this, I am thinking of Mozart's music. One day in sunny California I came to discover that it is given to the artist to express the inexpressible: therefore we call the artist, one who is touched by the divine. I firmly believe that God made me such that, without music, I would have died much sooner, because for me it was the very oxygen I needed so many times when I was overwhelmed by the ecstasy and agony of life and the awesomeness of God's love and the love of my dearest friends. Music is a language I have come to know very well. In music I have come to discover my deepest self as the image and likeness of God. Even as a little child I experienced music as an embrace of God. It has been a true sacrament to me and in it I have seen the lovely beauty of God. In heaven I will forever be a canticle of love and praise.

Very understandably I do not know who among my friends will ever read this reflection, but regardless, I have my own personal and unique thoughts and feelings for each one of them. Each relationship is so unique: what I would say to one, I would not say to the other and vice versa, but to all I would say, "I have loved you very dearly and as the profound saying of Roy Kroft goes, "I thank you, my friend, not so much for what you are, but for what I was when you were with me." To each one I would say in the beautiful text of Weston Priory's "Wherever you go, I will go...The color and texture which you have brought into my being have become a song and I want to sing it forever..When the time of our

particular sunset comes, our thing, our accomplishment, won't really matter a great deal, but the clarity and care with which we have loved others will speak with vitality of the great gift of life we have been for each other."

My sunset has come, but this same sun has risen for me in Jesus, Splendor of the Father, and will never set again. In this radiance I hope to meet all my loved ones again without ever having to say "Good-bye." In His light we will see light.

Just as I have a great need to thank God for my many friends, I have also the need to ask Him to forgive me where I have been a cause of pain and hurt for my family, community, friends and I am asking all of them to forgive me. I forgive all those who have hurt me, too. May we all find the peace of God's greatest gift: reconciliation.



Fr. Michael van der Peet with friend and fellow SCJ Fr. Jan de Jong.

Remembering a friend

Fr. Jan de Jong, SCJ, had been asked by Fr. Michael to give the homily at his funeral. "I felt privileged by this request and have often thought about what I would say," said Fr. Jan. The text from Fr. Jan's homily is available on the province website at: www.sacredheartusa.org/news-events/the-funeral-homily-for-fr-michael-van-der-peat-scj

SCJ student is "Volunteer of the Year"

Frater Greg Schill, SCJ, was honored as the "2009 Volunteer of the Year" by the Chicago Lighthouse, an organization that assists people who are visually impaired. He received the award during a banquet at the organization's headquarters in Chicago; over 100 staff, volunteers, friends and benefactors of the center attended the event last Wednesday. To give a sense of the significance of the award, Frater Greg is just one of 300-plus volunteers at the center. These volunteers are in addition to the 200 paid staff members of the center.

"I have been working primarily at the Chicago Lighthouse Low Vision clinic," said Frater Greg about his involvement with the center, which began last year. "I also have helped out at Cris Radio, the official radio station of the Chicago Lighthouse, reading over the airwaves to the visually impaired. In February, I participated in a fund-raising event benefiting children in

need of special lenses. I hope to do more with fund-raising in the future."

What does he enjoy about the ministry? "I love being in an organization where I can truly make a difference," said Frater Greg. "I have had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the visually impaired and about the work and enormous effort that has been made to help these people in need."

Frater Greg completed his studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago in May. This summer he will go to Argentina to live with the SCJ community there while studying Spanish. He returns to the U.S. Province in fall to prepare for final vows.



Frater Greg Schill



Fr. Byron Haaland with Br. Long Nguyen at a province gathering last year.

SCJ has a life-long love

Fr. Byron Haaland, SCJ, is in love, and it is that love which drives his ministry.

"I love the Bible; I love Scripture and I love playing with Scripture," he said. "I don't know any better word than that – I love to play with Scripture."

He said that he learned "Lectio Divina," a form of prayerful meditation on Scripture, years ago. "Mulling over Scripture is good, but now I take it to another level and just PLAY with it."

However, the Bible isn't Fr. Byron's only love. He also loves SCJ spirituality. "Welcoming the spirit, responding to Christ's love, seeking union and communion with Jesus, and cooperating in the work of redemption. That is SCJ spirituality in a nutshell. That is the base for all of my retreats."

Fr. Byron has worked with these two loves — SCJ spirituality and Scripture — in developing retreats

since he was a deacon.

"I led my first retreat when I was a deacon at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in St. Louis," he said. "The principal asked if I would give a graduation retreat."

That initial retreat was the start of a journey that seems to have no end in sight.

For many years Fr. Byron's retreat ministry was based at St. Joseph's Retreat Center in Baileys Harbor, Wis. He developed and directed retreats held at the center, but also traveled the country, as he still does (and internationally), giving retreats for a wide variety of groups and organizations.

In the 1980s and 1990s Fr. Byron served on the Wisconsin State Board for Adult Children of Alcoholics. "We

focused on getting information to teachers, administrators, counselors and parents to help them understand how alcohol and drugs affect children."

Out of that experience came a retreat series that Fr. Byron developed for adult children of alcoholics. He spent eight years presenting the retreat around the country, including Sacred Heart School of Theology, where it was done as a part of the continuing education program.

He has also presented retreats to participants in Alcoholics Anonymous. "There are many similarities in 12-step programs and SCJ spirituality," he said. "I think that SCJ spirituality kind of 'catapults' you into a poverty of spirit that helps you to see your powerlessness." And from that sense of "powerlessness," said Fr. Byron, one realizes that it is only through God that "we can do anything."

Supported by friends — the Bible and SCJ spirituality — Fr. Byron is rarely unnerved by his "audience." He loves what he does and he loves working with people as they join him in playing with Scripture.

But there have been a few retreats that have given him pause. One was a day of recollection given for the administrative council of the Diocese of Green Bay. He wondered if he had connected well with Bishop

Robert Morneau. "I was nervous, and then left the day not knowing how well I had been received by the bishop," said Fr. Byron.

Evidently there was a good connection because a month later Bishop Morneau wrote in his newspaper column that he

"was refreshed and enlightened by Fr. Haaland's presentations." The bishop then went on to base the rest of his column on what Fr. Byron had presented, namely one's faith journey.

**"I love the Bible;
I love Scripture
and I love playing
with Scripture,"**

And what was the base for Fr. Byron's presentation? The spirituality of the SCJs, a spirituality that focuses on a person's ability to answer the invitation to friendship and intimacy with Jesus.

When asked about favorite retreat experiences, Fr. Byron notes several, including one for people living with HIV/AIDS.

"We [he and another retreat leader] facilitated the retreat but the participants really took it over and owned it," said Fr. Byron. "It was an incredible experience. They talked and shared with each other their experiences. We then asked them to reflect theologically on what it meant to be living with HIV/AIDS..."

"Some expressed gratitude. They had this horrible disease but through their reflection they became grateful. Through their reflection they came to know God and their own goodness. To see them celebrate this was incredible. They were able to do that through SCJ spirituality. In seeking union and communion with Jesus and in the Eucharist there is a union and communion that takes place within us. We realize that what we experience, God too experiences."

Fr. Byron hears many stories in his ministry. "Wild, wild stories," he said. What is exciting for him is when people come to the realization that "God wants to be a part of everyone's story... it's an honor to be with people as they come to that realization."

Fr. Byron's retreat schedule also includes fellow SCJs — in the U.S. Province and internationally. He said that there is a comfort in being among "family," but it can be unnerving as well. It would be simi-

lar to a teacher teaching fellow teachers or a carpenter building a piece of furniture for another carpenter.

But since Fr. Byron's retreats are all based in SCJ spirituality he said that it is "wonderful in that I don't have to teach the language. With non-SCJs there is more time spent in explanation. With the SCJs I can cover ground faster and get down to the nitty-gritty."



Fr. Byron Haaland, SCJ

Outside of his retreat ministry, Fr. Byron works with the formation department at Sacred Heart School of Theology and is very active with St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care in Milwaukee.

"St. Ann's is a place where many of the forgotten of society come," said Fr. Byron. "There are people there with incredible disabilities."

Fr. Byron celebrates Mass at the center and participates

in ecumenical prayer services. He noted that on Holy Thursday the caregivers — both those who work at the center and in-home caregivers, including family members — were honored. "What they do," said Fr. Byron, "is what Holy Thursday is about. They serve, and they do it well. We are called, as a church, to serve everyone."

"That is the work of the SCJs; the spirituality of the SCJs. You, as a follower of Christ, serve people where they need to be served and their story is honored and embraced no matter who they are and no matter where they come from. People are to be accepted, honored and affirmed."

"That is the spirituality of the SCJs, and that is what I base my retreats in. You can't get any better than that."

Finally having the time to do all those projects...

well, maybe!

Many people struggle with the idea of retirement. For some, their work is what has come to define them. For others, a job is like a comfortable old shoe — it fits and simply feels good.

After being away from full-time ministry for two years, Fr. Tony Russo, SCJ, said that he is still adjusting to the idea of being retired.

"I don't miss the responsibilities of being a pastor," he said. "But I miss the ministry and being a part of the on-going life of a parish."

Professed in 1957 and ordained in 1966, Fr. Tony, 71, taught in SCJ seminaries, served in province administration, and did parish ministry in Texas and Wisconsin. His last full-time assignment before retirement was as pastor of St. Martin of Tours parish in Franklin, Wis.

"I was there for 12 years," Fr. Tony said. "After that long a place really grows on you."

Fr. Tony still lives just a few minutes away from St. Martin of Tours and initially, he said that he found frequent excuses to be at the parish.

Often, he'd come and concelebrate a weekend Mass. But slowly, the visits became less frequent as he became involved in other ministries and activities. Now, he mainly goes back only to celebrate a wedding or baptism.

"I'm finding a good balance now," he said. "At first I was worried that I wouldn't have enough to do."

It was just the opposite. Soon after retirement Fr. Tony was flooded with requests for priestly help-out.

Often pastors needed someone to cover a weekend Mass.

"It took time before I learned to say 'no' once in awhile," he said. "That's probably a problem that many people have when they retire. It's not uncommon to feel guilty about taking time off, to simply not work as much as you did before."

When asked if, as a pastor, he had counseled people who might have been struggling with the transition to retirement, he said "no." Instead, "many of the parishioners were good examples to me of what healthy retirement can be," he said. "So many of them were able to pursue things that they hadn't had time for when they were working full time."

Like many people, Fr. Tony has a number of projects that he planned to get to "when I finally have some extra time."

When preaching at St. Martin of Tours he enjoyed putting stories into his homilies. "I've saved those stories and often thought of putting them together either as a resource, or as a guide to helping people develop their own stories," he said.

And then there are the boxes of personal journals. "I've been keeping a daily journal since the 1970s; it would be interesting to take a look and see if there is anything that could be done with all of that."

Retirement has also provided opportunities for trying new possibilities in ministry. "I was asked to give a retreat for a group of retired religious sisters," he said. "I had done a few retreats before but never for a women's religious group. I enjoyed it. In preparing for it, I got a lot out of it myself."

How did he know that it was time to retire?

"It was a gradual realization," he said. "I started to feel more like a grandpa at the parish. You know the joke about grandparents – they love to spend time with the grandchildren when the kids are fun but when they fuss it is time to hand them back to the parents. I didn't have the energy for the 'fuss' any more."

Now the "grandpa" enjoys traveling more, often visiting family or friends he has come to know through parish ministry. He takes more time to connect with people, meeting others for a movie or a sports event.

"That's why I am looking forward to our new development [Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake]," said Fr. Tony. "It's good to be with our community but I'd like the opportunities that being with a larger group can provide."

Does he have any advice for other priests and religious considering retirement?

"You don't have to stop doing ministry; a priest never really retires from being a priest," said Fr. Tony. "But having the option of saying 'yes' or 'no' to the amount of ministry is important at a certain point. Retirement doesn't

mean 'do nothing.'

"The wonderful thing about retirement is that you can do as much or as little as you feel up to."

After sitting down for a short interview, the next stop for Fr. Tony was to be Raymondville, Texas, where he will be helping out a classmate — Fr. Richard MacDonald, SCJ — for a couple of weeks, celebrating Masses in the Rio Grande Valley.

And then it's back to the baseball stadium for a few more Brewers' games.



Fr. Tony Russo, SCJ



On the web

The U.S. Province has expanded its presence on the internet in recent months. As you may already know, the provincialate and vocation offices combined their websites into www.sacredheartusa.org. The weekly news updates (*Fridge Notes*) can be found there, as well as features, prayers and information about the congregation and the founder. There is also a calendar and a "search" feature, both of which can be found in the right column of the "News" section.

The province can also be found on Facebook. Just search "Priests of the Sacred Heart (SCJ), U.S. Province."

And finally, the province has begun a blog site at www.scjusa.wordpress.com. On it will be periodic postings from members and friends of the community about themselves and their ministries. Have something to share? E-mail: marygorski@sbcglobal.net

Congratulations!

During this year's graduation ceremony at Sacred Heart School of Theology Dr. Richard Lux, professor of Scripture Studies, was conferred with the status of "Professor Emeritus." Dr. Lux retires this year after 37 years at SHST.

On May 11 Dr. Lux was honored again during a fund-raising dinner for the Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies at SHST. As noted in the last *SCJ News*, the purpose of the center is to establish a legacy that will continue

Dr. Lux's life's work in strengthening Catholic-Jewish relations.

Bishop Richard Sklba of Milwaukee and Rabbi Ronald Shapiro of the Congregation Shalom (also in Milwaukee) have teamed up as advisory board co-chairs during the development of the center.

The primary activities of the center will include 1) an on-going accredited study program in Israel for SHST seminarians, 2) the endowment of an adjunct SHST faculty position for a Jewish scholar to teach Judaism, 3) major lectures on Catholic-Jewish relations, and 4) an expansion of the Judaica collection at SHST's Dehon Library which will be open to the public, including visiting scholars.

To learn more about the center go to <http://luxcenter.shst.edu>.

Construction update

The SCJ wing of Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake is starting to take shape. This wing will include areas for both retired and non-retired SCJs. Construction is currently focusing on completion of the basement.

The first floor of the SCJ wing will have a large kitchen, dining room and chapel for the retired community. On the fourth floor for the non-retired there will be a small chapel, living room, dining room and kitchen. A



Dn. David Nagel, Br. Frank Presto and Fr. Tom Westhoven take a look at the construction progress of Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake. Sacred Heart Monastery/School of Theology is in the background.

large recreation room will be added to the first floor during the construction of "Stage II." There will also be living rooms on floors two and three.

The SCJ wing will include common areas for laundry, storage (storage areas for each unit on the same floor as the unit), office space, an exercise room, library and activity room. There will also be basement parking.

This first wing is expected to be completed in late November. Move-in should be possible soon after. Once this wing is finished work will begin on the public chapel, community gathering room, apartments (for non-SCJs) and other public areas.

Members of the general public

who would like to receive information about Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake should call 414-409-4848 or e-mail: pmilczarski@poshusa.org.

Welcome!

He has been with the province for the past two years as a student and now as a member of the Lower Brule Pastoral Team in South Dakota. In May Fr. Christianus Hendrik, SCJ, originally from Indonesia, became a member of the U.S. Province. Welcome Fr. Hendrik!

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