



Brother Gerald Hopeck Arrives In Anderson For Internship

By Evelyn Beck

Whether it's starting a religious education program or kayaking through Alaska, Brother Gerald Hopeck is pumped up and raring to go. This ball of energy arrived at St. Joseph's this summer for an internship year before taking his final vows as a brother in the Franciscan Friars.

He and his older sister grew up in Stratford, Connecticut. Both their grandfathers were Pennsylvania coal miners. Their mom, a former Benedictine nun, worked as a district supervisor at a state mental hospital. Their dad was a color cameraman who produced fine lithographs. In addition to handling the Norman Rockwell account, he reproduced a mosaic from the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and an oil painting commissioned by Pope John Paul II. "My dad could shoot for a week for one lithograph, and then the artist signed it," said Brother Gerald. "It was a highly skilled trade, and he was very good at it. But once the computer came in, it was nearly extinct." Sadly, his dad became disabled at age 50 with multiple sclerosis, and his health has deteriorated greatly during the last two years.

Brother Gerald was the eighteenth person in his family to graduate from Kings College, a Catholic institution in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., sponsored by the Congregation of Holy Cross. He double majored in theology and European history, intending a religious life of some sort. While in college, he directed the religious education program in the local parish and also completed an internship with the diocese evaluating the religious education programs at 215 parishes throughout upper Appalachia, setting the

foundation for his interest in education.

Following graduation, he entered the Benedictines at St. Mary's Abbey in Morristown, New Jersey, to become a monk. But he left after about three years.

"It was a life-giving experience but not what God was calling me to do," said Brother Gerald. "The abbot told me, 'You have so many gifts to give the world, but you might have to wait so long here to give them.'"

He returned to his parents' home but was soon on his way to Philadelphia, where he spent a year and a half as the guardian of a great aunt who needed help after a fall. She had become a millionaire after designing ceramic models for catalytic converters, and he cared for her and helped preserve her estate. He lived in a nearby convent that had been turned into a Ronald McDonald house to help the families of transplant patients and also found a part-time job as the pastoral care director at a nursing home.

Then, at his mother's request, he returned home and accepted a post as the pastoral administrator at a church where the pastor had suffered a heart attack. But after a few years, in search of something more challeng-



Brother Gerald Hopeck

Continued on next page



A Focus On Outreach

Continued from previous page

ing, he returned to Philadelphia, where he taught third grade at an “inner inner city” Catholic school and served as a pastoral associate and then assistant principal. Though he was mugged three times, had a gun pointed at him, and had students so poor that their homes lacked floors, Brother Gerald relished life in Philly. “I got to know everybody, and I really changed lives,” he said. “You never knew what to do next, it was always crazy, but I loved it.” When the beloved parish priest, Father Taborelli, died, there were three days of viewing, and the crush of people trying to get to the funeral shut down the interstate. “Whoever knocked at his door, he answered,” said Brother Gerald. “He helped everyone.”

During that time, four African American women whom he calls his grandmothers took him under their wings and gave him their blessing to go back into religious life. So in 2008, feeling God’s call, Brother Gerald joined the Friars. He spent a year of discernment in Boston living at a shrine and ministering at a grammar school, followed by his novitiate year in Wilmington, Delaware. “That’s where you learn how to become a Franciscan,” he said. “It’s like boot camp. They take away TV, Internet, cell phone. You learn to follow the rules

of poverty, chastity and obedience as you get ready to take your vows. You ask permission for everything. You’re stripped of your identity as you prepare to take a new one.”

Other experiences included stints as an interim principal at St. Camillus and as an assistant principal and then principal at St. Francis International School in Silver Spring, Maryland, where he worked 80 hours a week and left with a booming enrollment and a paid-off \$750,000 debt. He lived at the post-novitiate house, where he continued his theology studies and chose his direction: to work as a school administrator. Along the way, he completed a master’s degree in theology at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania and a master’s degree in pastoral theology with a concentration in pastoral counseling from LaSalle University in Philadelphia.

Brother Gerald remains close to his family, who share his love of travel. For the past eight years in a row, they have gathered in Alaska, where they kayak everywhere and enjoy communing with the wildlife, including bears, caribou, and “whales galore.”

At St. Joseph’s, where he has found everyone friendly and welcoming, Brother Gerald will focus on religious education, youth ministry, adult faith formation, and outreach. “The more we form community, the more we can do together,” he said.

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