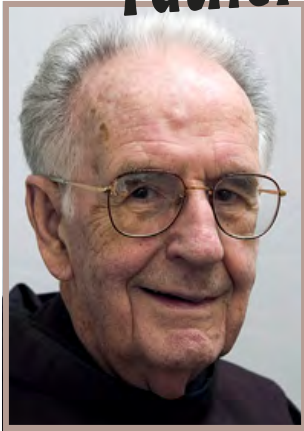


Father Peter Sheridan, OFM

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Living on M&Ms (Mass and Meals) is how Fr. Peter Sheridan, OFM, describes his daily life at the Holy Name friary and nursing home in Ringwood, New Jersey. The senior friar of Holy Name Province, Fr. Peter turned 97 years old on September 21, 2010. Attributing his longevity to good family genes and dumb luck, Fr. Peter explained, “I didn’t know the time was passing by!”

Peter Sheridan was born in Newark, NJ, the son of a mounted policeman who kept his horse at home and gave rides to the neighborhood kids at lunchtime.

As a youth, his activities included people-watching from the front porch and waiting outside the Yankee farm club field to catch foul balls, having no money to attend the games. He also attended the early Sunday morning service known as “the Printers Mass,” at the St. Anthony Shrine Church. Three years after graduating from high school he entered the formation program of Holy Name Province of the Order of Friars Minor, making a temporary profession of vows in 1935 and final solemn profession in 1938. On June 9, 1941, he was ordained to the Order of Priesthood.

This year Fr. Peter celebrates his 75th anniversary as a professed Franciscan Friar, and his 69th anniversary as a priest of the Church—a special gift of God.

Fr. Peter has himself been a special gift of the Church in various ministries. Early on, he was the pastor of small parishes in Lenoir, NC and Thomasville, Georgia—a ministry he loved and cherished—along with fishing for bass in the local lakes. He served as a “circuit” priest, visiting the few Catholics who lived in the South at that time.

One of the original ecumenical Friars, he arranged to have joint Catholic-Baptist religious events, observing that although Protestants did not put much emphasis on the role of Mary in their religious worship, after becoming involved with Catholics, they recognized and understood our devotion to the Virgin. He occasionally used the front office of a poultry operation as a chapel for Sunday services, causing parishioners to joke about coming to Mass to see him “lay an egg.”

Then from out of the blue came the obedience to be the Novice Master of the Province. In that job Fr. Peter was a major influence and blessing in the lives of over 250 young friars during a nine year period.

After serving a term on the Provincial Council of the Holy Name Province, he returned to the South to become pastor at St. Mary’s Church in Americus, Georgia, near the little country town of Plains, GA, the birthplace of Jimmy Carter. Fr. Peter was later fond of saying that,

“The President of the United States is one of my devout Baptist parishioners.”

In fact, he did have the pleasure of playing poker with the then-governor’s mother, Lillian Carter (*famous for joining the Peace Corps at the age of 68*).

Fr. Peter moved to the Washington, DC area in the 1980’s, where he served as associate pastor at St. Camillus. As his golden years beckoned, he moved next door to Holy Name College, living in community with young friars-in-formation.

He has said that, in some ways, this was his most important ministry—a sign to young friars that it was possible to grow old gracefully and cheerfully in the Franciscan way-of-life, with enormous gratitude for having been called to that life by God. In semi-retirement, Fr. Peter was the Spiritual Assistant to two large secular fraternities near DC: the former Assumption fraternity, and St. Mary of the Angels.

As a member of the Franciscan Community at Holy Name friary in Ringwood, he is still a prayerful, fraternal presence to all who have the privilege to know him.

Fr. Peter is the prime example of a Friar: a religious man of the people. He understands us and has the ability to influence us.