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## Obituary - Father Wilbert Hegener, OFM

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Father Wilbert — the oldest friar of the province at the time of his death — was born on Sept. 8, 1909, in Perscheid, Germany, and given the name Norbert at his baptism two days later. His parents were John and Annamarie (Mayer) Hegener. The family immigrated to Petoskey, Mich., where he grew up. He entered the First Order 80 years ago on July 3, 1929; professed first vows on July 7, 1930; and made solemn vows three years later. Bishop James A. Griffin of Springfield ordained him a priest on June 24, 1936.

Father Wilbert served as a missionary preacher for most of his priestly career. From 1938 to 1943 he worked out of St. Louis, then Chicago, and then in Dubuque to preach parish missions. For a brief time he was the administrator of St. Joseph Parish in Nashville, Tenn., before he entered the Armed Forces as a military chaplain during World War II.

In 1946 he returned to his preaching base in Dubuque before giving two years (1946-48) as the retreat director of St. Francis Retreat House in Westmont (now Oak Brook). Afterward, he returned to his work as a home mission preacher until 1967 when again he became director of retreats at Westmont (Oak Brook) while also serving as the chaplain and instructor for the Franciscan Sisters of Wheaton. He remained in this position for 11 years until he spent one year as an associate pastor at St. Anthony of Padua in St. Louis, and 19 years in Petoskey, Mich. as senior parochial vicar at St. Francis Xavier (his home parish) and hospital chaplain.

He retired in 1998 at the age of 89 first to Cross in the Woods in Indian River, Mich., and then in 1999 to Our Lady of Angels Friary at Villa West in Sherman.

He was preceded in death by his parents, a sister, Mary Rita Cotter; five brothers, Joseph Hegener, Dr. Aloysius Hegener, Father Mark Hegener, OFM, Wilbert G. Hegener and Leo Hegener.

He is survived by a sister-in law, Audrey Hegener; many nieces, nephews and cousins; and his Franciscan family of the Sacred Heart Province.

The funeral Mass for Father Wilbert was held at St. Francis of Assisi Church at the motherhouse of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis in Springfield on July 18. Private interment was in Petoskey, Mich.

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