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Fr. Wendling celebrates 50th anniversary

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Fr. Francis Wendling, OFM, will celebrate Mass for his 50th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood and his first Holy Mass at 2 p.m. Sunday at Our Lady of the Angels Friary, Ava, Mo.

Father Francis was born July 12, 1934, in Olpe. His parents were Seraphin F. Wendling and Anna Fitzpatrick Wendling. He has three brothers, Seraphin, Joseph, and John Wendling, and five sisters, Marie Russell, Lucille Trear, Theresa Coble, Betty Lutz and Dorothy Blaufuss.

At 18 years of age, Francis Anthony Wendling entered St. Francis Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio.

After completing his year of Novitiate on Aug. 16, 1954, Friar Francis made his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and he went to Detroit to study philosophy, completing a Bachelor of Arts degree. He earned a Master of Divinity degree from St. Leonard College Seminary, Dayton, and was ordained a priest, June 14, 1962 by Bishop Rembrandt Kowalski of Wuchang, China.

Years later Father Frances enrolled in a program of pastoral ministry at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California, where he received a doctorate in Ministry.

Father Francis celebrated his first Solemn Mass on June 17, 1962, in his home parish, St. Joseph Church, Olpe. After his ordination he served in missions for the Navaho and Zuni Indians in New Mexico and Arizona. He also served in parishes in Indiana, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri and Texas.

In 1995 he returned to mission service, completing 12 years at San Francis de Asis, Juarez, Mexico. With the help of St. John the Baptist Province of The Franciscan Order, he and Sr. Frances Alonzo, OSF, began a “Home for Children of the Street,” called Casa de Asis, and a program to give financial aid to poor families so they could enroll their children in school. There are annually about 60 boys and girls in this program, with 16 this year studying in college. Sr. Frances is the administrator of Casa de Asis, and annually has about 15 boys there. Father Francis continues to support both program while at his current assignment with the Interprovincial Franciscan Contemplative Prayer Fraternity at Our Lady of the Angels Friary, Ava, Mo.

After 45 years of emphasizing the active ministry of his Franciscan vocation, Fr. Francis chose to emphasize the contemplative dimension of the Franciscan Order and joined the Interprovincial Franciscan Contemplative Prayer Fraternity at Our Lady of the Angels in 2009.

Besides prayer their ministry is providing apartments in their guest house for married couples, single people, priests, sisters, college students and seminarians anyone seeking to find a deeper spiritual relationship. Guests pray with them in the chapel, share meals at their table, and enjoy the beauty of the landscape, the flower and vegetable gardens, the woods and many hiking trails.

The Franciscan friars live on the grounds of The Assumption Abbey in Ava. Greetings may be sent to Fr. Frances at RR 5, Box 1042, Ava, MO 65608.