


Anderson
FUNERAL HOME AND CREMATORY
ANDERSON'S ON BROADWAY
ALEXANDRIA CREMATION SERVICE



1935 — *Dennis* — 2021

Dennis Becker

January 2, 1935 — February 8, 2021

Garfield

DENNIS EDWIN “DENNY” BECKER

Overlooked in the histories of the cultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s is a little-known but highly unusual interfaith incident that took place in the tiny southwest Minnesota town of Cottonwood.

The headlines tell the story: “Lutheran pastor and family living in Catholic rectory.” “Priest running for mayor raises bishop’s eyebrows.” “Bishop aims canon at priest running for Cottonwood office.”

Then, finally: “Cottonwood elects priest mayor.”

The man who sparked all those headlines, Dennis Edwin “Denny” Becker, died Monday, February 8, following a heart attack in his home near Garfield. He was 86.

“I was born ecumenical,” Becker told the Minneapolis Tribune in 1973, when a newspaper reporter visited him to learn how a Catholic priest had become mayor in a Lutheran-majority town.

Besides being born ecumenical, Becker learned lessons of economic justice at an early age, seeing first-hand how government policies and programs can affect a family. Born on January 2, 1935 in Lynd, Minnesota, he was the youngest of five children of Peter and Amelia Becker. Peter Becker had lost his farm in the Depression, and when Denny was a child, he kept food on the table thanks to a job with the Works Progress Administration, part of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal” to employ Americans in public works projects.

Following graduation from Saint John’s University — an experience and school he would remember fondly for the rest of his life — Becker entered St. Paul Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1962. He served in parishes

throughout southwestern Minnesota. His political career got its start in 1970, when he learned that the Cottonwood Lutheran pastor and his family needed a place to live while a new parsonage was being built. Becker, then the pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church, suggested the novel living arrangement, with Becker moving into a Lutheran family's spare bedroom, joking that he'd done it all because his new host was an expert golfer and might help him improve his game.

The goodwill he engendered helped lead to his eventual election as mayor.

Not all were pleased, however. Becker's bid for mayor drew criticism from a parishioner who, according to the Tribune, had been unhappy with Becker ever since he preached that "there's good in everyone, even Communists." She complained to the bishop, who said Becker's candidacy violated a 1918 church law.

Nonetheless, Becker stayed in the race and won, and the bishop declined to discipline him. Serving as mayor was "a personal ministry to the people of this community, it's where my conscience is at," Becker told a reporter. Among Becker's accomplishments was a \$766,100 contract from a Department of Housing and Urban Development low-rent housing program to build thirty housing units for elderly people in Cottonwood.

Becker never sought public office after his single term as mayor. He eventually retired from the priesthood in 2000, at the age of 65. With his life partner and co-adventurer Marilyn Tisserand, he threw himself into international work with the Global Citizens Network, a nonprofit organization that promotes intercultural learning and helps support marginalized communities. Together, Becker and Tisserand laid concrete for a community center in Thailand, helped build a clinic in Kenya, and worked in gardens with the Quileute People in the northwestern United States.

Among his friends and family (Becker drew little distinction between those two categories), Becker was known as an indefatigable worker and an equally indefatigable conversationalist. An avid hunter and fisher, he liked nothing more at the end of the day than to grill up his catch and then sit with loved ones and “gasbag,” his own potent mixture of chatting, pontificating, and storytelling that invariably made the hours pass by unnoticed.

Denny Becker was predeceased by his sisters Irene Weidauer and Esther Andries. He will be dearly missed by Esther’s husband Harvey, by his sister Vi Suedbeck, and by his brother Gene Becker and Gene’s wife Ilene, as well as by his loving nieces and nephews. He will also be lovingly missed by Marilyn Tisserand; and by Michael Tisserand, Tami Hinz, and Cecilia and Miles Tisserand. Beyond that, he will be fondly remembered by so many more who are already longing for the days when they could pick up the phone to hear Denny gasbagging about Minnesota Vikings or St. John’s Johnnies football, about the latest turn in politics — and especially to start plotting their next adventure.

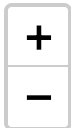
Back in 1970 in Cottonwood, after Becker had told a reporter that he’d moved into the Lutheran guest room because his host could help him improve his golf game, the reporter asked Becker about his score. Becker thought for a second. Then he replied: “If a priest is playing a good game that’s a sign he’s neglecting his parish.”

Those who knew and loved Becker remember him as a man who not only refused to neglect his parish — he dedicated his life to making that parish ever wider, ever more encompassing, and ever truer to the values of justice and compassion that he held dear and practiced unrelentingly. In lieu of flowers, Denny's loved ones invite you to support an organization that works for justice and provides comfort and nourishment to those in need, including these Minnesota based groups: The Council on American-Islamic Relations(www.cair.com), The Legal Rights Center (www.legalrightscenter.org) and Douglas County Outreach Food Shelf (www.outreachfoodshelf.org).



Visitation will be held on Thursday, February 18, 2021, 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. at the Anderson Funeral Home. Mass of Christian Burial will follow at 11:00 a.m. at St. Mary's Catholic Church. CDC guidelines of wearing mask and social distancing will be followed. For those unable to attend the service will be lived streamed.

Service Schedule

Past Services





Visitation

-  Thursday, February 18, 2021
9:30 - 10:30 am (Central time)
-  Anderson Funeral Home and Crematory
659 Voyager Dr, Alexandria, MN 56308



Mass of Christian Burial

-  Thursday, February 18, 2021
Starts at 11:00 am (Central time)
-  St. Mary s Catholic Church (Alexandria)
420 Irving St, Alexandria, MN 56308

Guestbook

I remember Denny in his early life very well. After his family moved to Marshall, Minn to a house across the street from Holy Redeemer church and one block from me, we became "best friends". He and I were 2 months apart in age and we spent many hours together at each others house. We spent many hours in the sandbox at his house and sleeping in the tent at my house during the summers of our grade school days. We were both very active as servers for Mass at Holy Redeemer. We shared many thoughts about life as we knew it and what desires we had for the future. After eighth grade we went separate ways. I stayed in Marshall attending high school while Denny went to Nazareth Hall minor seminary in St Paul, Minn. We did get together during summers and we spent a week fishing and camping enjoying the outdoors, freedom of movement and our companionship. After high school we both wound up at St John's but in different environments. Denny's was the seminary curriculum which was separate from my liberal arts college curriculum. I thoroughly enjoyed the time we spent together. At some of our high school reunions which he attended I heard him tell of his exploits in Cottonwood and the time a parishioner told Denny he needed to go to confession because he had just smashed Denny's car. Our childhoods were intertwined but our adult lives took separate paths. I've missed his story telling ability and his ability to make "lemonade from lemons". I really appreciated his obituary filling me in on some of his life after Cottonwood. I will remember him in my prayers.

DUANE RUBERTUS

Feb 22, 2021

My life is richer knowing you and Denny. I have many happy memories of our conversations and listening to stories about your shared adventures. I love you Marilyn, Love Sue

SUSAN GORHAM

Feb 18, 2021

Denny,I will always remember all the Thanksgiving celebrations and the wonderful stories you shared with everyone.Our thoughts and prayers are with you Marilyn.

DENNIS AND KANDACE

Feb 18, 2021

We pray for peace and comfort for Marilyn and all of Denny's family and many friends. We remember Denny as a valued colleague and longtime friend.

FR. PAT CASEY AND SISTER CAROLYN PUCCIO, CSJ

Feb 17, 2021

Uncle Den, I will miss your infectious smile and how generous you were with your time and stories. Memories of the MANY Thanksgiving celebrations you hosted have stayed with me all these years. Marilyn, we hope to still see you soon. Our love to you.

TAMMY (ANDRIES) EICKHOFF

Feb 17, 2021

I will always remember Denny with a big smile on his face, and full of stories on our many trips together with GCN organization - Africa, Thailand, India. It sounds like he had a very wonderful life filled with happiness and adventure. He will be missed! Marilyn, I'm so sorry for your loss, and hope that some time in the near future Howie and I will see you again. Lynne Harris

S LYNNE HARRIS

Feb 17, 2021

Saw the obit in the Echo. Extraordinarily well written. The photo really captures Denny's essence. Sympathies and love to all.

JOEL LEVIE

Feb 14, 2021

Dear Marilyn: I am so sorry for your profound loss and sudden death of your dear Denny. Thank you for the wonderful obituary; many unknown details to many! He will be missed. If this Covid ever ends perhaps we will meet again! Sending peace and love, Karen Schierman, Hutchinson, MN

KAREN SCHIERMAN

Feb 13, 2021

Marilyn, sorry for your loss. What a journey you have been on! Praise God!!! Love, Jim Wagner

JIM WAGNER

Feb 13, 2021

Marilyn, What a wonderful obituary that was about Dennis. We didn't know him that well but we know you and we are so sorry for your loss of a wonderful guy. What a life he led. After reading it I wish we had known him better. We hold you in our hearts. Prudy and Frank Jackson

PRUDY JACKSON

Feb 13, 2021

The best "fire insurance" salesman you could ever meet. Gasbagger extraordinaire, Denny could tell stories that would bring tears rolling down your cheeks, laughing and crying. May the adventures carry forth over that rainbow bridge, and may those of us that remain here learn a thing or two from this fellow traveler. Mix it up, shake it up, challenge the stagnant norms, do good for others and enjoy the journey. Love and hugs, Marilyn...let me know when it's time for coffee.

JANET M NEVALAINEN

Feb 12, 2021

Always in admiration and love for this FREE SPIRIT! I am so sorry for your loss, Marilyn, and all who have loved this wonderful man!

LUCILLE MATOUSEK

Feb 11, 2021