

# For Father Larry, jokes still coming 50 years later



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**E**ight-year-old Jordan Helein, a third-grader at St. Joseph's Middle School, says the Rev. Larry Abler not only teaches students great stuff about Jesus, "he gives us such great jokes that everybody loves."

That made Father Larry, as he's affectionately known at St. Joseph's parish and school, chuckle. He traces his comedic timing to time spent as a pastor in



**Abler**

Marathon. "I told a joke one day at the end of mass," he said. "Jeez, people loved it. So then I started putting pressure on myself to come up with one every week, and that's been going on basically since then."

These days at the end of all weekend masses at St.

Joseph's, Abler ends with a joke.

"People expect it now," he said. "In fact, it's almost harder to find a joke than putting my homily together."

In August, Abler, 70, celebrated his 50th anniversary with the Capuchin Order at Holy Family Parish in Fond du Lac. He is a native of St. Cloud and attended St. Lawrence Seminary in Mount Calvary. He joined

the Capuchin order in 1957 and was ordained a priest in 1964.

The capuchins are an international community of friars modeling themselves after St. Francis of Assisi. They are headquartered in Detroit and serve in a variety of ministries, including social service, schools, chaplaincy, retreat houses and parishes in Michigan, Wis-

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consin, Illinois, Indiana, Montana, Minnesota, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nicaragua and Panama. Established in 1857 in Mt. Calvary, there are currently 180 members in the St. Joseph province.

"I've learned a lot of things," Abler said of the last 50 years. "I've been most fortunate in getting a variety of experiences. It's not like being a diocesan priest. You know you work in one diocese, and you're pretty much a pastor. But I had lots of varied experiences."

He ministered on the Cheyenne Reservation in Montana, worked in Capuchin initial formation while also serving as pastor of St. Benedict Moor parish in Milwaukee and at St. Justin Martyr Parish in Chicago. He was vicar provincial in Detroit, which was followed by parish assignments in Michigan and Marathon.

"I left that and built the

new Solanus Casey Center in Detroit," Abler said. "I overlooked the construction of the building."

Since 2003, he has been pastor of St. Joseph parish in Appleton.

"One of the things the order, the Capuchins, did for me was build my confidence. As a young person, I was kind of timid and shy. And they continued to convince me I could do various things. And I found out if I tried, I could. ... It has given me the ability to jump into a lot of types of ministry. You know I'm not a real creative person at all. But I know I can get the job done."

Brad Norcross is principal of St. Joe's and with wife Linda Broussard-Norcross and daughters Elena and Nicole, members of the church.

"Father Larry Abler is the most selfless, nonjudgmental and loving person I've had the pleasure of observing," Linda said.

"Through his actions and words, he sets a good example for all of us to follow. He

is an excellent role model for younger priests."

Abler said coming to St. Joe's was one of the scariest situations he went through, having to follow in the footsteps of popular pastor and predecessor John Holly.

"They loved John Holly, but I think in their own way they also love me," he said. "We both bring something a little bit different to the ministry. I promised them at that time I would give them five years, which would take me until I was 70.

"Well, at our town hall meeting this spring I said, 'I'll do two more years, year by year, and they were very responsive to that; that made me feel very good. And, if my health holds out, I may stay even a little longer.

"I've been real fortunate in so far as I have loved being a Capuchin. And secondly, I have loved my ministry as a priest."