

# No retirement for friar, 92, until Fr. Solanus Casey beatified

ROBERT DELANEY  
*The Michigan Catholic*

DETROIT — At 92, the vice postulator of the Venerable Solanus Casey's cause for sainthood says he cannot retire until the famous Detroit priest has been declared "blessed."

"I feel I have to keep going until we get Fr. Solanus beatified, then I'll retire," Bro. Leo Wollenweber says.

Beatification by the Vatican can't happen until the Congregation for the Causes of Saints certifies that it believes a miracle can be attributed to the intercession of Fr. Solanus and the Holy Father accepts the congregation's recommendation.

For now, Bro. Wollenweber describes himself as semi-retired, which in his case means he still goes into the office of the Father Solanus Guild pretty much every day, but just doesn't stay as long as he used to.

But even once the milestone of beatification

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**Bro. Leo Wollenweber is still working for the beatification of the Venerable Solanus Casey at age 92.**

## Capuchin

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### Interest in art led to interest in St. Francis

is achieved, Bro. Wollenweber never sees himself just taking it easy. "Religious never really retire. You always have to be busy doing something in service to the Lord," he says.

Besides there always being plenty of work to do, there is also the prayer life of the community. "Participating in the daily morning and evening prayers is also an important work," he adds.

Bro. Wollenweber is just one of many older vowed religious men and women who continue working in one way or another long beyond normal retirement age, as long as their health holds out. But many others suffer infirmities that no longer permit them to engage in active ministry, and some of those require expensive medical care.

The Detroit-based Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph is one of the Michigan religious congregations that benefit from the Retirement Fund for Religious. The nationwide annual collection to support the fund is being taken Dec. 12-13.

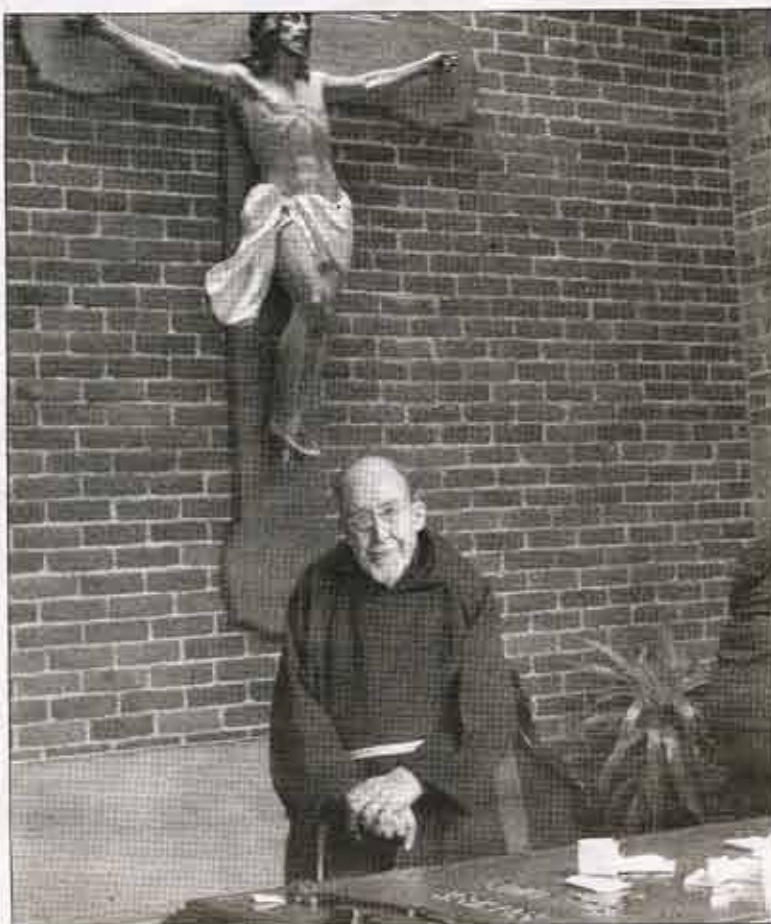
Bro. Wollenweber grew up on Detroit's lower east side. "I was born on McLellan near Canfield, but when I was about 4, we moved to a house on Eastlawn between Essex and Freud in the new St. Martin of Tours Parish. It had a fine school and high school, where I was taught by the IHM Sisters, and I was in the first class to be able to go all the way through both the elementary and high school grades," he recounts.

Having already begun to study art while in high school, Bro. Wollenweber got a job with an advertising studio downtown after graduation.

"I did a lot of reading about art, and I came across an article that mentioned how important St. Francis was to the artists of Medieval times, and what an effect he had. So, I thought I should read about St. Francis," he recalls.

In view of his growing interest in St. Francis, the pastor at St. Martin, Fr. Leo Healy, suggested he consider joining the Third Order — now called the Secular Franciscans — at St. Bonaventure Monastery on Mount Elliott Avenue.

"They had a very active group for young people, and I joined. When they told us the friars were looking for volunteers to serve their morning Masses — each priest said his own Mass at a side altar in those days — I volunteered to be a server," Bro. Wollenweber remembers.



**Capuchin Bro. Leo Wollenweber, vice postulator for cause of the Venerable Solanus Casey, stands by the tomb of the famous Capuchin priest at St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit.**

After about a year of serving Masses on his way to work each morning, he asked to join the community, was accepted as a candidate, and then as a novice. He made his profession of vows as a Capuchin Franciscan friar in 1941.

It was during those years of the early 1940s, that the newly professed Bro. Wollenweber worked as Fr. Solanus' secretary, helping the revered Capuchin priest with his correspondence, answering the telephone and enrolling people in the Seraphic Mass Association, now called the Capuchin Mission Association.

Fr. Solanus was already earning a reputation and gaining a following, as people would come to visit him and ask him to pray for them, then frequently report remarkable healings.

"He always attributed the healings to the work of the Seraphic Mass Association. 'Don't thank me, thank the dear Lord. It's due to the help of the Masses,' he would tell people," Bro. Wollenweber recalls.

As vice postulator for Fr. Solanus' cause (the postulator is a Rome-based Capuchin), Bro. Wollenweber answers enquiries and reads all the reports that come in from people reporting healings they attribute to Fr. Solanus' intercession.

"People call in or write in for prayers, and many, many people request send requests on our Web site asking to be remembered in the Masses here at the monastery,"

he says.

He is always on the lookout for a reported healing that might qualify as the miracle that gets Fr. Solanus beatified, but the Vatican's criteria are very stringent. For example, there must be no chance it was attributable to medical intervention and the person (or child's parents) must not have also prayed for the intercession of other saints (or potential saints) as well.

But although the Vatican has rejected every case it has been presented so far, Bro. Wollenweber believes one now under investigation might just be the one.

He says he and all the Capuchins are thankful to all those who have helped their work continue despite the current crisis — both their efforts to serve the poor through the Capuchin Soup Kitchen Ministries and the work of prayer, healing and reconciliation at the monastery.

"I remember, in 1939, how Fr. Solanus was asked to give a little speech on the radio, and how he said he especially wanted to thank our benefactors who had helped the Capuchins 'from their fairly empty purses,' even though their means had been depleted by the Depression," Bro. Wollenweber adds.

*For more information about the Venerable Solanus Casey's cause for sainthood, contact the Father Solanus Guild, 1780 Mount Elliott Ave., Detroit 48207, (313) 579-2100, ext. 140 or 169, or go to <http://solanuscasyguild.org>.*