The first reports in January of 2004 were that Fr. Benedict Groeschel had died then, the result of having been struck as a pedestrian by a motor vehicle in Florida. But those reports were mistaken and Fr. Benedict was with us for another ten years until his death last year on October 3, 2014. And what a ten years they were! After sustaining grave injuries that necessitated months of therapy and rehabilitation in the aftermath of the accident, Fr. Benedict would go on to give the Lord another decade of service and showed us how to get along with less—less mobility and less physical strength—and still do more for the Lord.

Early on, Fr. Benedict knew he was called to Religious life, and at the age of 19 he professed solemn vows as a Franciscan Capuchin. Seven years later, on June 30, 1959, he was ordained a priest. His early ministry was focused on the corporal works of mercy, assisting at a facility for emotionally disturbed youngsters and founding a shelter for homeless men. Eventually, though, Fr. Groeschel’s ministry turned in other directions.

After completing a doctorate in psychology in 1971 at Columbia University, Fr. Benedict began a decades-long service of assessing candidates for Religious life and the diocesan priesthood, conducting interviews with these candidates and administering testing to ascertain their psychological readiness for living the evangelical counsels and shepherding the Lord’s faithful. With his expertise in psychology, Fr. Benedict devoted a great deal of time in a span of forty years and more to counseling priests and consecrated men and women who experienced difficulties in their ministries and apostolates.

He was invited regularly to direct retreats in locations near and far and was always in demand as a spiritual director. Cardinal Cooke, whose cause for canonization Fr. Benedict worked on, named him the Director of Spiritual Development for the Archdiocese of New York. And in a career that was partly academic, Fr. Benedict taught at Fordham University, Iona College, and two downstate New York seminaries. He also had an affiliation with the Institute for Psychological Sciences in Arlington, Virginia.

Prolific as an author, Fr. Groeschel published more than forty-five books. The most significant of these works are *Spiritual Passages* (1984), *Courage to Be Chaste* (1985), *Reform of the Renewal* (1990), and *I Am
Robert J. Batule

*With You Always* (2010). He even found the time at one point to write a monthly column for *The Priest*, a publication of Our Sunday Visitor.

Fr. Benedict was a long-time member of the Board of Advisors of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists and was honored by the Society with a special award several years ago.

The influence of Fr. Benedict grew steadily with his appearances on the Eternal Word Television Network, giving viewers the opportunity to see his bearded face and hear his sometimes raspy voice and thereby connect with him in a different medium. Endearment and respect for Fr. Groeschel was solidified through the appeals he made for the Cardinal Newman Society, pressing as urgently as he could for an education true to its name at our nation’s Catholic universities and colleges.

Yet what probably stands out more than any other issue in Fr. Groeschel’s life was the decision he made in 1987 to co-found the Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and leave behind the Franciscan Capuchins which he joined right out of high school. It was no secret that Fr. Benedict had long been deeply concerned about the state of Religious life, and the time had come in his judgment to break with a revered Religious Order in the Church and to live consecrated life in a more compelling and evangelically fruitful way.

Starting over at age 54 takes nerve, and Fr. Benedict had plenty of that. It also takes great faith, and Fr. Benedict had an abundance of that, too. The faith of Fr. Benedict was that the Lord would do “more” with “less.” With less of a history than other Religious Orders, the Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal has been blessed by the Lord with more of a future—as in vocations, and plenty of them, too. A group that originally numbered only eight friars has grown to more than 120 now.

Growth is not just numerical, of course. In the depths of the soul, it is much more subtle, but the comparative words “more” and “less” remain apropos. While suffering diminishes us and makes us “less” of what we once were, we can still be “more” because it likens us to Christ and his passion. A series of strokes in the last few years of Fr. Benedict’s life made him “less” of a writer and speaker, but it allowed us to see the “more” in our lives when there is a likeness to the Lord in suffering. In Christ, “less” is actually “more.” Writing to the Philippian Christians, Saint Paul puts it this way: “For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him . . . to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8–11, emphasis added).

*Tu es sacerdos in aeternum. Requiscat in pacem.*