

# the Capuchin Journey

Magazine of the Province of St. Mary of the Capuchin Order



Another  
Summer  
of Grace

## From the Provincial Minister

**P**ease and all good things to you! As the recently elected provincial minister of the Province of St. Mary, it is an honor for me to share these words with you, our families, friends, benefactors, and partners in mission. As I begin this new ministry, I am particularly grateful for your continued prayers, friendship, interest in, and support of our friars and our various ministries throughout the Province.

It is now autumn, the season of harvest and Thanksgiving. We are in the midst of the Church's Season of Creation, when we give thanks for the beauty of the earth, our common home. As we enjoy the magnificent display of fall colors and anticipate gathering with friends and loved ones for the celebration of special holidays, please know that you are regularly in our prayers. We thank God for you! We remember you around the greatest Thanksgiving table, the altar, from which we receive the Body of Christ. There, we gather with our friars in community, those we serve in ministry, and those who seek our assistance in finding the Lord.

In this time of harvest gathering, may I invite you to join me in praying for an increase of vocations to our Capuchin Franciscan way of life? Jesus tells the disciples (and us!) in the Gospel, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37).

I consider it one of my top priorities as provincial minister to support the efforts of our vocation director, Fr. Erik Lenhart, in sharing the story of our community and our ministries as we invite young men to "come and see" who we are and what we do. We constantly encourage the friars to pray each and



every day that the Lord will send more laborers to work in His vineyard, especially as Capuchin friars. Will you join your prayers to ours for this very special intention, an increase in vocations?

On the pages that follow, you will read about and see pictures that tell the stories of our friars at work in service of the Gospel, living out their vocation joyfully. Your care, concern, presence, and support in our lives helps us to serve others after the example of Jesus and Saint Francis. Truly, you are a gift to us that we do not take for granted.

May God, who can never be outdone in generosity, bless you for your kindness to our friars, and, through them, bless countless others!

*Robert J. Abbatiello, OFM Cap.*

*Fr. Robert Abbatiello, OFM Cap., Provincial Minister*

### Capuchin Charisms

**FRATERNITY** calls the friars to promote genuine relationships among all people and nations so that the world may live as a single family under the gaze of its Creator.

**MINORITY** enables them to walk with the people they serve and be accepted as one of their own.

**CONTEMPLATION** requires they give priority to a life of prayer, especially contemplative prayer, to listen to God's guidance in their mission.

**MINISTRY** promotes the apostolic dimension of Capuchin life in proclaiming the Gospel and assuaging the hunger, despair, and loneliness of those among whom Christ would have walked.

**JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION** are uniquely Capuchin because an essential part of the mission of St. Francis was to strive for all of God's creation to live in peace and harmony.

### Province Mission

The needs of the poor and the demands of justice shape our every ministerial endeavor. We attempt to promote equality for all people within our fraternity, in the churches dedicated to the gospel of Christ, and in the larger world. Capuchin friars minister in a wide variety of settings. Service to people of a variety of cultures in North America and around the globe allow us to witness God at work in countless ways.

Here in the Northeast United States, the Province of St. Mary serves through any number of institutions dedicated to the service of real human needs and the proclamation of God's love. Urban, suburban, and rural; poor, blue collar, and middle class; Latino, Asian, and English-speaking—the friars can be found living amid all these diverse circumstances.



CAPUCHIN FRANCISCANS  
PROVINCE OF ST. MARY

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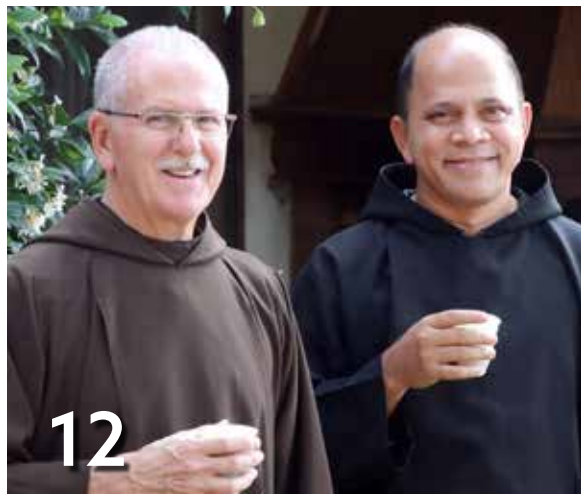
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Cover: The Catholic Literature & Arts Summer Program performers in final dress rehearsal for *Solanus: The Brother Behind the Beard* at St. Martin de Porres School in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Opposite: Fr. Robert Abbatiello embraces Br. José Leonardo "Leo" Rojas Gonzalez on the occasion of his first profession of vows in Yonkers on July 22.

**Publisher** Fr. Robert Abbatiello, OFM Cap.  
**Editors** Bruce Crilly, Br. Anthony Zuba, OFM Cap.  
**Design/Art Direction** Bruce Crilly, Br. Anthony Zuba, OFM Cap.  
**Editorial Office** 110 Shonnard Place, Yonkers, NY 10703  
212-564-0759

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*The Capuchin Journey* is our way of letting you know how the Province of St. Mary fulfills its mission. You, as part of our community, share this vision of service to those in need. Through this publication, we want you to see how we use the resources you so generously provide to us. We hope the contents of *The Capuchin Journey* will convey a sense of the work we do and how valuable your contributions are to this work.

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# Around the Province



## Speaking for the Earth



Fr. Benedict Ayodi has trained thousands of climate activists across Africa.

halted the construction of the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline through Uganda and Tanzania. He is also an outreach officer at Franciscans International, an NGO representing the voice of all Franciscan religious orders at the United Nations, which enables him to directly challenge governments that do harm to the environment and threaten the livelihoods of their citizens.

“I grew up in Kenya, and I touched with my own hands the importance that the forest has in this land, with the wildlife around us, with the waterways, with the resources that can feed everyone without exploitation, only with intelligent ways,” Father Ben told Vatican News. “I think this is what pushed me to unite myself to the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi.”

Preventing catastrophic climate change is only one motivation for Father Ben. Another is inspiring Catholics to live the Gospel. “Through our movement, certainly we have rekindled the faith of many young Catholics who had drifted away from the Church and who have come back to believe and hope that they can be agents of change. We have achieved this effect, and that is what I love most. Being part of this movement is not a job, it is my spirituality,” Father Ben told Vatican News.

Read more about Father Ben’s work with the *Laudato Si’* Movement at <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2023-06/laudato-si-story-brother-ben-kenya-environment-pipeline.html>.

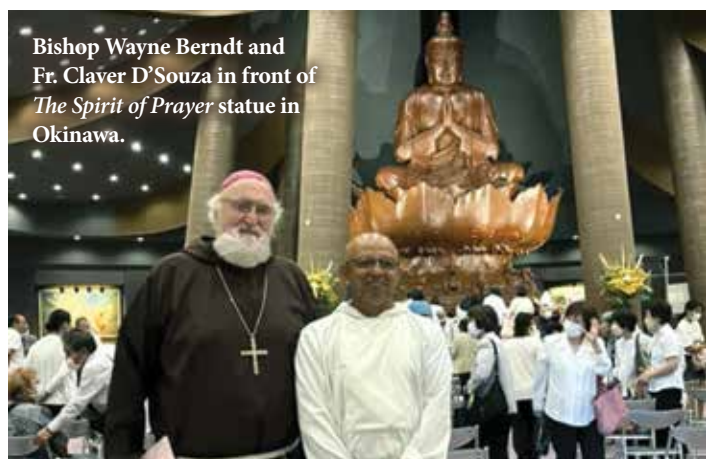
A contingent of Capuchin friars was preparing to join thousands of people in a mass march in New York City on Sept. 17 to advance the goals of the UN Climate Summit, whose purpose is to reduce the world’s use of fossil fuels.

One of the friars who is doing everything he can to protect the earth is **Fr. Benedict Ayodi**. He is a founder of the *Laudato Si’* Movement, a Catholic grassroots organization that promotes ecological conversion in the Church and the world through implementation of Pope Francis’ encyclical on care for creation, *Laudato Si’*.

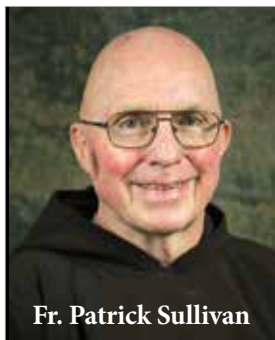
Father Ben has been the Africa coordinator for the *Laudato Si’* Movement, helping train thousands of animators and form over 20 chapters across the continent. With other climate activists, Father Ben and the *Laudato Si’* Movement

## Prayers for Peace

Saint Francis of Assisi is renowned as a peacemaker and sets the example for all Franciscans to follow. A week after the 78th anniversaries of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by atomic weapons, **Bishop Wayne Berndt** of the Diocese of Naha and **Fr. Claver D’Souza** represented the Catholic Church at the annual inter-religious peace prayer in Okinawa, Japan, on Aug. 15. The ceremony took place in the Prayer Hall at the Peace Monument. The large statue that resembles a Buddha is titled *The Spirit of Prayer* and was created by an Okinawan Catholic sculptor.



# Cuba Mission Memoir Gets Translation

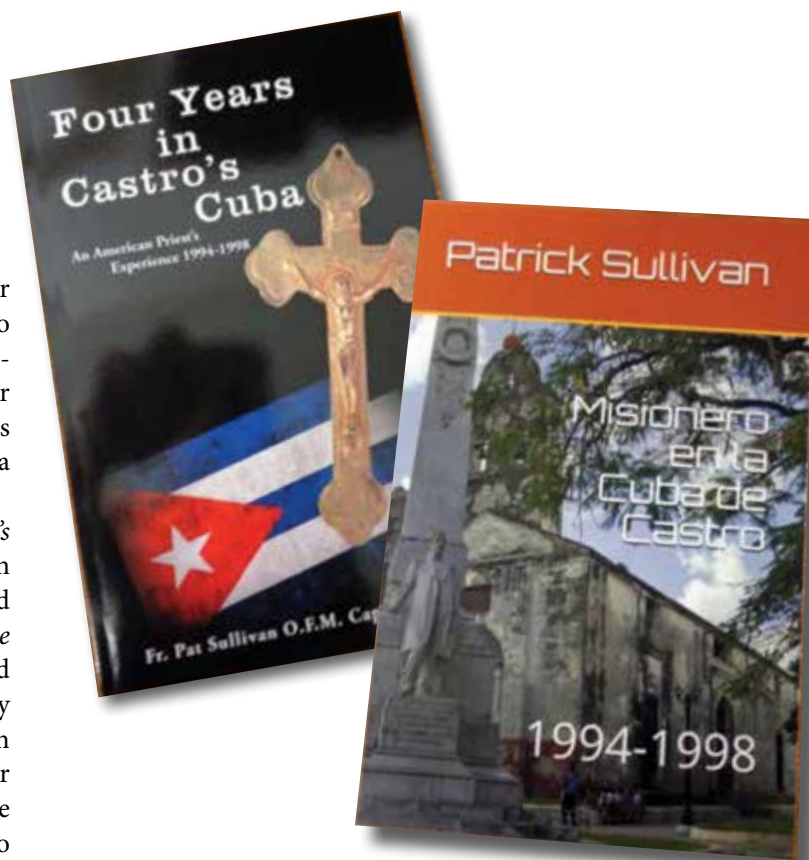


Fr. Patrick Sullivan

**Fr. Patrick Sullivan**, our missionary brother who ministered to Spanish-speaking peoples for decades, has re-issued his memoirs of Cuba in a new Spanish translation.

*Four Years in Castro's Cuba*, first published in 2012, has been re-issued

recently under the title *Misionero en la Cuba de Castro*. It was translated by Angel Cristobal and published in Miami. "Cristobal was a very active lay leader in [my] parishes in Cuba and added his own helpful introduction and supplement," said Father Pat. Both the English and the Spanish books are available at Amazon, and the English edition is also available as an e-book.



## A Pillar of Our Lady of Sorrows

Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in New York City has seen many friars come and go over the 156 years since its founding. But in a parish of constant change, in a city of constant change, one of those friars has been a steady presence.

For 45 years, **Br. Robert Gerdin** has been a pastoral associate of the parish. (That's more than a quarter of the history of the parish!) He has worked behind the scenes, supervising the maintenance of the facilities of the church and friary. Brother Bob's skills in building maintenance have been of immeasurable benefit to all the friars who have served as pastor over the decades he has been in residence.

This year marks Brother Bob's golden jubilee of religious life as a Capuchin. On June 17, the entire Our Lady of Sorrows community gathered in celebration of our quiet, unassuming, talented, and devoted friar. They offered

a special Mass for him, followed by a gathering with a meal in the church hall.

It is with little exaggeration that we can say Brother Bob is a pillar of the Our Lady of Sorrows community. Congratulations on 50 years as a Capuchin friar and 45 years at Our Lady of Sorrows, and may God bless you always.



Br. Robert Gerdin with one of his many friends at his religious jubilee celebration at Our Lady of Sorrows Parish on June 17.

# First Vows for Brother Leo

With thanks and gratitude to God, the giver of all vocations, the Province celebrated the vocation of **Br. José Leonardo “Leo” Rojas Gonzalez** with his first profession of vows in Yonkers on July 22.

The Church needs the testimony and the example of its saints, said **Fr. Robert Abbatiello**, provincial minister, in his homily for the celebration. Noting St. Mary Magdalene’s witness to the resurrection of Christ, he added that the Capuchins’ own testimony, example, and witness are needed, too. And so the world needs Brother Leo’s testimony, example, and witness, Father Robert said.

Like Mary Magdalene, we are called to show up in the darkness to proclaim the light of resurrection with courage, hope, joy, and trust. Through the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the Capuchins make promises to live the Gospel in acknowledgment of a God who has fulfilled all promises to humanity in the resurrection.

Just before Brother Leo kneeled for the rite of religious profession, Father Robert invited all the friars present at



**Br. Leo Rojas, supported by two of his brother friars, professes his vows before the provincial minister, Fr. Robert Abbatiello.**

Sacred Heart Church to remember their own first profession of vows and renew their commitment to live the Gospel after the example of St. Francis of Assisi. After making his vows, all the friars present welcomed Brother Leo with the *embratio*, a moving sign of their fraternal affection.

Brother Leo now enters his year of integration after completing his first two years of initial formation, postulancy and novitiate, outside the Province. He will reside at San Lorenzo Friary in Jamaica Plain, Mass. His formation directors are **Br. Lake Herman** and **Fr. John Koelle**.

# Formation Milestones, and a New Vocation Director

In addition to **Br. José Leonardo Rojas**’ first profession of vows, we marked the following milestones in our initial formation program.

Our newest novice, **Br. Shawn Natola**, received his religious habit at the investiture ceremony held at San Lorenzo Seminary in Santa Ynez, Calif., on July 16. San Lorenzo Seminary is home to the intercontinental novitiate of the North American and Pacific Capuchin Conference. Brother Shawn will spend the next year with his fellow novices from across the United States. With the guidance of his formation directors, **Fr. Will Tarraza** and two other Capuchin friars, Brother Shawn will deepen his relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and contemplation, study, work, and discernment of God’s will for him as a Capuchin friar.

**Br. Gabriel Conlon**, who is beginning his second year of post-novitiate formation, renewed his vows on Aug. 23 at San Lorenzo Friary, Jamaica Plain, Mass., before **Fr. Robert Abbatiello**, provincial minister, and all the friars who live in Boston. He is looking forward to his first semester of studies at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

Without a director of the vocation ministry, we would not have new friars to welcome and cherish. We wish to thank **Fr. Marvin Bearis** for serving the Province faithfully as vocation



**Br. Shawn Natola (center) in his new habit, flanked by Fr. Will Tarraza and Br. Lake Herman.**



**Br. Gabriel Conlon renews his vows as Fr. Robert Abbatiello looks on.**

office director for the last six years. We wish him well in his new assignment as pastor of St. Pius X Parish in Middletown, Conn. The new director is **Fr. Erik Lenhart**, who assumed the role on Sept. 1. With him, the vocations office will relocate to the Capuchin provincial headquarters in White Plains, N.Y. For a calendar of upcoming vocation discernment events, see Page 18. If you or someone you know is curious about religious life as a Capuchin, contact us at (857) 615-3893 or [vocations@capuchin.org](mailto:vocations@capuchin.org).

# God Bless You, Father Basil!

We give thanks for the strong fraternal collaboration between our Province and the Holy Trinity Province of Karnataka, India. Over the last 30 years, many friars have come from Karnataka for a period of service in fraternity and ministry in New York and New England as well as in our mission fields in Okinawa, Japan. They are hospital chaplains, pastors, and more. Our brothers from India are faith-filled, Spirit-filled, joyful evangelizers who teach us a lot about how to be good Capuchins.

One of these friars is **Fr. Basil Valerian Joseph**, who has served at the Parish of Holy Cross-St. John the Baptist in New York City as a parochial vicar. He has also served at San

Lorenzo Friary in Jamaica Plain, Mass., as a co-director of the post-novitiate formation program.

After five years of mission in the Province, we sent our cheerful brother home to Bangalore on Sept. 7. Before his departure, we celebrated his life and contributions to our provincial fraternity with a Mass of thanksgiving and reception at the Church of St. John the Baptist on Aug. 26. God bless you, brother. Surely, we will miss you very much!

**Parishoners of Holy Cross-St. John the Baptist Parish join some of our friars in thanking Fr. Basil Joseph (front, left of center) for his service and wishing him well on his journey home.**



# Thank You, George Vogel!

The friars rely on the people of God to support their mission in the Province and beyond. Our provincial development office funds the works of justice, peace, and charity that the friars offer in humble service to God, the Church, and all people. For decades now, a team of lay staff have stood at the friars' side to promote our mission and our good works, to endow us with the means to train our newest friars, and to support our most senior friars after a lifetime of faithful service.

Thus we congratulate George Vogel, who has retired after 10 years of service as the director of the development office. During his tenure, the Province moved its development office from St. John the Baptist Church and Friary in New York City to the Monastery of the Sacred Heart, Yonkers, N.Y., helping us reduce operating expenses. He also supervised the restructuring of the development office to fit the current size and means of the Province. Under his leadership, the development office became more efficient and more effective at raising money through its direct mail campaigns and special events like the Annual Capuchin Benefit.

George brought to the Province over 30 years of senior-level management experience in New York-based regional banks like Greenpoint Bank and Capital One, as well as skills in data analysis. He and Elizabeth, his wife of 36 years, reside in Long Island. They have three grown sons.

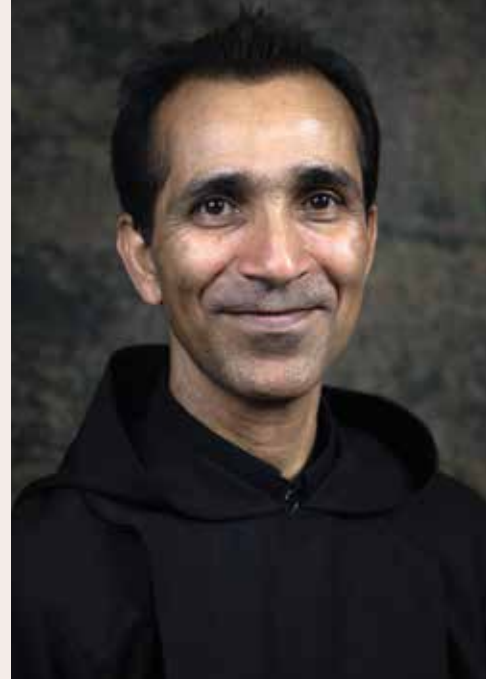


**George and Elizabeth Vogel celebrate his 10 years of service in development.**

Thank you, George, for 10 years of dedicated service. The friars are deeply grateful for you and wish you many joyful blessings in your retirement.

# Given and Received

## Fr. Royson Menolickal Expands Our Fraternity



In his *Testament*, Saint Francis of Assisi spoke of how “the Lord gave me brothers.” In the beginning, they came from his native Assisi, but then they came from beyond, first from all of Umbria in Italy and then from all of Europe. Today, God gives the Capuchins of our Province brothers, not only from New York and New England, but also from all over the world.

One of them is Fr. Royson Menolickal, who observes his silver jubilee of priesthood this year. Father Royson came to us from the Province of St. Joseph in Kerala, a state on the southwestern coast of India. The Capuchins first established a novitiate in India in 1922, and 50 years later, the Indian province was partitioned into four new provinces, including the Province of St. Joseph in Kerala.

Father Royson was born in 1970 in Josegiri, Kerala, and was the fourth of six children. (He has seven nieces, three nephews, and four grand nieces.) He was invested as a novice in May 1990, made his perpetual vows in May 1997, and was ordained in November 1998. For his first 15 years as a friar, he served in Kerala in parishes and as an educator.

Advanced studies in pastoral counseling brought him to the United States in 2005, and Father Royson eventually felt called to remain in our Province with his newfound brothers. In 2012, he became parochial vicar at St. Thomas, a Syro-Malabar Catholic church in the Bronx, and in 2016, he also became director of St. Joseph Mission in Buchanan, N.Y., serving the Syro-Malabar community in the Hudson Valley. In addition, he helps the Province arrange visas for other guest friars who serve for a period in our Province and missions, especially friars from Holy Trinity Province in Karnataka, India.

We interviewed Father Royson recently on the occasion of his priestly jubilee. The following interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

### **Tell us how you became a Capuchin. Why did you feel called to be a friar?**

I come from a family with several priests and nuns in the family. They all were giving me an inspiration to choose a way of life that will give fulfillment as a true Christian. After my studies in agriculture, I was asking the question to myself: What is the meaning of my existence here on earth, and what shall I do to fulfill my plan? Then, in the course of time, I was thinking of joining the religious life, but which one? I went to the Capuchins after debating with several other congregations. When I saw the life of the friars, I got the inner conviction that these guys are really challenging me, and God is showing me a new path for my existence in this world.

### **Tell us about your home province. What is Capuchin life like in India?**

The life of the friars in Kerala is challenging, and the friars keep a strict religious life by giving importance to community life and spiritual life. As the province does not have many institutions, they concentrate more on the preaching ministry. The mission retreats are highly appreciated, and we get a lot of vocations from the parishes.

### **Describe the ministries you performed before you joined the Province of St. Mary.**

I worked as the administrator of St. Thomas Pilgrimage Center at Malayattoor and assistant pastor at Malayattoor St. Thomas Church in 1998-1999. I was vice principal of St. Jude Higher Secondary School, Mukhathama Kollam, from 1999 to 2003. I was also pastor at St. Jude Syro-Malankara Church, Mukhathala; St. Joseph Church, Puliya; and St. Antony Church, Pallimon. I was professor of philosophy at Vijnananilayam, Eluru, Andhra Pradesh, from 2003 to 2005.



### **Tell us how you came to the Province of St. Mary.**

In 2005, I came to Fordham University for my studies in pastoral counseling. I was welcomed by Fr. Michael Banks, the provincial minister at the time. I was assigned to Our Lady Queen of Angels Friary in East Harlem, New York City, and remained there until 2007. Then I moved to Good Shepherd Friary in Inwood, New York City, as we took the parish. When I finished my studies, I found the ministry here more fulfilling, as we have few priests and more ministerial opportunities. Then my thoughts were shared with the provincials of both provinces, here and in Kerala. Fr. Francis Gasparik, the provincial minister, welcomed me to the Province of St. Mary. The Capuchin general curia confirmed my transfer to the Province of St. Mary. After becoming a member of the Province, I lived at Sacred Heart Friary, Yonkers, and Good Shepherd Friary.

The friars in the Province are showing me a real brotherly love, and I thank each one of you for accepting me as your brother.

### **Tell us about your current ministry in New York. How do you serve the Church and the people of God?**

While living at Good Shepherd Friary, I minister to the Syro-Malabar Catholic community in the Bronx and in Buchanan. These two parishes are Eastern Rite Catholic communities tracing their origin back to the apostle St. Thomas. I, too, help the Syro-Malankara Catholics when they are in need of service. The ministry in the parish is exciting and challenging. We have a strong youth group in the parish that gives real hope for the growth of the church.

### **What do you enjoy about living and working in the Province of St. Mary? Describe your relationship with the friars.**

The primary thing I enjoy in the Province and the friary is being with brothers. The prayer life and the community activities give real Franciscan joy. The challenge the brothers put forward always gives an opening for spiritual growth. The readiness of the brothers to share the community activities is something very remarkable.

“ The friars in the Province are showing me a real brotherly love, and I thank each one of you for accepting me as your brother. ”

*Fr. Royson Menolickal*

### **What are the challenges of living and working in the Province?**

The real challenge in the Province is the lack of vocations. A diminishing number of the friars limits our ministerial fields and our presence in different places. As a Province, we, too, need to broaden our thoughts regarding new vocations from different cultures.

### **How does being a Capuchin friar help you be a better follower of Jesus Christ? How do your Capuchin brothers help you?**

Each vocation is a call to follow Jesus Christ by being in the presence of God and fellow human beings. In moments of prayer, one experiences the presence of God, both through community prayers and personal meditation. The brothers in the community help each other by being present to one another during community prayers. The community that prays together will stay together and establish a strong support for each other's spiritual growth.

### **How does the Church and community you serve help you be a better Capuchin friar?**

The parish community where I work really loves the Capuchins. Daily, they pray for their pastors and encourage the youth to discern their vocation. We already have a few vocations from the parish.



Father Royson (center) celebrated his silver priestly jubilee with a Mass of thanksgiving on June 25.

# A Summer of Grace



## at Capuchin Family Ministries

Summer is the time the earth yields its fruits. Jesus calls us all to bear good fruit, so each July and August, the youth and adults of Capuchin Family Ministries (CFM) bear good fruit, both spiritual and physical, through our summer programs. This year, more than 100 volunteers brought material relief, spiritual uplift, education, and entertainment to all of God's people.

### Capuchin Appalachian Mission

During the week of July 8–16, the friars and volunteers embarked on their 30th Capuchin Appalachian Mission to Harlan County in Kentucky. Six friars accompanied the teens, young adults, and adults. One of the volunteering families brought three generations with them!

Among other good works, the mission team

- distributed a large number of backpacks filled with school supplies for elementary school students;
- assembled hundreds of bags of household supplies for needy families;
- distributed 85 boxes of clothing and donated shoes for children;

- built decks, ramps, and stairs onto old houses and mobile homes in disrepair;
- conducted a Vacation Bible School for children, providing a wonderful, fun-filled, faith-filled week.

“We all received more from the people of Harlan than what we gave,” said one volunteer. Another participant spoke of the spiritual benefits of the mission: “It was great interacting with people on the trip. Sharing our faith and working together, I had a stronger feeling spiritually and physically of being part of the body of Christ!”

Fr. Michael Greco joined Fr. Erik Lenhart, CFM chaplain, and the team for this year's journey. “It was awesome,” he said, beaming. “The teens and adults who came with us were tremendous, and so much good work was done for the people of Harlan County. Our teens and adults accomplished amazing work in just one week.”

### Summer Outreach Week

Similar to the Capuchin Appalachian Mission is the Summer Outreach Week (SOW), which took place in the Hudson Valley the week of June 25-30. It is geared toward high school



students, who spend their days in worship, service, and reflection under the direction of friars and adults. The volunteers, dubbed by Father Erik as “SOWjourners,” build bunk beds for children, visit nursing home residents, encounter the homeless, and lead a children’s Vacation Bible School.

Many of the teens came from Albertus Magnus High School in Bardonia, N.Y. One of these enthusiastic participants called the experience a “reset for my faith life” while another called it “the greatest week of my life!” The week of service and the overall attitude of the participants was perhaps encapsulated best by another SOWjourner who said simply, “Serving others! It’s what Christians are called to do!”

### CLASP

During the first week of August, our troupe of talented teens and their adult advisors converged on the Hudson Valley to bring a unique theater experience to the Church.

It was the sixth season of the Province’s Catholic Literature & Arts Summer Program, or CLASP. A team of dedicated artists and educators donate their time to immerse the teens in a mix of theater and theology. “The ultimate mission of CLASP is to

make saints, and we have fun doing it,” said Father Erik, who is the founder and director of the theater camp. “Some of our great saints were actors and playwrights, including Pope John Paul III!”

This year, our company of teens and pre-teens put on a performance of *Solanus: The Brother Behind the Beard*, an original musical bringing to life the story of our holy Capuchin friar, Blessed Solanus Casey. Each day started at Mt. Alvernia Retreat Center in Wappingers Falls with morning prayer and breakfast. Workdays followed at St. Martin de Porres School in Poughkeepsie, where the youth rehearsed, built sets, and prepared for the big performances on Sunday, Aug. 6. Late in the afternoon, the group moved back to Mt. Alvernia for a bit of free time followed by Mass, dinner, and an evening workshop conducted by one or more of the adult team leaders. An evening prayer service rounded out each of these very full days, but there was always more time to socialize and learn lines!

The experience was challenging, exhilarating, and uplifting for all. One CLASPer put it succinctly: “Service, caring, giving, sharing, valuing and appreciating others’ opinions and feelings, insight of adoration, and my interaction with God.”

Not a bad way to spend the summer!



# Administration as Ministry

## The Role of the Provincial Minister

Every organization needs a form of governance and structure. Countries have their prime ministers and presidents; cities, their mayors; and corporations, their CEOs. Structures within organizations of all sizes help them maintain their identity, vision, and order.

This is true not only for secular institutions but also for religious organizations like the Capuchin Order.

The Capuchins' organizational structure is outlined in its *Constitutions*. There is a general minister, currently Fr. Robert Genuin of Italy, who was elected in 2018 and resides in Rome. He animates the life and work of the Order in collaboration with the provincial ministers, who govern the local jurisdictions of Capuchin communities that we call provinces. While there is a hierarchy that facilitates the governance of the Order and its provinces around the world, an egalitarian spirit is maintained between our friars who are servant-leaders and all the brothers.

The current provincial minister of the Province of St. Mary is Fr. Robert Abbatiello. He was elected in May at the provincial chapter, the triennial gathering of the friars. He succeeded Fr. Michael Greco, who served as provincial minister for two three-year terms.

Father Michael recently shared some insight into the practical duties of a provincial minister with *The Capuchin Journey*. "The role of the provincial minister is one of both administrative leadership and spiritual animation," he said. "Our general minister in Rome has ultimate oversight, but each provincial minister has responsibility for his own province and the custodies and missions associated with it. The general minister does not involve himself in local matters unless necessary. Therefore, I was responsible to oversee the healthy living and effective working of all of the friars in New York and New England as well as Japan and Guam. Regarding our friars working in parishes, it is up to the provincial minister to assign them and to support them as they live Capuchin life; however, the local bishop is their actual employer."

Each province has its own history, character and needs; consequently, the specific responsibility of each provincial

Above: Provincial minister Fr. Robert Abbatiello and his provincial council.

Opposite: Father Robert in Frascati, Rome, at an orientation for newly elected provincial ministers.

minister varies from one jurisdiction to another. Nevertheless, every provincial minister works hard to care for the friars at all stages of life, and to foster the recruitment and formation of new members.

### **Spiritual Leadership**

The provincial minister provides guidance for the friars' prayer life, encourages study of Franciscan spirituality, and helps them adhere to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. "I always sought to inspire the men to a richer, deeper Franciscan life," said Father Michael. "I encouraged a prayer life within the friaries that included a healthy amount of spiritual reflection, also making sure there was a yearly retreat available for each of our brothers. For those who could not travel, we hosted Internet events around certain religious holidays."

### **Administrative Oversight**

The provincial minister supervises the management of the friaries, properties, and finances, ensuring responsible stewardship of resources. "Among my greatest challenges was, along with the provincial council, the task of balancing the provincial budget and stabilizing our finances," said Father Michael. The Province needs to operate within its means while ensuring there are sufficient resources to cover the basic needs of the friars and their ministries. "No one becomes a Capuchin to be a financial administrator," said Father Michael. "But we serve where and when we are called. I am grateful for the success we achieved in this area."

Sometimes that call takes the provincial minister to Rome, where he may meet with the general minister. The provincial minister participates in regional meetings with fellow provincial ministers of the North American and Pacific Capuchin Conference. He provides updates on the state of the Province, both its achievements and its challenges. He communicates decisions and implements directives from leadership of the Order that affect the lives of the friars of the Province. The provincial minister represents the Province in gatherings among other religious communities and ecclesial organizations.

It is the provincial minister's job to ensure that the friars live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the Rule of St. Francis, the Capuchin Constitutions, and the norms of the Catholic Church.

### **Formation and Care of Friars**

Friars come with different charisms, talents, needs, and personalities. Providing for their care is one of the most important tasks of the provincial minister. He oversees the initial formation of the new friars and the ongoing formation of fully professed members. Father Michael reflects: "Formation required lots of collaboration and consultation between the

“ No one becomes a Capuchin to become a financial administrator, but we serve where we are called. ”

*Fr. Michael Greco*

friars, myself, and the formation director for the Province, Br. Lake Herman, to create the healthiest environment for friars to thrive both personally and in ministry.”

Chief among the Capuchin charisms is fraternity. It is the provincial minister's duty to foster and preserve the spirit of Gospel brotherhood among the friars. This involves promoting a culture of mutual support, understanding, and respect, encouraging regular community gatherings, times of communal prayer, and opportunities for fraternal bonding. It also means ensuring that our sick and elderly friars receive proper care and support. This is one of the areas that Father Robert has identified as a key focus for his term as provincial minister. Like his predecessors, he will coordinate with health care providers to ensure that appropriate accommodations and assistance are provided to our brothers who are most in need.

In consultation with the provincial council, the provincial minister discerns what works the friars are being called to do and where they are to serve. After considering the needs of the Church and community, the overall mission of the Province, and the gifts and talents of the friars, he assigns them to their places and ministries.

"Perhaps my greatest challenge, as collaborative as provincials are, was to have to make the final call on things great and small," said Father Michael. "But we do what we are called to do for our Province and our brothers."

### **Vocation Discernment**

Fostering vocations is critical to the future of the Province and the Order. This is another area Father Robert has made a high priority. To better coordinate the vocation ministry with the



provincial administration, Father Robert is moving the vocation office to the provincial headquarters in White Plains, N.Y.

Promoting vocations is to be every friar's responsibility. "I hope to animate the friars to bolster our vocations through private prayer and Holy Hours," said Father Robert. He encourages his brother friars to make a more public effort in this area by attending parish-level vocation events and to find any opportunity to encourage youth who might be discerning a vocation. "We mustn't be afraid to approach young men and ask them if they are discerning a vocation. After all, that is what drew me to the Capuchins when I was in the fourth grade."

The provincial minister, with input from the provincial council, evaluates candidates for admission to postulancy. Once candidates have been accepted into initial formation, the provincial minister, through his formation team, supervises initial formation and the new friars' discernment of their vocation. The provincial minister has final authority to accept friars into first profession of vows and then final profession of vows.

### Preparation

Being provincial minister is a job for which no friar could possibly prepare. "You don't have the luxury of prepping for a role like this," said Father Robert. "Like my brother friars, I came into this life to minister rather than administer." But as they say, if you want to make God laugh, tell God your plans. Father Robert recalled: "On the final day of provincial chapter, I arrived at 8 a.m., and by 4 p.m., I was making my oath as provincial. It's very humbling to think that my brothers chose me as their leader, but we have to trust that the Spirit is in charge."

The responsibilities of a provincial minister are multi-faceted, encompassing spiritual leadership, administration, formation, and community building. We pray for Father Robert as he guides the friars of the Province to be ever more faithful to their Capuchin charisms while effectively carrying out their mission of service to God, the Church, and all people.

The beatification of Blessed Solanus Casey in Detroit in November 2017 was a highlight of Fr. Michael Greco's (left) tenure as provincial minister.



## Our Provincial Council

Every three years, the friars of each Capuchin province gather in fellowship to pray and discuss the state of the province and conduct provincial business. One of the most important aspects of these provincial chapters is the election of a new provincial minister and council.

During the provincial chapter of 2023, friars were elected by their brother friars to serve as the provincial council for the 2023-2026 triennium. Their mission is to guide the Province to where God wants us to be at this stage of our history and to help each of the friars live out his vocation faithfully and joyfully.



Fr. Robert Abbatiello  
*Provincial Minister*



Fr. Michael Ramos  
*Vicar Provincial Minister*



Br. Lake Herman  
*2nd Councillor*



Fr. Thomas McNamara  
*3rd Councillor*



Br. James Donegan  
*4th Councillor*

# Faith and Hope

## Supporting Our Capuchin Brothers in Central America



Br. James Donegan, who served in Central America for six years, is seen here in Choloma, Honduras, with a rural base community of the parish of Nuestra Señora de Lourdes.

**A**t our provincial chapter in May, the friars approved a proposal to support the development of the Capuchin presence in northern Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This territory is currently a custody of the Order and is on its way to becoming an independent province. This decision marks the beginning of new chapter in our long relationship with our Capuchin brothers in Central America, and with the local Church.

The history of the Order in Central America is a fascinating journey of faith, service, and adaptation. It spans centuries and continents. It tells of the tireless toil of many dedicated friars. The Capuchins have played a significant role in shaping Catholicism in Central America.

### Early Missions

The first Capuchin missionaries arrived with the Spanish colonizers. Their aim was to evangelize the indigenous populations and provide spiritual guidance to the Spanish settlers. Over time, Capuchins from four European provinces took root in the region, two from Spain (Andalusia and Catalonia) and two from Poland (Krakow and Warsaw).

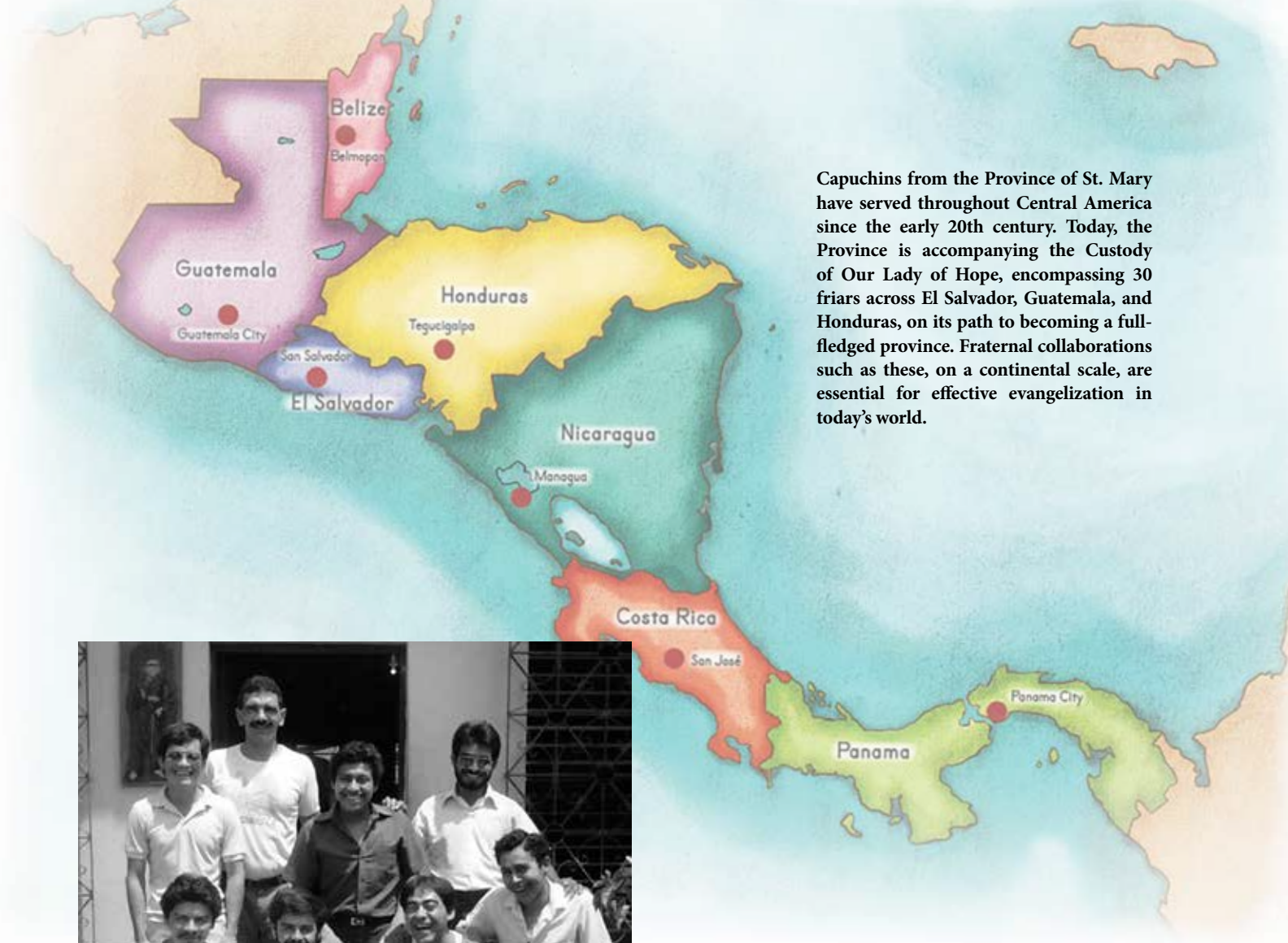
The United States became involved in Central America's Capuchin missions in the early 20th century. Friars from New York, New England, and the Midwest served the indigenous peoples of Bluefields, Nicaragua. After the division of the New York and Midwest provinces in 1952, the friars of the Province of St. Joseph assumed responsibility for the Nicaragua mission. In the mid-1960s, the Province of St. Mary established a mission in Honduras.

By the 1980s, the Order had reorganized the American, Polish, and Spanish missions into one vice province, creating a centralized structure for the coordination of activities. The aim was to foster greater collaboration among the friars.

### One Friar's Journey

During this transitional period, one of our friars began a lifelong relationship with the peoples of Central America.

Fr. Thomas Faiola's journey began in 1981, when he arrived in Honduras as a student in initial formation. For a year, he lived in a refugee camp in San Marcos, which housed over 40,000 refugees from the civil war in El Salvador. After his ordination to the priesthood, Father Tom returned to



Capuchins from the Province of St. Mary have served throughout Central America since the early 20th century. Today, the Province is accompanying the Custody of Our Lady of Hope, encompassing 30 friars across El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, on its path to becoming a full-fledged province. Fraternal collaborations such as these, on a continental scale, are essential for effective evangelization in today's world.



Fr. Thomas Faiola, standing second from left, at the formation house in Rama, Nicaragua, in 1988 with seven novice brothers during their year of *profundizacion*.

Honduras in 1985 to work in the formation of new friars. He became the director of novices and built a novitiate house in Ocatepeque. This house of formation now trains novices from all of Central America as well as from the Caribbean and Mexico. Father Tom, who is currently the pastor at Church of the Good Shepherd in New York City, continues to keep in touch and made a fraternal visit to the novitiate community this summer.

### Division and Transformation

In the early 1990s, the Order split the Central America mission into two vice provinces: a southern one (Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua) and a northern one (El Salvador, Guatemala,

and Honduras). The Order later reclassified these vice provinces as custodies. Custodies are jurisdictions with the potential to become provinces in the future.

The northern custody, called Our Lady of Hope, has seen steady growth. There are about 30 friars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The mean age of these friars is in the 40s. Fr. Juan Pablo Lobos, a delegate from the custody, reported to our provincial chapter that the custody had achieved financial independence, a testament to their resilience and dedication. Father Juan Pablo told the Province that the custody has the potential to become a province, and he believes that they only need further administrative preparation before taking that significant step.

At its own custodial chapter, Our Lady of Hope approved a proposal for formal association with the Province of St. Mary. Their request is not centered on financial assistance or personnel support; rather, the friars seek guidance,



accompaniment, and an ongoing fraternal relationship. This move reflects the growing realization within the Capuchin Order, as expressed at the pan-American Capuchin gathering held in Brazil in May 2022, that collaboration across jurisdictions is essential for effective evangelization in the contemporary world.

“Such cooperation is seen as necessary to forward the pastoral presence that reaches new generations who might not respond to current Church structure,” said Father Tom. “But they are nonetheless hungry for the kind of love, fulfillment, and transcendence that can come only through an encounter with our God.” Father Tom believes that the Capuchin charisms, which emphasize fraternity, simplicity, and service, are ideally suited for today’s evangelization.

### Lay Involvement

During his time in Honduras, Father Tom was deeply impressed by the creativity and dedication of the local Church. “When I first went to Honduras, I lived in a parish that had one or sometimes two priests who ministered to 84 communities with chapels,” he said. “Each community had Delegates of the Word and catechists who played a vital role in the celebration of the Word and the preparation of individuals for sacraments.”

These lay ministers, often men and women who learned to read specifically to understand the Bible, shouldered immense responsibilities. The pastor supervised the ongoing formation of these individuals and made periodic visits to the base communities for the celebration of sacraments. This grassroots engagement demonstrated the vitality and strength of the local faith community.

### Building for the Future

The Capuchin Order in Central America is not stagnant. It continues to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to

**Fr. Joseph Casimir Walsh administers the sacraments in San Marcos, Honduras, in May 1985.**

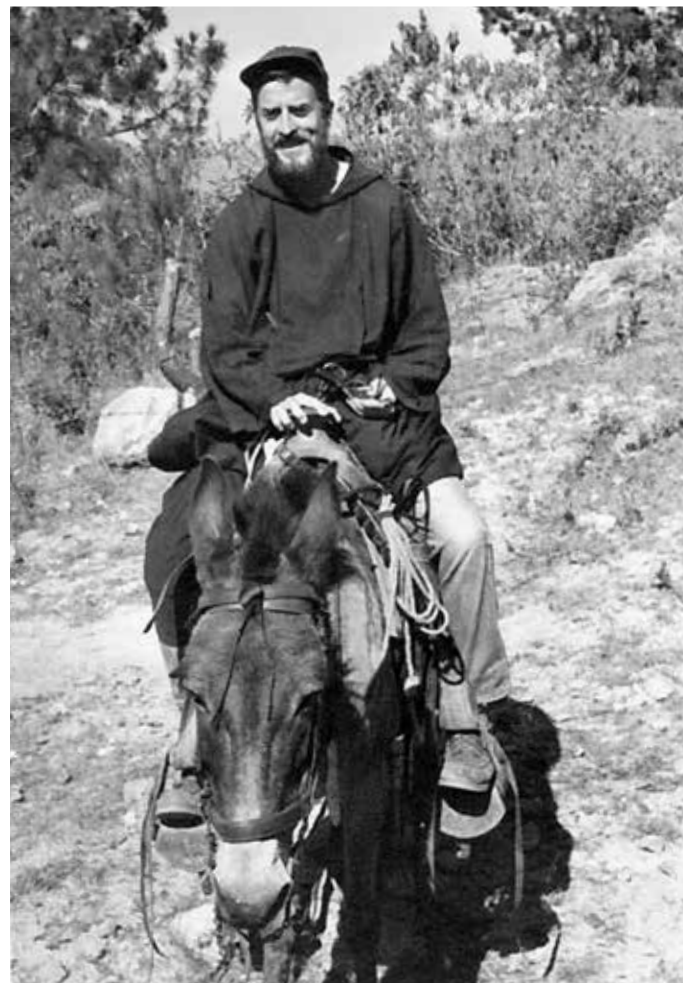


the needs of the communities it serves. The common novitiate for Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico, based in Ocotepeque, Honduras, is one example. This initiative brings together friars from eight custodies, fostering a new level of collaboration in initial formation.

The opening celebration of this novitiate was marked by simple but meaningful rites, rich with the symbols of the Capuchin charism. Superiors from the various custodies involved in this initiative were present, underscoring the importance of unity in formation. “We want to start this journey together, united under the standards posed by the Ratio Formationis [formation plan of the Order], and may it serve to encourage us to further collaborate on future initiatives,” said Fr. José Angel Torres Rivera, vicar general minister of the Order, who was present at the celebration.

The friars of the Custody of Our Lady of Hope are poised for further growth and transformation. Their desire for collaboration with the Province of St. Mary exemplifies the Capuchin commitment to unity and fraternity in the service of the Gospel.

**Like many Capuchin missionaries, Fr. Bruce Quinn traveled by burro through the hills of Honduras. He founded a health clinic, Casa de Maria, in Nueva Ocotepeque in 1970 that still serves the people today.**



# Are YOU receiving the Capuchin call?



Your thirst for meaning and purpose may be God's quiet call to live a life in Christ. If you are a young adult discerning a call to religious life, come and experience the joy and fulfillment to be found in a life devoted to fraternity, prayer, and service.

Come experience the Capuchin Way!

Join us at our discernment events!  
Meet the friars!  
Pray, rest, and reflect with us!

2023-24\*

Nov. 17-19 *Discernment Weekend, Boston*

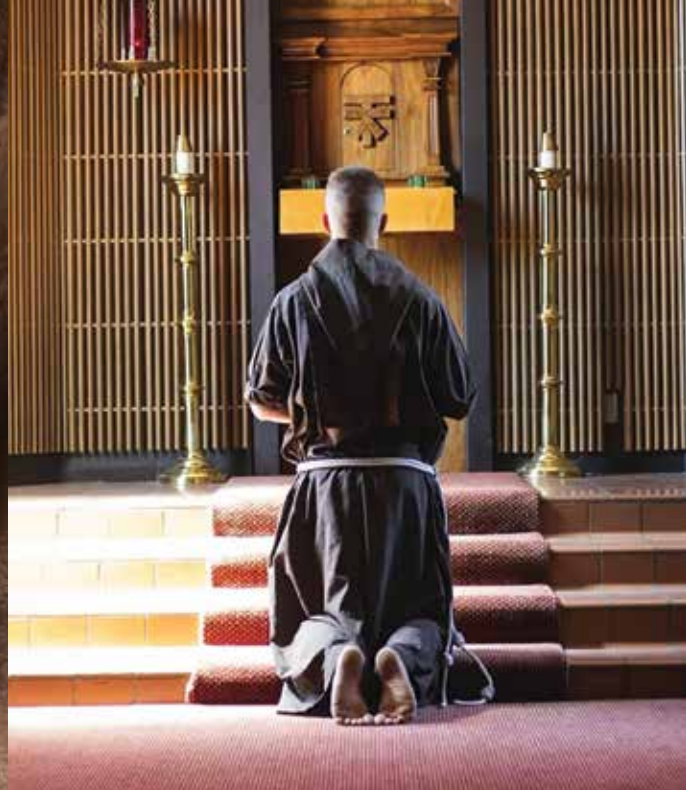
Dec. 9 *Day of Recollection*

Feb. 16-18 *Discernment Weekend*

March 9 *Day of Recollection*

April 5-7 *Discernment Weekend*

\* Events open to young men (ages 18-39). Locations for weekend retreats and days of recollection to be determined.



For more information on upcoming events or to schedule a visit with us, contact Fr. Erik Lenhart, director of the vocation ministry, at (857) 615-3893 or [vocations@capuchin.org](mailto:vocations@capuchin.org).

# Province Directory

## California

**San Lorenzo Seminary**  
1802 Sky Drive; PO Box 247  
Santa Ynez, CA 93460  
Phone: 805-688-5630

## Connecticut

**St. Pius X Friary and Parish**  
310 Westfield Street  
Middletown, CT 06457  
Phone: 860-347-4441

## Maine

**Holy Martyrs Residence**  
12 Johnson Road  
Falmouth, ME 04105

## Massachusetts

**Capuchin Vocation Office**  
46 Brookside Avenue  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
Phone: 617-522-6469

**San Lorenzo Friary**  
15 Montebello Road  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
Phone: 617-983-1919

**St. Francis of Assisi Friary**  
46 Brookside Avenue  
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130  
Phone: 617-522-6469

## New York

**St. Lawrence Friary**  
180 Sargent Avenue  
Beacon, NY 12508  
Phone: 845-831-0394

**St. Michael Friary and Parish**  
282 Warwick Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11207  
Phone: 718-827-6990

**St. Fidelis Friary**  
7790 County Road 153  
Interlaken, NY 14847  
Phone: 607-532-4423

**St. Joseph Friary and Parish**  
34 South Chestnut Street  
New Paltz, NY 12561  
Phone: 845-255-5635

**Good Shepherd Friary and Parish**  
608 Isham Street  
New York, NY 10034  
Phone: 212-567-1300

**Holy Cross Residence and Parish**  
329 West 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10036  
Phone: 212-246-4732

**St. John the Baptist Residence**  
213 West 30th Street  
New York, NY 10001  
Phone: 212-564-9070

**Our Lady of Sorrows Friary and Parish**  
213 Stanton Street  
New York, NY 10002  
Phone: 212-673-0900

**Infant Jesus Residence**  
110 Myrtle Avenue  
Port Jefferson, NY 11777  
Phone: 631-473-0165

**St. Conrad Friary and Provincialate**  
30 Gedney Park Drive  
White Plains, NY 10605  
Phone: 914-761-3008

**Capuchin Development Office**  
110 Shonnard Place  
Yonkers, NY 10703  
Phone: 212-564-0759

**Sacred Heart Friary and Parish**  
110 Shonnard Place  
Yonkers, NY 10703  
Phone: 914-375-8230

**St. Clare Friary**  
110 Shonnard Place  
Yonkers, NY 10703  
Phone: 914-423-2392

## Vermont

**St. Peter Friary and Parish**  
134 Convent Avenue  
Rutland, VT 05701  
Phone: 802-775-1994

## Wisconsin

**St. Francis Community**  
1927 North Vel Phillips Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53212

## Custody of the Star of the Sea

**St. Fidelis Friary**  
135 Chalan Kapuchino  
Agaña Heights, Guam 96910  
Phone: 671-472-6339

## Custody of Japan

**St. Francis Friary and Parish**  
1 Aza Oroku  
Naha City, Okinawa  
Japan 901-0152  
Phone: 011-81-98-857-3795



St. Michael-St. Malachy Parish



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Mission Association & Development Office  
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## Capuchin Mission & Development Office

The Capuchin Development Office funds the domestic and international mission of the Province of St. Mary. That mission ranges from supporting our own provincial members ministering here in the United States to providing assistance to Capuchins serving worldwide. The Province of St. Mary is a leader in supporting the works of justice and mercy undertaken by Capuchin friars across the globe.

**If you are interested in supporting our mission, please contact  
Fr. Michael Greco at 212-564-0759 ext. 258 or [michael.greco@capuchin.org](mailto:michael.greco@capuchin.org)  
or visit our website at [www.capuchin.org](http://www.capuchin.org).**