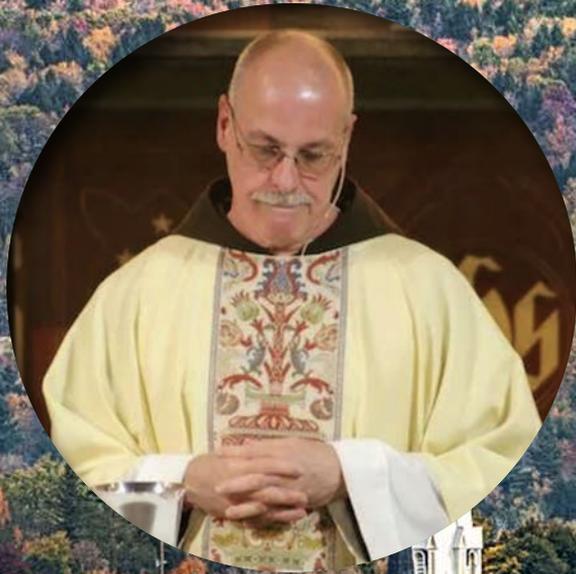


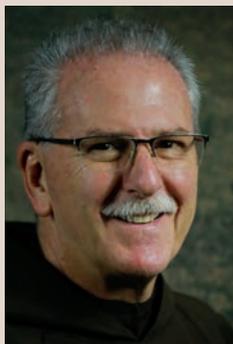
# the Capuchin Journey

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



Serving the Church  
in Southern Vermont

## From the Provincial Minister



Peace and every blessing to you and your families during this wonderful season of joy! From Thanksgiving through Advent to the celebrations of Christmas and a new year of grace—may these days be filled with a new hope and an awareness of the presence of Christ in your life each day!

One of my responsibilities as provincial minister of the Province of St. Mary is to make a formal visit to each friar in each of our fraternities and ministries. These visitations include praying with the friars, enjoying their company, and sharing a meal and recreation with them. Visitation gives each friar the opportunity to speak one-on-one with the provincial minister to share any concerns, special requests, or needs; offer suggestions about the life of the Province; and to relate pertinent, often very personal, information that the brothers wish to confide with me.

Our provincial territory extends from Port Jefferson, N.Y., to Falmouth, Me. Outside of the continental United States, it also includes the delegation of Guam and Hawaii, the delegation of Japan, and the Custody of Our Lady of Hope in Central America, comprised of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. I have enjoyed my visits thus far with the brothers, learning more about them individually and about their fraternal and ministerial experiences. May I share with you a few reflections on my visitations thus far?

Our brothers love being friars! They are deeply committed to a strong prayer life. This includes praying morning and evening prayer together, communal meditation, Eucharistic adoration, recitation of the rosary, and more. You can be sure

that in our community prayers we regularly remember you—our extended family, benefactors, and friends.

Our brothers are doing well in observing the call to live simply and humbly, in fraternity, and to be good stewards of the many blessings God has bestowed on us. Their gratitude finds expression in their willingness to serve God's people in so many different ways. The friars are willing to share the many responsibilities associated with fraternal living: shopping, cooking, cleaning, and maintaining facilities. In our increasingly materialistic society, which lauds autonomy and individualism and frowns upon interdependence and holding things in common, we are reminded by the Sacred Scriptures and our Capuchin *Constitutions* that bearing witness to a simple way of life, in community, is still possible!

Our friars are actively engaged and find tremendous satisfaction in serving the materially and spiritually poor through Capuchin Mobile Ministries, our food pantries, our refugee ministries, and our hospital ministries, to name a few.

The friars embrace the mission of evangelization, sharing the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They enjoy teaching, preaching, working with teens and young adults, and collaborating with other religious and lay men and women. Our priest friars love celebrating the sacraments and bringing people of all ages closer to God.

We depend heavily on your prayerful support, spiritual companionship, and kind generosity. And so this is a perfect time of the year to thank you, most sincerely, on behalf of all the friars in the Province of St. Mary for being so much a part of who we are and what we do. You certainly share in our joy as you help us to share our Franciscan charisms each and every day. May God bless you and yours in abundance!

*Fr. 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

# the Capuchin Journey

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

## Features

8

'Do Not Be Afraid to Be Generous'  
Br. Tino Arias on Being a General Councilor

10

Serving the Church in Southern Vermont  
A Story of Faith and Community

14

Feliz Navidad  
Memories of Preparation for Christmas

16

Seasonal Poetry

## Departments

4

Around the Province

19

Directory



Cover: Fr. Maurice Moreau and Fr. Richard Crawley are pastors at several parishes in the Diocese of Burlington in southern Vermont.

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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



## Br. Eugene Sheehan, Pillar of St. Pius, Dies at 81

Br. Eugene Sheehan, who gave his very best to God, the Church, and his Capuchin brothers at St. Pius X in Middletown, Conn., for four decades, died on Nov. 4 in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. He was 81.

“God’s pleasure, forever and always, is to take a human being and use them as an instrument of blessing. And God used Eugene Sheehan. God had great pleasure in using him,” said Fr. Martin Curtin in his homily at the funeral, which drew about 170 people to St. Pius on Nov. 11.

James Sheehan was born in Brooklyn and attended public and parochial schools in Woodside and Maspeth, N.Y., before graduating from Glencllyffe, the Capuchin minor seminary in Garrison, N.Y., in 1961. Received as a lay brother candidate later that year, he began a canonical postulancy on Oct. 4, 1961. Serious back pain forced him to withdraw in August 1962. After his recovery, he was readmitted to the Order and was invested as a novice on March 18, 1965. He made his perpetual profession of vows on March 19, 1969.

For the rest of his life, Brother Eugene fulfilled the ministry of a traditional lay brother, serving his brothers as tailor, cook, porter, in the laundry shop, and as maintenance man. From 1966 to 1981 he performed these tasks in various fraternities around the Province, including Mary Immaculate Friary, Garrison; St. Anthony Friary, Hudson, N.H.; St. Lawrence Friary, Milton, Mass.; and Sacred Heart Friary, Yonkers, N.Y.

In August 1981, Brother Eugene took up residence at St. Pius X Friary and Parish in Middletown, where he would remain for the next 37 years as provincial tailor and parochial assistant. He would endear himself to generations of Middletown parishioners and to the many friars who lived with him.

Brother Eugene’s fingerprints, said Br. Lake Herman, were on almost every one of St. Pius’ social and fundraising activities: the Sunday coffee socials, the bingo games, the Lenten fish dinners, the parish auction, the golf outing, and many others. He supervised the lay employees and teenagers who worked in the parish office, opened the door, and answered the telephone. He developed close relationships



with the religious brothers and sisters who taught at Xavier and Mercy High School in Middletown and was an advocate for the students. He befriended the local clergy, staying in touch with many of them after they moved on. He kept his eye on young families as they had children and watched as those children grew up, married, and had their own children.

He was no less devoted to his fellow brothers. After all, as provincial tailor, his fingerprints were literally on every habit they wore. “He loved serving the brothers in that capacity,” said Brother Lake. “It was quiet and unassuming work, and yet in every friary he lived in, the tailor shop became like the town square. Everyone seemed to gather there as he did his work.” At the friary dinner table, he would follow the friars’ stories and chime in to fill in the gaps in their chronicles. “Eugene paid attention. He listened. He was a brother,” Brother Lake said.

Brother Eugene moved to St. Clare Friary, Yonkers, N.Y., in June 2018 and resided there until shortly before his death.

He always carried out his duties with courtesy and graciousness, even as he struggled in later years with many health issues. “Eugene was a model of long-suffering,” said Brother Lake at the wake service at St. Pius on Nov. 10. “His health issues plagued him and grew progressively worse since he entered the Order. He had his rough edges. And yet he had a ferocious love for God, for the Capuchin way of life, for his family, and for all of you.”

# Franciscans Engage Elected Officials



Br. Anthony Zuba (left) and Fr. Thomas Franks (right) with Franciscan Br. James LaGrutta, Conventual Fr. Michael Lasky, and Franciscan Fr. Jacek Orzechowski at the Franciscan Justice Leadership Conference.

The Province of St. Mary supports the Franciscan Action Network (FAN), which mobilizes the Franciscan family at its grass roots to work for justice, peace, and care for creation. Two of our friars attended FAN's leadership conference in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 12-15 that culminated in 21 congressional meetings led by Franciscan college students and religious communities.

Conference participants included more than 100 students from seven Franciscan colleges, campus ministers, volunteers from Franciscan ministries, friars, sisters, Secular Franciscans, and members of Franciscan Justice Circles, local groups supported by the Franciscan Action Network. The conference attendees formed delegations that met with the staff of House and Senate members from both parties. They asked their representatives for their support for two pieces of legislation: the assault weapons ban and a part of the Farm Bill that protects workers suffering from heat-induced illness.

"Conference participants set aside the sharp, partisan style of communication that prevails in the United States

these days and instead used self-discipline to engage with members of Congress in a Franciscan style that is courteous and humble while also committed to the gospel value of loving our neighbors," said Michele Dunne, the executive director of FAN and a Secular Franciscan.

Fr. Thomas Franks, the vice president of mission integration at Felician University, Lodi, N.J., brought three students to the Franciscan Justice Leadership Conference. Br. Anthony Zuba, chair of the provincial JPIC commission, also attended. The Province, which is an institutional member of FAN, also provided a grant to underwrite the conference and enable so many young adults to come to Washington.

"Thank you to the participants for your dedication and to the Franciscan colleges, service organizations, and many religious communities who attended and supported the gathering with funding. We look forward to continuing this journey together," Dunne said.

## Focus on Faithful Citizenship



At a time when Americans find it difficult to express their political views to others who disagree with them, the friars have been practicing how to have a

constructive dialogue over issues that matter. In September and October, during the peak of the 2024 election season, the friars gathered for online meetings to talk about critical issues

like immigration, the economy, the climate crisis, respect for life, gun violence, and our democratic institutions. To guide their reflections, they applied the principles of Catholic social teaching and the U.S. Catholic bishops' catechetical letter, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.

We thank all our brothers who participated in these forums. Special thanks to Fr. Jack Rathschmidt and Fr. John McHugh for organizing the forums, and to our presenters Fr. Benedict Ayodi, Fr. Brendan Buckley, Fr. Salvatore Cordaro, Fr. David Couturier, Fr. John Gallagher, Fr. Scott Leet, Fr. Will Tarraza, and Fr. William Winters.

# Helping Refugee Families in Westchester



An ad hoc group of friars continues to quietly help newly arrived refugee families that are resettling in Westchester County and the metro New York area.

The Province began its collaboration with Hearts & Homes for Refugees, an interfaith non-profit from Pelham, N.Y., in 2018. Over the years, we have provided short-term material aid to families that the U.S. government has welcomed here from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Ukraine, as well as a few countries from Central America. We have provided everything from store gift cards and MetroCard passes to clothing, computers, home furnishings, hygiene items, medical equipment, and temporary rental assistance. In all, we have provided thousands of dollars' worth of material aid to at least a dozen families.

Currently, we are supporting a family of seven from Afghanistan that has found a home in Elmsford, N.Y., next to White Plains. The family is here on a Special Immigrant Visa that they were granted because of the services they rendered in support of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. To date, we have donated about \$300.00 in debit cards and MetroCards, and we purchased another \$230.00 in home furnishings, including a prayer rug. We thank our ad hoc team of **Fr. John McHugh**, **Fr. Jack Rathschmidt**, **Br. Terence Taffe**, and **Br. Anthony Zuba**

for coordinating the delivery of material assistance. In addition, Brother Anthony is working with the cohort of lay volunteers from Hearts & Homes for Refugees to find employment for the father and show the family how to use public transportation as they apply for driver's licenses.

Also, Father John has worked with **Fr. Robert Abbatiello** and Sacred Heart High School to involve the students in Hearts & Homes for Refugees. With the support of Kyle O'Donnell and Georgina Nieves, the principal and assistant principal, the students are forming an extracurricular club, Students for Refugees, to welcome and support newly arrived families.

Also, thanks to Father Robert and Father John, the former convent for the Sisters of St. Agnes (who used to teach in the grade school and high school) has been repurposed as a temporary storage space for furniture and other household items collected by Hearts & Homes for Refugees. These items are held here until just-arrived families are ready to move into their new homes.

To support the provincial refugee ministry, please send donations to the Province of St. Mary, Mission & Development Office, 110 Shonnard Place, Yonkers, NY 10703, and write "Provincial Refugee Ministry" in the memo line of your check. Thank you.

## Bringing Padre Pio to Guamanian Diaspora



Fr. Eric Forbes celebrated the Eucharist and gave a presentation on St. Pio of Pietrelcina for the Guamanian community at St. James Church, Redondo Beach, Calif., on Oct. 19.

Fr. Eric Forbes ministers to the Chamorro people both on Guam and in the continental United States. He led a 2-hour presentation on the life of St. Pio of Pietrelcina for 170 parishioners gathered at St. James Church in Redondo Beach, Calif., on Oct. 19. His presentation was preceded by a celebration of the Eucharist and veneration of Padre

Pio's relic. Father Eric also celebrated a Mass for the sick on Oct. 26 at the Guam Club in San Diego, with the veneration of a relic of St. Pio. On Oct. 28, he celebrated another Mass on the feast of St. Jude, the patron of the village of Sinajana on Guam, also at the Guam Club in San Diego.

# Friars at the United Nations

Franciscans International, the voice of the Franciscan family at the United Nations, assembled in New York City this fall. They held board meetings, had encounters with UN officials, and shared fellowship with local Franciscans.

The board of directors and two staff members met with Amina Mohammad, deputy secretary-general of the United Nations, on Nov. 13. In attendance were **Fr. Benedict Ayodi**, who serves on the international board of directors, and **Br. James Donegan**, who serves on the NYC staff as the liaison officer. During this meeting, Franciscans International had the opportunity to discuss the role of faith-based NGOs at the UN, particularly with respect to human rights and the environment. The next day, Franciscans International



**Fr. Benedict Ayodi** (second from right) and the international board of directors of Franciscans International.

hosted an event at St. Francis of Assisi Church in midtown Manhattan with local Franciscans and with members of other religious NGOs at the UN.



## Oktoberfest in Vermont

On Oct. 27, the parishioners of St. Bridget, St. Dominic, and St. Stanislaus in Proctor and West Rutland, Vt., treated themselves and members of the community to a feast of German cuisine. **Fr. Richard Crawley**, the pastor, took charge of the decorations, and the parishioners and volunteers prepared the food. Nearly 100 people were in attendance, including former parishioners who traveled in from other states and regions of Vermont. The dinner was a special treat, as it was the parishes' first social function post-Covid. All were grateful for the revival of Oktoberfest, an autumn tradition that was much missed.

Read more about our ministries in Vermont on Page 10.

**Fr. Richard Crawley** presents traditional Bavarian pretzels.



**Fr. Paul Karun Mascarnas** (standing left) celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Catholic parish in Mine, Japan.

## Golden Jubilee for Japanese Parish

Our brother in the Delegation of Japan, **Fr. Paul Karun Mascarnas**, celebrated the 50th anniversary of the parish at Mine, Yamaguchi Prefecture, on Nov. 10. Bishop Mario Yamanouchi Michiaki of the Diocese of Saitama celebrated the Mass of thanksgiving, during which he conferred the sacrament of confirmation on five candidates and gave first Holy Communion to two children. Father Paul is a friar of the Holy Trinity Province, Karnataka, India, which has 10 friars working in our Japanese mission.

# ‘Do Not Be Afraid to Be Generous’

## Br. Tino Arias Reflects on Being a General Councilor

In August, Br. Celestino Arias finished his six-year term on the general council of the Capuchin Friars Minor, which helps the general minister of the Order to govern the global Capuchin fraternity. He represented the North American and Pacific Capuchin Conference while also being a voice for friars in rapidly growing jurisdictions of the Order in Africa and Asia.

Brother Tino, who lived at the Capuchin general curia in Rome, has now rejoined his brothers in the Province. He is eager to see what God has in store for him in the next phase of his Capuchin vocation. He sat with *The Capuchin Journey* for a conversation on Nov. 13 to reflect on his service to the Order. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

### Tell us about some of the Capuchin general council's most significant decisions during your term.

The first one is having the pan-American Capuchin gatherings. We wanted to bring together all the Capuchins of the Americas, from Argentina to Quebec. We came together to look at challenges, to look at strengths, and try to create a common vision for the future. And the reason we focused on the Americas is because the Order for the longest time has been centered in Italy and in Western Europe. And it's no secret that the Church in Europe is going through a crisis. Italy went from 24 provinces to less than 12. Huge provinces like Holland, Belgium, and Austria are now just custodies. England is just a delegation. But we see that there is enough life in the Americas. We can't keep looking to Europe for leadership. We have to create leadership.

[The gatherings] helped break down barriers... There were all these stereotypes, but when we came together to pray, [and] everyone got a chance to participate, it was really a beautiful example of our fraternal spirit. Things are happening now that weren't before. There is now a collaboration between Haiti and Quebec, the only two French-speaking circumscriptions in the Americas. Mexico and some Northern American provinces are going to create a house right on the U.S.-Mexico border. The migration crisis is huge, and what a beautiful testament—Mexican friars and American friars living, praying, and ministering together.

Now every three years, we'll have this gathering, which I think is a great testament to that process.



Br. Tino Arias (left) at the convent of Renacavata, the birthplace of the Capuchin Order, in Camerino, Italy.

The other thing that we have been pushing that I think is very positive is fraternal collaboration. And that's something that I think the Americas, and especially North America, are doing particularly well. We don't just accept friars from India, from Africa, and other places, but we also really integrate them. We've had two provincial ministers now who were Indian-born friars. Almost every single provincial council has at least one or two friars from India, from Africa. They're really integrated. They're involved in formation. We have pastors. And that's giving us a second chance. Fraternal collaboration is really giving us a second chance.

### What were your distinctive contributions to the work of the general council?

I've been involved in the Capuchins' international solidarity office for 15 years. So I've made a lot of connections, contacts. I have a lot of knowledge of the Order beyond, in developing countries. I've lived in Africa, I've lived in Brazil. In many ways, I've been able to give voice not just to North America but also to parts of the Order that in some ways are underrepresented. There are so many friars in those parts of the world. When I was elected, when people came to congratulate me, one of the first to get in line were the Africans.

Languages help. I didn't just do visitations to North America. For example, Angola is African but Portuguese-speaking. Neither of the African general councilors speaks Portuguese. Since I speak Portuguese, I did the Angola visitation. For Chile, they needed an economic visitation. The general councilor for Latin America didn't have the experience with economic solidarity that I did, so I was able to do that visitation. So in a way I was able to expand my role beyond general council meetings, technical meetings, visitations, and provincial chapters.

### Describe what it was like to work with the other friars on the general council.

It was challenging. We were being too reactionary. A problem would come, and we would react to it. That seemed to be the

dynamic for two years, until Covid. Then during Covid we came up with this new model of collaborating. Covid really helped create this new spirit of councilors working together.

### **You lived in Rome for six years. What was that like?**

Rome is amazing, and sometimes it is easy to forget! Because you live there and you are not a tourist, you look at the garbage, you look at the potholes, the rats running across the street. Rome is an amazing place, but the municipality, it's horrible! I had a bus that went on fire! But Romans are like New Yorkers; nothing fazes them. The bus driver just pulls to the side of the street; people walked calmly off. But then I'll be walking with one of the friars in the evening, and we'll look down one avenue, and you can see a glimpse of the Colosseum, or you see the tower of Santa Maria Maggiore, and you're like, "Oh, my God!" It's just overwhelming. Every time I walk into Santa Maria Maggiore, I get goosebumps. In the wintertime, you'll get this sunny, blue-blue sky in the middle of winter and you see the Roman pine trees. It's hard to explain.

### **General councilors travel the world to support the Order. Where did you travel during your term?**

My very first visitation was to Chile in November 2018, and there was a sexual abuse crisis going on. Then there were the provincial chapters. I averaged three provincial chapters a year, being the six provinces in the U.S., two in Canada, and Australia, with some interruptions because of Covid. After Covid, it was back-to-back visits, so I was in Australia twice last year. It was my very first time in Quebec. I was able to do visitations of Quebec, New Jersey, Toronto, California. I did travel to Czestochowa, Poland, for the first pan-European Capuchin gathering. That was an experience. And, of course, the pan-American gatherings in Brazil and Colombia. In January 2019, before Covid, the pope had an interfaith religious dialogue meeting in the United Arab Emirates, and the general minister invited me to go with him to translate.

### **What aspects of being a general councilor did you enjoy the most?**

Hands down, visitation. Getting to meet friars where they live, pray, work, and minister is such a gift. I really didn't know California, I didn't know Quebec, I didn't know Australia, I certainly didn't know Chile and Angola. To be able to listen is what visitation is about, to listen, to see what life is like for the friars, to hear them. The general minister and council would take this seriously. I would write reports, 15, 20 pages, and the general council would sit there reading them, word for word, and then we would have to make decisions. Hands down, visitation is the most important work, and for me also the most enjoyable.

### **What aspects of your job were most challenging?**

General council is challenging. You sit there for two weeks, listening. Hearing Italian for two weeks straight was difficult. The problems come to us, and that is part of what leadership has to do, is deal with friars leaving, there's scandal, and that

can get very taxing. We had a particularly hard meeting, and one friar said, "Oh, the Saturday after, we're going to spend the day at Montecasale in La Verna!" And I said, "Yes, please!" You want to be reminded why you're doing this—root yourself in Francis and our charism. I think it is important to keep that in mind; it is not just the problems.

### **How has being a general councilor shaped your own Capuchin vocation?**

I think it's really given me the bigger picture. Being provincial, it's natural, it's common. We live in our province. But as I look what's happening in Europe, I ask, is it important that there is a Quebec province, or is it important that there's Capuchins in Quebec? Is it important that there's a New York-New England province, or is it important that we have Capuchins in New York and New England? The important thing is to have healthy, happy friars in New York, in New England, in Quebec, in Mexico. That's the goal. Perpetuating our life, our way of seeing the Gospel, that's the goal. If friars have to come from India to help us, God bless. If they need me to go to India, we should be open to that. We are Capuchins and we are keeping this beautiful vision, this dream, this charism, alive.

### **What is next for you?**

You tell me! Right now, one of the reasons I asked not to be considered for re-election to the general council was the health of my elderly parents. I had wanted a sabbatical time, but because of my parents' health, it is not the time for it. Whatever happens, I believe the provincial council will be kind, and whatever they assign me will still allow me a decent amount of time as my parents make this transition.

My friends, my godsons, my family get upset sometimes when they ask, "Oh, where do you want to go?" And I've stopped trying to guess! In fact, guessing or wanting sometimes is counterproductive. My second assignment, I went kicking and screaming because I had been promised I could stay at my favorite assignment in Brooklyn. But I went to Boston, and it ended up becoming the greatest experience of my life. So I'm more than open to receiving my obedience because I know that whatever I think isn't going to be half as good as what God has planned.

### **Please add anything else you think is important for our supporters to know.**

Do not be afraid to be generous. I think it is natural in times of challenge to want to hold on to what we have. But generosity really does come back, maybe not in the way you expect. Years ago, all this money was going out to India and to Africa from our mission office. It was just being seen as our duty. We didn't realize that 20 or 30 years later, it would mean we could have 80 to 100 Indian friars helping us in the Americas. If we are generous now, I can't promise you how it's going to come back to us, but I'm convinced that it will.

There is so much good will out there for us. Brothers look up to us. We are leaders in many ways.

# Serving the Church in Southern Vermont

A Story of Faith and Community



**T**he Capuchins have nestled in the foothills of the Green Mountains in southern Vermont for over 18 years. Here, in one of the most challenging mission fields of the Catholic Church in the United States, they have been quietly answering the call to serve the faithful.

Vermont, like many Northeastern states, has witnessed a decrease in its Catholic population because of migration and secularization. In 1978, it was home to over 161,000 Catholics, representing more than a third of the state's population. By 2023, that number had fallen to 110,000. While the drop in the number of baptized is notable, the decline in the number of priests available to serve them poses an even greater challenge. In 2023, the Diocese of Burlington, which covers all of Vermont, reported 36 active diocesan priests, 44 permanent deacons, and 15 religious priests. They are tasked with ministering to 68 parishes across the state.

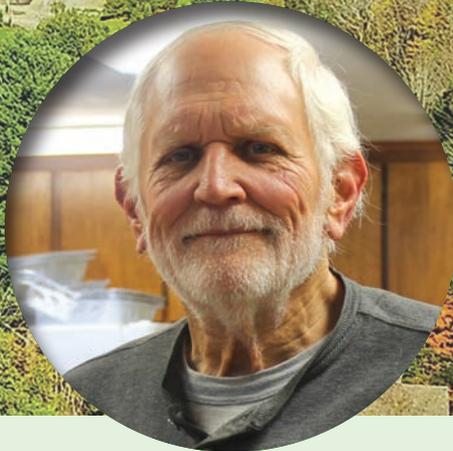
Into a region of the Diocese of Burlington where these demographic changes and shifts in church attendance have been acute, the friars stepped in. Their service has had an impact on the lives of the faithful and the parishes they call home.

## Two Parishes

The first Capuchins came to southern Vermont in 2006 at the invitation of Bishop Salvatore Matano. He sought to avoid parish closures wherever possible and instituted plans to combine parishes and create alternate Mass schedules. He looked beyond the pool of available diocesan priests by reaching out to religious congregations like the Capuchins for help. (Bishop John McDermott, who was installed in July, has followed the lead of his predecessors.)

Initially, the friars took charge of two parishes: St. Peter in Rutland and St. Dominic in Proctor. St. Peter, one of the oldest parishes in the region, was founded over 150 years ago and remains the mother parish of the area. St. Dominic was founded in 1925 to serve a largely Italian immigrant community. Several of our priest friars took up residence in Vermont, including Fr. Theodosius Corley, Fr. Thomas Houle, Fr. Michael Ramos, and Fr. Raynold Thibodeau, as well as lay brothers Br. Timothy Jones and Br. Joseph Yakimovich. All of them brought their unique ministerial gifts to the people of God.

Recently, three friars took on the yeoman's work to sustain the region's parochial communities: Fr. Richard



Crawley, Fr. Maurice Moreau, and Fr. John Tokaz. Arriving in 2015, Father Moe took on the parishes of Our Lady of Good Help-St. Mary in Brandon and St. Alphonsus in Pittsford. Father John succeeded Father Tom as pastor at St. Peter in 2020 and became guardian of the friary. He and Father Moe also provided pastoral and spiritual care at two other parishes.

In 2023, the diocese and the Province decided that the friars would assume the pastoral and administrative responsibilities for St. Bridget and St. Stanislaus parishes in West Rutland and return to St. Dominic in Proctor. Father Richard, who ministered in Vermont a decade earlier, was named the administrator of these parishes.

Father Moe became guardian of the fraternity in Rutland while he continued his service as pastor of St. Alphonsus, Pittsford, and Our Lady of Good Help, Brandon. Father John continued ministering as pastor of St. Peter until 2024, when he retired from active ministry. Father Moe then became the pastor at St. Peter as well.

The obstacles facing the six parishes under Father Moe and Father Richard’s care are logistical, emotional, and

spiritual. Many of these parishes have seen their numbers dwindle, with several undergoing mergers in recent years. The process of combining parishes can create anxiety and uncertainty, but the Capuchins have worked tirelessly to help their communities make the transition smoothly.

### Two Shepherds, Six Flocks

Managing six parishes with only two priests might seem like an insurmountable challenge, but for Father Moe and Father Richard, it is a calling they approach with joy, humility, and an unwavering commitment to the Gospel.

The friars preside at Mass at each of the churches and supervise the religious education programs. They celebrate all the funerals and weddings and any other special events that fall outside the normal schedule of liturgical life. Barb Kahler, the sacristan and a 15-year parishioner at St. Alphonsus, marvels at the ease with which Father Moe approaches his work. “Father Moe is so approachable, always in a good mood and always moving. He does every little thing in the church, even installing the carpeting,” she says. “But the greatest gift of these Capuchins is how they interact with us. They’re just special.”



Clockwise from top left: St. Alphonsus parish sacristans Elaine Ryan (left) and Barb Kahler; Father Richard greets parishioners outside of St. Bridget after Sunday Mass; Long-time St. Peter parishioners (from left) Joe Barbagallo with George and Cheryl Hooker; Father Moe working in the kitchen.

Another parishioner agreed. “Even on his down time, Father Moe is working for the parish,” said 20-year parishioner Elaine Ryan. “He paints rooms in the parish, he cooks for the parish council, and because he worked as a florist, he even manages all the flower beds. When we arrange flowers for the altar, he comes in, rearranges things, and always makes it better. These guys are always making it better!”

“School was never my thing. I just can’t sit still that long!” said Father Moe with a laugh. “I feel suited to this. I became a Capuchin to live in fraternity, and a priest to do parish work.

“This assignment is the best of both worlds for me. I feel I have been placed where I belong.”

Father Richard feels the same way. From a young age, he was drawn in by the life of St. Francis of Assisi and by Franciscan spirituality. He feels that as Capuchins, he and his brother friars are uniquely suited to take on the rigors of this assignment. “We’ve received a kind of formation and training as Capuchins that uniquely prepare us for this role,” he said.

Franciscans are found all over the world, and they embrace all peoples and cultures. Father Richard honors the history of the Irish, Italian, and Polish communities that were the bedrock of his churches. For example, he wore vestments bearing the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa, patroness of Poland, for the funeral of a long-time parishioner of St. Stanislaus. “I believe it is important to do little things well,” he says.

### Community Ministry; Fun and Games

Beyond the parishes, the friars have taken on ministries that serve the southern Vermont region. Joseph Meyers, a 25-year parishioner at Our Lady of Good Help who works at a nursing facility, reports: “They have brought the Mass to the Genesis Health Care Center, where I work, for the first time in years.” They can also often be seen ministering at the hospital.

The friars encourage parishioners to engage in outreach ministries that benefit the community. The faithful at St. Alphonsus gather groceries that are distributed to the needy through a regional food pantry called The Food Shelf. In



Clockwise from top left: Father Richard, the 'holy goalie,' hits the ice; Father Moe counting the bingo proceeds; father and son Jon (right) and Jeff Carrara working bingo night; Father Richard wears vestments honoring Our Lady of Czestochowa; St. Bridget parishioners gather after Mass; Our Lady of Good Help parishioner Marge Munger.

addition to her work as sacristan for the parish, Barb Kahler gives her time and talent to another lay ministry that knits shawls, lap robes, and blankets for the church and for those in need. "The Capuchins encouraged us in these ministries," she said. "Wherever we find a need, we fill it."

The community also comes into the parishes. Every Saturday night, Father Moe runs bingo at the St. Alphonsus parish center. "The proceeds benefit both parishes," says Father Moe. "Plus it's a great activity for the community." Jeff Carrara and his father John help run the evening. "The attendees are a mix of people from within and outside the parishes," Jeff said. "They come together for a fun night with friends, and it's for the good of the parish." Trish Bertino, secretary at Our Lady of Good Help for 8 years, also helps run the weekly bingo game. "The Capuchins have been just wonderful to work with."

In the midst of so much ministerial activity, both Father Moe and Father Richard find time to pursue their own interests. Father Moe happens to love gardening, cooking, and, as he says, "puttering around" the place fixing things.

Father Richard enjoys skating at the ice rink. Sometimes he can be found playing hockey for a local league. His love of the game is such that his parishioners affectionately refer to him as "the holy goalie."

### Reaching the Faithful

It doesn't take much to get parishioners talking about their affection and gratitude for the friars.

Joe Barbagallo, a lifelong parishioner at St. Peter, quipped, "These guys are like the circuit judges in the Old West, only now we have circuit priests. But I thank God we have them."

Outside St. Bridget, a group gathered to chat about the Capuchins. "I love them and the way they serve. They are so down to earth," said Brian McDermott, a parishioner for 49 years.

Marge Munger, a 40-year parishioner at Our Lady of Good Help, expresses a feeling shared by many of the faithful in the region. "I am grateful that the Capuchins have been so generous with these wonderful friars; otherwise, we would probably close our doors. Not to mention that they are the best shepherds a parish could ask for!"

# Feliz Navidad

## Memories of Preparation for Christmas

by Br. Francisco Serrano

**G**rowing up in Mexico, I was privileged to experience my faith deeply embedded in my culture. Christmas stood out as one of the most significant celebrations in my town. Our Catholic identity brought us all together. Even in public schools, we were encouraged to pray and decorate our classrooms, eagerly embracing the joyful anticipation of the Christmas season. Every family in town proudly showcased a nativity scene, displaying their creativity with whatever resources they had. There was an enchanting quality to Christmas, as we creatively mimicked American decorations to capture the magical essence of a winter wonderland. In school, we learned to make paper snowflakes, snowmen, holly branches, and Santa Clauses. Though these traditions were foreign to us—having never experienced snow in our region and Santa never being the one who brought us gifts—we embraced them with enthusiasm and imagination.





Growing up at my grandmother's house, I loved helping her set up the nativity scene. We would go to the outskirts of town to collect natural plants and rocks to decorate the manger. This was very special to me because, from that moment on, there was a unique feeling at my grandmother's house and throughout the entire town. From a young age, I learned that doing something for God required sacrifice and needed to be done to the best of our ability. I understood this as we scouted the outskirts of our town, gathering plants, small rocks, and pebbles to give the manger a natural look. This experience provided me with a palpable opportunity to connect more deeply with the reality of the world that God entered through the Incarnation.

At a young age, I learned to appreciate the simplicity of Jesus and the struggles He endured out of love for me. When the time came to place each figurine in the nativity scene, my grandmother would tell me stories that made the figurines come alive. Each figurine's story was interconnected and transformed by the baby in the manger. Through my grandmother's stories, I realized how special and powerful the baby in the manger was, as His birth brought joy to everyone, including me. My grandmother's house had a certain glow that radiated from the manger, bringing joy to all of us, especially to me. Each year, I became more eager to help set up the nativity scene because the stories touched me differently, to the point where I could see myself in some of the figurines.

In preparation for Christmas, my whole town celebrated *Las Posadas*, a novena celebration that culminates on the 24th with the midnight Mass. For nine days, all the kids in town were invited to celebrate *Las Posadas*, starting at the church with prayers of the rosary. After the rosary, we were divided into groups based on our neighborhoods to go to the house that was hosting the celebration that night. Three kids from each group were chosen to dress up as

Joseph, Mary, and the angel, who accompanied them on their journey to Bethlehem. The walk from the church to the host house gave us a sense of the long, cold, and difficult journey the Holy Family endured in search of a place to give birth to the baby Jesus.

Among us kids, everyone wanted to be one of the three who dressed up, because the family hosting the celebration treated them especially well. The family hosting felt honored that the Holy Family had "visited" their home. This celebration taught me so much, as it was another way to retell the story of the Holy Family through songs, Bible readings, and prayers. The *Posadas* represent the story of Joseph going from inn to inn in Bethlehem, searching for a place for the Blessed Mother to give birth. All the inns were full and indifferent, even when Joseph explained who they were and who the baby in the womb was.

This story deeply moved me because I realized how much rejection the Blessed Family faced from their people. It served as a wake-up call to the reality of how cruel people can be to those in need. Yet, at the same time, we sang a song where we offered our hearts as a place for the baby to be born. Even though I was young and did not fully understand what that meant, I knew I was offering to be Jesus' friend. This celebration highlighted values that were deeply ingrained in the fabric of my town. People were more hospitable and charitable, fostering a sense of unity and joyful hope as we awaited the Christmas season. People shared the little they had, and we were grateful for the small bag of candy we received.

Living in a small town of about 10,000 people, we shared many commonalities—not just in faith and culture but also in family stories. This is something I treasure, especially now that I live in America and have experienced cities like New York and Boston. Often, I do not even know who my neighbors are. There is something special and meaningful in being able to share your joys and sorrows not only with those who live with you but also with your neighbors.

I pray and hope that this Christmas will be a time for us to share the joy brought by the birth of the baby who has transformed the lives of so many. May this season inspire us to renew and share our Christian values and morals with those around us.



# Seasonal Poetry

by Fr. Robert Phelps

## Christmas 2020

There is nothing sweet about this December  
colorless gray. Remember the indifferent wind,  
that blew without sympathy in a past  
as dark as this day, on the huddled sheep,  
lying in a rocky stretch between  
anemic plots of wild grass.

And their shepherds: remember them,  
numbed on the hillsides of Bethlehem,  
cursing its blow.

You could line your bird cage  
with the saccharine Hallmarks  
about a shiny silvered Santa ho-ho world,  
as fictional as Disney's red nose Rudolph...  
Today is about Divinity being emptied out,  
and taking the form of a slave.

Nothing sweet about this day.

It was what was necessary for love.  
She, the little girl from Nazareth,  
in way over her head, offers him her breast  
her milk  
her love  
her fifteen-year-old life  
her days ahead.

A future blind now to her.

She won't change her mind even when she  
is on the agony road with him...

And when she has to hold him dead,  
as she now holds him nourished  
by her fiat and her milk.

There is nothing sweet  
about this gray December day.

But ah... there is glory.

In the highest, there is glory.

## The Visitation

Five days from Nazareth, driven by the words of an angel,  
young Miriam has trudged up miles of unforgiving incline;  
tired, pregnant, hungry.

A frail young girl, she touches reverently the mezuzah  
above the door of Casa Zechariah,

kisses the two fingers,  
call out her "Shalom,"

and falls into the arms of her aunt; overcome, weeping.

Elderly Elizabeth, wondrous with her blessing,

holds the girl in her arms with the reverence

of one carrying the ark, as the boy growing impossibly

within her dances in a liturgy of wonder and joy.

The not-yet prophet dances before the not-yet  
fulfillment of his prophecy.

## Epiphany

Night's dark has colors too shy to be shown,  
that render colorful the black of darkness,  
as black covers black in the depth of sky.

If you open your eyes as wide as you can...

only a suggestion or a refraction of a pin of light  
that colors dimly the stable.

But the night is glad for it,

and so are the tired travelers

who have found the child;

and finding him, sense that it is they

who have been found.

## Mother Mary

Sometimes, like a half-remembered fragrance,  
like smiles in a half-faded photograph,  
like the melody of a song hummed  
all through the night,  
like an unexpected gift,  
like a peek through the trees at the moon's light;  
like the sun capping the earth  
with the promise of morning,  
like the feverish hug of forgiveness,  
like the eyes of a little girl  
on the knitting hands of grandmother,  
like the fingertips of lovers  
at the love touch aborning,  
like the finches that settle  
on my mother's tombstone,  
like waking hungry from a fever's rack,  
like knowing that Christ sits with me in my car,  
like the embrace of cool wind on my back;  
like the loving darkness that wishes me well,  
like a kiss on my cheek,  
like sweet tears that well into my eyes are you,  
are you, O gentle, meek mother of my days.

Are you, with arms bigger than Siberia,  
and voice smaller than a confessional whisper.  
Are you, sweet mama for the days  
when I lose my hope, with your smile  
that burns away clouds and  
creates a hole in the earth from Dubuque to Shanghai.  
Who holds your Son in the crook of your arm  
and with your free hand walks me around,  
your adopted second child;  
a baby boy sick already with sophistication,  
and the consumption of consumption.  
You gently walk with me,  
a mother walk away from the dark to the light.  
Mother who laughs at my pretenses,  
a pierced heart mother laugh;  
a sounds-like-her-son's laugh,  
laughing at all that comes with the night.

*Fr. Robert Phelps' latest book of poetry is 100 Pictures  
(New York: Lion Autumn Music Publishing, 2024).*





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