

Franciscans 1209

The Capuchin Franciscans trace their heritage back 800 years to the little poor man of Assisi, whom history knows as perhaps the most clear imitator of Jesus Christ. St. Francis of Assisi followed Jesus' footsteps so closely and loved humanity and all creation so deeply that he is known as "the universal saint." He began the Franciscans – the Order of Friars Minor, literally "lesser brothers" – in 1209 and quickly gave them a Rule of Life, which the Pope orally approved that same year. Along with St. Clare of Assisi, Francis co-founded the Poor Clares and established the Secular Franciscan Order.

The Capuchin Reform

The Capuchin Franciscan Order began in 1528 as a renewal of the Order of Friars Minor. The friars of this reform movement wanted a life more focused on prayer and a stricter observance of poverty. These men were also fervent preachers of the Gospel and compassionate servants of the sick and suffering in their day. Attracting followers through their preaching, prayer, austerity, and service among the poor, the new reform movement grew rapidly and soon spread throughout all of Europe. The Capuchin Reform movement was given official approval by the Church in Pope Clement VII's Papal Bull, *Religionis Zelus*. The Capuchins were established as an independent order within the Franciscan Family.

The Capuchins truly captured the hearts of the people when the Black Plague struck Western Europe killing millions. While many of the clergy and religious fled the catastrophe, the Capuchins remained to care for the people. Over 2,000 friars died from the plague as Martyrs of Charity. Today, the Capuchins number about 10,500 friars worldwide.

The Capuchin Province of St. Conrad

For those who would like to know more about the Capuchin Province of St. Conrad, the following provides a detailed history of the Capuchin Franciscans in the territory of Mid-America. This history was written by Fr. Blaine Burkey, O.F.M.Cap.

A Pre-History 1772-1977

Capuchins first came to Mid-America in the late colonial period. The earliest European settlers in this area included FRENCH Capuchins who served as the first Catholic pastors of St. Louis. Fr. Valentin of Neufchateau, O.F.M.Cap., was there already in 1772, and that same year Fr. Hilaire of Genevaux, O.F.M.Cap.—the first prothonotary apostolic in what is now the U.S.—became pastor of nearby Ste. Genevieve.

When Valentine left in 1775, Hilaire cared for the St. Louisans until the 1776 arrival of Fr. Bernard of Limpach, O.F.M.Cap., from the BELGIAN Province. Bernard cared for not only St. Louis, but also Florissant, Carondelet, St. Charles, and Portage des Sioux. He was there until 1789.

IRISH Capuchin Thomas Flynn also had the care of St. Louis and its dependencies from 1806 till 1808.

It was 69 years then till the friars returned to Mid-America. RHINE-WESTPHALIAN Capuchins from

Cumberland MD, were the first to come. Anton Schuermann and six other friars took over the care of St. Mary's Parish, Metamora, IL, on July 25, 1877; and in the spring of the following year, the Westphalian Capuchins also took charge of Sacred Heart Parish in Peoria.

That same spring, BAVARIAN Capuchin Hyacinth Epp, who had led a group of Capuchins to Pittsburgh, PA, in 1873, visited the Volga-German settlements in western Kansas; and in May, 1878, he sent Matthew Hau and Anastasius Joseph Mueller to Victoria KS to begin St. Fidelis Friary and care for all the Catholic stations between Russell and the Colorado border.

The Bavarian and Westphalian Capuchins in the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA joined forces in 1881, and on July 16, 1882, Pope Leo XIII authorized the establishment of the Capuchin Province of Pennsylvania. Thus on August 7 of that year the Pennsylvania Province became one of the first two Capuchin provinces outside of Europe. The other was the Capuchin Province of Calvary, which while begun as a community already in the 1850s, was established as a province the very same day.

Beginning of St. Conrad's Province (1977)

For the next 95 years, Mid-America was part of the Pennsylvania Province which extended from the East coast to the Kansas-Colorado border, a distance of over 1,500 miles. Already as early as 1915, there was talk of dividing the province into two more manageable-sized territories.

This began to take form Feb. 6, 1963 when Colorado was added to the province's territory because of "the possible eventual need of additional metropolitan areas if the western part of the Pennsylvania Province is ever to be raised to the status of a province." The request for this was made by a provincial council on which the first and second councilors had served for many years in the West: Frs. Thomas More Janeck and Alfred Carney.

In February of 1970, this opportunity was advanced by Fr. Thomas More and his definitory, which actually sent the first three friars to serve in Archdiocese of Denver, as well as others to serve in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas.

The following year, a provincial chapter called for study of the pros and cons of division and appointed Fr. Anselm Martin as vice provincial ad experimentum to lead the Order in Mid-America.

The next chapter in 1974 decided to start working toward a division, and in 1975 provincial councilor Fr. Vincent Rohr moved from Pittsburgh to Hays KS to begin the Office of Planning, in which he was assisted by two elected advisors, Frs. Gilmary Tallman and Thomas More Janeck.

Thus it came to pass that on 12 April 1977, the Province of Pennsylvania was dissolved and two new provinces established: the one keeping the name Pennsylvania Province of St. Augustine and the other named the Mid-America Province of St. Conrad.

Friaries in the Mid-America Province at the time were St. Fidelis, Victoria KS (founded in 1878), St. Joseph, Hays KS (1893), St. Mary's, Ellis KS (1918), St. Bonaventure, Hays KS (1938), St. Charles Borromeo, St. Louis (1943), Sacred Heart, Atwood (1952), Annunciation, Denver CO (1970), and Good Shepherd, Shawnee KS (1972)

First Triennium 1977-80

Two days after the establishment of the two new provinces (14 April 1977) the leadership of the new Mid-America province was installed by the general minister, Fr. Paschal Rywalski, at St. Fidelis Church in Victoria ("The Cathedral of the Plains," which had been dedicated in 1911). Fr. Vincent Rohr was appointed first provincial minister, with councilors Frs. Charles Chaput, Daniel Conway, Gilmary Tallman, and Thomas More Janeck; and when Fr. Daniel Conway died in 1978, Fr. Ed Judy filled the vacancy.

Fr. Vincent had served as a councilor of the undivided province, and Fr. Thomas More had earlier been its provincial minister. As convener and first president of the North American Conference (NACC), Thomas More had participated in the 1st Plenary Council of the Order in Quito, Ecuador, in 1971.

Soon after the Mid-America province was established, the friary in Ellis was closed, and new friaries established in Thornton CO and Kansas City MO. The latter, St. Conrad's, became provincial headquarters.

Also during the triennium, Fr. Joseph Schreck was elected vice provincial minister in Puerto Rico (1978); Fr. Berard Tomassetti, one of Mid-America's eleven Papua New Guinea missionaries, was a delegate to the 3rd Plenary Council of the Order at Mattli, Switzerland (1978); and friars in Hays began the New Year's custom of annually "wuensching" the parents of friars from Ellis County (1977).

Every year since 1977, the province has had at least one meeting of all the friars in the province. In 1979, an extraordinary chapter was held to prepare for the first ordinary chapter by adopting a procedure for running the chapter. As the province was considering asking to have universal suffrage at the 1980 ordinary chapter, all were invited to the 1979 chapter and also delegates were chosen following the procedures of the old Pennsylvania Province. Every decision was submitted to two votations: one by the delegates, and one by all the solemnly professed. As it turned out, there was a perfect correspondence between the two sets of votes.

Second Triennium 1980-83

Mid-America's first ordinary chapter (1980), with special permission from the Vatican, was the first one in the entire Order to enjoy universal suffrage. Western America was the second to use it, and at the next general chapter in 1982, the possibility was added to the constitutions. Today the method is in rather common use.

Fr. Vincent Rohr was reelected as provincial in 1980, and Frs. David Gottschalk and Michael Scully replaced Frs. Gilmary and Thomas More as councilors. Frs. Charles Chaput and Ed Judy remained on the council.

During the triennium, the friars in St. Louis moved from St. Charles Borromeo Friary to the new St. Patrick's Friary (2 Aug. 1981), and St. Crispin Friary was begun in St. Louis at 3739 Westminster Pl. (June 1982). Also Fr. Thomas More Janeck began his extensive ministry to migrant workers (1982).

Internationally, Fr. Charles Chaput represented NACC at the 4th Plenary Council of the Order at Rome (1981), and Frs. Vincent Rohr and Dominic Unger participated in the General Chapter there (1982).

Third Triennium 1983-86

Fr. Charles Chaput was elected provincial minister in 1983, and Frs. Gene Emrisek and Earl Meyer replaced him and Fr. Ed on the council. Frs. Dave Gottschalk and Mike Scully remained.

That same year the provincialate was moved from Kansas City to St. Elizabeth Friary in Denver, Fr. Gene moved there a provincial executive secretary and treasurer, a provincial advisory board was established, and Fr. Christopher Popravak began the postulancy program in Kansas City.

Fr. John Lager started the provincial development office in 1984, Fr. Harvey Dinkel became executive secretary in 1985, and the provincial assembly room in Victoria was completed that same year. Since then practically all provincial chapters and assemblies have been held there.

During the triennium, Fr. Simeon Gallagher began his ministry as an itinerant preacher (1983), Fr. Steve Reichert was elected regular superior of the Capuchins in Papua New Guinea (1984), Bro. Joseph McGlynn at Kansas City became the province's first lay guardian (1984).

In 1984, the Province entered into a unique partnership with the Salina Diocese by being co-owners of Thomas More Prep-Marian in Hays.

Also the Catholic Campus Center at Ft. Hays State University was dedicated (17 June 1984), the province accepted the leadership of Samaritan Shelter (1 Sept. 1984), and the postulancy program moved to St. Louis (1985).

Fourth Triennium 1986-89

Fr. Charles Chaput was reelected in 1986, and Fr. Charles Polifka and Bro. Joseph McGlynn replaced Frs. Gene and Mike as councilors. Frs. Dave and Earl remained. Joseph was the first lay friar on the province's council.

The 1986 chapter voted overwhelmingly for a preferential option for the poor and also called for rounding out the Franciscan charism by bringing Capuchin Poor Clares into the province.

Fr. Harvey Dinkel became also provincial treasurer in 1986; and when Fr. Charles Chaput was named Bishop of Rapid City in 1988, Fr. Charles Polifka became acting provincial.

During 1986, friaries in Thornton CO, Atwood KS, and Shawnee KS were closed, the postulancy program moved back to Kansas City, St. Crispin's Friary moved from 3739 to 3727 Westminster Pl., and St. John's Friary was begun in Lawrence KS (15 July). Also during the triennium, the Capuchin Poor Clares arrived from Irupato, Mexico, and began Our Lady of Light Monastery (17 Nov. 1988).

Friars began ministering at Cure d'Ars parish in Denver (1886), St. John's Church, Lawrence (1986), and the Catholic campus center at Haskell Indian Nations University (1986), and the new Samaritan House

was dedicated (20 Nov.).

David Songy was commissioned for service in Papua New Guinea in 1987 and was there till 1994.

Most of the Mid-American friars attended Bishop Chaput's episcopal ordination in Rapid City (26 July 1988),

Fr. Vincent Rohr became the first executive director of NACC (1988), Bro. Mark Schenk was named English-speaking Secretary for the Order's General Curia at Rome (1988), and Fr. Charles Polifka attended the General Chapter at Rome (1988)

Fifth Triennium 1989-1992

Fr. Charles Polifka was elected third provincial minister in 1989, and Frs. Bill Kraus and Gene Emrisek replaced Earl Meyer on the council. Fr. David and Bro. Joseph remained. Later that year, the Poor Clares were encloistered (May 21).

During the triennium, the friars at Lawrence moved into St. Conrad Friary (15 July 1990), Fr. Berard received the 1st Conrad Key of Recognition for his development work in Papua New Guinea (1991), Immaculate Conception Friary was begun at Arnold MO (21 June 1991), the Alverne Chapel (a Capuchin ministry since 1961) closed in St. Louis, and Fr. Canice Froehlich and Fr. Simon Conrad moved their confession ministry to St. John the Evangelist Church (1991).

In Papua New Guinea, Fr. Pete Meis was elected regular superior of the Custody (1990).

Sixth Triennium 1992-95

Fr. Charles Polifka was reelected provincial minister in 1992, and Frs. Felix Petrovsky and Duane Reinert replaced Fr. Gene and Bro. Joseph on the council. Frs. Dave and Bill remained. At the chapter, Bro. Benignus Scarry received the 2nd Conrad Key of Recognition for his work with Habitat for Humanity. At the assembly in 1994, Fr. Thomas More Janeck was given the 3rd Conrad Key for his work with migrant field workers.

During the triennium, St. Elizabeth Friary was closed, the friars and provincialate moved to the new St. Francis of Assisi Friary (1 June 1993), and the first Capuchin Friars' Gala was held (29 Apr. 1994).

Elsewhere, Fr. Peter Meis was named first vice-provincial minister of the Capuchins in Papua New Guinea (11 Feb. 1993), Fr. Charles Polifka and Bro. Joseph McGlynn represented NACC at the first ever (and only) Assembly of the Order at Lublin, Poland (1982), Fr. Charles attended the General Chapter in Rome (1994), and Bro. Mark Schenk was elected vicar of the fraternity of the General Curia in Rome (23 Jan. 1993) and later Acting Secretary General of the Order (1994). Both of these were firsts for a lay friar.

Seventh Triennium 1995-98

Fr. David Gottschalk was elected the fourth provincial minister in 1995, and Frs. Gene Emrisek, Mike

Scully and Jim Moster replace him and Frs. Bill and Felix on the council. Fr. Duane remained.

Fr. Michael Scully received the 4th Key of Recognition for his service of the poor and evangelization of youth (1995), and Bishop Firmin Schmidt the 5th one for his evangelization and development work in Papua New Guinea (1996).

During the triennium, Fr. David Songy began the Capuchin Center for Spiritual Life at Victoria (1995), Fr. David Gottschalk (as NACC president) and Bro. Mark Schenk participated in the International Congress on Lay Expression of the Capuchin Vocation (Sept. 1996), the renovated friary at Victoria was rededicated (1997), and St. Bonaventure Friary (started in 1938) was dissolved (21 June 1997).

Fr. Stephen Reichert was consecrated second Bishop of Mendi (7 May 1996), Fr. Blaine Burkey began Capuchins-on-Line International (1996), Bishop Charles Chaput was installed as Archbishop of Denver (7 Apr. 1997), and Fr. Berard Tomassetti published "Papua New Guinea Encore" (1997).

Eighth Triennium 1998-2001

Fr. David Gottschalk was reelected as provincial minister in 1998, and Frs. Frank Grinko and Blaine Burkey replaced Frs. Duane Reinert and Jim Moster on the council. Frs. Mike and Gene remained. At the chapter, Fr. Paulinus Karlin was given the 6th Conrad Key of Recognition for his saving & recycling efforts, his services of the poor, and his peacemaking, and Fr. Bill Kraus was commissioned for missionary service in northern Mexico.

That same year, Fr. David Gottschalk represented NACC at the 6th Plenary Council of the Order at Assisi.

In 1999, Bro. Gerald Wintz was commissioned for missionary service in Papua New Guinea, Fr. Blaine Burkey began the province's web site at www.midamcaps.org and www.capuchins.org, and the province dedicated a new friary (Fraternidad San Antonio) to replace Annunciation Friary, Denver (3 May 1999).

That same year, Frs. Felix Petrovsky and others began a year's ministry of Reconciliation Missions throughout northeastern Colorado. This ministry was well received, and was renewed the following year. In subsequent years it was restricted to Advent and Lent, and though eventually diminished in extent continued in one form or another up until 2007.

In 2000, the friars left the care of Cure d'Ars parish in Denver (after 14 years) and the Catholic Campus Center at Ft. Hays State University, Hays (after 83 or more years); and Fr. David attended the General Chapter.

Ninth Triennium 2001-2004

Michael Scully became Mid-America's fifth provincial minister at the 2001 chapter, and Charles Polifka and Mark Schenk replaced Mike Scully and Blaine Burkey as councilors. Frs. Frank and Gene remained. The province also gave Valentine Young the 7th Conrad Key for his service of the poor in downtown St. Louis.

Soon afterwards a decision made by the previous administration to return Immaculate Conception Church in the Arnold to the diocesan clergy was implemented.

Plans quickly unfolded for a new ministry in Colorado Springs CO.

Solanus Casey Friary was begun in 2001 with five friars, all of whom began working at the new Catholic Center which the province began at The Citadel Mall to offer Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and pastoral counseling to the mall clientele.

In 2002, the province celebrated its silver jubilee with a special assembly at the Catholic Life Center in Wichita. Fr. Robert L. McCreary of the new Pennsylvania Province led the friars in a mini-retreat, which was followed by a festive celebration. For the occasion, Fr. Blaine Burkey was commissioned to produce a commemorative booklet, *Mid-America Ho! the pilgrimage goes on....* The province also had five regional celebrations held with those whom friars serve from St. Louis to Denver.

That year President George W. Bush appointed Archbishop Chaput to a four-year term on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.,

A second house, dedicated to Padre Pio, was established in Colorado Springs in 2003 to accommodate post-novitiate students.

Tenth Triennium 2004-2007

Fr. Michael Scully was reelected as provincial minister at the 2004 chapter, and Frs. John Cousins and Jim Moster replaced Frs. Charles Polifka and Gene Emrisek as councilors. Fr. Frank and Bro. Mark continued on the council, and Bro Mark Schenk was elected provincial vicar. Fr. Ed Judy posthumously received the 8th Conrad Key of Recognition for his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the poor and marginalized.

Plans began for the establishment for a permanent repository for archival materials which at the time were spread all across the province. Work finally began on the center in October of 2006, and it was dedicated at the end of the final meeting of the administration in February, 2007.

The province was fully accredited by Praesidium, Inc., on July 13, 2006.

In 2006, Padre Pio friary was closed and all post-novitiate formation was moved to St. Francis Friary in Denver.

During the General Chapter in August of 2006, attended by Fr. Michael Scully, Bro. Mark Schenk was elected a general definator, the first lay friar known to have ever held the office in the Capuchin Order. Fr. Frank Grinko was chosen to replace him as provincial vicar.

Eleventh Triennium 2007-2010

Fr. Charles Polifka, who had served as the third provincial minister from 1988 till 1995, was reelected

as the sixth provincial minister. Frs. Christopher Popravak and John Schmeidler replaced John Cousins and Mark Schenk on the council. Frs. Frank and Jim remained on the council, and the latter was chosen as provincial vicar. The 9th Conrad Key went to Fr. Regis Scanlon for his service to the imprisoned.

On May 27, Fr. Christopher Popravak was named to an international committee charged with preparing proposals for the next general chapter for updating the general constitutions .

Fr. John Lager became full-time vocation director, ending the Order's 23 years at the helm of Samaritan House. Bro. Jerry Wintz joined the staff at Samaritan House as a case worker, and Fr. Gene Emrisek came to Denver to serve as pastor of the province's second inner-city parish, Sacred Heart church on Larimer Street.

Fr. David Songy became councilor at the American bishops' North American College in Rome, and Fr. Christopher Popravak replaced him as director of post-novitiate formation (2007). After much investigation, the council decided in 2007 to center its theology program at St. John Vianney Seminary in Denver.

The province started planning in 2007 to establish a Capuchin formation foundation for support of the province's formation programs.

Groundbreaking for a provincial administration building adjacent to St. Francis Friary and the Provincial Archives was made on Feb, 12, 2008, followed by occupancy in October. Archbishop Chaput formally blessed the building 28 April 2009.

At the annual assembly in March, 2007, Barnabas Eichor and Joseph Elder became the first two friars solemnly professed in the province since 1996.

Archbishop Chaput's book, *Render Unto Caesar*, published in 2008, was on the New York Times best seller list for several weeks.

Extensive re-envisioning of the province began to take effect in the summer of 2008, when St. Crispin Friary in St. Louis was closed, the postulancy moved to San Antonio Friary in Denver, the post-novitiate moved to a new friary, San Damiano Friary, in Denver, and a new second friary began in Colorado Springs. This one dedicated to Our Lady of Angels is "focused on prayer" and dedicated as a possible site for a novitiate sometime in future. At year's end, St. Patrick's Friary in St. Louis was also closed and the friars there reassigned to four other friaries. Thus ended over 65 years of Capuchin presence in St. Louis.

Preparations for the 2010 chapter began at the 2009 Easter assembly with the election of Joseph Mary Elder, Jeff Ernst, John Lager, Duane Reinert, and John Toepfer to the steering committee and the discernment of a theme focusing on identifying and clarifying the province's Capuchin values with a special emphasis on how such values are lived out concretely in fraternal life and ministries.

Five friars joined the Eternity Fraternity during the triennium: Joe Schreck, Malachy McBride, Gene Pellegrino, Thomas More Janeck & Valentine Young.

Twelfth Triennium 2010-2013

Charles Polifka was elected for a fourth triennium as provincial minister at the 2010 chapter, and Christopher Popravak became provincial vicar. James Moster was also returned to the council, and John Cousins and Jeff Ernst replaced Frank Grinko and John Schmeidler. Michael Suchnicki received the 10th Conrad Key of Recognition for his service of the poor and homeless in Denver. Postulancy was lengthened to two years and St. Anthony of Padua Friary opened to house the postulancy program. The province decided to remain in the NAPCC novitiate and Frank Grinko began preparing for the move of the novitiate to California in 2011.