



**Chapter 2017**  
*Pre-Chapter Meetings: Local and Regional*

1 January 2017

*Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*

Dear Brothers,

As part of the chapter preparation process we have asked John Corriveau, OFM Cap to prepare a reflection on provincial leadership as seen through our Capuchin charisms and our provincial mission, vision and values. You will find John's reflection following, along with questions for discussion in our local communities and regions.

To assist us in reflecting together on the changing realities of our Capuchin life and province, and to help discern which brothers we need to lead us through these times, we propose the following process be used over the next several months:

1. In preparation for a local chapter, each brother is asked to read and reflect on John's reflection on Capuchin brotherhood and provincial leadership individually.
2. **Local Ministers:** schedule a local chapter prior to February 15, 2017. At this local chapter all the members of the community should discuss the questions posed by the reflection. The intent here is not to focus on names for election, just yet. Local ministers should take notes from the local chapter to be shared at a regional meeting to follow.
3. **Regional Coordinators:** schedule a regional meeting prior to April 1. At this meeting discussions from local chapters will be shared to encourage a wider discussion of the issues reflected on in local communities. From this will flow a discussion of names of brothers seen as most equipped to lead the province in the next three years. Regional coordinators will collate the notes from these discussion (including names) and submit a summary report to Steven Kropp ([srkropp@gmail.com](mailto:srkropp@gmail.com)) no later than April 10, 2017.
4. The summary reports will be shared with the province, along with a link to a survey for a straw ballot to be completed by April 30, 2017. The results of the straw ballot will be shared on May 1, 2017. A final straw ballot will take place on the first full day of chapter in preparation for elections.

We are most grateful to our brother, John Corriveau, for sharing his wisdom and insight with us and for helping to guide us in our own discernment of the future of our province and those who will lead us.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact one of us.

Peace and all good,

Michael Sullivan

Steven Kropp

Mark Joseph Costello

Robert Wotypka

Gary Wegner

Robert Roemer

Zoilo Garibay

Jerome Johnson

Michael Bertram

Gerald Pehler

*Reflections on Provincial Leadership*  
For the Province of Saint Joseph of the Capuchin Order  
John Corriveau, OFM Cap

**Premises**

1. As we reflect on the call to leadership in the Province of St. Joseph, we do not begin by looking at those called to leadership, *but at the brotherhood they are called to animate.*
2. Pope Francis speaks prophetically to the Capuchin Order today in his challenge to make the church a community *of missionary disciples bringing the transforming power of mercy to the world.*

**Reflection**

Pope Francis describes mercy as “the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2). Mercy was at the heart of Francis’ conversion experience:

“When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body” (Test. 1-3).

Pope Francis describes the gaze of mercy: “Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks to the very depths of the soul” (MV. 14). The gaze of mercy looks beyond disabilities, disadvantages, illness and even sinfulness, looks beyond the debris of human life, to touch the essential dignity, the yearning for love hidden in every human heart. Embracing the leper, Francis discovered the deeper reality of shared humanity. It changed everything in his life.

- It changed his faith vision of Jesus whom he came to revere as “this Word of the Father...(who)...received the flesh of our human frailty”.
- It changed his relationship with lepers and the poor.
- With a sensitivity given by faith in Jesus, his gaze of mercy penetrated surface realities and he discovered sisters and brothers in everyone he met. He came to understand that he was called to be brother to every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth.
- Toward the end of his life, this relationship was extended to all creation and he was able to speak of Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and Mother Earth.

The gaze of mercy made Francis a living “bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).

Francis made us an order of brothers. The seventeenth century Italian author, Alessandro Manzoni, endowed the Capuchins with their most cherished title: “frati del popolo,” “brothers of the people,” “brothers to the people.” Brotherhood is our identity. Brotherhood is our mission. Our brotherhood is to be that living “bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2).

## **Identity**

The Capuchin identity as “brother” is lived in many ways and with constant newness in every age. Our order has been a missionary force throughout the world for the past 200 years with a presence in almost 110 countries. The Province of St. Joseph has been part of this movement, particularly in Central America, but also in the Middle East. In the past 60 – 70 years, we have embraced scores of brothers of different racial and ethnic origins. The reality the Province of Saint Joseph- and most provinces in Western Europe and North America- is of diminishment, decline and aging. We have been blessed in recent years with a renaissance in vocations, not equivalent to the “glory days,” but certainly a boon that brings a new hope for the future. At the last chapter, the Province of St. Joseph consciously chose to invite and embrace brothers from India. The novices of our North American provinces include many representatives of different races and ethnicities. The Province of St. Joseph is becoming one of the multi-racial, multi-ethnic faces of our international brotherhood.

### Questions:

- Do we see the growing multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-generational face of the province as a living gospel in a world marked by divisions based on race, ethnicity and wealth?
- Is this perceived as an enrichment of our fraternal witness or simply a practical means to prolong of our ministerial outreach?
- Do we embrace gospel-based inculturation which assists our new brothers to appreciate the deeper values of our provincial fraternity and our American society, but allows our societal values and our provincial culture to be challenged?
- Diminishment, decline and aging are often used together with negative connotations. Given our Franciscan spirituality, is it possible to find meaning in our natural aging as friars and the mature state of the province in a more positive way?

## **Mission**

Brotherhood is not simply our identity; it is an essential dimension of our mission to the world. The “gaze of mercy” inspires countless ministries to the poor across the world. For “frati del popolo,” the poor are not case files, they are sisters and brothers. For example:

- The Capuchin Soup Kitchen, Capuchin Community Services (St. Benedict Meal Program and House of Peace)
- The Montana missions among the Crow and Northern-Cheyenne people
- The Damietta Initiative in Africa;
- The Ministry of Caring in Wilmington, DE whose theme is: “The Poor Should Never be Treated Poorly!”
- Children’s Village in Lima, Peru;
- Rehabilitation Center for Handicapped Children in Dodoma, Tanzania;

### Questions:

- The embrace of the leper changed Francis' faith-vision of Jesus whom he came to revere as "the Word of the Father ...(who)... received the flesh of our human frailty." The Province of St. Joseph has a long and passionate commitment to the poor. How does this change our faith-experience? Can it be said "that all may see in our faces and perceive in the life of our fraternities the goodness and kindness of God present in the world" (Const. 45.8)?
- Does the experience of the poor enter and enrich our local chapters? Are the poor comfortable and welcomed in our chapels and churches? Do the poor experience us as their brothers?
- Do we venerate the "Word of the Father ...(who)... received the flesh of our human frailty" in our own sick and elderly brothers, sustaining and supporting them in love?
- The province has a long and passionate commitment to justice, peace and respect for creation. Can we critique this mission in light of Pope Francis' description of the gaze of mercy: "Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks to the very depths of the soul" (MV 14)?

The gaze of mercy of the Capuchin charism of brotherhood goes beyond our ministries to the poor to include all aspects of our outreach to the world. When Pope Francis summoned to Rome thousands of confessors from across the world and commissioned them as "Messengers of Mercy," he brought the relics of Leopold Mandic and Padre Pio to inspire their mission. Evangelical poverty withdraws us from a world of greed ... minority redeems us from an obsession with autonomy and dominating power. Gospel poverty and minority build a world of brothers and sisters.

### Questions:

As we examine the ministerial outreach of the province and of your fraternity according to the following criteria flowing from poverty and minority:

- Do they (we) possess a vision of human freedom flowing from relationship rather than autonomy?
- Do they (we) express a world of justice flowing from redeemed relationships rather than the eradication of evil?
- Do they (we) embrace an authority that enables rather than controls?
- Do they (we) express a vision of priesthood flowing from service and brotherhood?

### Conclusion

Reflect on the leadership team which can animate a provincial fraternity to be that "bridge which connects God and man" (MV 2).

- What are the values and vision of our province that we must embrace to take us into the future?

- Acknowledging that we cannot sustain the growth of the past, what role does the virtue of humility have in a realistic provincial vision that balances fraternal living, communal prayer, and ministry?
- What are the challenges and opportunities our province is facing that leadership must address?