Fraternal Collaboration and Ministry  
Steve Kropp & Gary Wegner

Fraternal collaboration of personnel is primarily geared towards strengthening our Capuchin life in fraternity. When the brothers are stretched too thin in ministry, our fraternal life may be harmed. Being stretched “too thin” is not the same as “working hard” or being engaged in “full time ministry.” There is an expectation that we work hard and are engaged in full time ministry. However, our witness as Capuchins as ministers is enhanced when we can do this out of our fraternal life. Furthermore, it is when we live and work together that we are most effective at inviting others to join us in our Capuchin way of life. While we recognize that sometimes the needs of the Church (or the individual friar) require friars to live and work outside of a community, our constitutions and the repeated exhortations of our Ministers General and Provincial have called us to make our fraternal life primary, with ministry arising from it. Therefore, it is our hope that by engaging in fraternal collaboration of personnel we will be able to serve the People of God through the witness of an enhanced experience of our Capuchin fraternal life. We believe that rather than being “stretched too thin” we can make our fraternal life “thick with brothers” who live and work together, along with our partners in ministry.

Our local and regional discussions regarding fraternal collaboration of our province with other jurisdiction(s) of the Order throughout the world has raised from very important questions. In an attempt to both address those questions and to keep the brothers up-to-date on the work of collaboration, this report will summarize some of the work that has been done to identify ministry sites for friars who come here to collaborate with us.

First, an explanation of the work that was done, primarily through a survey. In October and December of this year a survey was sent to the directors of all provincial offices and ministries, as well as to pastors of parishes that were identified in the Pastoral Plan as being targeted for having a continued Capuchin presence (based on our ownership of the property, history of ministry in the parish, etc…). In this survey those who were polled (“Directors”) were asked to answer questions about the ability of their office/ministry/parish to accept friars from other jurisdictions for ministry either during a year of enculturation, for a longer term period of full-time ministry, or both. The “Directors” were also asked to comment about the ability of the site to pay salaries, benefits, etc… Finally, they were asked to identify possible roles that friars might assume and what skills or talents would be most helpful for them in fulfilling these roles in ministry.
The overarching guideline, as has been the case throughout this process of preparing our communities and ministries for friars to collaborate with us, was making our ministries “Capuchin-rich” through an infusion of Capuchin personnel to minister side-by-side with the members of our own province. The hope is that a “Capuchin-rich” ministry will enliven and encourage ourselves as friars of the province, our partners who minister (and administer) with us, those who are served by our various ministries, and, of course, our brothers from around the world who will share in the vital ministries of our province. Further, a Capuchin-rich ministry offers a greater opportunity for attracting vocations to our community. It’s not that our ministries are not “rich” as they operate now, offer vital service to the Church and our world, for they certainly are. Yet years of diminishment of numbers have led many of our ministries which were once teeming with Capuchins to rely on one or two brothers to provide the friar presence that is so essential to what we do. This collaboration offers our already rich ministries to once again, be richly staffed with Capuchin personnel who work along-side our employees and volunteers.

Now here’s some of the compiled data from our survey:
-17 “Directors” responded to the survey representing 7 offices (or internal ministries, including administration, formation, etc…), 6 provincial ministries, and 5 parishes (one response represented both St. Martin and St. Benedict)
-Of these, it was identified that 11 of the sites could host a friar(s) for ministry during a year of enculturation
-In total, the “Directors” identified 20 possible spaces for friars to engage in long-term ministry at their site, with most of them being able to provide some salary or benefits or both
-Some of the skills/talents identified that would be most helpful for ministry are: Spanish-language proficiency, English-language proficiency, ability to speak Arabic, openness, willingness to spend time with/listen to the people we serve, background in spiritual direction, willingness and excitement to work with youth and young adults, teaching skills, nursing ability, flexibility, communication skills, compassion, a good preacher, counselling experience.

A few things become clear from the results of this survey. First, our ministries are hungry for a greater Capuchin presence in providing ministry to the various communities we serve. If concerns around salaries and benefits could be put aside or negotiated, the desire for Capuchin personnel in our ministries expands greatly. While the work of our employees and volunteers is indispensable for being effective ministers today, the presence of friars in the ministry enhances and strengthens our charism in a necessary and welcome way. Second, the skills needed for ministry do not generally
require highly trained and educated friars to minister (although there is certainly room for friars who may have particular training and educational backgrounds), rather we need brothers who can minister with open hearts, attentive ears, an ability to communicate appropriately, and a compassionate response to the needs of those whom we serve.

As we continue to consider the impact of fraternal collaboration on our Capuchin communities and ministries, this survey has helped us all see clearly that there is both a need and a desire for Capuchin personnel to strengthen and enrich our ministries today. Of course, there are many questions yet to be answered and probably some questions yet to be posed. However, the proliferation of questions need not deter us from seeking the answers to accomplish the necessary and desirable outcome of inviting our brothers from around the world, who themselves are eager to join us, to take a share in this great enterprise of Capuchin life and ministry in the Church and world we serve in the Province of Saint Joseph.