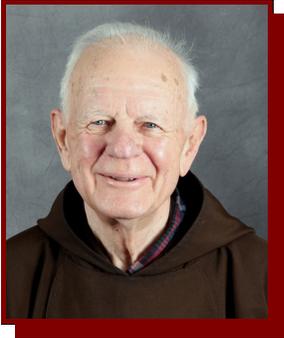


Nota bene: The Province of St. Joseph acknowledges that a small number of friars have had credible allegations of sexual misconduct levied against them. An investigation of the friar memorialized below concluded that he falls into that category. The province is committed to bring healing and hope to all those who have been harmed by one of our brothers, and to create a safe environment in all of our ministries.

Matthew Gottschalk
1927 - 2018



Matthew Gottschalk was born in Milwaukee on March 27th, 1927, and given the name Thomas James. He joined the Capuchins on March 2, 1945, and professed perpetual vows on March 3, Matthew was ordained in September 1953.

His first assignment was at St. Benedict the Moor Parish in Milwaukee. Champion Baer, in *Lady Poverty Revisited*, wrote "Although a Milwaukee native, Matt, or 'Fr. Matthews' as he was often called, had never met a black person before he began his census work in the Milwaukee Hillside Projects. He quickly endeared himself to the people. Dressed in his brown robe, with a flowing beard and flashing a soft friendly smile, he became a well-known figure at interracial and African American gatherings. He was known for his 'gentle presence' in Milwaukee's Black community."

While Matthew was sensitive and caring to all, most especially to the African American Community. For some seventy years Matthew Gottschalk was the shepherd and spiritual companion of thousands of people in the city of Milwaukee, in the parish territories of St. Benedict, St. Francis and St. Elizabeth (currently St. Martin de Porres). He related to many as pastor, and to even more as a companion in their journey of life. It is fitting at this time to try to describe the spiritual attitudes and ways of relating to so many who were touched by his life, example, presence and ministry. The following is an attempt to describe his spiritual practice as observed by one of his brothers.

Matthew was the shepherd who reached out to people, where they were at, who they really were, especially the marginalized, and to know them by name and family connections. He kept notes so that in future visits he could easily relate with a knowing smile.

As a faithful companion he walked with many on their journey of life, from birth with baptism, instruction in the faith, first confession and communion, marriage, sickness and death. He did not prejudge or define a person according to age, sex, color, race or religion. He discovered and affirmed each one as a unique human being.

Matthew expressed his theology of priesthood in these words: "The priest may not have discovered all the answers but he must wrestle with the most profound mysteries. Priests meet people at the innermost level of their being and catch almost terrifying glimpses of the intrinsic beauty of the human person as an image of God." (*Catholic Herald*, Nov. 8, 1975, p.7A)

When people were troubled in mind or heart, he was the compassionate listener, always available even in the middle of the night, patiently listening to their physical or mental sufferings to let the other know he or she is not alone.

When a person in need rang the doorbell at any hour, Matthew would answer and always give the person something, at least a blessing. He did not try to figure out how the person might use the gift. Give without judging. A quote from one of his talks: "You should never let your life be governed by prejudices. Go out and see the good in everybody."

In 1970 Matthew was appointed pastor of St. Elizabeth Parish at a time when many city parishes were experiencing changes and tensions. The whites were moving into the suburbs and the blacks were moving into the neighborhood. The goal of changing the Catholic school into a community school open to all caused many arguments and tensions. Whites felt their parish was no longer their own and that the new community school, called Harambee, was for the blacks. Many stopped attending and a thousand families moved out between the years 1967-1970. Matthew brought a new style of leadership that emphasized personal relationships, and some stability was restored.

When there were riots in the streets of Milwaukee caused by some brawl in a nightclub in the vicinity of St. Francis parish, Matthew was there with the people trying to calm them down, while people pulled him away from the danger. After the riots and destruction, people had many needs, and with Booker Ashe and Wilbert, Matthew helped to establish the House of Peace.

Matthew was transferred to St. Francis Parish as an assistant in 1959, and while there he felt the need for deeper understanding of the history, culture and social background of the African American community. In 1961 he studied at Fisk University in Nashville for his degree in cultural anthropology.

Knowing the people personally meant knowing their oppression through racism, prejudice and exclusion.

He could better empathize with the wounds of slavery, internal racism and the American culture of white racism, discrimination and structures of exclusion. He joined African American organizations that dealt with racism in our city and helped organize interracial dialogues that brought together people of various races, classes, backgrounds to foster understanding, healing, reconciliation and collaboration. He was the spiritual companion of Fr. Groppi in his efforts at open housing.

In 1963 Matthew was appointed pastor at St. Francis. He got involved in the struggle against racism. In March 1965 he joined the Selma March with Martin Luther King. That same year the Milwaukee United School Integration Committee planned a boycott of public school to protest the racial imbalance in inner city schools. A number of inner city pastors, along with Matthew, decided to support the boycott in their schools. However, the archdiocese ordered the pastors not to participate. No parish school could be used for the boycott. The pastors were disappointed. They chose Matthew to set up a meeting with the bishop and be their spokesperson. He read a statement that the pastors had composed. Basically they were going to follow their conscience and continue the boycott. The chancellor said it was a direct defiance of ecclesiastical authority. The group then published an open letter to the people: "With every protest short of direct disobedience and with the conviction that we are substantially betraying our people, but with the hope that we have not done so...we reluctantly close our parish facilities to the use of the freedom schools." (Baer, op. cit. p.136) Matthew helped the pastors and people to walk the fine line of clear obedience and powerful protest at the same time.

As Matthew was more involved with the African American community, he began to attend the meetings of the Midwest Clergy Conference for Negro Welfare. In the fall of 1962 the meeting was held in Milwaukee and eventually the group recognized his ability and leadership and elected him president of the conference.

"Fr. Matthews," had a special love and care for the physically and mentally ill. He would go to the nearby hospitals to look up the names of the patients to see if he knew any, or if they were Catholic. His purpose was to be present, listen and pray with them. He celebrated mass every Monday at the County Complex for the mentally ill.

Throughout his life and ministry in central city Matthew received many awards. In 1977, when he was co-pastor of St. Francis, he received the Milwaukee B'nai B'rith award for his work in the inner city. In 2011 Matthew received the "Outstanding Community Servant" Claver Award for his special dedication and calling to witness and service to Milwaukee's African American community: "his contribution to the Milwaukee area has touched the lives of so many individuals, more than anyone could ever imagine." Again in the same year as co-founder of the House of Peace, a leader of Milwaukee's civil rights movement, as parish pastor and community friend, he was awarded the Vocare Award that recognizes people whose lives speak by who they are and what they do with their gifts and talents.

Matthew's experience, together with his sociological studies, resulted in this insight: the church teaches that racism and discrimination are contrary to the Gospel, but the attitudes and practices of the people often reflect society and the Gospel attitude, and practice does not always filter all the way down to the grass roots. "One cannot always blame the system for the people's social ills. You also have to encourage people to do what they can in their own domain." "If we really believe in and practice our religious values, then we would accept people as individuals and not put them in categories." (*Catholic Herald*, April, 1992).

One insight he had on the church's relation to black youth who experienced the church as racist: "The Church is symbolic of white society. Many black youth don't identify as participants in American white society. They feel alienated...The animosity at least suggests their needs, their cry for love." (*Catholic Herald*, Sept, 1971).

His thought on racism: "Prejudice, being something emotional, is exceedingly complex, both in its cases and in its effect. It is in reality a two edged sword that wounds both him who wields it and the one attacked." (*Catholic Herald*, Superior edition).

He explained his pastoral approach in these words: "I don't like sermons. I don't think they do any good. You must work with people and deal with their inner selves. I want to find meaning in my life and help others find it in theirs. If people could only see the blue skies! You're constantly struggling and helping people who are struggling, constantly trying to find the answers in life." "My theology in life has been worked out in the inner city. I don't think it would have been any other way." (*Catholic Herald*, June 1977)

It could be said that Matthew was ahead of his times if we take Pope Francis seriously when he urges creating a culture of encounter that is no longer indifferent and exclusive. God can be known, experienced and revered in the people who are excluded, the poor, the outcast. It is kindness, tenderness, and love that heals and gives people back to themselves. The people, the poor, the sick taught Matthew how to love as God loves with life giving compassion and service.

Booker Ashe wrote of him: "Matthew came to the inner city 39 years ago as a young priest and from the outset followed Christ's way of washing the feet of the poor and telling them that they would do far greater things than He, if they believed in themselves." (*re-Caps*, April, 1993)

A constant reader, Matthew delighted to read over and over again the works of G.K. Chesterton and John Newman. This meant for him a fidelity to tradition, and yet an openness to the new. He also learned a certain classical style of clear and pithy phrases that summed up the point of his teaching and preaching. One typical quote: "There are three things I do not understand. I do not understand hate. I do not understand despair. And I do not understand myself without the light of the grace of God." He kept a copy of all his homilies, talks and correspondence. They are all preserved in over 20 boxes in the archives in Detroit.

Matthew's way of relating to all could be summed up in the words of Psalm 67: "May the light of God's face shine upon us that your ways may be known upon earth." The life-giving love of God did shine through the face of Matthew and his pastoral ways. God's ways with people were revealed through Matthew's pastoral style. Modern scholars translate the face of God as God's loving smile. Matthew's smile was always there for all. In the presence of Matthew people felt good about themselves, and felt respected and hopeful.

Matthew had the gift of seeing people beyond color, race, creed, culture, wounds. He could see who they actually were, their dreams or needs and even what they could be. Looking deeply into the hearts of the people, especially the African Americans, he found hidden treasures of God's work and grace in their lives. He was always seeing something to affirm, make them smile, feel good about themselves. It was his pastoral way to make people feel comfortable, invite trust and openness. People who knew Matthew described him with these words: he loved the people, did special things for them, cared about everybody, and helped everybody, very honest, a gentle giant, always smiled and had a twinkle in his eye.

Matthew had a love of learning and often took courses in computers, geology and botany. He became an expert in identifying and naming wild flowers, grasses and trees. He knew the popular name of the sugar maple, but he would call it from memory by its official Latin name: "that's an acer saccharum."

He was a confessor and spiritual guide to many religious sisters in Milwaukee, and celebrated the Eucharist, giving new insights into the scriptures of the day, inspiring and challenging.

Even as he aged and was transferred to the House of Peace, Matthew did not lose his desire to serve the poorest of the poor. He was a gentle and kind presence to all who came for assistance. For years he wrote thank-you letters to the donors of the House of Peace. In 2012 Matthew received the Martin Luther King Jr. Justice award for his quiet yet strong advocacy of African Americans in Milwaukee during the tumultuous days of the civil rights struggle.

It was a delightful tradition in every provincial chapter since 1978 that Matthew would send off the brothers with poetic words. In the chapter of 1984 he said: "Through sun and storm, amid laughter of life, and having heard the bitter-sweet call of Sister Death, we have merged our lives this week – and our dreams for tomorrow – some of us never to meet again, none of us ever to be the same again: I move that we adjourn the 35TH Chapter of the Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin order, *sine die*."

Matthew performed his final vanishing act peacefully on October 23, 2018, surrounded by his Capuchin brothers. His last communication to the province came through *Inforum* where he described his last years as "loss of energy, ceasing of priestly ministry, appreciation of nursing care, the meeting of many new friends and more than I can tell. What I am learning is that self-pity is useless, and gratitude generates grace." He always ended visits with a handshake and a "Thank you."

~ Francis Dombrowski

Regretfully, in his later years, the province received several credible allegations of sexual misconduct against Matthew. He was immediately removed from active ministry, and was transferred to St. Fidelis Friary in Appleton WI where he spent his remaining years in prayer and penance.