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Our Newest Members Reflect on A Year of Postulancy

As their first year in the order, our postulants are preparing for the next period of discernment as novices. We asked them to briefly talk about their experiences of community and ministry.



Franco Chavez

Franco Chavez: I'm originally from Michoacan, Mexico. I lived in Knoxville, TN before joining the order and I worked as a server in a Mexican restaurant for over a year down there. Before moving to Tennessee, I lived in Miami where I volunteered in my parish doing ministry as a elector and usher and I also was part of a youth group called "212 Youth on Fire".

I'm a member of Stigmata Province. I knew the Capuchins by two friends of mine who began a discernment process with them. Although I was very familiar with the Franciscan charism since I was a kid. While living in Tennessee, I found a website called VISION Vocation Network and through them I met the Capuchins.

My experience of postulancy has been wonderful. We spend around one hour and a half almost everyday meditating together and praying the office (Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer), this has helped me to grow spiritually and to continue discerning my call.

Ministry has played an important role in my experience as a postulant. In my case, I was assigned to help at St. Francis Parish, that has helped me to be more responsible and to live what to be a friar is like. Not to mention, the amazing people I've met working for the parish and especially doing communion calls to a couple of parishioners.

I remember when I came to Milwaukee, I was a little nervous because I didn't know anybody and I was wondering how long it would take me to get used to all the changes, but thanks to all the friars and my peers, the transition was very smooth and I felt welcomed as soon as I got here.



Francisco Cux

Francisco Cux: I'm a member of the St. Joseph Province. My experience at Saint Conrad's made me face many challenges this year. The first has been speaking and understanding English. It has been different for me to be in a community where almost everyone speaks English and not many speak Spanish too. Here I have had to pray, sing, speak, and listen in English. I have been speaking the necrology, the reading of the days, and trying to find appropriate songs for the liturgical season. It was a great challenge for me. Despite my bad pronunciation of English, I have grown in my confidence not only as a leader of prayer, but spiritually understanding the prayers and scriptures. I have also learned that music often speaks of what I am feeling.

In community life we all have different personalities in which each person acts differently. This has also been challenging and difficult at times for me, to relating and feeling part of the community due to the language that I cannot often expressing myself well.

I have always tried to be part of this community in doing my chores, cooking, and trying to show kindness to everyone. At the beginning it was difficult for me to find myself in the kitchen because it is not the same to cook for myself than for a community. I think this unique experience was also a challenge, and at the same time wonderful, because whenever I cooked, I felt part of a family the community, where I could share my talents. This also motivated me to show my creativity because of the feeling of being part of the community. This was my way of showing my appreciation and gratitude. This has left me feeling like I have made some good progress this year.

There are a few friars, that overtime I have become comfortable with, and I feel I can open myself up to them. Over this past year, The Saint Conrad Community has helped me to grow a lot not only with the English language, but spiritually and given some confidence in who I am. The community have been supportive and patience with me. I am grateful to them.



Gabriel Conlon

Gabriel Conlon: I come to the order as a member of the St. Mary Province. I spent March, April and May in the NYC Catholic Worker community that had been my home for nearly three years, sharing the look-down with a community of around forty people, continuing our ministry to the homeless. Seeing the suffering and fear all around, the sirens, the refrigeration trucks, losing people I held dear, was my prelude to postulancy, and much of this year has been spent in personal reflection on how we – as Franciscans and as Church – can be present to the wounds of our present world and can take the lessons of the pandemic into ministry. It is an ongoing discernment for me, as I know it is for many Catholics, of all walks and stations of life.

Fortunately the formation team and the friar residents at St. Conrad's Friary are a truly great bunch, whose hospitality, generosity and willingness to be present to us in our discernment and our transition has been edifying. In all the ups and downs of the year, fraternal life, the warmth of the community – made perhaps more intense by pandemic measures – was a constant, reliable consolation and source of spiritual sustenance. Being assured of the sacraments, of a regular spiritual life lived in community, has been a true gift that it this world cannot be taken for granted, and I am truly thankful for it. Our community, made up of friars and postulants from the US, Mexico, Guatemala and India, is something I will miss going forwards.

I am equally thankful for the experiences of ministry that the collaborative postulancy program has offered me. I was attached to two ministry sites, St. Francis of Assisi parish and the House of Peace, both run by the province.

It has been a very powerful year, with many of the ups and downs of spiritual discernment, accompanied by the collective trauma of the pandemic experience. In August I lost my grandmother, Mary, shortly after she was diagnosed with leukemia. The brothers were enormously helpful in arranging my trip back to the East Coast for the funeral. I'm very grateful!



McLean Bennett

McClean Bennett: I'm now completing my second postulancy for the St. Joseph Province, having completed my first year of initial formation in 2016. At that time, I'd been invited

to apply to attend the novitiate, but opted instead to re-enter the workforce. Since 2016, then, I've held jobs reporting, copy editing and fact-checking for publications both local and national. I loved my journalism career, but continued toying with the idea of a religious vocation for much of the time that I spent working.

During the pandemic and a resultant downturn in the magazine economy, I decided the time was finally right to reapply to join the Capuchins again. I figured I'd have to redo a full year of postulancy, and thus would need to wait to join the Class of 2021-22 — something I was willing to do, assuming I could find a job to tide me over until then. I was surprised late last year to learn that the province was inviting me instead to join an existing postulancy class midway through the formation year. I agreed to do so, and have been living with and reintegrating myself into the community at St. Conrad's since November 2020.

I've been stationed to work at the food pantry at the House of Peace, and have appreciated opportunities to work directly with the people to whom the Franciscans minister. Many of the people I've come across have taught me important lessons about faith, myself and God — often without their realizing they were teaching me. Franciscan ministry has been as affirming and paradigm-shifting as I'd recalled it being five years ago, and I'm glad to be back with the friars.



Jaico George

Jaico George: I am 19 years old, and originally from Kerala, India. My family moved to U.S. three years ago living in Houston TX. I finished my high school here in the U.S. I knew about the Capuchins and I was familiar with their brown habit since childhood. In my senior in high school I came to contact with the Midwest capuchins through internet. I came into contact with the vocation director. After finishing my high school, I waited for almost six months to come live with the friars. Because I was not 18 at that time. I lived as a residential candidate in Chicago at St. Clare Friary. That was the time I lived outside of my family circle. I also went to college for a brief time in Chicago. Living with friars was an interesting experience for me. I also met friars from different parts of the world. Later

in the year I applied for postulancy and I got accepted.

I am a member of the St. Joseph Province. As part of the program, I did my ministry at House of Peace this year. I also had the chance to volunteer in both food pantry and clothing section. In community I learned how to cook, lead prayer and also do my stewardship. As part of living in community I did a lot of learning and also unlearning. Throughout this year of my discernment God spoke to me through various people around me. Especially in ministry I learned to see Christ in people with whom I minister. As brothers living under one roof we helped each other in this discernment process. With God's grace I will be able to move to novitiate in a couple of months. I also ask all the brothers to remember all of us in your prayers.

JPIC Survey Charts New Direction for Commission

Several weeks ago, the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission surveyed the brothers to ensure that the priorities and work of the commission reflect the priorities and needs of the province. We want to share those results with you. 58 friars—over one-third of the province's members—responded to the survey.

The first question asked what *the commission's areas of focus* should be. The top four answers were:

- 1) Immigration issues (internal and external) [31]
- 2) Care of Creation (climate change, energy, etc.) [26]
- 3) Oppression/Discrimination issues (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) [25]
- 4) Building a culture of life (seamless garment) [20]

These choices seem to be mostly in line with a survey conducted by commission several years ago. The high priority of immigration is consistent with the priorities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

The second question asked *how the commission can best serve the brothers*. The top four answers were:

- (1) Researching the issues and sharing data on local opportunities with the brothers [35]
- (2) Collecting, highlighting, and sharing the ways our brothers are living JPIC values [25]
- (3) Disseminating information through newsletters, alerts, etc. [20]
- (4) Offering workshops/conferences on becoming JPIC animators in our communities [13]

The final part of the poll asked for additional comments from the brothers. The wide-ranging responses included: helping friars to get “Third-World” experience, helping hold the province accountable by asking the right questions, recommending books and podcasts, addressing the time constraints of our brothers who want to be involved, justice formation at all levels, and keeping local communities and activism in mind.

We’re grateful to the brothers for their input. Since the restructuring of the commission, we’ve been looking for ways to be more responsive to “the signs of the times” as well as the needs of the province. The mandate, which we will begin implementing, gives us direction and a template for our ongoing ministry to and with you.

Commentary:

Last week, over 40 friars (from Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan) attended a memorial mass for Roach Gaspar’s mother. The liturgy was held at St. Martin de Porres Parish in Milwaukee, and was the largest gathering of friars since the beginning of the pandemic! It was a joyful time, not only to support our brother Roach, but to celebrate what we hope is the *beginning of the end* of this terrible time. We still have a long way to go before our country is back to normal. But the fraternal experience of this event was palpable. Since all the friars present were fully vaccinated, we were able to socialize and enjoy dinner together safely. We’re grateful to the St. Conrad Community for hosting this event so beautifully.



The St. Conrad Friary Community

Of course, we recognize the need to continue safe practices (masks and distancing when in public),
so please stay safe!