

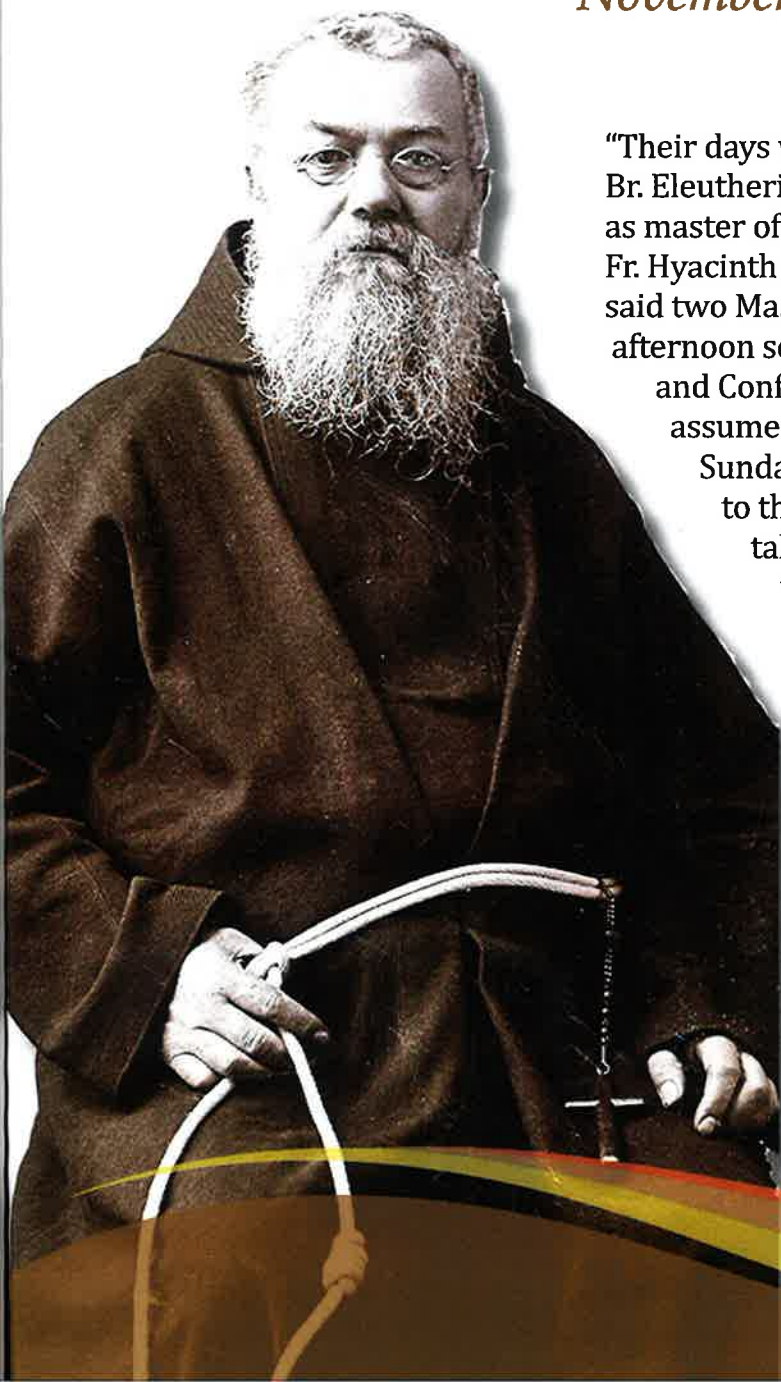
"On November 7 Fr. Hyacinth assumed the office of curate at St. Augustine Church and hastened to summon Fr. Matthew and Br. Eleutherius to Pittsburgh."

They arrived on November 15, 1873.

"Their days were busy ones. Br. Eleutherius was installed as master of the household. Fr. Hyacinth and Fr. Matthew said two Masses every Sunday, besides attending to the afternoon services, which consisted of Sunday School, Vespers and Conferences for the Christian Mothers. In addition they assumed the chaplaincy of St. Francis Hospital, where on Sundays and twice weekly they said Mass and ministered to the spiritual needs of the sick. One of their first steps taken toward the further upbuilding of the parish was the introduction of the Third Order.

"... Work was plentiful, and they had neither reason nor time or inclination to indulge in nostalgic reveries or complaints of their exile. They were happy and content, thanking Providence for the visible protection accorded them, and hopefully and trustfully biding the future."

Based on Father Hyacinth Epp's manuscript of the early years of the Province of St. Augustine, by Father Severin Scharl, editor of "Seraphic Child."



The Earliest Years

1873

Bavarian Capuchin friars Fr. Hyacinth Epp, Fr. Matthew Hau and Br. Eleutherius Guggenbichler arrived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in November 1873 to establish a Capuchin foundation and serve German immigrants at St. Augustine Church. In six months three more friars from Bavaria arrived. The friary was canonically established in April 1874 and the novitiate authorized in June of the same year.

1875

Fr. Anthony Schuermann and Fr. Francis Wolff of Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, established SS. Peter & Paul Monastery in Cumberland, Maryland, in June 1875. Eleven more friars from Westphalia arrived in August.

By 1876 the number of friars from Rhine-Westphalia would double. In 1880 the Pittsburgh and Cumberland foundations agreed to combine, but a majority of friars originally from Rhine-Westphalia returned to Europe in 1887 when the government permitted re-opening Capuchin friaries.



*Old St. Augustine Church
Butler Street, Pittsburgh, PA*



SS. Peter & Paul Monastery Cumberland, MD

1876

Friars were given care of St. Mary Parish in Herman, Pennsylvania, on May 28, 1876. The following year a friary was constructed, and a Seraphic School, eventually called St. Fidelis Seminary, was established. Fr. Maurice Greck was named the first director of the school. He and Fr. Fidelis Weinschenk comprised the teaching faculty. The school of philosophy was also moved to Herman in 1877. Thus began more than a century of preparing young men for Capuchin life and the priesthood.



Monastery and Parish Church Herman, PA, 1886



St. Fidelis Seminary

1878

At the urging of a Kansas bishop, Fr. Matthew and his companion, Fr. Anastasius Mueller, were sent to Victoria, KS, to labor among immigrants from the German colonies in Russia. Arriving in early May 1878, they found only a wooden shanty with no furniture for their accommodations. In mid-June, Fr. Matthew suddenly died. Another friar, Fr. Joseph Calasance Mayershoeffer, was sent in July. He immediately began construction of a small friary adjoined to the ramshackle church. From these humble beginnings, the friars established several friaries in the region to serve the faithful of numerous parishes.

At the same time, the Westphalian friars of the Cumberland foundation, led by Fr. Anthony Schuermann, established friaries in Peoria and Metamora, Illinois. By the summer of 1881 the number of friars in Illinois had grown to 14. They served in parishes of Peoria, Metamora and Pekin.

1882

Less than nine years after the original Capuchin pioneers' arrival in Pittsburgh, the Capuchin Minister General, Fr. Giles of Cortona, on August 7, 1882, officially established the Province of St. Augustine, comprised of friaries in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Illinois and Kansas with a total of 71 friars.



Fr. Matthew



Fr. Anthony



Fr. Francis



Fr. Maurice



Fr. Fidelis



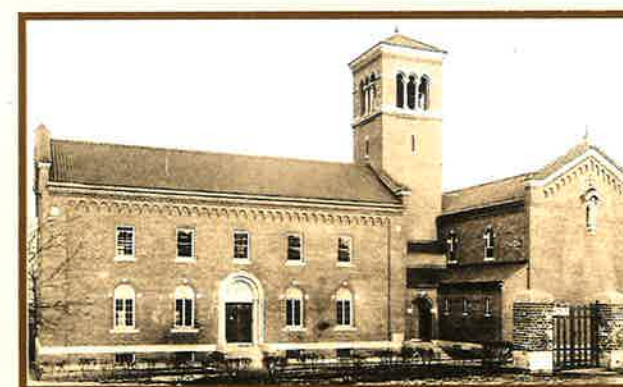
Capuchin Lay Brothers in Herman in 1913



Brother Meinrad in the friary garden in Wheeling



St. Joseph Church in Dover



Capuchin College in the early 1920s

Of the Seraphic school, St. Fidelis Seminary in Herman, one writer reflected, "It is true, the beginnings were small and insignificant, and there seemed to be ground for anxiety; however, God's blessing and protection were with the undertaking, and the tiny seedling has since grown into a vigorous tree, into a fruitful nursery of vocations, without which the foundation could not have grown into a Province nor could the latter have entertained just hopes of endurance in the future."

Capuchin life and the works of the friars spread rapidly. In 1884, Fr. Felix Maria Lex became the first Capuchin pastor of the German parish of St. Alphonsus in Wheeling, West Virginia. The friary and parish became a favorite of Fr. Hyacinth; he died there in 1907.

In 1886 the bishop of Columbus asked the friars to assume pastoral care of St. Joseph Church in Canal Dover, Ohio. Fr. Maurice Greck initially headed a band of friars. A friary was built a few years later. In those early years friars served Catholics in the towns of Vickers, Sherrodsville, Bolivar and Mages.

Friars in theological preparation for priestly ordination were sent to Munjor, Kansas, and later to Cumberland. In due course, property was purchased near the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, in 1916. At first it was for non-seminary studies at the University but became its own school of theology, known as Capuchin College.

In its 150 years, the Province of St. Augustine has seen the Capuchin charism implanted in places such as the Ohio River Valley of western Pennsylvania, the coal fields of West Virginia and urban centers like Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Cleveland. Preachers, teachers, pastors, craftsmen, chaplains, tailors and more ... with faith and prayerful devotion, true to the spirit of St. Francis, labored for the sake of Christ and His Church amid immigrants, laborers, young and old, poor and rich alike.



In the 1870s friars from Bavaria and Westphalia left their homeland to establish missions in the United States. Not long after the Province St. Augustine was established, friars were sent abroad, heeding Christ's mandate to "go out to all the world and announce the Gospel." In a collaborative venture with friars from Spain and Germany, four friars were sent to labor in China in the early 1900s. The last American friar was expelled in 1950 by the Communist government.



Puerto Rico was the destination for friars in 1929. Although the Church had long been established on the island, much work remained to enliven the faith of people who had been forgotten in tough city neighborhoods and hard-to-reach rural villages. The friars in Puerto Rico today are predominantly homegrown and comprise the Custody of St. John Baptist.



In 1955 the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea were opened to "outsiders." Six friars from St. Augustine Province were among the earliest to preach the Gospel to people who had lived much as their ancestors had for millenia. Many friars have been sent as missionaries since, and today Capuchins in Papua New Guinea, consisting of PNG Nationals, Americans, Indians, Tanzanians and Kenyans work and live together as the Custody of St. Michael the Archangel.

Barely five years after the founding of the Province, there was concern that the friars were spread too thinly. From Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio to Illinois and farther still to Kansas, they realized "they couldn't do it all." A decision was made in 1887 to withdraw from Illinois and hand over care of the parishes to the Franciscans.

As the needs of the Church evolve, so must the way in which the Province is of service. Through 150 years the friars have taken on ministries and established fraternities while simultaneously disbanding friaries and relinquishing pastoral care of parishes.

It continues to the present. Leaving the faithful who have supported and cared for the friars is rarely easy. In recent years the Province moved from Wheeling, Charleston, Dover, and others. At the same time, friaries and ministries were assumed in Washington, Cleveland, Baltimore, Indiana (PA), to name a few. As parishes are reconfigured in many places, the Capuchin presence has also changed, as in Cumberland, Rochester, Herman and even in Pittsburgh, involving the Mother parish of St. Augustine.



*At right from top left, and clockwise:
Conversion of St. Paul Shrine, Cleveland;
St. Ambrose Church, Baltimore;
St. John Church, Philadelphia; and,
St. John Church, New Baltimore, PA.*

Noteworthy Events

Divide to Grow

For many decades the Province of St. Augustine stretched from Pennsylvania to Kansas, and as of the early 1960s Colorado as well. After decades of consideration, the nearly 2,000 mile-wide Province was divided in 1977 at the Indiana-Illinois state line. Thus, the Province of Mid-America was created. Today the Province of St. Conrad is headquartered in Denver, with friaries in Colorado, Kansas and Texas. The efforts of the friars in Kansas begun in 1878, regarded by Fr. Hyacinth as "our best mission work," were rewarded with success and the hard work of beginning again.

Shared Purpose



Welcoming and forming young men as Capuchin friars begins with novitiate. Less than five months after arriving in Pittsburgh, permission was granted by Rome to receive novices. The first novitiate was part of St. Augustine Friary in Pittsburgh. Only a couple of years later it was moved to St. Mary's Friary in Herman. In 1881 it was moved to Cumberland where it remained until 1950 when it was relocated to the banks of the Severn River in Annapolis, MD. St. Conrad's Friary (*left*) received its first group of novices in July. An addition to the existing property was constructed to receive larger groups of novices. The Severn River property was placed on the market in 1983 when the novitiate was moved to Allison Park, PA.

In more recent years, the eight Capuchin Provinces of the United States, Canada and Australia, joined resources to establish one novitiate, which is located in Santa Ynez, California. San Lorenzo Friary (*left*) has served as the novitiate for the past decade. A staff of friars from various Provinces comprise the formation team, guiding young men to discern professing first vows as Capuchin friars.

Undiminished Legacy

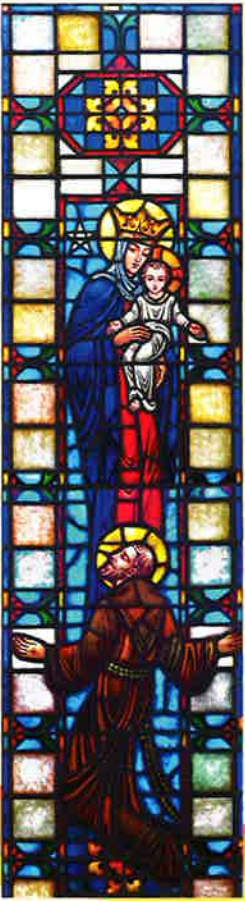
Cultural and demographic realities often determine the viability of strategies developed in earlier times. For nearly 100 years St. Fidelis Seminary trained hundreds of young men for Capuchin life and the priesthood, and many others for other vocations and careers. In the 1970s enrollment began to decline. By the end of the decade it became clear that change was imminent.

In 1979 St. Fidelis College was closed, and the formation program was moved to Borromeo Seminary (*lower right*) in Wickcliffe, Ohio, a seminary of the Diocese of Cleveland. At least a couple of friars have always been on staff to guide young men interested in Capuchin life. Those friars also serve the diocesan seminary as teachers, spiritual directors, and in other capacities as requested.

The high school program in Herman, St. Fidelis High Seminary, was closed a year later. Alumni of the seminary have remained in close contact with one another through the years.

Though St. Fidelis Seminary remains no longer, it contributed enormously to the Church and the Capuchin Province of St. Augustine.





"Trustfully biding the future"

The Province of St. Augustine was born, not from strategic planning, but the turmoil and chaos of change. Capuchins in Bavaria were threatened with suppression by an unstable King Ludwig, while the Westphalian friars were disbanded by the brutally enforced *May Laws* enacted by the secular government. Both Bavarian and Westphalian Capuchins would have to change or become extinct. With few alternatives, they decided to seek asylum in the United States.

Even after finding refuge and establishing a stable foundation, from the very first days of the Province's history, the demands of reality shaped hopes and plans. Change was ever-present, rarely allowing for "settling in."

Thanks be to God for 150 years of history, embraced with prayerful gratitude and rightful pride in those who've gone before us. It is, for sure, a story of many changes, some faced with excitement, and others with uncertainty and fear.

Change is perpetual.

No matter what changes are demanded as the future unfolds, there is unmistakable certainty that "the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus" shall never disappoint.

