

The Alexians

The Love of Christ Compels Us

*Immaculate Conception
Province of the Congregation
of Alexian Brothers*

Mission Statement

Strengthened by community, prayer, commitment to the poor and the legacy of our founders, and in partnership with others, we Alexian Brothers witness the Healing Christ by a holistic approach to promoting health and caring for the sick, dying, aged and unwanted of all socioeconomic levels.

Values

*Compassion
Dignity of the Person
Care of the Poor
Holism
Partnership*

COVID-19 Report

Alexian Brothers honor forebears' legacy through COVID-19 efforts

When the Black Death struck Europe in the 14th century, the Alexian Brothers' forebears risked their lives to care for the sick and to bury the dead.

Today, as the world grapples with the COVID-19 crisis, the Brothers no longer are front-line caregivers, but they continue to provide care and support for the sick, poor and vulnerable, whose needs and concerns have grown during the pandemic.

Knowing that front-line caregivers are working under heightened stress, the Brothers also are reaching out to them, providing a listening ear and spiritual comfort while expressing their deep gratitude.

In some cases, the Brothers' work has meant accepting personal risk. By early April, several



Signage outside AMITA Health Alexian Brothers Medical Center in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, reflects the respect and gratitude felt by many for its staff's efforts during the COVID-19 crisis.

Brothers had self-quarantined after possible exposure to COVID-19. Fortunately, all of the Brothers avoided infection.

This edition of *The Alexians* features special coverage of how the Brothers are extending their forebears' legacy through their response to the pandemic in the U.S., the Philippines and Hungary. (See pages 3-6.)

Four Brothers renew vows, novice professes First Vows

Five Alexian Brothers recently celebrated milestones in the Philippines, including four Brothers who renewed their Temporary Vows and a novice who professed his First Vows.

Brother Ignatius Gonzales, C.F.A., and Brother Dionisio De La Banda, C.F.A., renewed their Temporary Vows March 18 during a Mass

Brothers Health & Wellness Center.

“What is amazing in the renewal of our religious profession is the deepened understanding of our vows and the challenges in living them out in the community and in our ministry,” Brother Ignatius and Brother Dionisio said in a joint statement for *The Alexians*. “What keeps us inspired is the life-giving and faith-renewing motto of the Congregation, ‘The love of Christ compels us,’ especially in recent challenging times amid the threats of COVID-19.”

A day later, Brother Mark Buenaobra, C.F.A., and Brother Francisco Cabangon, C.F.A., renewed their Temporary Vows, and Novice Brother Henry Anthony Pabualan professed his First Vows during ceremonies in the chapel at the Brothers’ residence in the Bajada section of Davao City.

Father Joel Baguna, S.S.P., presided at the ceremonies, and Brother Raphael Fallado, C.F.A., director of the Alexian Brothers Bajada Community, accepted Brother Mark’s, Brother Francisco’s and Brother Henry’s vows on behalf of Brother Dan.

Before Brother Henry professed his vows, he received the scapular of the Alexian Brothers from Brother Raphael. Brother Henry then lit his profession candle from the Paschal candle, and Brother Raphael asked him, “What do you ask of God and of His Church?” Brother Henry replied, “I ask for God’s love and for the grace to serve Him in the religious community of Alexian Brothers in total self-giving.” He then professed his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Brothers from the Bajada community attended the ceremonies and in unison pledged their faith, trust and love to the three Brothers as each ceremony concluded. “We offer you a sharing in prayer and Eucharist,” the Brothers said. “We receive you with the hope that together with you, we will grow in the healing love that shows forth Jesus Christ to all men and women.”



Brother Francisco Cabangon, C.F.A., (fourth from left), Brother Henry Anthony Pabualan, C.F.A., (fifth from left), and Brother Mark Buenaobra, C.F.A., (sixth from left), pose for a photo with fellow Alexian Brothers after vow ceremonies in the Philippines. Brother Francisco and Brother Mark renewed their Temporary Vows, and Brother Henry professed his First Vows, in the chapel at the Brothers’ residence in the Bajada section of Davao City.

celebrated by Father Allan Rodriguez, D.C.D., in the chapel at the Brothers’ residence in the Matina section of Davao City.

Brother John of God Oblina, C.F.A., director of the Alexian Brothers Matina Community, accepted the two Brothers’ vows on behalf of Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A., provincial of the Immaculate Conception Province of the Congregation of Alexian Brothers.

Brother Dominic Andes, C.F.A., witnessed the renewal of vows for Brother Ignatius and Brother Dionisio. Also attending the ceremony were Aracelli Adlawan, Amor Repamonte and Rubyline Murga, associates at the Alexian

Provincial's Letter

Dear Alexian Friends:

A mask with a long beak hangs on my office coatrack, providing a constant reminder of the earliest Alexian Brothers.

It's a replica of the masks they wore to stave off infection as they cared for the sick and buried the dead during the Black Death in Europe in the 14th century. While people of means fled bubonic-plague hot spots, the Brothers stayed behind, helping the less fortunate who could not leave. In doing so, the Brothers put their own lives at risk. Although they wore the masks, they were not impenetrable, and many of the Brothers got sick and died.

Their selflessness, compassion and courage inspired other men to become Brothers, and they perpetuated our Congregation's healing mission through the centuries that followed.

Just after Brother Bonaventure Thelen, C.F.A., founded our U.S. ministry in Chicago in 1866, a cholera epidemic struck the city, and he and other Brothers cared for victims of the disease at a hospital that he established in a small house on Dearborn Street.

During the 1918 influenza pandemic, Brothers again served on the front lines, caring for patients at hospitals in Chicago and Elizabeth, N.J. Many of them lost their lives trying to save others, just like our earliest forebears had done.

I have been thinking often about all of these Brothers as the COVID-19 pandemic has advanced across the U.S. and around the world this spring. I have remembered how inspired I felt when I first learned of their commitment and sacrifice. After I joined the Brothers in 1994, I often would ask God during my morning meditation to infuse my heart with the spirit of the Brothers who had gone before me, so I could understand their sense of mission and purpose as well as the fear they must have felt as they risked their lives to care for others.

In retrospect, I realize those prayers were a

safe intellectual exercise. I knew at the time that when morning meditation ended, I could return to the real world, which was safe and comfortable, especially by comparison with the worlds of Brothers in the 14th, 19th and early 20th centuries.

But COVID-19 has shattered that reality. The pandemic has arrived at the Brothers' doorstep, presenting the greatest opportunity ever encountered by today's Brothers to honor the legacy of our forebears. It's an opportunity for us to set aside the security and control we have enjoyed for years and to step bravely into an uncertain future, aligning our hearts and minds more closely with the spirit of our bygone Brothers.

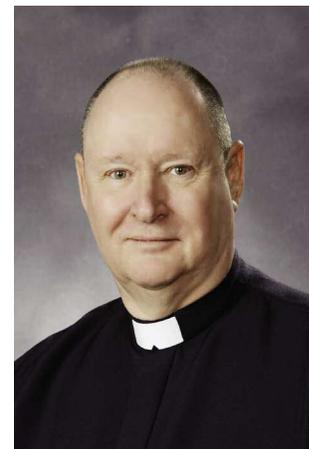
Across the Immaculate Conception Province, our Brothers are embracing this opportunity. Unlike our forebears, we are not providing front-line medical care. But, as highlighted in this edition of *The Alexians*, we are helping in other ways, collaborating with our associates and with health-care administrators at our namesake facilities to care for those affected by COVID-19.

Our efforts are limited to an extent by strict safety policies enacted to protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19. But Brothers still have taken on personal risk to support those in need, with several Brothers self-quarantining after possible exposure to COVID-19. Other Brothers are helping from a distance through prayer and outreach. Together, they are honoring our forebears' legacy, demonstrating that serving the poor, the sick and the powerless remains our life's work, just as it has been since the 14th century.

May God Bless You and Yours,



Brother Daniel McCormick, C.F.A.
Provincial
Immaculate Conception Province of the Alexian Brothers



Tennessee ministry plays leading role in helping vulnerable adults

St. Alexius Outreach Ministries (SAOM), which serves isolated older adults in Chattanooga, Tennessee, took early action to prepare the most-vulnerable for the COVID-19 pandemic. The ministry then joined a communitywide effort to support vulnerable adults during the crisis, with its staff playing a leading role while self-quarantining.

The staff swung into action in early March after attending a meeting at which local health experts discussed the potential impact of COVID-19. The staff quickly assembled emergency kits with toiletries and a two-week supply of food for 14 highly vulnerable participants in SAOM's Hospitality at Home program, which provides ongoing friendship and supportive case-management services to a total of 45 homebound older adults. The kits were distributed the week of March 9.

The COVID-19 outlook darkened significantly the same week, causing SAOM on March 13 to suspend in-person visits with its Hospitality at Home participants, as well as its Senior Shopping Shuttle program, which provides free rides to and from grocery stores for seniors living in so-called "food deserts." On the same day, the ministry's staff began self-quarantining at home after learning a staff member had been exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms. Brother Richard Kane, C.F.A., who regularly works at SAOM, did the same. (See sidebar.)

While self-quarantining, the staff collabo-

rated with state and local government officials and representatives of other social services agencies during daily video conferences aimed at establishing community hubs for supporting isolated older adults, the homeless and the mentally ill during the pandemic. The staff took a leading role by offering to make SAOM a drop-off/pickup site for donations of personal care and household products.

When the staff's self-quarantine ended without illness, they began setting up the site, developed program guidelines and safety protocols, and began publicizing the program and accepting donations. The program was up and running in a week, with donations available for social services agencies to order and to pick up. SAOM included with all pickup orders a letter describing the ministry, COVID-19 prevention steps and what to do in the event of COVID-19 symptoms. The letter advised donation recipients to be alert for phone scams and included phone numbers to call for support services and additional COVID-19 information.

"We want the recipients to know we're here for them and they're not alone," said Susan Chill, SAOM executive director, who praised SAOM Program Coordinator Sidney Barham for speeding the creation of the donation program. "We want to bring them hope."

Meanwhile, SAOM volunteers and Brother Richard have called Hospitality at Home participants regularly during the pandemic, checking on their needs and overall well-being while providing the friendship and support they ordinarily would provide in person. "We're still keeping a tight watch on all of our participants," Chill said. "We're also calling new referrals, and we're collaborating with other agencies to make sure all of our participants are safe."

Friends of the Brothers who want to support SAOM's efforts can mail donations to the ministry in care of Chill at 250 East 10th St., Chattanooga, TN, 37402.



Sidney Barham, program coordinator for St. Alexius Outreach Ministries (SAOM), (left), watches as SAOM volunteer Smita Donthamsetty unloads the first donation of personal care and household products under a COVID-19 relief effort organized by SAOM.

Brothers self-quarantine

When Brother Richard Kane, C.F.A., self-quarantined in March because of possible exposure to COVID-19, his fellow Brothers in Signal Mountain, Tennessee, joined him, refraining from any contact with residents at Ascension Living Alexian Village.

While self-quarantining, the Brothers comforted residents by phone and provided prayerful support, said Brother Richard Lowe, C.F.A., director of the Brothers' Signal Mountain community.

All of the Brothers avoided illness but continued to follow the Village's strict social distancing guidelines.

Missions keep focus on needy while adapting to new realities

The onset of COVID-19 in the Philippines and Hungary caused multiple changes at the Alexian Brothers missions in the two nations.

With the government of Davao City mandating that residents quarantine themselves at home, the Alexian Brothers Health & Wellness Center (ABHWC), which provides diagnostic services and treatment for minor medical issues, saw a sharp drop in patient visits.

ABHWC remained open with limited operating hours for about two weeks after the government mandate. But with the center's income declining, the Brothers suspended most of its operations March 25. ABHWC's Nephrology Center remained open to serve dialysis patients.

"It was a difficult but wise decision since we were concerned about our staff's safety due to a lack of personal protective equipment," said Brother Ignatius Gonzales, C.F.A.

At the Alexian Brothers mission in Győrújbarát, Hungary, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Home for the Elderly remained open but tightened its safety policies. Brother Leó Vendrey, C.F.A., continued ministering to the home's residents and staff, but was confined to the mission site to minimize his chance of contracting the novel coronavirus, which causes COVID-19 and poses a high risk to the elderly. "Luckily, our monastery and the elderly home are on the same site, so we are practically separated from the outside world," said Brother Alexius Siska, C.F.A., who oversees the mission as director of its Alexian Brothers Community.

After the Hungarian government declared a state of emergency because of COVID-19, Brother Alexius limited his trips outside the mission to about one per week for essential purposes. He also ceased his interactions with residents at the home, which serves low-income older adults.

Daily Masses were suspended at both missions, but the Brothers continued their morn-

ing and evening prayers. In the Philippines, the Brothers could watch live-streamed Mass daily or could listen to it on the radio. In Hungary, the Brothers could watch Mass on TV.

Strict enforcement of the Davao City government's stay-at-home mandate prevented the Brothers from continuing their ministry of presence to the sick and disadvantaged, but the Brothers found other ways to help the needy. For example, the Brothers donated 10 sacks of rice and made a cash donation to the Caritas office of the Archdiocese of Davao.

"We also have offered our times of prayer and adoration on behalf of those we serve, those who are sick, and those who have died of COVID-19," Brother Ignatius said. "We take turns in an hour of adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament every day."

In general, he added, the pandemic has given the Brothers more time in prayer and in community with one another, strengthening their bonds as Brothers. "This pandemic has changed our lives and the structure of our community life," he said. "But it has given us a deeper sense of bonding, belonging and relationship."

Before the Brothers suspended most of ABHWC's operations, Brother Ignatius was assigned to the center to screen patients with COVID-19-like symptoms. He said the experience enhanced his understanding of the earliest Alexian Brothers and their ministry of caring for the sick and burying the dead during the Black Death of the 14th century.

"It gave me the courage to transcend my fear of being infected," he said. "Christ's healing mission became concrete because of what I was doing. Truly, this is what an Alexian Brother is all about – an ordinary man living an extraordinary life in the service of God."



Brother Dioniso De La Banda, C.F.A., (left), and Brother Ignatius Gonzales, C.F.A., wait to screen patients with COVID-19-like symptoms at the Alexian Brothers Health & Wellness Center in Davao City. The Brothers later suspended most of the center's operations because of the impact of a strict stay-at-home mandate issued by the city.

Brothers collaborate with providers to provide support, encouragement

As COVID-19 began to advance, Alexian Brothers in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, Milwaukee and St. Louis collaborated with their namesake ministries to determine the most-appropriate ways for the Brothers to provide support.

“We’re paying as much attention as we can to the spiritual welfare and health of the people we care for, working within the COVID-19

restrictions,” said Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A., provincial of the Immaculate Conception Province of the Congregation of Alexian Brothers and director of the Alexian Brothers Community in Elk Grove Village.

The Brothers of Elk Grove Village continued their presence ministry on a more limited basis than usual at their namesake facilities in Chicago’s northwest suburbs. Through the ministry, the Brothers provide comfort, support and spiritual guidance to patients, residents, family members and staff at the facilities.

Brother Torch Acosta, C.F.A., who leads the ministry, continued to visit facilities “to the degree he can on a day-to-day, situation-by-situation basis,” Brother Dan said. Before visiting a facility, Brother Torch obtained permission from supervisory staff; he then adhered strictly to safety policies, including wearing a protective mask and gloves.

Recognizing the enormous stress that front-line caregivers were experiencing, Brother Torch, Brother Dan and Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., who together comprise the Brothers’ Elk Grove Village community, made an extra effort to provide support for hospital staff members. “We encourage them and tell them how much we appreciate what they are doing,” Brother Dan said. “They are out there putting themselves at risk, and we need to recognize and support their efforts.”

In Milwaukee, the Brothers worked closely

with administrators at Ascension Living Alexian Village to identify ways for the Brothers to help the Village and its residents while still following strict COVID-19 policies.

Brother Patrick McCabe, C.F.A., and Novice Brother Joe Pense were allowed to minister to residents in the Village’s Health and Rehabilitation Center and Village Square assisted-living area, respectively, helping staff keep residents engaged. Brother Joe subsequently self-quarantined after visiting with a resident who developed COVID-19-like symptoms. He emerged from his self-quarantine without illness and resumed his ministry after it was determined the resident did not have the virus.

Novice Brother Robert Podjarsky sorted residents’ mail, and he and Brother Warren Longo, C.F.A., helped lead morning prayers on the Village’s closed-circuit TV network. Brother John Howard, C.F.A., director of the Brothers’ community in Milwaukee, helped update residents about new chapel rules, including a prohibition on gathering for daily Mass, which residents could watch on TV. While following strict safety procedures, Brother Robert also distributed Holy Communion to residents who requested it. Brother Warren, meanwhile, continued his prison ministry, communicating by phone, through the Internet, or with letters to prisoners and former prisoners.

In St. Louis, the Brothers usually minister regularly to residents at two Ascension Living nursing homes, but they suspended that ministry after the facilities prohibited visits by non-essential personnel. “We’re in a holding pattern until we get permission to return,” said Brother Steve Fogt, C.F.A., director of the Alexian Brothers Community in St. Louis. “We are praying daily for all the residents and staff.” The Brothers also continued to provide food for homeless people who occasionally come to their door. “We know these people, so we are not going to close our door to them,” Brother Steve said.



Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., (left), and Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A., (second from right), are shown with Karen Stearney, a pharmacy technician, (second from left), and Dahlia Kerns, pharmacy director, at AMITA Health Alexian Brothers Medical Center in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.

Novice reflects on year of learning in Philippines

As Novice Brother Carl Sisolak nears the end of a year of Novitiate training in the Philippines, he feels grateful for multiple experiences that have informed and challenged him while fostering his spiritual growth and teaching him valuable lessons about caring for the needy and living in community as an Alexian Brother.

His formation under the guidance of Brother Raphael Fallado, C.F.A., director of novices in the Philippines, has included a series of educational experiences, such as classes at an institute for men and women beginning their formation as religious brothers and sisters.

“I was challenged with the classes, most notably with the class on missiology, which focused on cultures within and without our communities and on ministry with respect to indigenous peoples,” Brother Carl said.

He arrived last July at the Alexian Brothers mission in Davao City and took classes at the institute from August through November, establishing friendships with instructors and with novices from other religious orders. Brother Carl also has received local instruction from Brother Raphael and Sister Claire Espiritu of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master (P.D.D.M.).

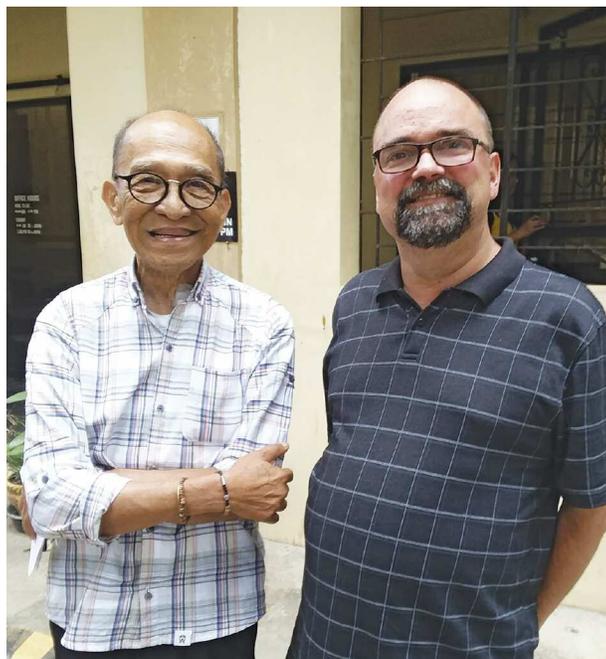
To further his spiritual development, Brother Carl has participated in regular retreats with his fellow Brothers and most recently in a weeklong silent retreat led by P.D.D.M. Provincial Sister Mary Anthony. Meetings with a spiritual director have helped Brother Carl to stay faith-centered and to cope spiritually with the death of his father last October.

Brother Carl also has ministered to patients cared for by the Missionaries of Charity, a congregation of religious sisters established by Mother Teresa. “I enjoy visiting with them and being present to them, even if I don’t know a lot of their language,” he said. “I at least can say, ‘Good morning,’ in their language, and I know a smile for them speaks a thousand words.”

A musician, Brother Carl has filled in sometimes for the regular organist and has sung hymns at the P.D.D.M. sisters’ daily Mass. He and his fellow Brothers often attend the Mass and assist as lectors. The sisters have taught Brother Carl about Filipino liturgy and worship celebrations, and he has learned important lessons from the sisters and his fellow Brothers about living as a member of a religious community.

“I have learned in community that when my Brothers are speaking Bisayan instead of English, I still can communicate with them by just observing their voice tones and mannerisms and by asking questions about what I don’t understand,” Brother Carl said. “Communication in a community is, I have learned, more than just words. I also feel the strength of community through daily living and group prayers.”

The Immaculate Conception Province of the Congregation of Alexian Brothers has been sending novices to the Philippine mission since July 2018 for a year of instruction and formation as part of the two-year Novitiate program. “I understand that when Brother Carl returns to the U.S. this July, he probably will join the Brothers in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, for six months and participate in a clinical pastoral education program,” said Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., U.S. director of vocations. “He then might be assigned to another Alexian Brothers community to complete his Novitiate training and to participate in our older-adult ministries.”



Novice Brother Carl Sisolak (right) poses for a photo with one of his instructors, Redemptorist Brother Karl Gaspar, in the Philippines.

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The Alexians

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Brothers' presence at gala reflects AMITA Health's faith-based roots



(Left to right) Brother Torch Acosta, C.F.A., Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., Keith Parrott, president and chief executive officer of AMITA Health, and Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A., provincial of the Immaculate Conception Province of the Congregation of Alexian Brothers, pose for a photo at the AMITA Health Gala on Feb. 29. The event at the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile drew more than 800 people and raised more than \$1.5 million to support people served by AMITA Health's hospitals and other ministries. A joint venture of Ascension and AdventHealth, AMITA Health includes three legacy health systems: Alexian Brothers Health System, Presence Health and Adventist Midwest Health. Foundations from across AMITA Health planned the gala, which was the first combined fundraising effort of its kind since Ascension acquired Presence Health and added it to AMITA Health in 2018.