

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*

Brothers chart future course at productive Provincial Chapter

As summer gave way to fall, the Alexian Brothers of the Immaculate Conception Province gathered for their Provincial Chapter, making important decisions regarding their ministries, spiritual lives and governance structure.

“It went very well,” said Provincial Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A. “It reflected a new attitude toward ministry that I see as a bright dawning for those of us who already are Brothers and for those who will join us in the future.”

The Brothers usually hold their Provincial Chapter once every six years to set the Province’s future course, but this year’s gathering at the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois, was delayed for two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The delay left the Brothers with considerable ground to cover, and the 17 Brothers in



The Alexian Brothers of the Immaculate Conception Province gather for a photo during their Provincial Chapter at the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois.

attendance from their three U.S. communities and their mission in the Philippines set their sights on discussing key issues and new ideas while praying together and renewing their relationships with each other.

They approved several proposals, including one that will enable the Province to expand its efforts to help the poor and the powerless by

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Brothers eye new ministries abroad as part of aggressive vocations drive

As the Alexian Brothers of the Immaculate Conception Province widen their search for men with religious vocations beyond the U.S., the Brothers have endorsed a proposal to revive a dormant project to explore the possibility of launching a mission in East Timor, a poor nation in southeast Asia.

Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., U.S. vocations

director, made the proposal while delivering a report on vocations at the recent Provincial Chapter, and the Brothers in attendance supported the idea unanimously. They also unanimously endorsed a companion proposal to explore other possible ministry sites overseas, including the northern part of the Philippines.

With overall religious vocations declining for decades in the U.S., the province must intensify its efforts to recruit men overseas, Brother Zeke said. One way to do that, he added, could be to establish

ministries in East Timor and other impoverished places with strong Catholic faith traditions and a pressing need for the Brothers' healing ministry. In 2015, the Brothers of the province's mission in the southern part of the Philippines began to explore the possibility of establishing a mission in East Timor. They later submitted an in-depth report on the idea, but the COVID-19 pandemic sidetracked the project.

"Opening the doors to international vocations recruitment is vital," Brother Zeke said. "We are called to embrace greater diversity, and we want to welcome people from different walks of life and to be more inclusive of other cultures. That's the key to growing our Congregation and renewing our 800-year healing tradition."

Using online recruitment strategies focused on social media and the Brothers' website (www.alexianbrothers.org), Brother Zeke has heard from – and has begun conversations with – a growing number of men in places outside the U.S., such as Ireland, Brazil, Argentina, Sri Lanka and Africa. He emphasizes in social media posts that the Brothers welcome inquiries from men with diverse ethnic and cultural heritages.

The Brothers also are willing to embrace the challenges of helping candidates with immigration issues if they are good fits for the Congregation, Brother Zeke said. He is scouting resources that the Brothers could use to provide legal assistance with immigration issues for qualified candidates from abroad.

While exploring the possibility of establishing new ministries overseas, the province also must expand its international marketing efforts, Brother Zeke said. He took a step in that direction this fall by working to establish a relationship with Vocations Ireland, an organization through which religious congregations can promote vocations. He hopes to post ads and other information about the Brothers on Vocations Ireland's website and social media platforms.

Collaboration with such organizations and with other Alexian Brothers provinces will be essential to vocations success, Brother Zeke said, noting that efforts have begun to expand cross-province collaboration. "All these vocations efforts require a deeper understanding of the implications of true collaboration," he said. "If we truly believe there is hope for the future in terms of surviving the threats to religious life of aging, diminution and death, we must change the way we think and live, and we must make choices. Our province is making an aggressive effort in this regard." He added that "coming to completion," a term commonly used to describe the end of a religious congregation, "is the last thing on our minds."



Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., delivers a presentation about the Immaculate Conception Province's vocations efforts at the recent Provincial Chapter.

Provincial's Letter

Dear Alexian Friends:

The catchphrase, “coming to completion,” has emerged as a common way of referring to religious institutes that are dying because most of their members have retired, fallen ill or passed away.

There is nothing wrong with accepting completion if the leaders of a religious institute truly believe the Holy Spirit is leading them in that direction. But the Alexian Brothers of the Immaculate Conception Province are far from completion, even though our membership is down significantly from its 20th-century peak because of the deaths of elderly Brothers and an overall decline in religious vocations.

The vibrancy of our province was evident at our recent Provincial Chapter, where we made many important decisions about our future. None had anything to do with completion. Rather, we focused on how we can make the biggest possible impact with a smaller number of Brothers while taking aggressive steps to attract new men with religious vocations.

We approved several proposals, including one that will enable the province to expand its efforts to help the poor and the powerless by allowing Brothers to participate in short mission trips sponsored by other organizations to places such as Nigeria, Thailand, Guatemala, Mexico and the Navajo Nation in Arizona. We also approved a proposal to make ourselves available to help organizations providing aid to communities reeling from natural disasters, and we supported continued expansion of our outreach efforts to the imprisoned and to former inmates trying to rebuild their lives.

In addition, the 17 Brothers in attendance from our three U.S. communities and our mission in the southern Philippines recognized the potential of attracting men with vocations from overseas by establishing ministries in impoverished places with strong Catholic faith traditions and a pressing need for the Brothers’

healing ministry. The Brothers unanimously endorsed proposals to revive a dormant project to explore the possibility of launching a mission in East Timor, a poor nation in southeast Asia, and to explore other possible ministry sites overseas, including the northern part of the Philippines.

These decisions and others made at the Chapter reflected our determination to move forward without fear despite the challenges we face. A spiritual director once told me, “You should pray as if everything depended on God, and you should work as if everything depended on you.” And that’s exactly how we are approaching the future.

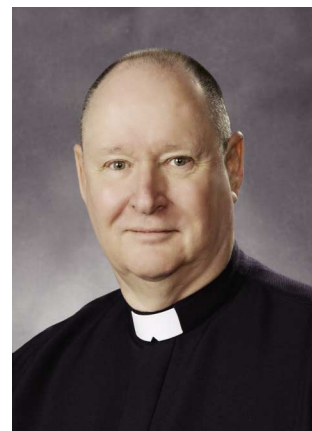
We recognize that God doesn’t just put us in a car and tell us to close our eyes while He drives. We recognize that we as a Congregation are responsible and accountable for using all the gifts that God has given us to serve Him by caring for His people. We also recognize that we can’t save the world and that we should take a targeted approach to perpetuating our 800-year healing mission without trying to reinvent the wheel.

That’s why we’re ready to partner with other organizations to bring God’s grace to those in need and to maximize our impact as a small religious institute. We’re successfully doing that already with new ministries we have established in recent years, and we intend to do more of it in the future. Far from contemplating completion, we’re excited about our future, and we firmly believe that God will take care of us, no matter what.

May God Bless You and Yours,



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



Brothers chart future course at productive Provincial Chapter

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allowing Brothers to participate in short mission trips sponsored by other organizations to places such as Nigeria, Thailand, Guatemala, Mexico and the Navajo Nation in Arizona. The Brothers also approved a proposal to make themselves available to help organizations providing aid to communities reeling from natural disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes and floods. Brothers



The Alexian Brothers of the Immaculate Conception Province pray together during their Provincial Chapter.

could travel alone for any trips in the U.S., but two Brothers would be sent on any trips abroad. The Provincial Council would need to approve any such missions.

“All of these efforts would be predicated on partnering with an organization that already will be at – or going to – the destination,” Brother Dan said. “We recognize that it’s not only undesirable, but also could be dangerous, for a Brother to show up and say, ‘Here I am; put me to work,’ without a place to stay, without funding and without some sort of infrastructure.”

Brother Dan cautioned his fellow Brothers that any such missions will be contingent on the manpower available at any given time to staff the Province’s existing ministries. The province now has a total of 24 Brothers in the U.S., Hungary and the Philippines, but only 16 of them are in active ministry. “Although these new ministries align with our mission, our manpower is short, and we must be realistic,” he said.

The Brothers also re-emphasized their

support for continued expansion of their outreach efforts to the imprisoned and to former inmates trying to rebuild their lives. For many years, Brother Warren Longo, C.F.A., of the Brothers’ community in Milwaukee, has corresponded with current and former prisoners, offering encouragement and prayerful support. Since early 2022, the Brothers have partnered with the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Kolbe House Jail Ministry, with individual Brothers supporting its re-entry ministry by providing guidance and support to recently released inmates. And just recently, Brother Patrick McCabe, C.F.A., director of the Brothers’ community in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, began seeking his certification as a chaplain for Cook County Jail and Kolbe House.

“In many ways, the Brothers are taking Matthew 25 very literally,” Brother Dan said. “It calls on us to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and comfort the sick and imprisoned, and each of us is finding a way to do that as we continue to rediscover who we are as Brothers since leaving our former ministries at healthcare institutions.”

Reflecting this spirit, the Brothers unanimously approved a proposal by the Brothers of the Philippines to allow Brothers to choose personal ministries suited to their individual gifts, guided by the Brothers responsible for their formation. The Brothers also unanimously approved a proposal calling for at least one Brother in every community to be trained in home health nursing so he can lead fellow Brothers if they must care for a fellow Brother contending with illness or infirmity.

Deepening the Brothers’ spiritual lives was another major topic at the Provincial Chapter, which took place from Sept. 17 to Sept. 21. After much discussion, the Brothers approved a resolution requiring community directors to engage an outside expert to explain the core basics of spirituality to the Brothers in their community.



Brothers elect delegates to General Chapter

The Immaculate Conception Province's delegates to the Congregation of Alexian Brothers' General Chapter meeting next year pose for a photo after they were elected at the Provincial Chapter meeting in September. They include (left to right, standing) Brother Vincent Timbang, C.F.A., Brother Raphael Fallado, C.F.A., Brother Tom Klein, C.F.A., Brother Steve Fogt, C.F.A., and Brother Ignatius Gonzales, C.F.A., and (left to right, sitting) Brother Patrick McCabe, C.F.A., Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., and Brother Richard Lowe, C.F.A. Brother Romie Duriman, C.F.A., and Brother Richard Kane, C.F.A., (not shown) were elected as alternate delegates. The General Chapter is scheduled to take place next spring in Siegburg, Germany. The meeting usually occurs once every six years, with delegates from the Congregation's provinces and regions electing their worldwide leaders and addressing other issues of importance to the Brothers. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed back the upcoming General Chapter to 2024 from 2022.

These presentations will provide an overview of spirituality without embracing any particular school of spiritual thought, because the Brothers always have taken an eclectic approach to individual spirituality. Each community director also will be responsible for finding a spiritual director for every Brother in his community.

The Brothers also gave unanimous approval to a pair of governance proposals. One calls for reducing the size of the Provincial Council to include two Brothers instead of three. "We simply do not have the manpower to have three councilors anymore," Brother Dan said. The two councilors, along with a provincial leader, would be elected at the Brothers' Provincial Assembly next year and would assume their roles in November 2024, when Brother Dan plans to step down after three consecutive four-year terms as provincial.

The other governance proposal calls for the Brothers of the Philippines to spend a year

researching the possibility of their Matina and Bajada communities becoming a separate region within the Congregation of Alexian Brothers. "It will be a step up in administration for them, but it will recognize their talents, abilities, commitment and desire for autonomy," Brother Dan said. If recommended by the Brothers of the Philippines after they complete their study, this change would require approval from the General Council, the Congregation's governing body.

A unique aspect of the Provincial Chapter was the attendance of Joanne Kristoffersen, Adeline Dzierozynski and Crystal Ritchie, who play key administrative roles within Alexian Brothers Communities and Ministries. "We wanted to make sure they were there because they understand how our province operates," Brother Dan said. "It's also important for them to understand the thinking behind the direction we've chosen for the next several years so they can provide help and guidance for my successor."

Chapter's inclusive spirit draws praise

Several Alexian Brothers who gathered recently for their Provincial Chapter praised the event for its inclusive spirit and the opportunities it offered to deepen their spiritual lives and to renew relationships with other Brothers.

"A number of proposals needed clarification, resulting in some good discussions," said Brother Steve Fogt, C.F.A., comptroller and director of new ministry development for the

Immaculate Conception Province of the Congregation of Alexian Brothers. "All the Brothers were able to speak their minds without being cut short."

Brother Anthony Abastillas, C.F.A., from the province's mission in the Philippines, said he was impressed by the "hospitable and respectful" atmosphere at the Chapter, which took place from Sept. 17 to Sept. 21 at the Carmelite Spiritual Center in Darien, Illinois. The Chapter "opened my

eyes, heart and mind on how the Alexian Brothers lead and nurture the Congregation, how dedicated they are, and how they use their resources to make the Congregation productive," said Brother Anthony, who attended the Chapter for the first time. "The proposals presented show how they value and love the Congregation."

Brother Carl Sisolak, C.F.A., of the Alexian Brothers Community in Milwaukee, echoed Brother Anthony's comments, saying a team atmosphere pervaded the Chapter. "When the sessions were presented, I felt I was part of this important process and that my input would be

valuable," said Brother Carl, who also attended the Chapter for the first time. "This made me feel that we are all in this together and that our future was joined together by the work of the Holy Spirit."

Brother Robert Podjarsky, C.F.A., another first-time attendee at the Chapter, said it was an honor "to be allowed to voice opinions on what is best for the Congregation moving forward." A highlight for him was the unanimous approval of his proposal to teach novices the practice of contemplative prayer.

While discussing proposals for deepening their spiritual lives, Brothers at the Chapter also attended Mass and morning and evening prayer sessions each day. "Our faith in the works of the Holy Spirit through and with us strengthens and moves us in bettering all aspect of our lives, in community and ministry," Brother Carl said. "I was glad we were reminded of this in our daily Masses together and our prayer together."

The Chapter, which had been delayed by two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic, also included time in the evenings for the Brothers to socialize and to catch up. "It was very pleasant to spend the evenings talking and getting to know each other better as religious Brothers," Brother Steve said.

With five Brothers from the Philippines in attendance, the Chapter also presented a unique opportunity for U.S.-based Brothers to gain a better understanding of the province's two communities in the Philippines, their traditions and Filipino culture. "I really enjoyed working with the Brothers from the Philippines and learning from their perspective," Brother Steve said. "Each of our communities in the U.S. and the Philippines took turns leading the morning and evening prayers, and when the Brothers from the Philippines had their turn, they prayed in their language. The songs were beautifully sung, and it was interesting to hear the universal Church's prayer in different languages."



(Left to right) Brother Richard Lowe, C.F.A., Brother Anthony Abastillas, C.F.A., Brother Patrick McCabe, C.F.A., Brother Vincent Timbang, C.F.A., and Brother Carl Sisolak, C.F.A., enjoy a game of Scrabble® during the Provincial Chapter. The Chapter, which had been delayed by two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic, included time in the evenings for the Brothers to socialize and to catch up.

Two Brothers renew Temporary Vows

Brother Robert Podjarsky, C.F.A., and Brother Carl Sisolak, C.F.A., members of the Alexian Brothers Community in Milwaukee, renewed their Temporary Vows during a ceremony in the chapel of the Alexian Brothers residence in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.

Brother Richard Lowe, C.F.A., director of the Milwaukee community, accepted the vow renewals, and Brother Warren Longo, C.F.A., served as witness during the ceremony, which occurred July 17, the Feast of St. Alexius, patron saint of the Alexian Brothers. Also in attendance was Brother Zeke Mapa, C.F.A., of the Alexian Brothers Community in Elk Grove Village. Brother Robert and Brother Carl each signed a document affirming their renewal of their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for one year. Brother Richard and Brother Warren also signed the documents.

“As I get closer to God, these worldly milestones are just so meaningful,” Brother Robert said. “They’re a way of telling God ‘I love you, and I’m with you.’” Brother Carl said his renewal of vows “meant that I can experience another year of joy doing God’s work and

that I’m on the right track.” He added, “It’s just a blessing knowing that other Brothers approve of and support what I do. That means a lot.”

Brother Robert ministers to residents of Ascension Living Alexian Village in Milwaukee. He also travels to Chicago each week to participate in the Brothers’ food delivery ministry on the city’s West Side and to support a weekly Bible study luncheon for seniors.

Brother Carl also ministers to residents at Alexian Village, bringing the Eucharist to them, leading rosary sessions and Bible studies, participating in resident activities, scheduling residents for various roles at Mass, and playing the piano, including sometimes at Mass.

The two Brothers also work at a local church on Thursday evenings, helping to prepare free takeout meals for people in need.



Brother Robert Podjarsky, C.F.A., (left), and Brother Carl Sisolak, C.F.A., pose for a photo after renewing their Temporary Vows.

Brothers developing plan to protect vulnerable adults

Provincial Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A., has appointed Brother Patrick McCabe, C.F.A., and Brother Warren Longo, C.F.A., to develop a best-practices plan to ensure the protection of vulnerable adults in all Alexian Brothers ministries.

The effort is part of a push by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) for religious institutes to take a proactive approach to preventing the abuse of vulnerable adults, including those struggling

with addictions, mental disabilities or the infirmities of aging.

“Every religious institute I can think of now has a plan for the protection of minors,” said Brother Dan, noting that the Brothers’ plan for protecting minors has become a template for other religious institutes. “CMSM is leading the way in saying we need to get ahead of this issue and to be, on paper and in practice, ensuring we’re protecting vulnerable adults just as we protect minors.”

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Alexian Brothers
Communities and Ministries
600 Alexian Way
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007

Brother Lawrence Krueger, C.F.A.
Superior General, Congregation of Alexian Brothers

Brother Dermot O'Leary, C.F.A.
Vicar General, Congregation of Alexian Brothers

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

Brother Patrick McCabe, C.F.A.
Director of the Alexian Brothers Community, Elk Grove Village, Illinois

Brother Richard Lowe, C.F.A.
Director of the Alexian Brothers Community, Milwaukee

Brother Tom Klein, C.F.A.
Director of the Alexian Brothers Community, Signal Mountain, Tennessee

Brother Leó Vendrey, C.F.A.
Director of the Alexian Brothers Community, Győrújbarát, Hungary

Brother Romie Duriman, C.F.A.
Director of the Alexian Brothers Bajada Community, Davao City, Philippines

Brother John of God Oblina, C.F.A.
Provincial Legate, Alexian Brothers Mission, Davao City, Philippines, Director of the Alexian Brothers Matina Community, Davao City

Brother Steve Fogt, C.F.A.
Comptroller, Immaculate Conception Province of the Alexian Brothers

The Alexians

The Love of Christ Compels Us

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Brother from Hungary takes sabbatical in Knock, Ireland

Brother Alexius Siska, C.F.A., formerly director of the Alexian Brothers Community at their mission in Győrújbarát, Hungary, is taking a yearlong sabbatical with the Alexian Brothers Community in Knock, Ireland.

The sabbatical is giving Brother Alexius an opportunity for rest and reflection after many years of overseeing the mission, including St. Elizabeth of Hungary Home for the Elderly, which provides assisted-living and skilled nursing care for low-income older adults.

"We will look at his next placement when his sabbatical ends," said Brother Dan McCormick, C.F.A., provincial of the Immaculate Conception Province of the Congregation of Alexian Brothers.

Brother Leó Vendrey, C.F.A., has been appointed as community director at the mission. Now the only Brother at the mission, Brother Leo "is doing a wonderful job," Brother Dan said. "The Hungarian mission is very strong and is functioning very well."



Brother Alexius Siska, C.F.A., (right), is taking a yearlong sabbatical in Ireland, and Brother Leó Vendrey, C.F.A., (left) has been appointed as community director of the Alexian Brothers Community at their mission in Győrújbarát, Hungary.

A plan to expand the mission to include independent-living apartments for older adults continues to move forward. The plan calls for converting part of the Brothers' monastery at the mission into eight apartments housing a total of eight to 10 people. The expansion project is expected to be completed by the end of next year.