

"I'M HERE BECAUSE I WANT TO RETURN A SERVICE TO THE LORD." • VICTOR GARCIA, 50



Tom Nguyen, blue shirt, 21, and Tim Aller, 39, overlook the courtyard at the St. Fidelis Friary in Victoria during their training to become Capuchin friars. "I went to Vietnam with my mom, and we realized we couldn't give money to everyone who came up to you," Nguyen said. "My mom stopped giving them money and began to pray for them. Then they started to form a line so she could pray for them. That was when I reconsidered becoming a postulant. I realized that is what people need and are looking for, for hope and faith. We are here to give everything up to God, and he in turn gives us his grace and love, and then we are to go out into the world and be an example of Christ's love."

Answering the calling

story by phyllis zorn

photos by jeff giraldo

VICTORIA — The friendship between Joe Newton and Dwayne Santos is easy to see, despite the obvious differences between them. The lives of Newton, a client of Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas who spends his days at Pioneer Development Center in Russell, and Santos, a native of Guam who used to work in the tourism industry, intersected during a training program for men interested in taking Capuchin vows.

One recent day at Pioneer Development Center, Newton wheeled into the room in his motorized wheelchair and spotting Santos, called out to him.

Santos smiled and walked over to Newton to ask what he'd been doing. "I did physical therapy," Newton said.

Newton told Santos about the Ford Fairlane 500 his grandmother used to drive. It was just like the model car kit Newton had in a bag hanging from the back of his chair.

Then Newton's eyes lit on another friar in training.

"Duncan, Duncan, what are you doing?" Newton asked.

"I'm reading them a story," Duncan Cromb answered from where he sat with a group of other DSNWK clients at a table a short distance away.

After a round of snacks, it was the end of the learning day at Pioneer Development Center and time for the students to go home. Santos and Cromb drove to the residence Newton shares with Sollie Eller and Johnny Strobel. There, Santos and Cromb



Aller, 39, is in training at St. Fidelis Friary to become a Capuchin friar. This style of beard is common to the way traditional Capuchins used to appear.

helped the men with their leisure activities.

Newton proudly showed one of his prized possessions, a photo of himself with an Elvis impersonator taken while on a birthday outing with his family.

The two future friars are among 26 men at St. Fidelis Friary whose diverse walks of life have led them into a communal journey toward deeper

meaning. In the first leg of their journey toward life as Capuchins, the men have gathered at St. Fidelis to learn to live together in the fraternal manner of the order. They arrived in late May for two months of studying and doing missionary work. They spend part of their time at area nursing homes and working with DSNWK clients and part of their time in classes learning about the Capuchin life.

On July 27, they will go to Burlington, Wis., for a year's intensive study in their preparation to take vows. It is in Wisconsin that the men will be given the traditional robes that are the mark of the Capuchin order.

The men range from 19-year-old former students to a 50-year-old Manhattan architect born in the Philippines.

Some long have felt a call to the service-filled life of the Capuchin. Others admit they haven't quite figured out what drew them to enter the program.

"I'm a late profession," said Victor Garcia, the oldest at 50. "I'm here because I want to return a service to the Lord."

After spending 25 years in his native Philippines, Garcia moved to New York to work as an architect. After working at various architectural firms, he started his own architectural firm, which he ran for seven years.

What compelled him to begin a journey toward becoming a Capuchin partly was what he calls "the discovery of self." It's also about a yearning to learn more about



Dwayne Santos shares a moment with Joe Newton, resident at the Krug Home in Russell.

Christ, Garcia said. "I knew very little, and I still know very little," Garcia said.

Joseph Hala, 32, born in Sydney, Australia, was a business development manager in a bank for nine years before choosing the path of becoming a Capuchin. He can't explain what led him to his decision.

"I'm still trying to work that out," Hala said.

He met some Capuchins one night about four years ago and was impressed with their way of life. He returned to his job, but it wasn't the same.

"I think my heart started to turn," Hala said. "I went back to work. And when I was at work, I enjoyed it, but I couldn't forget."

For Kenneth Gabor, a 28-year-old former union electrician, firefighter, emergency medical technician and park police officer, the brotherhood of the order is reflective of the brother-

hood of firefighters. He also is drawn to the hands-on approach Capuchins take to living and working among the poor.

Tim Aller, 39, a teacher in a juvenile prison before entering the Capuchin training program, was pursuing a master's degree in special education. He'd need that to teach in the public school system, but it's unlikely he'll complete his master's degree now because any future teaching he does probably will be in a private school setting.

Aller's path to the religious life has been far from pristine. A former addict, he's been in Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous for eight years.

Robert Battalini, 41, was a mechanical engineer for 10 years before withdrawing from that life to paint houses while he focused instead on a vocation quest.

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Santos closes the door as he helps John Strobel, resident of the Krug Home, into his room while Glen Geschwentner waits for his assistance.



Father Edmond teaches class on the spiritual life Monday morning to the 26 men who have come to the St. Fidelis Friary to begin formation as Capuchin friars. Topics have included prayer, contemplation, personality tests and the spiritual life.



CALLING: Need to be of service leads men to Capuchins

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During the two years he painted houses and did things people needed done, he looked into more than one religious order. He looked at the Brothers of Mercy and the Augustines before deciding on the Capuchins, whose simplistic style of living and dedication to the poor appealed to part of Battalini that yearned for a more meaningful life.

George Real Bird, 23, grew up on the Crow reservation in south-central Montana.

"My family, they're all Catholic," Real Bird said.

The family has had comfortable ties to the Capuchins who have done mission work on the reservation for many years. Some of his relatives are third-order Capuchins, Real Bird said.

He hopes to become ordained as a priest.

"I can do a lot more for my people back home," Santos said.

For Stephen Sobol, 43, born in Toronto, Ontario, the same impulse that compelled him into social work is the one that compelled him into the Capuchin order. His desire for a life of service to the Lord and to others manifested itself first in his choice of career.



JEFF GIRALDO / Hays Daily News

ABOVE: Joseph Lindzius, 21, Chicago, is one of the youngest postulants at St. Fidelis Friary in a group of 26 men from varying ages and backgrounds. Lindzius began his training to become a Capuchin four weeks ago. RIGHT: Tom Nguyen, left, Joseph Hala, George Real Bird and Joseph Lindzius play soccer in the "Tin Gym," behind the friary. Exercise is a regular part of the postulants' week.

"I think the two ultimately are related on some level," Sobol said.

Sobol said he had a sense of calling from early on.

"It's almost the flip side of a single coin," Sobol said.

A case in point involves working with a teen who murdered two other children, ages 8 and 9, that Sobol initially

didn't want to deal with. He didn't want to even work with the young killer because what he'd done was too heinous, Sobol said.

"It really was a test of my Christian mettle," Sobol said. "I came to be really fond of him, and he's doing well to this day, more credit to his psychiatrist than to me."



The training program is a cooperative venture of several Capuchin provinces. Dwindling numbers of men interested in joining the Capuchin life has led to the provinces making a joint effort to train incoming novitiates. Thus the men come from numerous states as well as Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines,

Cuba, Canada and Guam. One was born in Vietnam but raised in Louisiana.

They are being shepherded by Edmund Walker of the New Jersey Province, James Froehlich of the Pennsylvania Province and Frank Grinko and Jerry Wintz of the Mid-America Province. Additional staff members are Jeff Ernst

of the Mid-America Province, Mark Mance of the Western America Province, Gerard O'Dempsey of the Australian Province and Mike Greb of the Pennsylvania Province.

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Religious conservatives in Iowa favor Brownback

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — More than 50 religious conservatives in Iowa will lead an effort to persuade Republicans to support presidential candidate Sam Brownback.

In a statement, Brownback said the conservatives "share my goal to rebuild the family and renew the culture" and could play an important role in his bid for the GOP nomination.

Chuck Hurley, a former state legislator and a leader among the state's religious conservatives, will head Brownback's "Faith and Family" committee. Hurley heads the conservative Iowa Family Policy Center, but he stressed that role is separate from his efforts for Brownback, with whom he has ties that date back to college days in Kansas.

"I don't want to overstate it, but some of these are pretty well known in their circles of faith leaders," said Hurley. "It really does give Sam a boost."

The list of religious conservatives backing Brownback comes from throughout the state, and Hurley said they can play an important role in encouraging members of their congregations and fellow religious conservatives to show up for next winter's precinct caucuses.

Those conservatives have a history of playing an important role in Iowa Republican politics, such as in the 1988 caucuses when they helped TV evangelist Pat Robertson to a second-place showing. A forum sponsored by the Iowa Christian Alliance and Iowans for Tax Relief drew nearly 800 people to Des Moines last weekend to hear from six Republican candidates, including Brownback.

Brownback, a staunch abortion foe, underscores his conservative religious ties as he stumps in the state courting conservatives, but others such as former Arkansas Gov. and lay minister Mike Huckabee are making a similar case.

That's led some to worry that they could slice up the conservative vote and diminish its importance.

"Primarily Brownback and Huckabee would appeal to the same group of people," Hurley said.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has been working hard to sound a conservative theme, but Hurley said there are suspicions among religious conservatives about Romney's positions on issues such as gay rights and abortion while he was governor.

In addition, Romney has faced questions on the campaign trail from religious conservatives about his Mormon faith, and Hurley said that is an issue.

"It's not like a bigoted feeling, it's just a big question mark," said Hurley. "What do you do with that as a Christian?"

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