

To Africa!

By *Thai Binh Nguyen*

Last year, leaders of the Capuchins in North America met with representatives of the Capuchins in Africa. The meeting took place to create a closer relationship and a better understanding between the Capuchins on the two continents. In the fall of 2004, the Provincial Council of the Province of St. Joseph, which is the province which operates St. Lawrence Seminary, decided to send a small group of people to visit Africa so that the ties within the worldwide Capuchin family would be strengthened.

Two familiar faces from St. Lawrence Seminary will be heading to Africa in the summer of 2005 from June 12th through June 30th. These two people are Mr. Don Mueller, who directs the province's lay volunteer program called Cap Corps, and Fr. Gary Wegner, SLS social studies teacher. Fr. Gary and Mr. Mueller, along with others, have a fairly important assignment. Mr. Mueller said, "The Council wanted us to check out the possibilities of placing some volunteers (lay missionaries) with the Capuchins in Africa. Briefly, Cap Corps Midwest currently has full time volunteers working in Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit (USA) and Nicaragua (Central America). These people, mainly young adults right out of college, commit themselves to serve for at least one year. They share in community with common prayer and a simple life." It was recommended that some of those Cap Corps volunteers would serve in Africa.

If the possibility for volunteers to travel there presents itself, much preparation would be necessary. Cap Corps has a ministry council that oversees this effort. A proposal, which includes details such as priority ministries, training procedures, housing or community living possibilities, on-site support and supervision, a budget, and the length of commitment, must then be prepared for a council meeting in August. Additional funding sources may also be required. The earliest lay missionaries would be sent to Africa would be in the fall of 2006.

Going into further detail, Fr. Gary stated, "We're looking to make contact with the Capuchin friars in Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi. The Midwest Capuchin Provincial Council is actually giving financial support to the friars in Malawi, so I'm very excited to meet with them."

Br. Bob Smith, an alumnus of St. Lawrence Seminary, the Vicar Provincial, and President of the Messmer High School in Milwaukee, is also joining Fr. Gary and Mr. Mueller on the trip as representatives from the Midwest. Joining those will be two other Capuchins, Br. Celestino Arias and Br. John Conway, from the New York Province. Besides Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi, Br. Celestino and Br. John will also visit Zambia.

According to Mr. Mueller, there are seven main goals for the group. These goals are: to know better the joys and concerns of each other and form mutual friendships; to find out more about the social situation: the economy, special concerns, AIDS, or the growth of Capuchin Order; to explore the needs and conditions for possible Cap Corps lay missionaries; to talk about the interest, needs and expectations for African friars who might study in the United States; to check out short term ministry opportunities and study possibilities for American friars there; to share more resources in justice; and to educate the Capuchins in the United States about the African Capuchin Order and the reality in East Africa. The overall goal of the trip, however, is to learn from their African Capuchin brothers and form deeper relationships.

Those people going on the mission trip are very excited about the experience. Fr. Gary said, "I'm really looking forward to the opportunity to connect with the Capuchins over there. I believe it

will enlarge my own vision of the order as it has every time I've made connections with Capuchins abroad. There's always a bond of being part of the same community even if it's expressed in different ways. We are still committed to the same principles. I do, however, expect the visit to be very exciting as it always is when forming relationships overseas."

Fr. Gary and Mr. Mueller are looking forward to spreading the experience to the St. Lawrence Seminary community as well. Fr. Gary stated, "Africa is off the radar in many aspects, and the situation over there is quite troubling. I'm looking forward to opening the eyes of some of the students at SLS."

Mr. Mueller also added, "I hope that next year Fr. Gary and I will have many opportunities to share what we have learned with the students at SLS. I remember well that I was a freshman here when I heard the call from God to get involved in the global mission. Sharing faith and life with people from many parts of the world has been a great blessing for me. I hope that I might be God's instrument for others to be involved in the worldwide mission of Jesus--to witness to the great love and diversity of God."

The trip to Africa will help open eyes to the beauty and reality of the world. The fact that there are Capuchins all over the world sharing the same principles strengthens the idea that a brotherhood exists within all human beings. This trip will open new avenues of brotherhood and global friendship .

[From *Hilltopics*, *The student publication of St Lawrence Seminary*, vol 40, issue 6]