



# THE ST. ANTHONY COMPANION

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## The Friars Respond to the Covid-19 Crisis



*Most of our Franciscan ministries have taken advantage of modern technology to live-stream Masses, including the daily services broadcasted from the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City, Maryland (pictured above).*

During this age of the Corona virus pandemic, the Friars of the Our Lady of the Angels Province have been doing their part to comfort, inspire, motivate and serve the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their communities.

With live stream Masses, driveby food distribution, mobile adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and more, the Friars have found creative ways to serve in these unprecedented times.

Although the circumstances are unique, the reaction of the Friars is one they have repeated many times throughout the ages. Through world wars and economic depressions; through natural disasters and times of drought or famine, the Friars have always answered the call.

“Although ‘socially distanced,’ our Friars are ‘spiritually united’ with the people we serve – be they parishioners in our churches,

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students in our schools, the needy in our streets, the companions on our mailing lists, and the viewers of our video programs.” said Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv., the Minister Provincial of the Our Lady of the Angels Province. “Our mission as Franciscans is to put into action the words spoken by Jesus Christ to Francis of Assisi: ‘Repair my House.’ God’s ‘House’ is our broken and afflicted world. We Friars are using every possible means during the coronavirus troubles to connect with people, foster healing, assure their sustenance, allay fears, and upbuild unity in the human family.”

According to Fr. James, this approach is exactly as it was during the time of St. Francis.

“Eight-hundred years ago, St. Francis initiated an outreach to those afflicted by the pandemic of leprosy. Since that time, his followers – the Franciscan Friars – have never ceased doing outreach to people in times of crisis

– earthquakes, floods, wars, terror, exile, economic upheaval, plague, or famine. Just as our Friars in the USA and Canada have accompanied stricken society during the crises of the past century, so now we cannot ignore the cry of the poor and the plea of the afflicted.”

Here are just a few of the initiatives the Friars have undertaken, over the last few months, in response to the needs created by the Coronavirus Pandemic.

### **Drive-thru Palms**

In Winston Salem, North Carolina, Friars at Our Lady of Mercy Parish, conducted drive-thru distributions of palms on Palm Sunday.

Friars Carl Zdancewicz and Joe Angelini greeted parishioners as they drove their cars onto church grounds and received their blessed palms. More than 500 cars were served.

The same Friars have taken the lead on videotaping the parish Masses and posting them online for viewing. They even



*Following in the footsteps of St. Francis, (from left) Fr. Richard-Jacob Forcier, Fr. James McCurry and Fr. Michael Heine, set a good example by wearing facemasks to prevent the spread of infections.*

live-streamed the Holy Week services in both English and Spanish.

The experience has provided a crash course in technology education, as the parish computers have been upgraded, with a new telephone system planned next.

### **Food Distribution**

The Blessed Sacrament Parish Food Pantry, also known as “The Little Portion Pantry,” in Burlington, North Carolina, recently hosted a drive-thru food distribution to support those left unemployed by the Covid-19 Pandemic.

A massive turnout caused a traffic tie-up, but the Friars managed to serve all 526 families in the parish, totaling more than 2,300 people. Each family received five meals. This followed a



*A parishioner at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Winston Salem, NC, receives a palm on Palm Sunday as she drove her car thru a pick up area organized by the Friars. More than 500 palms were distributed.*

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previous distribution, in March, in which 329 families were served, many of which were visiting a food pantry for the first time.

More than 9,500 pounds of produce were purchased through Aldi and nearly 3,000 pounds of canned goods were purchased through the SHFB Food Purchase plan. In addition, a large quantity of food was secured from the Catholic Charities pantry in Durham, NC.

### **caRe vaN remains in action**

In Chicopee, Massachusetts the caRe vaN unit, the brainchild of Br. Michael Duffy, OFM Conv., of the Our Lady of the Angels Province, and operated by Elms College, has continued to provide free health care to the homeless during this time of crisis. Services include blood pressure checks, blood sugar checks, foot care, first aide and minor-wound care. For now, services have had to be adjusted, and are provided on the parking lot outside of the van, so that all can safely practice social distanc-



*The Elms College caRe vaN has continued to serve the homeless and poor during the Covid-19 pandemic.*



*Friars and dedicated volunteers unloaded “drive-by” food donations to restock the shelves of local pantries at St. Junipero Serra Parish, Seaside Heights, NJ.*

ing. Screenings, vitamins (C and zinc), acetaminophen, as well as the simple comforts of coffee and a snack are still being provided for the most vulnerable.

Br. Michael also serves as Associate Dean and Director of the Undergraduate Program of the School of Nursing at Elms College.

### **Adaptability in Jersey**

The Friars of St. Junipero Serra Parish in Seaside Heights, NJ have proven most adaptable during this time of crisis. In addition to live-streaming Masses (in two languages) and other special celebrations, such as the entire Paschal Triduum during Holy Week, they have also utilized technology to continue Faith Formation for Children by using Google Classrooms to keep up with classroom work and

sacramental preparation. In addition, the parish Friars have responded to the continuing opioid epidemic in the area, as well as increased levels of substance abuse and alcohol dependency by continuing their 12-step recovery program via the Zoom Meeting platform.

Of course some issues cannot be solved through technology alone, including the growing problem of food insecurity in the area. To meet the increased needs of both Simon's Soup Kitchen and the St. Francis Food Pantry, the Friars and some devoted volunteers have worked tirelessly to operate a “drive-by” food collection program, collecting bags and bags of groceries from the cars of generous parishioners, who responded to the call to help restock the once bare shelves of the pantries.

# Find Hope – The Lord Always Walks with Us

By Fr. Michael Heine, OFM Conv.

Four years ago, two of my nephews began their college careers. Four years later they find themselves doing their last semester in their parents' home and instead of the President of the University giving them their diploma, it will be a United States postal worker. Two of my other nephews began their 2020 college baseball season in February, dreaming of ending it in Omaha at the College World Series, only to find it stalled. Now, they're playing a catch with their Dads in their back yards. Our friar Bishop Gregory Hartmayer was named the Archbishop of Atlanta. A great honor for the Franciscan Order and our Province of Our Lady of Angels. Plans were made to hold the installation ceremony in the biggest Church in the Archdiocese due to the huge crowd expected and the limited number of seats in the local Cathedral. Those plans were put aside, and the new friar Archbishop was installed in an empty cathedral in front of nine other people.

Yes, we realize that life has changed, but not ended. Living rooms have been turned into gyms, dining rooms transformed into board rooms, the kitchen table has returned to its rightful place for school-work.



Stories like these of dashed expectations, hopes and dreams have been shared repeatedly during this time of Corona-virus. Proms canceled, weddings postponed or conducted on zoom, millions of jobs lost, families who didn't even know what the inside of a food pantry looked like are now depending on what is being distributed to long lines of hungry people, mourners who are burying their loved ones at the graveside not able to offer a funeral Mass, and to make the experience even more painful, their loved ones not being able to be surrounded by loved ones at their bedside due to visiting restrictions.

Lord, don't you even care, do you not understand? Do you even know what is taking place these days in our world?

As we continue to walk along the road hoping to make it to the other side of the Coronavirus journey, we may begin to lose hope. Depression, anxiety, and frustration to name just a few, may seep into our lives. Heading out on a journey without hope is like wandering around aimlessly, there is no destination if there is no hope. We certainly recognize our own temptation to hopelessness in this moment right now. When will it end? Will we ever get a vaccine so



we can go back to work, travel, gather with family and friends, and attend Mass?

In the midst of looking downcast, the risen Jesus draws near to us and walks with us. Not in front of us or behind us but with us. Jesus, the one who did everything right during his life, performed mighty deeds, wonders and signs, suffered and was killed. That same Jesus understands our pain, our frustrations, our loneliness, our broken expectations and disappointments, our deaths. On this journey, The Risen One hears our questions and invites us to share our stories with him.

We tell stories, we tell lots of stories – posting them on Facebook or Snapchat, watching them on TV and ending the CBS Evening News as Nora O'Donnell shares a feel-good story of strength, survival and selflessness each night after a half hour of sad news. But the key to telling stories is not simply to tell them, but to pay attention to how we link our stories to the story of our faith. We link the ancient stories of our sacred scriptures to the experiences of our day as a key to finding meaning in this moment.

So, stories of the health care workers, hospital staff and other first responders remind us of Matthew 25 where Jesus states, “Whenever you did this for the least of mine you did this for me.” Or the stories of the Franciscan Center in Baltimore whose meals went from 300 per day to over 3,000, call to mind examples of the times Jesus’ love poured out in healing and feeding miracles. The teachers and parents whose computer skills may limp along but nonetheless creatively collaborate to keep their children from falling behind remind us of Jesus when he tells his disciples to “let the children come” to him.

Or stories of the unique ways people have found to share what they have, to make masks in a Dunkin’ Donuts or celebrate a life of a longtime parishioner, 100 years young, in our parish in Kensington, Connecticut by driving by her home in a parade of honking cars with Happy Birthday signs. Or those who break out of their comfort zones and reach out to those whose skin color is different, whose lifestyle is different, and

***“We are people who live in hope. We believe because the love of God in Jesus has made ‘hope’ part of our spiritual DNA...”***

who worship in a different way but whose faith reminds them of the hospitality shown to Jesus on the road to Emmaus and they break bread together – even 6-feet away and with masks. These are moments when listening and learning are valued above all else. Choosing what stories we tell and linking them to our sacred story reminds us of the hope we find in Christ’s presence.

We are people who live in hope. We believe because the love of God in Jesus has made “hope” part of our spiritual DNA from the foundation of the world. Jesus walked among us to not only offer – but to remind – us of the hope we have. Jesus risen from the dead walks among us, holds us by the hand, and helps us to recall that God raised him up, releasing him from the thrones of death. Because it was impossible for him to be held by it, we, too, participate in that death, burial and resurrection by our baptism!

There lies our hope – our faith and hope are in God! Today as you enter into private prayer, I invite you to reflect on the good news, those stories of hope, courage and compassion that you hear, some even in your own homes—and be reminded of the risen Jesus who has, and who will continue, to walk with us on our journey.

### ***About Fr. Michael***



Fr. Michael Heine, OFM Conv. is the Vicar Provincial of the Our Lady of the Angels Province and the former Director of the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City, Maryland.

# MISSION REPORT

## Sustained Impact

The story of Kofi Nyarko, and his interactions with the Franciscan missionaries in Kofi's native land of Ghana, West Africa, is truly one of sustained impact.

Prior to meeting Brother Vincent Vivian, a Franciscan Friar Conventual with the Our Lady of Angels Province, in 1987, Kofi was a 13-year-old boy suffering from leprosy. He had the disease nearly his entire life but did not know it. However, Brother Vincent, who arrived in Ghana as a missionary a decade earlier and had devoted his life to serving those afflicted with leprosy, recognized it right away.

He took Kofi into a home he had established to care for chil-



*Kofi Nyarko as a teenager in 1987, after meeting Brother Vincent and being cured of leprosy.*

dren with leprosy and got him the medical attention which cured him of the terrible affliction.

Over the many years that followed, Brother Vincent continued to care for Kofi and other children of Ghana, providing all the medical attention they needed.

Brother Vincent's desire to serve and care for the sick was embedded in him when he was a

child, when he helped care for his twin brother, Richard, who was ill much of his life.

The impact of those experiences, as well as the example of St. Francis, eventually inspired him to volunteer to serve in his Province's new mission in Ghana. Not long after arriving in Africa, he learned of a hospital devoted to caring for leprosy patients and he felt compelled to visit.

"It was so unbelievably horrifying to see the way those human beings were left to live," said Brother Vincent, in remembering that first visit. "But yet something was drawing me there."

Through his work, Brother Vincent helped save the lives of countless children in Ghana and planted the seeds for a man — Kofi Nyarko — who would devote his life to working with international health agencies, traveling the world to help eradicate leprosy.

After more than 30 years apart, Kofi visited the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City, Maryland, for a touching reunion with Brother Vincent.

The story of Kofi and Br. Vincent illustrates the incredible impact of the Mission work of the Friars — and the donors whose generosity makes it possible.



*In 2019, while visiting the United States for a conference related to his work to eradicate leprosy throughout the world, Kofi enjoyed a tearful reunion with Brother Vincent at the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City, Maryland.*



**FMA**  
Franciscan Mission Association

*From the beginning, the Companions of St. Anthony have supported the missionary works of the Franciscan Friars Conventual around the world. Help us share the hope of the Gospel. Please give today! [www.franciscanmission.org](http://www.franciscanmission.org).*



# Educating Friars for World Ministry

Among the many important components of educating and forming a young man for Franciscan life, is preparing him for international service. Whether an American Friar is being groomed to minister overseas, or a foreign born Friar comes to the United States to learn skills which he can utilize in his native land, this training is vital.

“We are a universal church,” said Fr. Christopher Dudek, OFM Conv., an American Friar with extensive international language and cultural training, currently teaching at Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore, MD. “I did not profess to a province, but an international order that truly brings to light the power of the Gospel and the spirituality of St. Francis.”

Fr. Chris studied Spanish at Catholic University of America (CAU) and in Alajuela, Costa Rica; Italian in Assisi; and Polish in Krakow. He spent two years in a Hispanic community in Washington, D.C. and ministered in Costa Rica, Guatemala City and Honduras. He also studied at Seraphicum, the Orders International College in Rome.

“In each situation, I had mentor Friars who helped me grow by their example,” said Fr. Chris.

Fr. Chris would welcome an opportunity to serve overseas once again.

“I would love to go back to Italy, to study or serve in various roles there. I would be open to

going to Latin America to improve my Spanish and help in some of the cities there. As a new priest, I am content to serve my first few years at Archbishop Curley. However, it is great to know the possibilities of international ministry that the Conventual Franciscan Friars can offer.”

Fr. Everest Nyaki, OFM Conv., a Friar from the African nation of Tanzania, currently in the U.S. studying canon law at CAU, is on the opposite end of the spectrum. He has also studied at London University. His international education has already helped him have an impact in his homeland.

“My studies allowed me to help so many people in Tanzania who had different challenges,” said Fr. Everest. “I helped by forwarding their issues and cases to the church tribunal. My studies at Catholic University will help me be even more useful.”

Fr. Everest was introduced to the Friars through *Militia of Mary Immaculate*, a magazine produced by the Tanzanian Friars, prompting Fr. Everest to pursue his vocation. Eventually he will take his training back home, but Fr. Ever-



*Fr. Chris Dudek, OFM Conv. during a concert/prayer service at a parish in Guatemala City.*



*Fr. Everest Nyaki, OFM Conv. with students at St. Maximilian Kolbe Education Center in Tanzania.*

est knows he may be called to serve in other parts of the world.

“Being part of an international order, I might be used for the good of the Order in any part of the world,” said Fr. Everest. “I thank God for having the opportunity to study here, helping with the ministry, and serving God’s people. I thank all those who work with the Companions of St. Anthony and the many benefactors that pray for us and support us. May God bless you.”

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# Will You Be an Angel to Those in Need?

As a dear and loving friend to the Companions of St. Anthony, your commitment to us and the poor we serve does not go unnoticed. Time and time again, you open your heart and your wallet... giving generously to our programs, with one goal in mind, which is to improve the lives of all God's children.

As a treasured Companion, we would like to make your life easier while, together, we change lives. We invite you to become a St. Anthony Angel today!

St. Anthony Angels are special Companions who sustain the mission of the Friars with a monthly gift. When you become a St. Anthony Angel, you see immediate and practical advantages and immense benefits for the work of the Companions, and the Franciscan Friars you assist.

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**Reduced number of mailings a year.** As a St. Anthony Angel we will remove you from our monthly mailings. You will only receive our St. Anthony Companion newsletter and information on our special needs.

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**Better budgeting.** With the ups and downs of mail delivery, it is difficult to know when and how much income will arrive in donor support. However, with monthly sustainer commitments, the Friars will be able to budget more accurately for our ministry.

Instead of receiving our regular appeals in the mail and sending back your response, your donations would be automatically transferred directly to the Companions as monthly gifts. These gifts, electronically processed from your checking account or your credit/debit card, are a safe and secure way for you to offer your sustained support



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