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Capuchin Vocation Update Province of St. Joseph

Craving Symbolic Life by David Hirt, Capuchin Postulant

(The Midwest Capuchins gather next June for their triennial chapter, a meeting of members to elect leadership and to consider various issues. This chapter will address issues of our fraternal life, and learning about the concerns of the youngest men in the province is one of the chapter's talking points. David Hirt kicks off a series of Vocation Updates in which our youngest talk about their desires for Capuchin life.)

Living as a Postulant, even when one is caught up in the crush of course work and prayer, of ministry and community life, one is always coming back to vocation and discernment. As a Postulant I've been blessed with the time and ability to talk to many other young men considering religious life, as well as older friars who interact with them. I've found that there is a central theme to many of those discerning, even if it isn't an explicit one—Symbol.

We can see it everywhere in society today if we just step back and look below the surface. Fancy clothes are status symbols. That Hummer the executive drives, though he never gets out of town to off-road, is a status symbol. The "Bling" in a rap video, the rainbow bumper sticker, the car you choose to drive and the clothes you choose to wear to show who you are, your tattoo; symbols fill our lives.

We can see it in darker ways too. Look at the proliferation of the "Cutter" culture. These adolescent boys and girls cut and scar themselves to get attention or to prove to themselves they feel something, but it also becomes a symbol of their disaffection. We are creatures who need symbols.

With the recent Papal re-approval of the celebration of the "Latin" mass, I see many young men and women wanting to see the mass just once, to experience it. I believe this is also part of our country's craving for symbol.

Religious life has symbols too. As Capuchin Franciscans, people associate us with our habits, or our cord and triple knots, or maybe a long beard. They see the Tau Cross or our Side Rosary. To those we meet, they are external signs of an internal choice we have made. They are symbols. I was talking to a vocation director at one point who told a story of an inquirer who was put off because he, the vocation director, didn't visit in his habit. For the novices, candidates and postulants I've talked too who can't wait to get their habits, a brown hoody sweatshirt or clothes with the



David Hirt with co-postulant Julio Gallegos

Capuchin Seal makes their day. We crave these symbols and feel the older friars can't even understand why.

Modern society, though, scorns this belief in symbol. It smacks of the "Spiritual" or the "Religious" and people never associate their own iPods or mini cell phones with the same thing. Philosophy tells us life is meaningless. We suffer and die, and the only thing that makes life worth living is the stuff we have.

But those discerning religious life know there is something more than that. We can sense it. We know life has meaning. We want a Symbolic Life. We want a life that has meaning and shows that it has meaning to those around us. We say that our communal life as Franciscans and Capuchins has meaning, but if we aren't showing that to everyone, then what good is it? Is it a light under a bushel basket? We have to manifest that choice to the world, i.e., Saint Francis' Incarnational World.

**Wisconsin Capuchin Ministries Weekend
15-17 February 2008.**

Learn about Capuchin ministries in Milwaukee and at St. Lawrence Seminary.

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