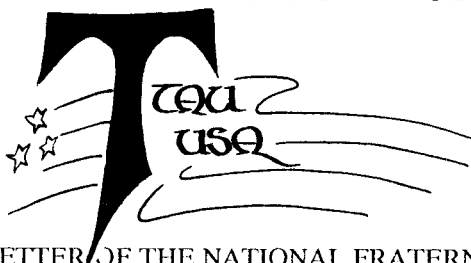


TAU-USA

THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER



Issue Number 10

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY

Winter, 1996

STATE OF THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY

The manner and intensity of how we embrace the life of the Gospel is our primary concern when attempting to assess the state of our Order. How are we doing in living the life of the Gospel? How do we measure up to the essential elements of our Franciscan vocation? Listed below are the fundamental values and directions of Franciscan living embodied in our Rule against which we measure our level of excellence:

- to live the Gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis--the essential element,
- to commit to continual conversion,
- to live the brotherhood with all people and all creation,
- to live in communion with Christ,
- to follow the poor and crucified Christ,
- to participate in the life and mission of the Church,
- to live in the love of God,
- to be instruments of peace,
- to live a life of prayer--personal, communal and liturgical,
- to live in joy,
- to possess a spirituality secular in character,
- to be pilgrims on the way to God,
- to participate in the lay apostolate,
- to serve the poor,
- to be loyal to the Church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her bishops and priests,
- to be open to the action of the Holy Spirit,
- to live in simplicity, humility and littleness.

My opinion, based on observations and conversations over the past four years as National Minister, is that our members are doing very well in being faithful to their commitment as Secular Franciscans. Both the young and the old, newly professed and those who have been professed for many years, are, on an average, living the commitment of profession as they presently understand its implications for them in their state of life.

To facilitate growth in loving the Gospel life, the formation process, both initial and on-going, assumes an important role. The National Formation Commission, chaired by Ron Pihokker, has presented workshops in

various parts of the country. These workshops have provided opportunities for those at the local fraternity level to increase their understanding of the formation process and to become better acquainted with the wealth of formation material available to assist them in their ministry. I believe that formation--initial and on-going--is the most important task that our Order undertakes.

Last year, two new formation resources were published. Gospel Living: Every Day of Our Lives by Teresa Baker, SFO, is a new formation guide to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. As far as I know, this is the first formally published formation book authored by a Secular Franciscan. Congratulations, Teresa! Also, Fully Mature with the Fullness of Christ by Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, was published in its third edition.

We have been moving toward a more apostolic expression of our vocation. This is due to a large extent to the work of the apostolic commissions: Ecology chaired by Charles Spencer; Family, Carol Gentile; Peace & Justice, Ron Michieli; and Work, Mary and Edward Zablocki.

Regionalization is in its last stages. The Regionalization Committee, chaired by Geraldine Rome, anticipates the process to be completed in October, 1996, when the four remaining emerging regional fraternities become fully established. These regions are located in Kansas-Oklahoma, northern New England, southeast New York and southern New England.

(continued on page 5)

I have come to light a fire on the earth. How I wish the blaze were ignited! Luke 12:49

READ - CHECK - AND PASS TAU-USA ALONG:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minister | <input type="checkbox"/> Vice Minister |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secretary | <input type="checkbox"/> Treasurer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Formation | <input type="checkbox"/> Councillors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ecology | <input type="checkbox"/> Peace & Justice |



In this issue:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| +Education: Bishops' Policy | +Fraternity in Prison |
| +Happenings | +Networking Corner |
| +Book Reviews | +The Lampstand |
| +Poverty, Per Capita & Mission | +St. Francis & Air Force One |

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

Position: Chair, National Formation Commission

The National Executive Council invites Secular Franciscans to send in applications for the position of Chair, National Formation Commission. Requirements include:

- +Active Secular Franciscan status;
- +Familiarity with Mission Statement and Goals of the National Formation Commission;
- +Provide summary of Formation experiences in local, regional or national fraternity, or other;
- +Ability to attend required meetings;
- +Provide copy of Certificate of Profession.

Extended due date: April 30, 1996. Please mail to: Mary Mazotti, SFO, P. O. Box 2571, Arnold, CA 95223-2571.

Position: Chair, National Peace and Justice Commission

The National Executive Council invites Secular Franciscans to send in applications for the position of Chair, National Peace and Justice Commission. Requirements include:

- +Active Secular Franciscan status;
- +Familiarity with Mission Statement and Goals of the National Peace and Justice Commission;
- +Ability to communicate, educate and motivate regions and fraternities on peace and justice;
- +Provide summary of personal experiences with Peace and Justice Commission in fraternity or region;
- +Provide copy of Certificate of Profession;
- +Ability to attend at least two four-day national meetings yearly.

Extended due date: April 30, 1996. Send to: Mary Mazotti, SFO, (address above)

Youth Coordinators Appointed

Mary and Anthony Mazotti, SFOs, have been appointed National Youth Coordinators. As they begin work to bring the message of Secular Franciscan life to young people throughout the country, they would like to receive information about any SFO sponsored youth groups in existence. Write: P.O. Box 2571, Arnold, CA 95223-2571.

Qualified CPA Needed by FFA

Franciscan Family Apostolate is in need of a CPA to audit the Apostolate's financial records annually. Contact Alan Ouimet, 93 Country Way, Madison, CT 06443 or at 203-421-3866.

Prayers and sympathy of all members of the Secular Franciscan Order in the USA are extended to Vice Minister, Geraldine Rome, on the death of her husband, Pete. Pete died unexpectedly in November, 1995. Rest in peace, faithful husband, father and friend of St. Francis!

MYLDRED JONES: NAFRA NOMINEE

Myldred Jones, SFO, of St. Francis Region has been selected by the National Executive Council from twelve nominees as the NAFRA ideal of a Secular Franciscan who has "lived his/her life in a heroic manner." Although she is not asked to be present at the ceremony, Myldred will be honored with other outstanding Seculars from around the world at a special liturgy at the General Chapter in Rome in July, 1996.

Myldred was recently awarded the Pope John XXIII Award of Distinguished Service. She established Casa Youth Shelter for runaway teens in California. Living next door to the shelter, Myldred visits with the youth each day.

Congratulations, Myldred, for living your Secular Franciscan profession to the fullest!

The Cord Seeks Writers & Subscribers

Ed and Mary Zablocki, SFOs, serve on the editorial board of *The Cord*, published at St. Bonaventure University. They report that *The Cord* is seeking quality articles about Franciscan life. Talks presented at workshops or retreats present a possible source. Editor Elise Saggau, OSF, states, "There is excellent work being done 'out there,' but only small groups are receiving the benefit of it. If we could give really gifted speakers and writers a wider forum, it would benefit the whole [Franciscan] family." International and cross-cultural contributions would be valuable additions.

The Cord offers an advertising service. Camer-ready material is accepted. New subscribers are always welcomed. For information, contact:

The Cord - Elise Saggau, OSF, Editor
St. Bonaventure University
St. Bonaventure, NY 14778 USA
716-375-2105 (FAX) 716-375-2156

EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE HOLY SEE
Rome, Italy
December 7, 1995

Richard Morton, National Minister
Secular Franciscan Order

Dear Mr. Morton:

A happy and holy Christmas to you. I hope all is well with you as you continue your important work. It's hard for me to believe, but it has been two and a half years that I have been U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See. It has been an incredible diplomatic and educational experience combined with the unique honor of working with the Holy Father and leading Catholic Church officials from around the world.

Knowing your deep devotion to St. Francis, I wanted to share with you a moving experience I had recently during the Holy Father's recent visit to the United States: "It isn't often the public is privy to private conversations and events involving high-ranking public officials. Well, something took place recently that I would like to share with you that shows another dimension of the efforts for "peace in our time": Last October, while talking with President and Mrs. Clinton on Air Force One on the way from Washington, D.C., to meet Pope John Paul II in Newark, NJ, I mentioned to the President that the date (Oct 4) was the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi. I also mentioned that exactly thirty years before, Pope Paul VI had been the first Pontiff ever to visit the United States of America. The President replied that he admired St. Francis and that he would like to refer to the significance of the day and event. President Clinton began reviewing his remarks of welcome for the Holy Father and indicated that he wished to quote the Prayer of St. Francis. The President began immediately to write in his remarks the opening lines of the well-known prayer: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon...". Well, the President and Mrs. Clinton, Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, and I "hit the wall" trying to remember the rest of the prayer. We were only able to remember the remainder of the words to the prayer by singing it.

The experience of being in the company of the President and Mrs. Clinton in Air Force One on our way to greet the Pope, all singing the prayer of St. Francis, was remarkable -- and one I shall never forget. When I related the story to a priest in Rome, he reflected that "Air Force One is thought of as a 'Flying White House' -- a place where a great deal of power resides, including nuclear power. It sounds as if it can also be a place from which a power for peace can be exerted." He called me later to say that a Franciscan from the troubled area of the Balkans to whom he had told the story enjoyed it hugely and said: "President Clinton's commitment to peace is the greatest news our wounded country has had in years."

If we take a longer look at this informal moment in the busy schedule of the leader of the world's only real superpower, we can get a notion of the moments of relief and reflection so necessary for the "peacemakers" of the world, whether they work for peace in the ruins of Yugoslavia, the heartbreak of Africa, or elsewhere in this troubled world.

St. Francis has always had a very special meaning for many Americans, but that trip on Air Force One has made the relationship even more special for me.

Last, let me say that as Mayor of Boston, I was privileged to witness the dedicated service priests and nuns provided for people throughout the U.S. My position here at the Embassy to the Vatican and my travels throughout the world have only deepened the respect and admiration I feel for those who toil so courageously in the service of God. Again, may I wish everyone a joyful New Year filled with peace, good health, and happiness.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ L. Flynn, U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See

U.S. Embassy to the Holy See
PSC 59, POB 66
AMEMB APO AE 09624



An Open Letter to My Brothers and Sisters in St. Francis

from June Carpenter, Regional Formation Director of the Eastern Churches Region: *Exaltation of the Holy Cross.*

Our tiny and unique Byzantine Secular Franciscan group (formerly the Province of St. Mary of the Angels), recently held our first fraternal and pastoral visitation from NAFRA as a region. Our birthing to an Eastern Churches region was not without accompanying birth pains, pains you may have experienced in your transitions. But we came to life with our identity intact. This birth ushered in a keener awareness of the importance of our relationship with NAFRA and the SFO worldwide.

Our national visitors, Richard Morton, National Minister, and Fr. Camillus MacRory, OFM Cap, National Spiritual Assistant, came as genuine Franciscan brothers and servant co-leaders. This visitation would not have had the impact it did had our national leadership not been personally rooted in the Franciscan charism. This charism makes all the difference to our success at being truly family.

We all know it takes a good deal of support to remain faithful to our Franciscan calling. We are definitely "people who need people" (one of my very favorite songs!). From such a need true community is born. No doubt, "The kingdom of God is among you" (Lk 17:21). This truth can be experienced through interaction in fraternity life on various levels. I would be much less a Franciscan without this interaction, without this family. I believe in and thank God for the grace present within a group, a community, a family. At the same time there are ups and downs, give and take that are also inevitably present. Despite this, perhaps because of this, we become more the Franciscans we are called to be. Together we help keep alive the possibility of fulfilling our calling. We need, and the world needs, the Franciscan family spirit--locally, regionally, nationally and universally.

At the innermost core and soul of Francis and his vision lies the truth that sets us free and makes us whole as Christians and Franciscans. We know in our heart of hearts that the gift Francis rekindled, as he peeled his soul bare for all to see, was no less than the barebones of the Gospel.

Let us pray that our vision remains clear. What we do not have within us and among us we cannot offer to others in peace.

Letters from you.....

To Richard Morton:



Thank you for your invitation to share my thoughts on the kind of SFO I would like in the future. (By the way, the National Fraternity Newsletter is wonderful and I am very grateful to receive it. Thank you for all the hard work that goes into publishing it. Thanks to Patti Normile, our wonderful Editor.*

In the Fall, 1995 issue was an article by Sue Cavanaugh, SFO that I thought expressed exactly what the SFO should be: "living stones rebuilding the Church." When so much conversation in families, among friends, co-workers, fraternity members, parishioners and in media is so polemical, it is the clear and certain voice of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church that calls us -- implores us--to unity of faith. Francis was faithful to the teachings of Christ by being faithful to the Church and that must be the foundation of our Order. It is Christ's teachings through His Church that Secular Franciscans are to take into the world without compromise, gloss or accommodation. That is the gift, not ours but God's, that we are called to share. Fidelity to and unity with the magisterium is the pillar on which the SFO can be, as you said, "on fire with the Gospel and one willing to be fully dedicated to 'rebuilding the Church' and reconstructing society."

It is a tragic and sad development to see some in the Church who stir up rebellion and break the unity by not being filled with affection and respect for the magisterium. It is my prayer and hope that the SFO can be an example of unity and fidelity to the Church so that the energy of the members of the Church isn't sapped by polemical rhetoric but can be expended to preach the Gospel as Christ implored us to do. St. Francis wrote more about obedience than he did about poverty. Secular Franciscans will be more faithful to our vocation if we are more faithful to the Church. What society is in need of and hungers for are holy people - we must be holy people before we can help others authentically by our actions. We must embrace both calls, "charity in all things."

Thank you very, very much for being our National Minister. I respect you very much. Kerry T. Kober, SFO

You asked for sharing of thoughts--first--the Newsletter. I read it with much attention and was very happy with it.* We need inspiration on how to live our SFO life daily. The commissions show us our way to do this--family is easy --but peace & justice and ecology are not so easy for the little people. The statement [reference unknown]- "a true Franciscan generally need not strive to care, so much as to place himself in the presence of need"--shows how to do it in a practical way.

I would like to see the SFO more concerned with our daily lives as we go about following the Gospel--this issue of the newsletter is a good start as is your asking for sharing.

Prayers and pax et bonum, Ed Riendeau

*(Editor's note: I only include these glowing statements because of awareness that the Holy Spirit is truly the editor, inspiring you to send contributions. I just put the puzzle pieces together.)

(more on page 6)

(continued from page 1)

Regionalization has been very successful. Where the process has been fully implemented, it has been received with enthusiasm. The fruits of closer fraternal bonding of local fraternities is evident across the country. I expect similar results within areas remaining to be regionalized. As well as allowing the Order to utilize its resources more effectively, regionalization has provided an opportunity for new leadership to emerge. Many of the new leaders have brought new life and inspiration to their regional fraternities.

There are too many other initiatives that have begun in the National Fraternity (NAFRA) to be mentioned here. Be assured that the leadership at all levels of the Order is now fully responsible for its administration and welfare. We are no longer overly dependent on the friars for direction and inspiration.

Speaking of the friars, the dark cloud on the horizon becoming more evident is the decreasing number of friars able to serve as spiritual assistants. The challenge will increase at the local and regional levels to identify "...suitably and well prepared religious..." (Rule, Art. 26) to serve as spiritual assistants. To help resolve the situation, the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants with Fr. Matthew Gaskin, OFM, as its President, has prepared guidelines for training and certification of lay animators for local fraternities.

The statistics for NAFRA for the past three years are:

| As of: | <u>12/31/93</u> | <u>12/31/94</u> | <u>12/31/95</u> |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Membership: | | | |
| Professed | 20,264 | 19,636 | 19,364 |
| Candidates | 876 | 1,036 | 990 |
| Inquirers | 560 | 529 | 660 |
| Fraternities: | | | |
| Provincial | 21 | 19 | 12 |
| Regional | 11 | 22 | 27 |
| Local | 763 | 766 | 759 |
| Emerging | 37 | 45 | 36 |

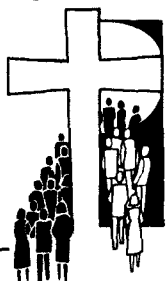
After the NAFRA meeting in October, 1996, the number of provinces will decrease to zero and the number of regional fraternities will increase to 31.

The above indicates that we are beginning to hold our own with our number of professed. My guess is that the number of members and fraternities will start to increase in the next few years.

I want to thank all who have and continue to help the members of NAFRA (this includes all SFOs in the USA) to be Gospel people and to be more faithful in living their commitment as Secular Franciscans.

In summary, I believe the National Fraternity continues to grow as a Gospel-based community. Good things are happening and will continue to happen. However, even though we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go for up to now we have done very little.

Fraternally,
Richard Morton, SFO
National Minister



Lent

Thanks to all who send contributions to TAU-USA. Many excellent articles are received for publication. Others are "gleaned" from the outstanding local and regional/provincial newsletters that are sent to the Editor. If you do not find an article you submitted to TAU-USA in print, the following reasons may apply:

- The article is too long and cannot be edited to usable length without losing meaning.
- The topic has been covered previously.
- The topic is not particularly Franciscan. This is a tricky area because all the Church is of Franciscan interest. Space available makes it impossible to print all that is of general interest in the Church.
- The article simply may not "fit" the style and intent of TAU-USA.
- The article may have arrived too late for timely publication. (Deadlines are the 15th day of January, April, July, and October.)

If you wish to have articles you send returned, please include self-addressed envelope stamped with sufficient postage. It is always helpful, but not necessary, to receive articles in both paper and disk form if you work on computer. TAU-USA is written in WordPerfect 6.0.

It is assumed that all material sent either as originals or in newsletters is original or that credit is given original source with permission to copy granted. We need to respect copyright laws at all times. Permission is granted to reproduce articles published in TAU-USA in your newsletters. However, we hope that all fraternities will subscribe to TAU-USA for all members so that we will all receive the "family mail."

The Dirty Dozen

The Guardian of Creation, published by the National Ecology Commission, reports that The Cancer Prevention Coalition (CPC) has presented its first annual "Dirty Dozen" list of consumer products with carcinogenic properties. The list includes: beef frankfurters, whole milk, talcum powder, Cover Girl Replenishing Natural Finish Make-Up, Crest Tartar Control Toothpaste, Alberto VO5 Conditioner, Clairol Nice'n Easy, Ajax Cleanser, Zud Heavy Duty Cleanser, Lysol Disinfectant Spray, Zodiac Cat & Dog Flea Collar and Ortho Weed-B-Gon.

For more information including safer alternatives, contact: CPC, 520 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 410, Chicago, IL 60611, phone (312) 467-0600.

NEXT TAU-USA DEADLINE: April 15, 1996
Submit articles to: Patti Normile, Editor, TAU-USA
609 Amherst Avenue
Terrace Park, OH 45174
FAX (513) 831-7542

For subscription information or change of address: See back of TAU-USA. Write to copy all material printed in TAU-USA is granted. Please credit TAU-USA and author if noted.

CNSA LEADERSHIP RENEWED

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of the Secular Franciscan Order, USA, announces that Fr. Matthew Gaskin, OFM, has been retained as president-in-turn for CNSA for 1996. Fr. Fabian Sheganoski, TOR, will be secretary-in-turn. CNSA leadership will now rotate every two years instead of annually.

Theme for the 1996 annual meeting with provincial/regional assistants will be "Sharing the Vision, Sharing the Charism: What Are We Supposed to Be Doing as Assistants?" Tentative date for the meeting is set for September 17-20, on the east coast.

The Handbook for Spiritual Assistants will be ready for publication in early 1996.



LETTERS FROM YOU... (from page 4)

To: Richard Morton, SFO

May our Lord Jesus Christ give you His grace and peace! I am responding to your invitation in the Fall issue of TAU--USA to share some ideas of the vision of our Order in the future. The times in which we live as Catholics and Secular Franciscans are privileged ones and, I would also say, urgent ones. As in the era touched so profoundly by Saint Francis and the contemporary followers of his spiritual family, the world cries out for a rebirth of the presence of our Lord and of His redeeming love and mercy.

These times are also privileged for us because of the effective and powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and most especially through the ministry of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. The more I read and try prayerfully to plumb the depths of Francis and Clare, the more profoundly I am moved by their total love and humble obedience to the Church. There is nothing in them which does not trust and love and submit to the Truth of God which comes through the Church. To be faithful to the charism of our spiritual heritage, then, would be for the Secular Franciscan Order to embrace wholly the vision of the world, the Church, and the mission of the Church enunciated in the teachings of Pope John Paul II. I believe the Order and our fraternities on all levels should look to his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (*As The Third Millennium Draws Near*) and to *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) in order to enunciate our vision in union with the Church.

I very much agree with you that we need to look to the graces of our Order's founding. We need to fall in love with the real and true Francis of history as revealed to us through the witness of the earliest sources and through his own words and writings. The world is full of "interpretations" and "misinterpretation" of this holy saint painting him to be everything from a political revolutionary, tree worshipper, psychotic, and, forgive me, even a sexual deviant. Regrettably, many "use" him to justify all manner of rebellion and are even retelling the "story" (I prefer the word history) as

part of the neo-modernist attack upon the Church. This is a travesty, and we Seculars have the best opportunity of all in the Church to bring to life again the real Francis. First, we must truly know him, and then we must truly live as witnesses to the grace we receive through him as his spiritual children.

In coming to know Francis, we also should learn the wisdom of the saints in coming to true self-knowledge. I am concerned by much of what I see occurring in the name of formation of Secular Franciscans which is so often obscured under the guise of feeling-oriented introspection. The saints teach us that we come to know ourselves and also God's will by looking into the eyes and heart of Christ. The challenge is not how I feel about Christ, His Church, the Order, or myself. Rather it is in whether I **know** Christ, **know** His Church, **know** the Order, and truly know myself before God. Formation must be wholly spiritual, rooted in the Truth revealed by God, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel, that is, from Christ to life and life to Christ. Its objective is to lead each of us, whether in initial formation or in our journey of on-going conversion, to profound life-changing union with Christ. This is what Francis shows us, and we will only be authentic as Franciscans and as brothers and sisters to all in our world to the extent we are filled, transformed and overflowing with Christ.

Our spirituality is truly radical in all periods of Christian history, as radical as the very life of our Lord. Francis plunged himself in love into the very breath and blood of Christ Crucified. We must do the same with profound reverence and gratitude and humility. We will always have to confess that "until now we have done nothing," but Francis will always obtain for us the courage to "begin."

I remember reading that Pope Leo XIII envisioned that our Order would be instrumental in the salvation of the world. I truly believe that our Rule enables us to learn to do our part and will be effective to the extent we embrace in love Francis and the Church. At the same time we need to enkindle true fraternal life in a world which has forgotten what love really is... the love that makes us one in Christ as He is with His Father... the love which Francis prayed for so that "all may be one."

Love in Christ! Sue Cavanaugh, SFO

Immaculate Conception Fraternity

Dear Richard,

I just read the fall newsletter! "What kind of SFO do I want?" As you stated "effective interaction," local fraternity level is where it begins. "Gospel based communities where life and spirituality are seamlessly integrated."

Today at age 58, my favorite words are inclusive, integrated, tolerate, compassionate and wholeness of mind, body and spirit that empower us to become just that. I love the part in Elements of Formation that states, "...aims at setting the candidate on the way to attaining full maturity in three dimensions: the human, the Christian, and the Franciscan!" That's it! Integration! Wholeness! What a wonderful journey for the SFO!

Peace and all good, Mary Lou Kreider, SFO

(more page 10)

EDUCATION: BISHOPS' PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

by Mary C. Lahiff, SFO, Chair

FRATERNITY MINISTERS: PLEASE DUPLICATE AND MAKE THIS AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS.

This article is being written in early January while a budget agreement is being negotiated between the President and leading members of both Houses of Congress. Therefore, broad and basic concerns and beliefs are given which may guide your own decisions as you make them on individual issues. The Bishops' position (all Catholic social teaching) on many individual issues still pending was published in EDUCATION-BISHOPS' PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA in 1995.

The emphasis of the Bishops this year is to educate Catholics in parishes throughout the U.S. on their **Political Responsibility**. This is a new concept for many laity of the Church. Political Responsibility is not partisan, not a matter of political party, but a matter of the values taught by Jesus as we see Him in the Gospel. To this end, our U. S. Bishops have issued a statement entitled: **Political Responsibility: Proclaiming the Gospel of Life, Protecting the Least Among Us, Pursuing the Common Good.** "In the Catholic tradition, citizenship is a virtue, participation in the political process is an obligation. The test of the 1996 elections will be how our choices touch the weak and vulnerable. We encourage Catholics to share our values, raise our voices to shape a society more respectful of human life. This kind of religious political responsibility can strengthen our nation and renew our Church." (Quote from U.S. Catholic Bishops)

Our effort in these articles of the past few years to encourage you to become involved as lay Catholics and Secular Franciscans was very much on the mark. You should be hearing more from your own parish and diocese. Again, the Church guards against becoming enlisted in partisan politics and we, the laity, should too in our discussions. Stick to values, not political parties. And never tell anyone how to vote or how to think.

ISSUES

Bosnia: Much work must be done to insure that the human rights of all persons, especially minorities, are fully respected. As difficult as it is to overcome the divisions created by four years of war, the goal of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society should not be abandoned. A precondition for achieving this goal is protecting the right of displaced Serbs, Croats and Muslims to return to their homes in safety, confident that their equal rights will be protected. The U. S. Bishops have long supported the enforcement of a just peace settlement by the international community, including the participating of U.S. troops if necessary. If these war torn countries are to be rebuilt, the United States and the international community will have to provide substantial support. The U. S. Bishops will continue to work with the Roman Catholic Church and other religious leaders in the region to help them play their critical role of encouraging long-term reconciliation between their divided peoples. There is need for continued support of the U. S. and international community for the war crimes tribunal where individual perpetrators of crimes can be brought to justice legally, thereby discouraging acts of vengeance.

Budget: Hopefully, the budget issues will have been settled by the time you read this. However, it appears as if some issues may be finally settled by vote at the November election. At their regular meeting in November our Catholic Bishops voted to change their agenda to speak out for poor, vulnerable and immigrant children. There was remarkable unity among them in expressing their urgency in opposing national priorities which shed the safety net, encourage abortion, hurt children and target immigrants. Our Bishops feel the need to speak out at this time when so much is at stake for the poor. They see themselves responding to the challenge of the recent visit of Pope John Paul II. Cardinal Keeler pointed out, "We stand with our Holy Father who asked just a few weeks ago: 'Is present day America becoming less sensitive, less caring toward the poor, the weak, the stranger, the needy? It must not!' the Pope declared. We will do all we can to insure that America does not." Our voices must be out there carrying the message of our Holy Father and our Bishops. Make sure your Congressional representatives in House and Senate and our President know where you stand. Evaluate individual issues on Catholic social teaching.

Other issues remain. However, most of them have been touched in articles published in 1995. A new Congress convenes in January. The Congress and President must find a way to get the government working again and come to a just and equitable method of balancing the budget other than on the backs of those who can least afford to pay and who have no voice: the working poor, children and the frail elderly. Meet these people. Mingle with them. Listen to their stories. Jesus did and he spoke out for them. He counts on you to be his voice today.

On Contemplation

As Secular Franciscans, we are called by our Rule to make "prayer and contemplation the soul of all (we) are and do" (Rule #8). What is contemplation and how do we practice it?

Perhaps a helpful approach to contemplation is to consider what contemplation is not. Clearly, it is not a verbal prayer where there is an active, vocal participation of those who pray. Contemplation is also distinct from meditation. While meditation appears to be a silent act toward the outward observer, inwardly, within the person meditating, it is a very active process. In meditating, an individual is reflecting inwardly on a thought, image or passage from scripture. The mind and soul are actively engaged in meditative prayer. "Meditation is a preliminary stage preparing us for the deeper relationship God has in store. Contemplation takes us into the very heart of the communion of saints." (Robert Llewelyn, A Doorway to Silence)

What, then, is contemplative prayer? It can be considered a response to the exhortation, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46). God, the Supreme Being, "I AM WHO AM" is inviting us through contemplative prayer to meet Him where He is by simply being; not thinking or feeling or imagining but simply being, being present in silent awareness to the Lord and to ourselves. "Abide in me."

Contemplative prayer is not so much the absence of thoughts as detachment from them. It is the opening of the mind and heart, body and emotions--our whole being--to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond words, thoughts and emotions--beyond, in other words, the psychological content of the present moment. We do not deny or repress what is in our consciousness. We simply accept the fact of whatever is there and go beyond it, not by effort, but by letting go of whatever is there." (Fr. Thomas Keating, Open Heart, Open Mind, p. 14).

How do you practice contemplative prayer? To begin, just sit down and relax. Let go of everything. As tensions melt away, you become aware of Abba, your loving Father. This increasing awareness of our Father's presence leads to various responses--acceptance, surrender, repentance--which break down our internal barriers and lead to deepening levels of awareness of self and God. As our intimate awareness increases, praise, thanksgiving and intercession are natural responses to a Creator and Savior who finds us worthy to share His presence with us as a friend. As we move into interior silence, we experience the abiding state of union with God--the silence that is pregnant with His presence.

Contemplative prayer is eminently Franciscan. Many of our most powerful images of St. Francis are those where he is in deeply contemplative prayer, before the Cross at San Damiano, reaching the depths of union with his beloved Savior on Mount LaVerna. "To be Franciscan it is essential to be committed to prayer. The key events in the life of Francis, his conversion, dilemma, and the stigmata, came out of prayer. What we can see is that the movement he founded is always adapted to circumstances and is radically contemplative. The first value is prayer." (Fr. Maurice Sheehan, OFM, The Spirituality of the New Rule, p. 12).

Such prayer is a true source of strength and vital energy. It has the same effect on us as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had on the apostles at Pentecost, changing them from fear-filled humans to emboldened evangelizers of the World--intent on spreading the Good News to every corner of the Earth. As our source of energy, the contemplative dimensions of prayer are absolutely critical to our success as evangelizers of the culture.

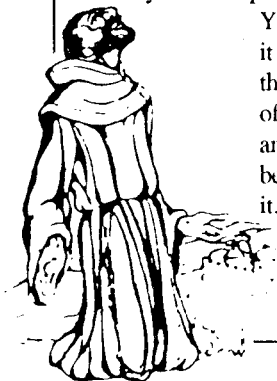
Contemplative prayer is a subversive activity because it so effectively helps us "put on Christ." We can say, as did St. Paul, with increasing certainty, "I no longer live for myself, but Christ lives in me." Seeing the world through Christ's eyes we feel compelled to work to change it, to realize His kingdom of love, joy, peace and brotherhood. We live less easily with a world in which the reality of the kingdom is being denied. ("Contemplative Prayer as a Subversive Activity," Fr. Alban McGuire, OFM).

"Contemplative prayer is the world in which God can do anything. To move into that realm is the greatest adventure. It is to be open to the Infinite and hence to infinite possibilities. Our private, self-made worlds come to an end; a new world appears within and around us and the impossible becomes an everyday experience. Yet the world that prayer reveals is barely noticeable in the ordinary course of events." (Keating, op.cit; p.13).

Why contemplative prayer? Perhaps this poetically expresses it:

Your heart has been tried by suffering and darkness; now allow it to stop relying on the earth it is leaving. Let your tears flow, to water the arid land of your faith. Persevere. Do not think of anything else. God is before you. Contemplation is not a matter of watching, but of being watched, and he is there watching you. And if he is watching you, he loves you, and in loving you gives you what you are looking for: himself. What other gift could there be for one who had searched so hard. Our heart is so hard to satisfy. God alone can fill it. Things never can. (Carlo Carretto, In Search of the Beyond).

(contributed by Edward Zablocki, SFO, from a talk on contemplative prayer)



ILLUMINATED TEACHERS & GUIDES

From an address by Minister General, Emanuela de Nunzio, to the Ordinary General Chapter of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual.

"...the SFO...represents a great evangelical force precisely to the extent that its members see themselves 'more strongly connected' to the Church by nature of their Profession--a solemn, public and perpetual commitment.

What is still lacking among the Secular Franciscans is the capacity to involve themselves in society with recognizable and effective initiatives. In a society concerned with 'image,' as ours is, the SFO presents a very modest and drab face which certainly does not 'make news,' does not capture imagination, does not attract attention, not even on the part of ecclesiastical authorities, who seem to pay attention only to those movements which are capable of filling up plazas and carrying out grandiose gestures...

"Should we regret this? Perhaps we should, since every age has its own style and one cannot remain 'outside' of one's own time. So, without losing our identity and our physiognomy (with its characteristics of simplicity, humility, meekness patience), without allowing ourselves to become contaminated by the germs of protagonism, we ought to become more capable of those courageous initiatives of which the Rule speaks, we ought to become more capable of 'coming out into the open.'

"This is the task of renewal which the leaders of the SFO are carrying out at the international level and also at the national level within the various countries.

"However, at the grass roots level the fraternities do not always carry out this process which is indicated in the new legislation of the SFO (Rule and Constitutions). Instead, they are...strongly inclined toward the indications given them by the spiritual assistant.

"This is a great responsibility on the part of the First Order. I could not express this with more effective words than those used by the Ministers General in their letter of 1989 (The Vocation and Mission of the Franciscan Lay Faithful in the Church and the World). The work of the Spiritual Assistant, today less in the areas of direction and organization, can and will have to be ever more deeply focused on as accompaniment and aid in the formation of the sisters and brothers.'

"I am well aware that this requires a change of mentality which is anything but easy. In our texts and in the various discourses which we hold, the expressions 'communion, corresponsibility and vital reciprocity' continually appear. But the SFO is still most often considered as an area of apostolate for the First Order, something to be 'run.' It was that way for a very long time and new concepts and nice words are not sufficient to change ways of thinking and living which have become deeply rooted....

"I wonder how much the friars know of the SFO; not the one which is static and passive, closed in on itself and caught up in devotionalism, not the one which is seen as a refuge by many who have relational difficulties, but the SFO which has been reborn by the Pauline Rule and lived by many of its members who have matured a deep consciousness of the Secular Franciscan identity.

"The commitment to promoting and assisting the SFO could bring about a true 'vital, reciprocal communion.' Reciprocal in the sense that the Seculars also have something to offer to the friars:

- the provocations which result from the daily 'drama' of the existence of the laity,
- the increased possibilities for disseminating the Franciscan message in the various 'fora' of the modern world,
- a broader and more sensitive, informed context for the promotion of vocations to the First Order by way of the various branches of Franciscan family and...youth.

"Even religious institutes which have never had lay groups that participated in their charism and mission (or which have abandoned them for long periods of time" are discovering (or rediscovering) an interest in the relationships between the lay faithful and religious. The Franciscan religious have desired and chosen to maintain such relations for seven centuries and today they find at their sides a laity which is organized and faithful. I believe, without being presumptuous, that this is a 'patrimony' to be cultivated and esteemed. But it also deserves a spiritual rapport with you, brothers of the First Order, which is very deep since it is you who have the responsibility for our way in faith. Therefore, it is necessary that you be for us illuminated teachers and guides--illuminated by the Word of God and by the examples of Francis. It is you who have the task of accompanying us on the way toward sanctity, teaching us to read the 'signs of the times' and giving us the necessary spiritual charge through an appreciation and actualization of Franciscan culture, with concrete indications for the formative path we have to follow, in our relations with other components of the Franciscan family and in the orientation for our constructing a world which is 'more fraternal and evangelical' (SFO Rule 14). Teach us to be authentic and credible carriers of the message of Francis in order to witness, in the ordinary conditions of our lives as lay people: ...the courage of the cross, the challenges of love, the risk of hope, the contemplative dimension of life.

"I have some concrete requests to present to your General Chapter. As Secular Franciscans we wish that friars would:

- come to know, in the course of their initial and continuing formation, the history, legislation and specific characteristics of the SFO;
- be imbued with a culture which is appropriate to the times in order to help the SFO fraternities to present themselves as significant communities in the Church and the world;
- be inclined to spiritual assistance to the SFO as a priority with respect to other commitments of assistance to the laity;
- be sustained in the service of spiritual assistance to the SFO by means of specific courses for updating and periodic gatherings (at national, subcontinental and continental levels) that would provide opportunities for comparison and exchange of experiences..."

The Lampstand

"You do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket. You set it on a stand where it gives light to all the house. In the same way your light must shine before others so they may see your goodness and give praise to your heavenly Father." (Matthew 5:15-16)



The Franciscan charism of hospitality finds its home in the person of Gloria Daly, SFO, in a very professional way. Gloria, from Albany, NY, was awarded Interstate Hotels' 1995 Chairman's Award for exceptional work performance and community service. Gloria is the concierge supervisor at the Marriott Hotel in Albany. As such, she has the role of doorkeeper or caretaker for the facility.

Gloria brings to her profession as concierge all the energy and vitality of a committed Secular Franciscan. She brings the loving care of a mother and grandmother, which she is, to the hotel's clients. That includes baking her own cookies for the guests.

Unusual kindness rendered to guests included puppy-sitting for Joan Rivers' puppies when she did not want to leave them alone. How Franciscan to care for all of God's creatures!

Gloria says of her work, "I love my job...I feel very close to everyone and I ask Guardian Angels to guide them all, from my family and friends to the people I work with and for...I do what I can to show people that someone cares." When a regular guest had a heart attack while staying at the hotel, Gloria visited him in the hospital every day for two or three weeks. In the past two years Gloria has received 10 All-Star nominations and dozens of letters from guests plus 7 Marriott honors.

Gloria is also active in her Franciscan fraternity. Her husband, Jim, is minister of St. Bernardine of Siena Fraternity, Schenectady. In their spare time, Gloria and Jim volunteer at a local hospice for HIV positive patients where they serve lunches and collect food and clothing for the patients.

Editor's Note: Marie Amore suggested the "The Lampstand" as a way to tell the stories of Secular Franciscans who live Gospel to life and life to the Gospel. Tell about a Secular you know. Send articles to:

Patti Normile, Newsletter Editor,
609 Amherst Ave., Terrace Park, OH 45174.
Fax: 513/831-7542

25 YEARS OF PROMISE FULFILLMENT

Congratulations, Franciscan Family Apostolate! Twenty-five years ago, in 1971, Alan Ouimet, promised God that if his wife, Mary, did not have cancer as was suspected, he would do something special for God. He kept his promise when no cancer was found by becoming a Secular Franciscan. As an SFO, Alan realized he needed to reach out to the poor.

What began by helping one poor schoolteacher in India has evolved into a ministry to literally thousands of impoverished Indian families who have no one to turn to but God. The ministry, known as Franciscan Family Apostolate, operates with approval of the National Fraternity (NAFRA).

Sponsoring families are linked to their families in India by regular correspondence through photographs and letters written by volunteers. The letterwriting work will soon be assisted by Indian youth awaiting profession as Secular Franciscans.

An Indian family can be sponsored for as little as \$15 per month. That amount enables families to survive by providing food, shelter, job training and the knowledge that someone cares about their plight. For sponsorship information, see page 14.

("What kind of SFO..." from page 6)

"What kind of SFO do I want in the future?" I want an SFO thoroughly grounded in basic understanding of Gospel living so eloquently described in the Rule--an SFO whose brothers and sisters live the commitment of Gospel to life and life to Gospel in the manner and spirit of Vatican II. The SFO, to be vital force of change the world so desperately needs, must be an Order that returns over and over again to the excitement of its founding story based on the life and legends of St. Francis. It is a story of individuals and communities enlivened by the Holy Spirit and filled with zeal. This foundation provides energy and strength to address issues of contemporary life.

As was true of those in our founding story willing to enter the Paschal Mystery and experience a death, we must be willing to follow their example. The death we experience from living the Gospel is not likely to be a finalizing, mortal experience. Feelings such as rejection, humiliation and scorn are more likely to be our experience.

The SFO I envision will require leadership willing to enter the mystery of God's plan. The primary call will be the local fraternity where the most effective interaction with the social and political environment occurs. Fraternity members must take the Gospel to the faith level and be Gospel-based communities who have an intentionality to faith share. Any "stained glass window" that separates spirituality from everyday life must be shattered. Life and spirituality must be seamlessly integrated. The SFO I want is one on fire with the Gospel, one willing to be fully dedicated to "rebuilding the Church" and reconstructing society.

(from "Cabrini Herald," Juan Lezcano, SFO, Editor)

