

NAFRA Chapter a 'privileged moment'

By BOB AND MARY STRONACH, OFS

The focus of the national chapter was on the good of the order, and the vitality of its future.

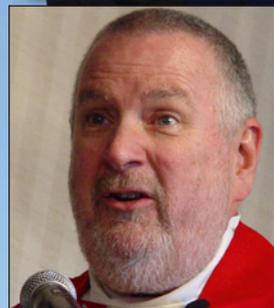
Held Oct. 16-21 at Loews Hotel in Denver, Colorado, the chapter began with dinner and

National Minister Deacon Tom Bello's opening remarks, welcoming regional ministers and delegates, proclaiming the Word of God, and prodding everyone to pray and "search for what is best for the life of the Fraternity."



MEET THE 2012-2015 NATIONAL LEADERS

Top, left to right: National Minister Deacon Tom Bello, OFS; Vice Minister Elaine Hedtke, OFS; Secretary Jan Parker, OFS; Treasurer Cyl Maljan, OFS; Councilor Mary Bittner, OFS; Councilor Arturo Villareal, OFS; Councilor Mary Frances Charsky, OFS; International Councilor Mary Stronach, OFS, and President-in-Turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR.



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Two days of discussions and geographic break-outs culminated with the assembly agreeing on the U.S. order's priorities for the next three years. There are three primary thrusts -- communications, formation and spiritual assistance -- all regarded as equally important and interrelated. A sort of Trinitarian triangle. And encircling, or immersed in, this priority triangle are the additional priorities of youth, vocations, and expressing the Franciscan charism in the world (outreach).

Those priority discussions and the awarding of the *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Award* to disability advocate Janice Benton led to two other actions:

- a call to the winner of the U.S. presidential election to regard all of creation, especially human life, as having dignity and value.
- a theme for 2013 for the National Fraternity (NAFRA) -- *Be the Bridge: Accept all people as a gift of God.*

Accepting people as a gift was a running motif. For example:



Deacon Tom Bello jotted down main points as small group spokespersons (such as Jeff Ramirez) reported the results of their discussions.



Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS, minister of the hosting Santa Maria de las Montañas Region, her planning committee and numerous volunteer workers from the region received rounds of applause for all their hard work on behalf of the chapter.



Violeta Manibusan, OFS, minister of a new fraternity in Guam, attended with a Guam delegation.

Regional ministers and delegates discuss and reflect on priorities for the Secular Franciscan Order.

• Friar spiritual assistants preached that Franciscans need to be peacemakers, rising above discord and dissent within the church, listening to and accepting others even when disagreeing, and embracing ecumenical brethren. “Our charism is to reach out...and say, while we disagree, we love you,” noted Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap, outgoing president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants. “...We each bring our own imperfect understanding of faith to the table... Your Rule says every day there should be conversion... I’ve got plenty of opportunities for conversion. So do you.”

• Rev. Deacon Joan Verett of the Anglican Third Order Society of St. Francis and Craig Miller of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans expressed their grief over the recent death of Ed Shirley, OFS, who chaired NAFRA’s Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee. “In Ed’s passing, we all lost a dear brother,” Miller said. Verrett, who has attended several national gatherings, said she “feels like I’m coming home” when she’s among Secular Franciscans, and Miller said their time at the Quinquennial Congress in Chicago was “simply awesome.”

Father Lester summed it up another way: “All of us are part of being Christ present in the world.”

THE NEXT DAY, Bello continued to focus on the chapter as being a place of vision. “The celebration of chapter becomes a privileged moment...It’s the Holy Spirit’s order, not mine...not yours, not ours. It’s the Holy Spirit’s.”

Roll call revealed that all 30 regions were represented, with only two regional ministers not present due to health.

Garnet Moses, OFS, of Canada brought greetings from General Minister Encarnita del Pozo, saying she “would like to acknowledge the whole Franciscan family as one.” As presider of elections, he issued three calls for nominations from the floor over the next three days. Joining him was another international visitor, Fr. Carlos Reyes,



Lester Bach, OFM Cap



Kevin Queally, TOR



Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv., along with Fathers Lester and Kevin, conducted a session on the role of spiritual assistants, pointing to the importance of “life-giving union” and “vital reciprocity” (or “essential mutual exchange”) within the Franciscan family. They also identified a need to accept and love one another, noting that polarization can occur with single-issue Franciscans.



Deacon Joan Verrett represented Anglican Franciscans. Graig Miller is minister general of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (whose members come from 15 different denominations).



Garnet Moses, OFS, presided over the NAFRA elections, representing the International Fraternity.

OFM Cap., representing the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

Bello began his national minister’s report by proclaiming the Gospel passage, “You are the salt of the earth,” and then referred to Pope Benedict XVI’s call for a year of faith -- a renewal of the church “achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers.” It’s a summons to “authentic and renewed conversion.”

That’s what the Franciscan order is

about, continuing Christ’s call to Francis to “rebuild my church.”

Pointing to declining membership numbers -- 13,328 active professed vs. 13,420 the previous year and some 14,000 the year before that -- Bello asked, “What is the Holy Spirit calling us to do?” and “Do we offer a spiritual reality sufficiently attractive to bring us new life?”

With such questions in mind, he had



PRAYERFUL BOOST

With a hotel conference room converted to a chapel, Chapter attendees got to refresh the spirit by attending daily mass, participating in group prayer, and spending quiet time in contemplation.

asked a Franciscan youth (YouFra) at the Quinquennial Congress in Chicago this past July why she was involved. Siena College student Gladys Veloz listed three things she found in a YouFra group at the college: (1) a faith-based community, (2) a welcoming community with good people, and (3) a community trying to improve the world, a community that's "doing something."

"I was really struck by that," he said. Nationally, what could be done? He already saw hopeful signs. The Quinquennial (the Q) was one of them -- where he saw "a true revival of the evangelical spirit...with fidelity to the charism and to the rule."

In fact, it was one of his three "great joys of 2012," he said. The others were:

- The "Forming the Formators" workshop and the national release of the new "FUN" formation manual. He was delighted at how the workshop has been replicated across the regions.

- The first-ever JPIC Rally. "I loved the one-on-one sharing" and the insight coming out of Fr. Pio Jackson's assessment that JPIC is "the DNA of our Franciscan life."

He said the National Executive

Council (NEC) hoped to appoint a Youth/Young Adult chair and that he was hopeful for a joint JPIC/Youth Rally in 2013 "to continue the momentum." After the elections, the NEC appointed Rob Breen, Ph.D., OFS, the YouFra mentor at Siena College, as youth chair, and scheduled a joint JPIC/Youth gathering for July 25-28 at Our Lady of the Snows Shrine in Belleville, Illinois.

Bello reminded the assembly that the 'Q' helped to bring some focus on the future direction of the order, with three primary thrusts:

1. Rebuilding and building bridges.
2. Better formation at all levels.
3. "Be who we are in all we do"... be "children of the Gospel."

Those points complement the evangelizing theme of the Year of Faith:

1. Evangelize the evangelizers. "That's us... to draw ourselves closer to Christ."
2. Evangelize the evangelized. "The people of our fraternities... We need vital Franciscan fraternities."
3. Evangelize others -- the "people not in our fraternities... bringing the joy and the witness of the Good News by our lives."

All of this "brings us back to that constant need for conversion," Bello

concluded, "for prayer, devotion, charity and almsgiving in our lives."

THE SMALL GROUP break-outs revealed common concerns and interests among the regions, and not only led to priority topics for the next three years, but also the creation of two new national committees -- communications and spiritual assistance development.

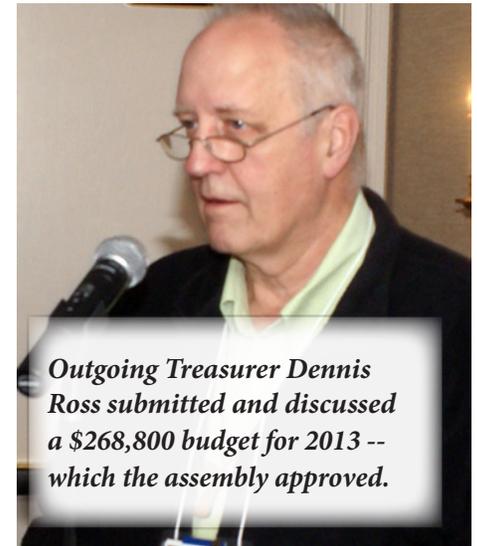
With fewer Franciscan religious available to serve as spiritual assistants, and with the lack of a Franciscan religious presence in many areas, the assembly saw an urgent need to address the challenge of providing spiritual assistants for local and regional fraternities.

The assembly also saw a need to better communications at various levels, especially in the areas of reaching out in ministry, of attracting vocations, and of reviewing Tau-USA and the NAFRA website.

NOT ONLY was Franciscan youth a topic of discussion, but it also presented itself in the flesh with the arrival of Pamela Townsend, a student at Siena College near Albany, NY. Part of a YouFra group that's journeying with Secular



Jerry Rousseau of Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region and Sylvia Paoli of St. Francis Region were among those reporting the results of small group breakouts.



Outgoing Treasurer Dennis Ross submitted and discussed a \$268,800 budget for 2013 -- which the assembly approved.

FRANCESCO'S CAFE
NAFRA served up a menu of exhibits touting the work of Commissions and Committees, and Franciscan organizations like Franciscan Mission Service (above), Franciscan Action Network (top right) and JPIC award-winner Jan Benton (right).

Franciscan mentors, Pamela attracted some 30 attendees to an impromptu roundtable discussion. She spoke of meeting two to three times a month over pizza, song and open sharing. They're fascinated by Franciscan studies and the Franciscan perspective on peace and justice issues. They want to go out and do things, such as working on an environmental project or visiting the Catholic Worker House in Albany.

The group erupted in laughter when Clare Ferris, the young daughter of JPIC Chair Kent Ferris, spoke of her reaction to meeting YouFra at the Quinquennial this past summer:

"It was really awesome to see other people who weren't old and really Franciscan!"



A few talented Franciscans provided music for liturgies and evening entertainment. Among them were Jan Parker, left, and Jim and Cindy Wesley.

Advocate Receives 'Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Award'

JANICE BENTON HEADS NATIONAL CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP ON DISABILITY

DENVER -- "Don't think of disabilities as exceptional... We say it's a normal part of life."

That's how Janice L. Benton, OFS, described her advocacy work Oct. 18 before the national gathering of the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order -- where she was honored with the Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award.

"You should make assumptions that people with disabilities want to be part of our community."

A Secular Franciscan herself, Benton encouraged Secular Franciscans to start building relationships, one on one. The Franciscan vocation, she noted, is about affirming the dignity of life. That covers a wide range of people -- those with such disorders as Down syndrome, refugees who come across the border, victims of human trafficking, elderly persons deteriorating physically and mentally, homeless children everywhere.

Recognizing the needs of people with disabilities is not just an issue of charity, Benton said. "It's an issue of justice."

Justice, first of all, means recognizing people as having value, she said, and



Janice Benton, OFS

fighting against such things as abuse in institutions and providing what people need to be able to participate meaning-

fully in life. A big concern for her, she said, is that "our society, our culture is teaching that some people are disposable." These folks are "despised" because they're costly, inconvenient or requiring too much time. This involves everything from aborting less-than-perfect babies to organ donation pressure to so-called compassionate death.

That's where Franciscans come in, she said, because they understand, as Franciscan Theologian Sr. Ilia Delio put it at the Quinquennial Congress in July, that all of humanity is imprinted with the dignity of God and that nothing in creation is accidental. Nothing is worthless.

Benton has been an advocate for 30 years, including the last eight as executive director of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) in Washington, D.C. She serves as vocation director for a fraternity of deaf Secular Franciscans.

National Minister Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, presented the JPIC Award, a glass statue of a pair of hands enveloping the globe, along with a \$2,000 prize, noting: "You are a hero for me. You are my 'Secular Franciscan' Secular Franciscan."

STATEMENT OF THE U.S. SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

to the U.S. Presidential Candidates, President Barack Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney.

We encourage the winner of the presidential election, as well as other leaders of government and business, to approach politics and the marketplace with the foundational premise that all of creation, especially human life, has dignity and value.

That sets the stage for recognizing that: people with disabilities have value, disabilities are a normal part of life, we should assume people with disabilities want to be meaningfully engaged in society, and that their participation contributes significantly to the fabric of society.

Further, this vision seeks to preserve the dignity of a wide range of people -- persons such as those with Down syndrome or other disabilities, victims of human trafficking, elderly persons in declining health, the poor among us, refugees who come across the border, homeless children everywhere.

Recognizing the value of people is not just an issue of char-

ity. It is an issue of justice. This is counter to today's cultural notion that some people are disposable -- are despised because they're costly, inconvenient or requiring too much time. This involves everything from aborting babies thought to be less than perfect... to organ donation pressure... to so-called "compassionate" death.

The national body of the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order, gathered in Denver, Colorado, and representing 13,400 members, is committing the Order to prayer and activity around the issues confronting our national leaders in 2013 and beyond (especially during the Catholic Church's Year of Faith). Our National Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission will coordinate action items for the 30 Secular Franciscan regions across the U.S.

October 19, 2012

Chapter Elects National Leaders for Next 3 Years



AFTER INSTALLATION MASS: from left, Elaine Hedtke, Tom Bello, Cyl Maljan, Jan Parker, Mary Frances Charsky, Mary Bittner, Arturo Villareal. Not shown: Mary Stronach and Fr. Kevin Queally.

The Secular Franciscan Order in the United States elected national leaders for the next three years during its Chapter Oct. 20 in Denver, Colorado.

Deacon **Tom Bello**, OFS, McLean, VA was re-elected national minister for a second three-year term.

Other re-elected officers:

- Vice Minister **Elaine Hedtke**, OFS, of Port Angeles, WA.
- Secretary **Jan Parker**, OFS, of O'Fallon, MO.
- Councilor **Mary Bittner**, OFS, of Ypsilanti, MI.
- Councilor **Arturo Villareal**, OFS, of El Paso, TX.

Newly elected:

- Treasurer **Cyl Maljan**, OFS, of Pittsburgh, PA.
- Councilor **Mary Frances Charsky**, OFS, of Binghamton, NY.
- International Councilor **Mary Stronach**, OFS, of Marcy, NY.

As the incoming president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, Fr. **Kevin Queally**, TOR, joins the National Executive Council as a member.

TOM BELLO, OFS

Professed in 1983, Tom is a member of St. Thomas More Fraternity in Arlington, VA. He is a former minister of St. Margaret of Cortona Region. On the national level, Tom has worked on the National Statutes and previously served as national vice minister. He has worked as an ESOL teacher for over two decades. Tom and his wife Judy have three children.

ELAINE HEDTKE

Professed in 1965, Elaine was formation director for her fraternity, and, for

Troubadours of Peace Region, she served as commissioner for liturgy, vice minister and minister. Most of her career has been spent as a law enforcement officer. She has four adult, married children.

JAN PARKER, OFS

Professed in 1988, Jan is a member of San Damiano Fraternity where she served as formation director, secretary and minister. For St. Clare Region, she was formation director and minister. A former full-time pastoral associate involved in liturgy and music, Jan works in a family home-improvement business.

CECILIA (CYL) MALJAN, OFS

Cyl was minister of Lady Poverty Region. Professed in 2001, Cyl is a member of St. Augustine Fraternity in Lawrenceville, PA. She has been executive secretary to the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants since 2010, and she was a member of the 2012 Quinquennial Committee as registrar. Cyl is retired from Bank of New York Mellon.

MARY BITTNER, OFS

Mary is former minister and vice minister of Divine Mercy Region. At her local fraternity of St. Joseph, she has been formation team member, secretary, minister, councilor. Mary is a research assistant professor at University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor, MI.

MARY FRANCES CHARSKY, OFS

Mary Frances was minister of the St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region. A retired elementary school principal, Mary Frances has been a member of St. Francis Fraternity in Binghamton for over 30 years.

She served as local minister as well as in other positions. In her church she has been Eucharistic minister, member of the parish council, and member of the adult formation and social justice committees. She is a board member of Holy Family Vocational Orphanage Foundation.

ARTURO VILLAREAL, OFS

Arturo has served as vice minister of Empress of the Americas region and was professed in 1981. He is member of St. Patrick's Fraternity in El Paso. He and his wife, Sofia, also a Secular Franciscan, have three children, Diana, Ben and Natalie.

Arturo also was elected alternate international councilor.

MARY STRONACH, OFS

Mary was formation director for St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region. Professed in 2003 at St. Joseph Fraternity in Utica, NY, Mary has served the national fraternity as public relations co-chair and the international fraternity as an interpreter-translator. She teaches Spanish and Italian at Utica College, and operates a PR firm catering to non-profits. Mary and husband Robert have two daughters, three sons, and four granddaughters.

KEVIN QUEALLY, TOR

Father Kevin resides at St. Francis Friary in Loretto, PA. He is former secretary general for the Third Order Regular, stationed in Rome, Italy. After returning in 2001, he spent over seven years working in campus ministry and later as assistant vice president for mission and ministry at St. Francis University in Loretto, PA. From 2009 to 2012 he was chaplain and director of campus ministry at Alvernia University in Reading, PA.

FACES OF THE 2012 CHAPTER



YouFra Pamela Townsend, left, addresses some 30 chapter attendees during an evening roundtable discussion on youth.



NAFRA Chapter participants pose for group photo (above and below).

