



***“Diapers! Please, we need
diapers!”***

SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

DISASTER RESPONSE TEAM?

by Jim Flickinger, OFS

The mother looked squarely at me and then flitted her eyes back and forth between me and her toddlers, hoping that I too would turn to look at the children and appreciate the situation.

Diapers. This weren't what I had expected to be the most desperate need of families who, at gunpoint, had just fled from Kosovo into a Macedonian refugee camp. Yet looking across the camp I saw hundreds of infants and toddlers in soiled diapers or no diapers. In their flight to safety these children and their parents had escaped with the clothes on their back. For the older refugees, clothing was one of the least concerns. What they had would last. But that was not the case with the little ones. They needed a change — not in a month, but now.

Getting diapers wasn't complicated. I drove with two friends to Skopje, bought nearly a half semi-load of diapers, and delivered them to overjoyed parents.

Although the purchase wasn't complicated, it was and is an example of the need for, and the flexibility of, non-governmental aid. Non-governmental aid, too, is more than just the purchase of goods. It is spending time (sometimes sitting in the dirt or on a brick) talking, sharing coffee or a cookie, loving, praying, and just being there to listen.

Disasters come in many forms — not just from war, but also from natural disasters: hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes and fires.

For several years consideration has been given to forming a Secular Franciscan team that could respond to disasters in our country. Basically, we would develop a list of Secular Franciscans or others who might be available to help in the event of a national emergency. At the same time we would begin collecting and warehousing relief supplies. And when a disaster strikes in our country, the team who would go to work assessing needs, arranging the purchase and/or shipment of relief items, and contacting Secular Franciscans for “boots on the ground” help.

No final decision has been made on whether formation of a response team is feasible or desirable. Secular Franciscans can certainly do relief work individually or through other organizations. Yet there is merit, too, in our presence as Secular Franciscans. We might not be able to solve all problems, but we can solve some. We would like your thoughts and comments on the idea. Send comments to Jim Flickinger, OFS, 1456 Blythe Drive NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504, or to flickingersfo@prodigy.net or by phone to (616) 453-9104.

**PLAN NOW TO ATTEND THE
NEXT QUINQUENNIAL GATHERING!**

**When: July 1-6, 2016
Where: Denver, Colorado**

In 2021, the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States will celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the first National Congress of the Third Order of St. Francis. Normally, the Quinquennial is held every five years, but since there are only nine years until the 100th Anniversary Quinquennial, the next Q is now scheduled to occur in 2016 so that there will be five years to prepare for the 2012 Quinquennial. Stay tuned for more details.



Wanted: Executive Director for *The Dwelling Place*, a small Franciscan retreat/prayer center in rural Mississippi. The Dwelling Place, founded on the charism of St. Francis, offers both hospitality and prayer opportunities for renewal of spirit, mind and body.

These occasions are provided through private or directed retreats, prayer and spiritual counseling and weekend retreat experiences for those who seek peace, joy and healing. For more information, contact Mary Horrell at www.dwellingplace.com, email address: dwellingpl@gmail.com or telephone 662-738-5348.