



The NAFRA theme for 2013 is calling us to “Be the Bridge,” but what does that mean? When I think of a bridge, I think of an arched stone structure like the ones in Yosemite Valley. An interesting fact is that the central stone, the final piece to be placed at the apex of the arch, locks the whole structure together and is referred to as the keystone. For me, the keystone is my Franciscan Way of Life. Read through the following reflections and ponder your own thoughts about “Being the Bridge.”

Jim Wesley, OFS  
Bl. Junipero Serra Region

Being the BRIDGE . . .  
Is Lessons of GOD’s Grace  
and Total Acceptance  
of its Path,  
Leading to Discover  
an Indescribable Unseen LOVE  
It is then, that one can Simply  
LOVE  
And there is no longer the GAP  
of Absent LOVE!  
Cherryle Fruge, OFS  
St. Joan of Arc Region

As our society become more diverse, building bridges among diverse groups of people and, in fact, all of creation is essential if we are to survive as a humane and human family. Jesus gave us a norm of greatness—put the *other* first. In essence, it is the way of humility. Jesus invites us to be *the* bridge spanning the gulf of misunderstanding, powerlessness, humiliation and neglect. The path to this greatness lies in the realization that all of God’s creation is interconnected and when one part of the body suffers, we all suffer. Yet awareness is not enough. Being *the* bridge takes dedication to prolonged dialogue and a firm commitment to right what is wrong.

Anne Mulqueen, OFS  
Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Chair

The very essence of mission work is being a bridge builder – opening oneself to another culture. Mission work is “crossing a bridge” to create a bridge. Building that bridge requires relationship and a ministry of presence. It’s not just about “giving” – it’s about humility, exposing yourself deeply, and marveling at the gift of finding your true self as you open yourself to others. Francis was the ultimate “bridge-builder.

Kim Smolik,  
Executive Director of Franciscan Mission Service:  
(Shared at our 2012 NAFRA Chapter)

### Being the Bridge:

A daily process of having enough humility to be willing to lay down your life for another.

Susan Simeone, OFS

Minister, St. Thomas More Region

To "Be the Bridge" one must "lay down". Jesus showed us how. Jesus laid down his life on the Cross and became a bridge. A bridge connects opposites. On the cross Jesus bridges heaven and earth and brings the full spectrum of humanity into unity within his own Body. He is our peace as he breaks down the dividing walls. (cf. Eph. 2:14) He reconciles. He unites. He bridges. There is no greater love. To "Be the Bridge and accept all people" challenges me, in truth and love, to lay down my pride, my wants, and my desires in order to open myself to others. I need to stretch and reach across the divide, trusting the power of the Cross to help me bridge the gap, no matter how wide or deep the ravine.

Jan Parker, OFS

NAFRA, National Secretary

When I think of "Be(ing) the Bridge" I am reminded that a bridge provides a connection or passage over some obstacle. Some bridges are constructed of suspension cables that have great strength. Others are raised or lowered often to let tall ships pass through. Still some others are covered and purely for strolling. To "be the bridge" I must be the connecting link - strong enough to be stretched, open-minded and impartial enough to new ideas, and compassionate enough to walk on with my sisters and brothers in fraternal charity.

Joan Geiger, OFS

Minister, Tau Cross Region

As I left the Quinquennial gathering last July one phrase stuck in my mind. BE THE BRIDGE! To me this is indeed a challenge. It's one that every Secular Franciscan can take to heart. Whether we are in leadership or not, married or single, young or old, rich or poor, sick or healthy, each of us can be a bridge. There is no need for an agenda, committee or reports. Each of us can listen and show respect as well as reverence for all people even those with whom we differ. There are so many differences among people. We can be a link, a connection to help toward healing, forgiveness and understanding. We can be like Christ who heals, forgives, and understands. I will try.

Marie Amore, OFS

NAFRA, Minister of Vocations

Like Francis we are called to understand where the other person is coming from and to embrace the individual with different ideas – from one extreme to the other, whether they agree with us or not. We should listen and respect one another like Francis did with those he met. He also did not agree with all of them, but he listened and he respected. We always talk about bridge building – what we need to do is not only build the bridge, but BE the bridge. We must embrace our humanity and know ourselves so we can continue our conversion, not only through (initial) formation, but through our entire life. We need to re-build relationships with others, to be open to healing, to go out and witness by our lives and be healing for others. We all have a unique mission or we wouldn't be here – the Lord doesn't waste time. When we are called we need to do it. Like Francis, we are called to be evangelists – going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel.



Pat Johnson, OFS

*Pat was a nominee for National Treasurer and made this statement at our 2012 NAFRA Chapter. Just a few weeks after Chapter Pat unexpectedly met Sister Death.*