A Franciscan Dream…

By Fr. Greg Friedman, OFM

I have a dream. I imagine people seated around a radio - it’s sometime in the late 1940s, and radio is still in its “Golden Age.” Radio dramas attract a nightly audience. Among the shows are religious productions, starring Loretta Young, Bing Crosby, Ricardo Montalban. Audiences tune in across the country each week to listen. One of the shows is “The Hour of St. Francis.” At the end of the program comes the announcement that this story “was brought to you by the Third Order of St. Francis, whose members pray with St. Francis, ‘Lord, make me an instrument of your peace…” Lately, I’ve had a similar, but slightly different dream. It’s Christmas 2009. People still listen to the radio - and to Catholic radio stations across the country. But they also hear Catholic programs streamed on their computers. Catholic podcasts are downloaded to iPods and other devices. Through Web sites and social networking, Catholics and those seeking faith are connected to the message of Christmas. They’re listening to “A Franciscan Christmas,” three hours of programming available free of charge to Catholic radio stations hungry for stories, music and inspiration for the season. At the end of the program comes the announcement: “A Franciscan Christmas was brought to you by the members of the Secular Franciscan family across North America, who pray with St. Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace…”” Could my second dream come true? The first dream was a mission and ministry done in collaboration between the friars of St. Barbara Province and the Third Order over a half-century ago. A new collaboration might be possible today. Friars and their lay collaborators at St. Anthony Messenger Press in Cincinnati, Ohio, have inherited the innovative radio and film production ministry of our West Coast Franciscan family. Since the 1990s, Franciscan Communications has been a part of St. Anthony Messenger Press. The Press itself had its beginning in St. Anthony Messenger, first produced to provide inspiration to lay Franciscans in the late 19th century. Today, “Franciscan Radio” is a ministry of this Franciscan team in Cincinnati. We already produce a national radio show for the U.S. bishops, American Catholic Radio, heard on many Catholic stations around the country, and on the Web at www.FranciscanRadio.org. Our team has the dream of a new collaboration with Secular Franciscans to offer a “Christmas gift” to Catholics across the country. It would be three hours of Christmas programming with a Franciscan flavor.

Stories, music, interviews, the account of Francis and the Christmas Crib at Greccio - a true “Franciscan Christmas,” offered to Catholic stations in a season when they need programming to fill the gaps in their schedules during the holidays.

What form could this collaboration take? We are interested in suggestions for programming. We want to hear ways the SFO family celebrates Christmas in service to the world. We need musical talent. Above all, we need financial resources to bring the dream to reality. If you have ideas which can help us make this dream a reality, we’d love to hear from you. Write to me at: Letters@FranciscanRadio.org.

St. Francis gave the world a beautiful Christmas gift at Greccio in 1223. Could we do something similar with the gift of a “Franciscan Christmas” to the world this year?