

Classic Franciscan

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Richard Morton, SFO
National Minister, 1991-1997

Richard's Psalm for Living:

"...grant me a generous heart, O, my Friend and Teacher, for I would give freely of my time and energy in your Name." from Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill. Born and raised in the heartland of America in Gary, Indiana, the former National Minister of the Secular Franciscan Order, Richard Morton, carried the beliefs and flavor of his childhood throughout his life. Richard is the oldest of five children born to Clair and Blanche Morton. An enduring influence in his life was his father. Richard describes him as a peaceful, gentle parent who loved nature. He had a quiet steadiness that led to his baptism as a Roman Catholic on the Sunday before his death. Clair Morton was just 63 years old when Sister Death took him by the hand and led him into the next world.

While pursuing a degree in electrical engineering at Purdue University, Richard met his future wife, Karol, who was also one of five children. They married during their senior year on September 7, 1957. Upon graduating in 1958, he and Karol left Purdue for his first job in Long Branch, New Jersey at the US Army Signal Research Development Labs at Fort Monmouth. Everything they owned was packed in their trusty 1947 Chevrolet, with the ironing board stretching between them through to the back seat. Their son, Michael, was born in New Jersey.

Accepting a position with Honeywell in 1959, the Mortons loaded up the same 1947 Chevrolet and moved just 300 miles south of the Canadian border to Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota, where they still make their home today. Their own brood of five children: Michael, Susan, William, Katherine, and Barbara, have increased the family with eight grandchildren who are aged from 4 to 25 years.

Richard and Karol were professed as Secular Franciscans 40 years ago on March 30, 1970 in St. Patrick's Church in Inver Grove Heights. Their fraternity - St. Thomas More Fraternity - was established at the same time. It was made up of three young couples and a young woman. Richard was the first minister of the fraternity. A year after his profession, he became Provincial Minister of the Immaculate Conception Province.

After retiring from Honeywell, Richard accepted nomination for National Minister and, subsequently, was elected (in 1991). He describes the richness of the experiences in the variety of leadership roles he has held in the Secular Franciscan Order. Standing out is a distinct memory of walking up to the registration table at the 1972 Quinquennial Congress held in Santa Clara, California, and being graciously and warmly welcomed by Anthony and Mary Mazotti.

Individuals are precious to Richard. He speaks of Brother Juniper, one of the simplest yet most generous followers of St. Francis. Happily reading a children's book, Brother Juniper, written by Diane Gibfried and illustrated by Meilo So, it is evident that Richard has a Juniper's lightness and heart. In the story, Brother Juniper gives away everything in the chapel when the Brothers are away, including his own clothes. Finding him standing naked in the empty shell of a building, the other Brothers chastise Juniper. But soon, the church is filled with children, a teacher, a baker - everyone who received something from Juniper returns to the church, bringing others with them. Recalling that Francis of Assisi said he wished for "a whole forest of Junipers," Richard Morton says that Brother Juniper is a model as we as Seculars start to rebuild our church.

