

TAU-USA

Publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States
Winter 2008 - Issue 61



By Roberto Ferruzzi

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Christmas Blessings to you:

As Christmas nears, may you spend Advent in peace filled reflection and prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Lord. The mystery of the Incarnation is central to who we are as Franciscans and our spirituality. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus surround you with His love and fill your lives with His abundant blessings! Patrick Mendés

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TAU-USA is a vehicle of communication within the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, allowing the national fraternity to disseminate information to the regional and local fraternities and allowing Seculars to communicate with one another throughout the country, thus fostering a sense of community Nation wide.

All professed members of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States receive the TAU-USA without charge. It is the responsibility of the Regional Ministers to ensure that the addresses of professed members, who wish to receive it, are in the Data Base. Please send the names, addresses, and fraternity names of newly professed members and all address changes to Bob Herbelin, Data Base Adm. Please send subscriptions to Randy Heinz, Subscription Coordinator.

Local and Regional fraternities are responsible for providing copies of the TAU-USA for their Spiritual Assistants by purchasing subscriptions.

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The deadline for sending address changes to Robert Herbelin, Data Base Adm. And for submitting articles to the Editor for the next issue is Jan 15, 2009.

Submissions to the newsletter for possible inclusion are welcome. To increase the likelihood of your submission being published, the following guidelines are offered:

- Articles should not exceed one page in length (single spaced).
- Please send all submissions for possible publication in WORD format, as an e-mail attachment or mail to Editor Frances Wicks (address is on top left of this page).
- Material received after the deadline for a particular issue will be considered for other issues.
- Please understand that all articles may be edited for length and clarity.
- TAU-USA does not accept ads.



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Musings on the Chapter



and Fraternity

By Patrick Mendés, SFO
National Minister

From October 14th to 19th the National Fraternity gathered for our Annual Chapter in Nashville at the Scarritt-Bennett Center. I want to express our thanks to the host Region, Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis, whose attention to every detail and immediate help with last minute requests made our entire agenda run smoothly. The famed “Southern Hospitality” was very much in evidence! What a treat it was to be entertained in our evening socials by the brothers and sisters of the Region who are such gifted musicians and the wonderfully wise and very funny story teller, Barbara Freeman, SFO. If you ever have the pleasure of meeting our sister, Barbara, ask her to tell you the “peanut butter” story. Truly a classic!

A quick review of the post chapter evaluations reflected that the Regional Ministers would like more time for their geographic group meetings, even though they were the most blocks of time allocated for geographic groups in recent history. What a wonderful message their comments were! They so much appreciated and valued their time spent discussing their concerns, sharing their successes and building fraternity!

National Chapter is just like fraternity chapter at any level and consists of the 4 elements of a fraternity gathering: prayer, formation, business and fraternity/community time. Our liturgies were well planned and beautiful. The sacred space was thoughtfully created by Kathy Taormina, SFO, of our FYYA. Kathy has extensive experience in art and environment ministry. It helps that she is a florist by profession!

Our opening mass was celebrated by the Most Rev. David Choby, Bishop of the Diocese of Nashville, who joined us for opening evening dinner. Bishop Choby is a native of Nashville. He is warm and welcoming and very approachable and has visited Assisi numerous times. How blessed are our brothers and sisters who live in that diocese to have a bishop with such a Franciscan heart!

Our formation sessions presented by Teresa Baker, SFO, Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO, Pat Brandwein-Ball, SFO and outgoing President-in-turn of the CNSA, Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv., were timely and special. The NEC and National Fraternity thank them for their generous contributions to our life and the building of fraternity.

While it is very important that the National Fraternity take care of the business of the Nation, in your name, and they attended to this task diligently and with careful thought and attention to the matters before them, the hallmark of our gathering was building fraternity.

How do we build fraternity at any level? The elements of prayer and on going formation are the basis for true intimacy. The sharing of our stories, our difficulties and our successes and the acceptance of one another where we are in our journeys from Gospel to life and life to Gospel, with encouragement and without passing judgment, essentially, with our unconditional love for one another.

While it is often difficult for folks outside our Order to see the importance we place on the “social” part of our gatherings, it is exactly this informal setting that fosters the building of community and fraternal love that is so much a part of our charism.

The lesson to be learned – be sure to make enough time at our monthly gatherings and take other opportunities such as shared retreats, formation days, special liturgies to reach out to the larger Franciscan family and include ample time for the “social” part of our gathering. As our Holy Rule tells us, “Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters...”

As Christmas nears, may you spend Advent in peace filled reflection and prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Lord. The mystery of the Incarnation is central to who we are as Franciscans, and our spirituality.

May the Sacred Heart of Jesus surround you with His love and fill your lives with His abundant blessings!



St. Francis' Christmas Crèche

By St. Bonaventure in
The Life of St. Francis of Assisi

“The story of the origin of the Christmas crèche rests with the very holy man, St. Francis of Assisi. In the year 1223, St. Francis, a deacon, was visiting the town of Greccio to celebrate Christmas. Greccio was a small town built on a mountainside overlooking a beautiful valley. The people had cultivated the fertile area with vineyards. St. Francis realized that the chapel of the Franciscan hermitage would be too small to hold the congregation for Midnight Mass. So he found a niche in the rock near the town square and set up the altar. However, this Midnight Mass would be very special, unlike any other Midnight Mass.

It happened in the third year before his death, that in order to excite the inhabitants of Greccio to commemorate

the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, St. Francis determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff. Then he prepared a manger, and brought hay, and an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God, St. Francis, stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem.

A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Greccio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake Him from sleep. This vision of the devout soldier is credible, not only by reason of the sanctity of him that saw it, but by reason of the miracles which afterwards confirmed its truth. For example of Francis, if it be considered by the world, is doubtless sufficient to excite all hearts which are negligent in the faith of Christ; and the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle, and many other pestilences; God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles.”



Photo by F. Wicks, SFO

**Group picture of the National Fraternity of the
Secular Franciscan Order in the United States,
who met in Nashville Tennessee for their Annual NAFRA Meeting**



A Few Random Photos:



Sylvia Paoli and Rock DeSpain, Vice Minister
and Minister of St. Francis Region



Vickie Klick, SFO,
Computer Committee Chair



Brother Bob Brady, OFM
CNSA President-in-turn

Welcome to Brother Bob Brady, OFM, CNSA President-in-turn. Bro. Bob has a long history of service to the Seculars. He is Spiritual Assistant for Blessed Junipero Serra Region and Provincial Spiritual Assistant of Saint Barbara Province. He lives in San Francisco, CA.



**National Fraternity Meeting
October 14-19, 2008
Nashville, Tennessee**

By Dan Mulholland, SFO

We had a really good NAFRA meeting this year and the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region went all out to make it special; many thanks to Judy Haupt, Dale Anesi and Kathy Taormina and Jan Parker and the whole host committee.



Patrick Mendés, SFO



Judy Haupt, SFO

October 14th – We were welcomed to Nashville by Judy Haupt and Patrick Mendés, with introductions of everyone including our special guest, Nashville Bishop David Choby who told us that coming together as lay Franciscans in the name of the Poverello gives us a unique perspective. He concluded by telling us that he prayed that God will be present to us and that we may find joy in being the poor ones of God.

The first order of business was to present Marie Dennis, SFO with the 2008 Peace Award. After Vice Minister Tom Bello introduced Marie, Patrick Mendés presented her with the St. Francis statue. Marie’s talk was well received and in it she made the following statements of what it means to be a peacemaker among the poor and suffering:

-To work for peace is to work for those clinging to life on the margins of our world.

-To work for peace is to work for an end to dehumanizing poverty and economic injustice.

-To work for peace is to accompany migrants (who face great obstacles and horrendous violence in trying to provide for their families), and advocate for justice, tolerance and hospitality.

-To work for peace is to struggle for an end to destructive violence - for an end to war, all war; for an end to all the ways our societies attack and destroy human life.

-To work for peace is to promote reconciliation.

-To work for peace is to care for the earth...to stop and prevent wars over scarce resources by careful conservation and intervention to slow or reverse climate change.

-To work for peace is to work for right relationships within an inclusive community (triumphing over the genocide and brutal repression of the last 100 years that collectively have taken millions of lives - from the Nazi holocaust to the Rwandan genocide to the slaughter in Darfur).

Marie was very pleased with the award.



Marie Dennis, SFO

Bishop Choby celebrated Mass right after the Peace Award Ceremony. After Mass we were entertained by a local Storyteller who kept us laughing with her tales and culminated with a skit she did with Tom Bello.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October14#slideshow>

October 15th – Morning prayer was led by Geographic Group one (Northeast) to start the day off right. The Call to Order included Roll Call, Agenda Approval, Secretary and Treasurer’s reports, and introductions of the NEC and special guests.



Rev. Joan Verret, TSSF

Rev. Joan Verret, TSSF, was introduced. She talked about the Anglican Franciscans in the Province of the Americas, which covers 12 countries and 47 states, has 17 Bishops and 533 Tertiaries. She noted our similarities, and thanked us for our openness and hospitality. Shoshonah Kay, OEF is the new Formation Director of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. She had an interesting story about her journey from being a Quaker and through Franciscanism ending up Catholic. She continues to journey with the Ecumenical Franciscans, she said, because of the richness of interfacing with people of other faiths. The OEF is small with only 60 members.



Shoshonah Kay, OEF

The next introductions were of the five new Ministers – all pictured below L to R: Mary Lou Scebelo (Fr. Solanus Casey), Hans Hueimmer (Five Franciscan Martyrs), Cindy Wesley (Bl. Junipero Serra), Mary Anne Lenzi (Santa Maria de las Montañas), and Edward Feiler (Queen of Peace)



New Ministers

Teresa Baker gave her last Formation session as the outgoing Formation Chair, on the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. She discussed the evangelical, penitential and secular aspects of our Secular Franciscan calling: to be present to God’s will; to be available to what God would have us do; to be gift to the world bringing joyous optimism. She also reminded us not to trip over God at the doorstep in our rush to go out to do good works.

Mass celebrated by Fr. Richard Trezza OFM finished the morning session.

The Minister’s State of the Order address started off the afternoon. Patrick Mendés reported on growth in the SFO in the United States this past year, with increases in the number of Spiritual Assistants (Secular Franciscans and religious sisters). Formation workshops were well received; Youth and Young Adults had a successful H₂O project; Franciscan Action Network is going quite well; and the transition of the Commissions to JPIC is underway.

After a session responding to questions on the annual reports, Teresa Baker gave all the Regional Ministers a Formation CD. Then Jan Parker, Clare McCluggage, and Kathy Taormina gave a musical review of the RESPECT Guidelines and mutual invitation guidelines to be used in the Geographic Groups session. This was quite good and made us wish there were a video to capture it.

While the Ministers met in their Geographic Groups, the Computer Committee met to discuss problems and needs for the coming year. Evening Prayer was led by Geographic Groups two and four (South and Mid-West).



After dinner we had the Memorial Service with each Regional Minister reading off the names of deceased members this past year after lighting a candle for their region. The Rev. Joan Verret, TSSF, read for her Order, and the CNSA Friars read for their respective Provinces as well.

The BSSF Region had skits to celebrate Creation as the evening's entertainment followed by a light social and some musical entertainment.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October15#slideshow>



Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO

October 16th – Morning Prayer was led by Geographic Group three (Great Lakes). Bob Fitzsimmons, the new Formation Chair's talk was about the question asked of St Francis: Why After You? Bob talked about how your journey determines how you arrive, and today's reality – where does it need to be turned upside down? He also mentioned that part of Franciscan Poverty is accepting what we have been blessed with. Bob hopes to continue the regional workshops and look at ways of getting Formation to the Fraternities with modern media aids.

Vickie Klick gave a quick presentation asking how the Computer Committee can help the Regions. The computer committee had discussed a need to have a

database person assigned in each region, and a list server to connect them with the right people for questions and problems. Part of the Computer Committee's job is to get the TAU-USA up on the web, and it was mentioned that the last issue was the best NAFRA has seen ever.

Pat Brandwein-Ball addressed what has been happening with the process of moving from the Apostolic Commissions to JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation). This process involves re-visioning what was done with the Commissions and how to form JPIC. Most of the groundwork has been done, and soon they will be looking for people who could be on JPIC.

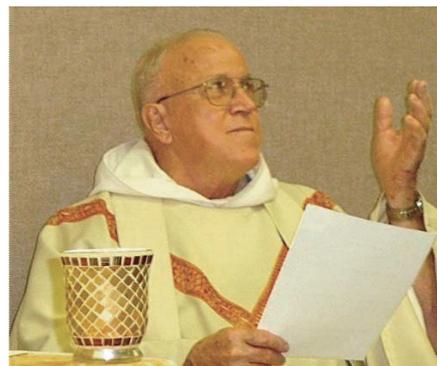
Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, read two statements for the Ministers to consider on the Economy and on Orissa. (See on page 8).

Tom Bello discussed FAN (Franciscan Action Network), what it has done this past year, what its goals are and what the budget is, to which NAFRA will be contributing \$14,000 this next year. This prompted some suggestions that the amount should be cut back, but that would be part of the budget discussions in the afternoon.

Elaine Hedtke led the afternoon Geographic Group feedback session covering FAN and JPIC. The feedback was generally positive on FAN and the confusion between FAN and JPIC seems to have been settled.

The budget discussion was lively as always and the budget was passed the next morning.

Mentioned during the end of the day: Clare McCluggage is heading the Quinquennial 2012 committee and looking for volunteers; next year's NAFRA is at the Inn at Rio Rancho in Albuquerque, NM, October 20-25; it will be an election year, so a nominating committee is needed; Living by Faith hasn't been published for some time. Ken Beattie and then Randy Heinz, who said he had been in the NAVY (Never Again Volunteer Yourself) decided to volunteer.



Mass was celebrated by Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap, with music provided by Jerry Aull from a local fraternity.

Lester Bach, OFM Cap.

After Mass, Kathy Taormina, with the help of her daughter, Sara, gave out awards for the five top Regions helping make the H2O project a huge success this year. Top award went to Troubadours of Peace Region with Elaine Hedtke accepting.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October16#slideshow>

After the presentation, the Ridley School of Dance performed, with several groups of girls in many colorful outfits. This was a photographer's field day. The social included some extras for the girls afterwards.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October16Dance#slideshow>



Pat Brandwein-Ball

October 17th – Morning Prayer was led by Geographic Group five (West). Pat Brandwein-Ball led Formation with a discussion on visioning. Where we are is sacred ground; who are we called to be; who am I called to be? Franciscans are ecumenical, penitential and secular. The Order gives us a sense of belonging; belovedness from Fraternity to the outside world; we are moving from complexity to simplicity. Pat left us to ponder where is God calling us now?

Kathy Taormina discussed the restructuring of the Youth and Young Adult Commission to bring it more in line with International. It will be the Youth and Young Adult (FYA) Council. The FYA Council will have four young adults, a spiritual assistant and two professed Secular Franciscans serving as fraternal animators. It will take two years to make the transition. The YouFra group will elect a president who sits on the local sponsoring fraternity council and represents youth/young adults on a regional FYA council. The regional FYA council elects a president who will serve on the SFO

regional executive council and represent regions on the national FYA Council. The regional FYA presidents elect a national FYA president to represent youth and young adults on the NAFRA Executive Council.

Other new business discussed was Affiliate Guidelines led by Teresa Baker and Bob Fitzsimmons, and Grant and Funding request guidelines led by Clare McCluggage.

The open forum discussions ranged from having NAFRA documents translated into other languages with links on the NAFRA Web site, to suggesting a fund to help out people entering religious vocations, to an appeal for Franciscan Mission Service needing lay missionaries to Brazil and Bolivia.

Evening Prayer included prayers for Susan Simeone (the delegate representing St. Thomas More Region who fell and broke her leg on the first day of the meeting) and blessing of the Prayer Shawl knitted for her by Teresa Baker and Sarah Mulholland. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Kevin Queally, and was followed by music by Jerry Aull and a talk by Cricket Aull. This was followed by special presentations to Teresa Baker for her years of service.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October17#slideshow>



Fr. Stephen Gross, OFM Conv.

October 18th – Morning Prayer was led by Geographic Groups two and four again. Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv., led Formation with the question: Who is Francis of Assisi? St. Bonaventure had all written stories about Francis sent to him, which he recorded and destroyed. He didn't want pictures of Francis to reflect factions

within the Order. So today scholars look at Francis' writings to reflect who Francis is.

Anne Mulqueen discussed CIOFS and their priorities of Formation, Presence in the World, Franciscan Youth and Finance. Anne handed out a demographics form to be filled out by the Regions.

An announcement was made that Tom Bello had been appointed St. Margaret of Cortona's Regional Spiritual Assistant, the first SFO in such a position. A final wording of the two statements to be released by NAFRA on the economy and Orissa was presented. The FYYA Statute revision was approved. Open Forum discussed the availability of a nice calendar from Frank Carpinelli's Region; Delia Banchs circulated an article on Prison Ministry with some ensuing discussions, and Clare McCluggage had drafted a Novena for Orissa.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October18#slideshow>



After lunch a number of group photos were taken before departing for our Day Away. The bus took us to downtown Nashville, where we did a walking tour in different groups, most starting at the old Fort Nashborough. We had a local TSSF give us a guided tour, walking around back streets, stopping in an Irish Pub, spying Fr. Lester, Ken Beattie, and Stephanie Sormane in an ice cream parlor, wandering by the Ryman Auditorium (original home of the Grand Old Opry), and stopping in the Ernest Tubbs Record Store. We then got back to the bus to go to St. Mary's of the Seven Sorrows for Mass at 5 pm. Dinner at the Wild Horse Saloon was followed by line dancing sessions, which had a lot of us out on the dance floor until late at night.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October18DayAway#slideshow>

October 19th – Morning Prayer, Round Table discussion, and travel were the plans for the day. Everyone remaining for the Round Table discussion was asked for their views and comments about the week. The feelings were that it was a great week, well paced, and the BSSF Region had done a wonderful job of keeping things running smoothly. Many agreed that the entertainment was good, but they would prefer to have more time in the evening to socialize as this was their only time together. The Day Away had to be on Saturday this year, but it was felt it should be on a Thursday when people needed a break from all the meetings. It was also felt that the Round Table discussion should be done on Saturday evening when everyone was still present rather than on Sunday when a lot of people had to make early plane flights. I know that we'd appreciate that because leaving for home after the meeting got us in at 1:00 AM (3:00 AM Nashville time) on Monday morning.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/dannymai3/NAFRA2008October19#slideshow>



Two statements were passed at the National Meeting on the economy and Orissa. See below:

Statement on the Economy

In his letter of September 26, 2008 Most Reverend William Murphy, Bishop of Rockville Centre and Chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, called on our government officials to remember the values of Catholic Social Teaching as they deal with the current economic crisis in our country.

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States gathered in Nashville, Tennessee from October 14 through 19. These Secular Franciscans wish to support the Catholic bishops in prayer and echo them in their call for justice. With the bishops, the Secular Franciscans recall the words of Pope John Paul II:

“Our Catholic tradition calls for a *‘society of work, enterprise and participation’* which *‘is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the state to assure that the basic needs of the whole society are satisfied’* (*Centesimus Annus*).”

These words of John Paul II should be adopted as a standard for all those who carry this responsibility for our nation, the world and the common good of all. Following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, Secular Franciscans exhort our government leaders to remember the poor who suffer most in times of economic downturn. Approved by the assembled members on October 18, 2008

Statement on Orissa

In Orissa, India, Christians are being persecuted in a shocking display of a type of “religious” cleansing. According to impartial observers, there is a systematic attempt to remove all Christians from the area. Many Christians have already been killed. In addition, thousand of homes have been burned and Catholic and other Christian Churches have been targeted in an organized manner, burned and looted.

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, gathered at their National Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, from October 14 through 19, condemns these actions most forcefully. We Secular Franciscans stand in solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters in India and pledge our continued prayers.

We further commend Franciscans International as it continues to speak out against the atrocities and call for immediate international attention and action. This situation merits increased coverage in the national and world media. We denounce all violence.

Approved by the assembled members on October 18, 2008

Quote:

Provide reinforcement and strength
for yourself and for others.

Cherie Carter-Scott, Ph.D.

Another Summer Seminar in Loretto...

By Cecilia Maljan, SFO
Lady Poverty Region

Thanks to **Fr. Gabriel Zeis, TOR**, President of St. Francis University, for his desire to serve the Secular Franciscan Order, to **Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR**, for making Fr. Gabriel’s dream a reality, to the **Sacred Heart Province of the T.O.R** for their initial funding of the seminar, to **Fr. Bernie Tickerhoof, TOR** and **Anne Mulqueen, SFO** for their stimulating and enlightening presentations, to **the seventy-three Secular Franciscans** from across the country who took the chance on this uncertain venture, and finally to **all those “behind the scenes,”** who contributed to the **HUGE** success of the *First Annual Summer Seminar in Loretto*, in June 2008. There will be a *Second Annual Summer Seminar in Loretto* in June 2009!

On **Thursday evening, June 25** through **Sunday afternoon, June 28, 2009**, our Secular Franciscan family from across the country will again gather in the beautiful setting of the rolling Allegheny mountainside, surrounded by buildings reminiscent of famous Franciscans or Franciscan places by their names, for an unique learning adventure designed just for them.

The topic for the 2009 Summer Seminar, *Franciscan Spirituality for Secular Franciscans*, was recommended by NAFRA, who endorse and strongly encourage participation. Fr. Kevin has lined up two Secular Franciscans to be the presenters: **Vinal Van Benthem, SFO**, Spiritual Assistant for St. Joseph Fraternity, Appleton, Wisconsin, and **Bob “Fitz” Fitzsimmons, SFO**, Troubadours of Peace Region, our new **National Formation Chair**.

At the end of the 2008 extended weekend, everyone at the seminar was ready to register for the 2009 seminar right then and there! Mark your calendars NOW and be looking for more details and registration information will soon. You don’t want to miss the opportunity to be a part of this SFO learning experience and family gathering! If you have any questions, contact Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, 814-472-3367 (daytime) or e-mail kqueally@francis.edu.

National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States State of the Order - October 2008

**By Patrick Mendés, SFO
National Minister**

My dear sisters and brothers:

I begin the review of our demographics by saying thank you for your assistance. My annual address would not be possible without your hard work and that of your councils, in completing the Annual Regional Report, from which my statistics are gleaned and my review of the life of our National Fraternity is based.

Number of Professed sisters and brothers: 15,811. This is the first year in recent memory that we have seen an increase. Last year, we reported 15,293.

Candidates: 1,208

Inquirers: 850

Canonically established fraternities: 718 (an increase of 16!)

Emerging fraternities: 37

Newly forming groups: 33 These figures represent significant growth. Last year there were 28 newly forming and emerging fraternities reported, totally.

Spiritual Assistants:*

Friars: 314

Sisters: 91(an increase of 21)

SFO: 80 (an increase of 16)

Diocesan clergy (not SFO members): 32

Members of other Religious Orders: 6

Secular Franciscans enrolled in the Franciscan Family Connections (Spiritual Assistant training) Program: 66 – a dramatic increase over last year, when 27 persons were enrolled.

Fraternities who have no spiritual assistant: 185 – a slight improvement over last year when 187 were reported.

The need for Regional Spiritual Assistants has grown.

Regions with no Regional Spiritual Assistant: 3. Last year it was just 1 region.

Formation:

This has been the “Year of Formation” as the tremendously well received “On the Road” workshops were presented in Florida and Missouri. The Formation Commission under the leadership of Teresa Baker presented this highly effective, thorough program for “forming the formators.” The enthusiasm from the participants, who represented most of the Regions of our National Fraternity was evident in both their

communications with me and with the Formation Commission and they took very seriously the request and challenge to return to their home regions and replicate the workshop for their local formation directors. As I have made visitations to the various regions, I learn that the Regional formation teams are preparing Regional Formation Manuals or updating them and preparing to present formation workshops or have already done so. Many have shared their newly prepared or revised manuals with me and they are impressive! I saw real excitement for the implementation of the pillars of the workshop at the Regional level. I have added a new function to my role as National Minister – cheerleader for the Formation Commissions and teams at every level of fraternity. May the enthusiasm and growth continue! Solid formation is the foundation for a genuine Franciscan life lived to the fullest in hope, joy and peace!

Youth and Young Adults:

Once again, the young people had a very successful fund raising for the Water Project. This was well supported by many of the Regions. See the Commission Chair’s report for details. The adult leadership, chaired by Kathy Taormina, has worked hard at developing the young people to govern their own commission, culminating in her recommendation that they begin to assume leadership for themselves. While growth in numbers has been slow, the young people are vibrant and alive in the Franciscan charism.

Franciscan Action Network:

National Vice-Minister, Deacon Tom Bello, has been elected Vice-President of FAN. The network is growing and has taken part in a number of peace, justice and integrity of creation issues. I continue to serve on the steering committee and attended the meeting in Washington, DC, in September. A number of educational opportunities relating to peace, justice and the integrity of creation are being offered by the FAN leadership and staff.

This will be addressed more fully by our National Vice Minister, in his report and presentation.

Ad Hoc Committee on Re-Visioning of the Holy Rule:

The Committee has completed its work and Chairperson and National Councilor, Patricia Brandwein-Ball will present the guidelines for implementation during our Chapter. My thanks to Pat and the members of the Ad Hoc Committee for their work and careful analysis. The National Executive Council and I will appoint the new Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Chair shortly.

Fraternal Life:

Local fraternities around the country are involved in the various corporal and spiritual works of mercy such as staffing shelters and diningrooms for the homeless and other services which assist the poor and marginalized. They are also very active in their parishes various ministries. Many work in ministry to the imprisoned

Most of our Regions, have an annual retreat which brings together brothers and sisters from across the Region to pray, deepen their spirituality and share fraternity.

Some unique Regional activities have been a Regional “Towel Drive” in which the participating fraternities gathered towels and gave them to several local shelters.

A fraternity in Michigan co-sponsored an appearance of a nationally known photographic exhibit on Darfur Three neighboring regions on the eastern seaboard hosted a Franciscan Life In Community.” These days of learning, praying and fraternity were shared by the brothers and sisters of the regions.

Another region had a week-end conference on “Francis and Islam.” The theme of the conference was World Peace, Awareness of Global Concerns and the Integrity of Creation.

One Region has an “All Franciscan Day” which is a gathering for all branches of our Franciscan family.

Another Region sends prayer books to service men and women.

Additionally, Regions and their local fraternities represent our SFO at diocesan events such as the Festival of Faith, the diocesan “Third Order” Masses et al.

Progress in addressing the challenges and opportunities identified by the Regions in last year’s survey:

Lack of Spiritual Assistants: During visitations and conferences, the Pastoral and Fraternal Visitors have encouraged strongly, the members of the respective regions to identify and encourage those persons who are qualified and interested, to enroll in the Franciscan Family Connections Course. As a result of the promotion by the visitors and the Regional Councils, we have now have 66 persons taking the course. We certainly need more, but this represents an excellent increase over last year’s number of 27.

Additionally, the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants sponsored a very well attended Congress for Spiritual Assistants in Detroit, this past September. The well prepared and in-depth program was very well

received. There was frank discussion of the issues surrounding the lack of spiritual assistants for the local fraternities and with the fewer number of friars, also the friars who were giving spiritual assistance at several levels of fraternity. The realities were clearly identified and ideas explored for creatively meeting the need for Spiritual Assistance.

Training of Servant Leaders: We have encouraged Regional Councils to develop programs for the preparation of servant leaders, and many have done so with considerable success.

The Summer Seminar for Secular Franciscans sponsored and provided by St. Francis University of Loretto, PA, focused on Servant Leadership. The Seminar, which saw 17 of our Regions represented, was highly successful. The University will continue the Summer Seminar annually, except in years when there is a Quinquennial Congress.

Uniform formation of formation directors. The “On the Road” workshops addressed this need very effectively and it is being carried over by most of the regions to their local fraternities.

Looking ahead:

We will continue to implement the Formation work begun in this past year.

Continue to help our brothers and sisters understand the work of the Franciscan Action Network and our united Franciscan Family voice in matters of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, which of course, include the articles of our Rule relating to family and work.

Support the growth of our youth in assuming leadership of their own fraternities.

Revitalize the Multicultural Committee

Revitalize the Living By Faith newsletter – under the aegis of the JPIC Team.

Begin preparation for our next Quinquennial Congress in 2012.

Discern candidates and prepare for our Chapter of Elections in 2009.

In conclusion, it has been a year of change, growth and excitement. Let us rejoice and give thanks to Our Lord for blessing us with a grace filled, productive year with so much good that we have been able to accomplish in His holy name.

I want to express my personal thanks to all of you for your cooperation and support and for your very warm Franciscan welcome as I visit your Regions.



EXPLORING

Things Franciscan



++ CNSA Notes & Views ++

Lester Bach OFM Cap

SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS' WORKSHOP

We want to express our gratitude to all the Provincial, Regional and Local spiritual assistants who were part of our gathering at Plymouth, MI, in September, 2008. Your presence and involvement blessed us and shared good insights that will help our ministry as members of CNSA. Thank you very much.

TAU-USA SUBSCRIPTIONS

Perhaps there are Provincial, Regional, and Local Spiritual Assistants who do not have a subscription to TAU-USA. It is important that they get copies of the national newsletter.

- + Provincial SA's pay for their own subscription.
- + Regional SA's receive a subscription paid for by the Regional Council.
- + Local SA's receive a subscription paid for by the local council.

If this has not been done, now is the time to do it!

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It is no secret that we dislike changing things in our lives. It is easier to keep things as they are. Of course, that goes contrary to the SFO Rule's call for conversion - *DAILY!* (SFO Rule #7)

St. Francis understood conversion as something that turns us from selfish, self-centered living to living in a God-centered, generous and compassionate way. It does not mean a change only in one or the other area of our lives that fail to reflect the Gospel. Franciscans do a complete turn-around so that our whole life is influenced by the ways of Jesus as expressed in the Gospel. The conversion permeates our whole life.

God's desire for us can be found in the SFO Rule of life approved by the Church. It is how we respond to the call of the Holy Spirit to be 100% Franciscans.

Few things take priority over our Franciscan way of life. Our way of life includes presence at regular gatherings; sharing ideas and insights with other Franciscans; having a willingness to serve if we are competent for a particular role; readiness to keep in touch with other secular Franciscans for ministry; visiting members who are unable to be with us at gatherings; an ability to serve people who are poor or marginalized in the Church or society; learning the ways of contemplative prayer.

1. The brothers and sisters are co-responsible for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and to the SFO as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.

2. The sense of co-responsibility of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer and active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations for the animation of the fraternity.

3. Rule 25 In a family spirit, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity fund, according to each one's means, to provide financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic, and charitable works. The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the fraternities at higher level, both by their financial assistance and by their contribution in other areas as well.

SFO Constitutions - Article 30.1, 30.2, 30.3

Beyond these personal requirements of the SFO Rule, there are special responsibilities for council members. Their leadership should prompt the development of a vibrant fraternity life. Involving the members in achieving this goal is an important part of good leadership.

4. The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings, both of the fraternities and of the councils. They should seek to

inspire life and soul into the fraternities by their own witness, suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity and of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it that the decisions made are carried out and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters.

SFO Constitutions - Article 31.4

It doesn't take a genius to realize that profession in the SFO is a total response to the call of the Holy Spirit. Yet some think that creating a vibrant fraternity life is someone else's task. Some think that formation is what formation personnel are expected to do. Sharing a variety of prayer forms is too much work. Being involved in work with the poor is always satisfied by writing a check. Offering forgiveness and reconciliation do not apply to some of the people who have hurt us.

Reading the SFO Rule and Constitutions will quickly dispel any of the ideas in the previous paragraph. Conversion means we have embraced a whole-hearted movement to fulfill what we have promised God, the Church, the world and one another by profession. May God help all of us find faithful ways to give flesh to our profession of the SFO way of life.

WHAT ABOUT FORMATION?

Visitations sometimes offer surprises to those who conduct a visitation. This is especially true when we dialogue with the council and formation directors about initial and ongoing formation. Here are some things we hear:

+ Our initial formation is to watch a TV program from EWTN.

+ Our initial formation sessions read a text and see if there are any questions. Our time schedule doesn't allow for long sessions.

+ Our initial formation sessions spend most of the time in prayer.

+ Our initial formation sessions use a book we wrote about the SFO - but never dialogued with regional or national formation people to make certain the book was on target for good formation.

+ We just have a scripture study session for initial formation.

+ We think there are too many requirements for initial formation so we just have people attend the regular gatherings of the fraternity.

These are a few ideas we hear on the journey. They are done with good will and good intentions. However, they will ordinarily fail in forming people to a committed dedication to our SFO gospel way of life.

Formation is prayerful work exploring the requirements and consequences of the SFO Rule and Constitutions. It is not easy. We ask people to absorb ideas which may be foreign to them. Our Franciscan perspective and viewpoints counter many of the ideas, attitudes and perspectives that surround us both in the Church and the world.

Trinitarian spirituality requires us to maintain relationships with everyone - both in our fraternities and in daily life. Our Franciscan way of approaching things seeks to maintain relationships even when we disagree with others. Prayerfulness is vital to this task. Some people are very difficult to love. We may offer pity rather than compassion. We may avoid people we need to love. Life does not present us with ideal situations that make everything "wonderful."

Life can be messy, sad, disruptive, require change, forgiveness, and reconciliation. We choose to draw people together and avoid whatever separates us. The economy can threaten our livelihood and may not be easy to deal with. Franciscans bring a loving spirit to situations and find ways of mending hurts and seeking unity. "How" to do this is by no means easy to determine. The community we call "fraternity" needs to dialogue about practical solutions, gaining support from people who have a Franciscan spirit.

Ongoing formation can offer solutions. A common sharing, getting insightful solutions through good input and dialogue are normal for Franciscans. Learning various forms of prayer means having a variety of prayer forms at gatherings. Using the same form of prayer at every gathering will never accomplish this. Learning ways of dialogue will not happen if we only have a speaker tell us what to do. Dialogue needs practice to sharpen our skills.

Fraternities are part of Regions. Regions are part of a National structure. All are joined to our International servant leaders. If we become "*Lone-Ranger-Fraternities or members*" we miss something vital for relationships in the SFO.

We do not live good lives to get God to love us. Rather, Franciscans know it is because God always loves us that we are able to live good lives. Good formation is vital for good Franciscan living and identity.

O Tiny Babe

By Alice Kenat, SFO
Billings, MT

O Tiny Babe born today
In Bethlehem we seek thee
From Heaven to earth
Our Lamb at Birth
A stable warm to greet thee

A star is bright
That lights the night
Three wise men follow the
sight
A child is near
Who warms the heart
His arms are open wide

Open wide your arms to Him
Allow His spirit to enter in
He is the way, the truth, the life
This Babe of Bethlehem

The Christ

By Kenton Miller, SFO
Tulsa, OK

New life rejoices when a summer storm
Strides the earth and shouts,
Thunder voiced and lightning crowned,
In deep electric concentration,
Bent upon its chores:
To wash the sky and feed the ground.

Shall I care less about a thirsty Earth;
Give ear to those who cry "Conform!"
In their fear of Love and Passion,
Born to die while never having lived?

Oh, it is dangerous, I know,
To say 'I Am!'
More, perhaps, than I was meant.
And yet,
I will hazard every chance,
Endure their snipes and threats,
And, dying in the end,
Will Live!
That you too might be Sunday born:
Again, a summer storm of Love
On the high, dry plains of their
indifference.

The World Turned Upside Down

By Caroline E. Richbourg, SFO

For dog fighting, off to prison,
As Michael Vick has learned.
For killing one's unborn child
No penalty is earned!

Some protest the suffering of
animals
Caused for the good of humanity
But claim a baby being aborted
suffers
Nothing during this calamity!

Protest the death of soldiers in
Iraq
And you many will hail;
Protest the killing of the unborn
And you might end up in jail!

Molestation and rape are rightly
Punishable abuse,
But killing an unborn baby is
The ultimate child abuse!

Many deny life begins at
conception
If so there'd be no life ever
And nothing growing in a womb
And no new life to sever!

Holy Hands

By Richard Hurzeler SFO
Tyler, Tx.

I found her there moving
like a cat stalking bounty
Her smooth chocolate hands
washing gently the frail
old man who had no one.
She remained in the
shadows—
beyond crystal chandeliers
and elegant furniture facades.

At the margins she found
the mother lode of human
need
which she treated as royalty.
This humble nurse's aid—
princess in the valley of
Charity.

Up front a preacher proclaimed
the Word of God and here quietly
it was fleshed out. Unknown
but to a few wandering eyes...
and to...God.



Photo by William Wicks, SFO

WINTER JEWELS

By Alice Kenat, SFO
Billings, MT

Crystal shanks replace the grass
Sparkling like diamonds each Fall and
Winter
Like summer dew, yet frozen in time
Winter's cold becomes Winter's beauty,
subtle yet shimmering
Giving luster to all that it touches
Transforming sidewalks, lawns,
and rooftops into a jeweler's dream.

A SEASON SEEN

By Roger K. Van Natta
Carlsbad, NM

Autumn fades as its colors die
Bring on winters burst, let the
snowflakes fly,
Sparrows perch searching for life's
Sustaining seed,
Then fly down to get what they need
Squirrels dart bushy tailed
along the ground
Grabbing their nurture in a leap
and a bound
Suddenly autumn leaves are swept away
A Zephyr picked them up, as if to play
Gone are the leaves, coolness is
all that remains
Winter's warning came from
across the plains
Clouds darken all around; the
sky goes gray
Sun's last light fades from this display
Winter bursts from its lair
Let autumn fade from care.

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

Theological Reflection: A Process for On Going Formation

By Pat Brandwein-Ball, SFO
patball76@yahoo.com

The initial emphasis of JPIC grounds us in an examination of our Rule and General Constitution. Recall that the Constitution gives flesh to the meaning of the day to day manifestation of our life as a penitent. The penitential life draws us ever more deeply into union with God by His grace and our conversion - turning from the ways of the world to the ways of a Gospel life. Jesus, the Incarnate Word of the Father, entered human history to make known the way to the Father.

Our Rule comes out of the Vatican II Council. But...all of the laity are called to conversion and evangelization: acting from grace to bring Christ into the world directly. This takes many forms and each of us is gifted in diverse ways. All of our gifts are necessary to build up the Kingdom already begun in this life. Our particular *penitential way* draws us by Profession into the life and mission of the Church more intimately.

There are many issues in our time that require careful examination and an authentic Catholic/Franciscan response. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) speaks to these issues. Our common sense in the light of faith is appalled by recent greed and violence to name but a few areas that beg our attention. There are ways to effectively review and evaluate our response. One such way is Theological Reflection. JPIC encourages all fraternities frequently to incorporate this style of ongoing formation in regard to the questions of our time.

Theological Reflection

- I. **Preparation:** A well prepared reflective session is essential. What specific social issue/question are you pondering? Write it out; name it. Gather background material, i.e.: What does the USCCB say about this issue? Does the Catechism of the Catholic Church deal with this issue? Does Vatican II address this? What does our Rule and Constitution express? Etc. Make sure there is a review of materials ahead of time by the planners and that the resources are available for study by the fraternity.

- II. **Personal experience:** Begin the session with an introduction of the issue to be explored, then give time for the individual to pause to think about his/her own experience of life that may bear on the topic. If the issue is given to the fraternity ahead of time, give time for the members to “re-collect” their thoughts. Does any of my culture play a role in how I think about this issue? For example, I grew up in the Midwest; is this reflected in how I view issues in New England? You may come up with your own examples of culture on its many levels. Go beyond the obvious. Reflect in terms of your religious tradition. Again, go beyond the obvious!

- III. **Mutual Conversation:** Use group discussion and group review of the supporting materials. This may be handled in smaller groups for a large fraternity. Mutual invitation is a great way to begin the session. The RESPECT guidelines also may enhance the reflection time. When this phase is done well it inspires creative thinking and leads to transformation of the person.

- IV. **Transformative Action:** What flows from mutual conversation becomes the “lens” we use for setting a course of action. Some examples are: “It appears we function as agents to Christify the world when...” Or “Our neighborhood has need of...” We are motivated by our charism to...” Etc. Look at the resources available, people, talent, time, and of course funds. I’m confident you will come up with your own list of resources.

- V. **Evaluate:** Once the plan is implemented, it is essential to evaluate it. Are we true to our Rule and the Church’s teaching? Did we meet the needs of others as intended or did we impose on them our need to do something? How is God calling me now? Begin the reflective process again.

Like anything new, Theological Reflection takes more time in the beginning. More than one fraternity gathering may be required to complete the process or you may come together for an entire day or weekend. The possibilities are open. Many issues may be reflected upon, in this manner, with your fraternity. If used on a regular basis, Theological Reflection can be a tool that opens the door to integrating the Rule in ways never imagined.

Resource: Theological Reflection for Transformation, prepared by Dianna Bergant, CSA; Faustina M. Crus, SM; Kathleen Dorsey-Bellow; Bernard J. Lee, SM; Maureen R. O’Brien, The Center for the Study of Religious Life, Chicago, IL, 2004



Graced beginnings

By Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO
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Like Jesus, Francis found a different way, bridging the gap between the depository of Faith (Church) and the place where the Gospel could really bear fruit (the margins of society).

In April of 2009, we will gather in our fraternities, hopefully, to celebrate 800 years of Franciscanism. We might use this occasion to re-dedicate ourselves to our original profession of the Gospel way of life, and again ask if we have dared to live the Gospel.

In 1209, Francis began a journey that both showed him what was his to do and also attracted countless followers to his new way of life, his *Propositum Vitae* (1209).

Francis was certainly a man of his times, aware of the effects of war and greed and how they destroyed the fabric of society and people's lives. His answer was imitation of Jesus and the doorway for entering was the door of Poverty (Lady Poverty). Embracing her was his way to remove the obstacles and attachments that can water down true Gospel living. Even the existing religious houses of his day were embroiled in wealth and the affairs of state, and for him this was not the way.

So what is the difference?

After surveying the rules of many of our religious orders, I found marked similarities of all striving to be more Christ-like, loving and of greater service to those in need. Yet each focused their energies differently, for some, it is by preaching and defending "Right" faith and doctrine, others through work and prayer, and others still through sound teaching and education.

For me the greatest difference between us is directly in our Rule. It's not about ministry at all; it is purely and simply about observing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, for a Franciscan, it is not about doing (an Apostolic movement), it is about becoming (being Gospel, Being Jesus, an Evangelical movement). For Francis, the Gospel was not Matthew, Mark, Luke or John; the Gospel is Jesus. We are called in every age to discover in the Gospels, the person of Jesus and from His example, discover what is ours to do today.

I do not, for a minute, believe that Francis ever intended to found an Order. In fact, it would seem he resisted it for most of his life, seeking not structure, but a brotherhood of equals who simply loved the Lord enough to risk caring for each other and all those that society deemed broken, un-needed or un-worthy. Francis sought not to chastise the Church he loved, any more than Jesus sought to undermine Judaism. Like Jesus, he just moved outward, to the edges and bottom of society, where truth could be heard and where the broken people were open to hear and be loved. Like Jesus, Francis found a different way, bridging the gap between the depository of Faith (Church) and the place where the Gospel could really bear fruit (the margins of society).

Though the brothers did, eventually, wrestle the Movement from Francis and embrace a more formal Rule and clerical structure, the underlying current of fraternity was never totally extinguished. A brotherhood or fraternity, not based on class, position, status or any other marker important to society, but a fraternity based on seeking the little portion, the place that society frowns upon, but from which God exalts!

Have we become too main-stream to live the adventure of the Gospel? This April of 2009, as we gather in our fraternities, we might again ask Brother Leo's question "Why after you?" If running after Francis also causes us to fall into the waiting arms of the Lover, and allows us to experience our own belovedness, then we have a wonderful legacy to keep alive and vital. If not, then 2009 might begin the journey of re-discovering what is ours to be.

**Attention Formation Ministers:
Make plans to attend the
National Formation Workshop
Our Lady of the Snows
Belleville, IL
May 28-31, 2009**



By former National Chair
Kathy Taormina, SFO
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A NEW BEGINNING - - - A RIGHTFUL PLACE

*“...unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies,
it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”
John 12:24*

As Secular Franciscans, we understand the need for change, progression and metanoia. Sometimes these processes are painful, but more often than not, we are blessed with new and exciting things that were always meant to be! Such is the way of the FYYA Commission. By a unanimous vote of the National Fraternity, the FYYA Commission has been dissolved and a FYYA Council has been established at the national level.

This two-year interim FYYA Council will lay the groundwork for the 2010 election of a National Franciscan Youth (YouFra) President and Council.

According to the SFO GC, Title VII FRANCISCAN YOUTH, Article 96 and 97:

- ▶ “The SFO fraternities will promote the vocation to the Franciscan Youth by means of appropriate and dynamic initiatives.” GC 97.1
- ▶ “The Franciscan Youth has a specific organization, methods of formation, and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth, according to the exiting realities in the various countries.” GC 96.5

How do we arrive there? What now?

National Youth/Young Adult Council

- ▶ June 2009 – Franciscan Youth (YouFra) Assembly in San Antonio, TX.
 - Present 2008 FYYA Statutes
 - Study YouFra vocational journey
 - Study YouFra Formation
 - Fundamentals/rules of elections
- ▶ 2010 – National YouFra election

Emphasis is placed on a 2 year-2 fold plan:

- ▶ **Ministry for and with the youth for their Franciscan journey, together with a second ministry to the SFO.**

A National Franciscan Youth (YouFra) President

- ▶ A president elected according to the SFO GC and USA~SFO FYYA Statutes
- ▶ Elected by Regional FYYA Presidents
- ▶ Forms a part of the SFO council at the National level and has a vote on that council if professed in the SFO
- ▶ Accompanied/Aided by an elected Youth Council, an SFO Fraternal Animator, and a Spiritual Assistant.

National Franciscan Youth (YouFra) President and Council responsibilities:

- ▶ Maintain records of FYYA groups/activities
- ▶ www.franciscanyouthusa.com
- ▶ Hold FYYA Assembly every 2 years
- ▶ Represent FYYA~USA within SFO~USA/CIOFS
- ▶ Annual Lenten H2O Project

Emphasis is placed on:

- ▶ **YouFra, supported by the SFO**

Note the change in Emphasis!

- ↓ 1994-2008 -Ministry to the USA~SFO by ministering to youth and young adults.
- ↓ 2008-2010 -Ministry for/with the youth for the youth's Franciscan journey encompassing a 2nd ministry to the SFO.
- ↓ After 2010 -Centered solely on YouFra fraternities, with support by the SFO.

The next important STEPS for the SFO:

- ▶ Keep your Regional and Local FYYA Chairs. If none, recruit one to network!
- ▶ Support FYYA with information (books, web access) and action (apostolates).
- ▶ Regions with YouFra groups need to support them with materials and opportunities to attend YouFra events; provide a Fraternal Animator and a Spiritual Assistant; and require a YouFra representative on the respective SFO Councils, according to the SFO GC.

Ecumenical



Interfaith/Committee

OUR FELLOW FRANCISCANS: SOME SIMPLE SUGGESTIONS

By Ed Shirley, SFO
National Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Chair
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In the past few articles, we've looked at some basic beliefs of other Christians, Jews and Muslims. Before we proceed further, I would like to offer some practical suggestions for ways to gather together with fellow Christians. After all, to use an analogy, no matter how much we read about Germany, it is not the same as sitting in a Biergarten in Heidelberg. The same goes with our fellow Christians: our goal is not just to know *about* them, our goal is to get to know *them*.

As with any friendship, the easiest place to start is our shared interests, so perhaps the most logical place for SFOs to begin would be to reach out to members of other secular Franciscan Orders: the Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF: Episcopalian) and the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF). Not only do we share a secular lifestyle and spirituality (like the SFO, some are clergy, and some are lay), but we also share a desire to walk the Gospel of Jesus in the footsteps of St. Francis. I have had the privilege of visiting these brothers and sisters on "their home turf," in their official gatherings, and I have always been welcomed as a brother. When we sit and talk, when we share our journeys, when we pray together, you cannot tell who is TSSF, OEF or SFO: we are Franciscans. I have been made an honorary member of the Texas Bluebonnets, the regional OEF community, and I receive all of their e-mailings, and am invited to all of their gatherings. Since we SFOs are, in a sense, the oldest sibling, it is really our responsibility and blessing to be the first ones to reach out to the TSSF and OEF. When NAFRA, or the OEF and TSSF equivalents, meet, representatives of the other Orders are invited. I am writing this on my way to the annual chapter of the national leadership of the TSSF. My friend, Deacon

Joan, won't be there, since she will be at NAFRA. I will, however, be able to visit another friend, Brother Leo, the liaison from the OEF. The same type of mutual visitation could be done easily for our regional chapters: an official representative from the TSSF and OEF could be invited, and someone could be asked to represent the regional SFO at their regional gatherings.

Francis was called to rebuild the Church, which had "fallen into ruin." When Franciscans pray together today, the Body of Christ will begin to be healed.

But we shouldn't stop at inviting them to "our" gatherings; we should invite them as equals to plan and execute common Franciscan events. Think of what wonderful a witness it would be if OEFs, TSSFs and SFOs were seen working together with the homeless, or sharing a booth at a local peace and justice festival. We could pray together: the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an excellent place to start. The Greymoor Fathers have been promoting this for almost a century, and have published prayers, both for individuals and communities. The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity has produced two common prayer services: the first is a common "Office" that can be prayed between the Feast of the Stigmata through the Feast of St. Francis (or for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), and the second a shared agape service, since we cannot share a common Eucharist. Franciscans could agree to pray the common Office each day, either alone or in community, and celebrate the Transitus together. The agape service could be prayed during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but could also be prayed together at other times of the year: once in Advent, to remind ourselves and the world, that we share a common belief that the Divine Word of God has, indeed, become flesh and dwells among us; once in Lent, to mutually repent of the terrible division we have brought to the Body of Christ; and once during Easter Season, to remind us of our hope that all things will be transformed in the Divine Light. Both suggested prayer services are available on the NAFRA website, and can be adapted to local needs.

Francis was called to rebuild the Church, which had "fallen into ruin." When Franciscans pray together today, the Body of Christ will begin to be healed. This is an essential part of our Franciscan vocation: SFO, TSSF and OEF, alike. Jesus said that it is by our love for each other that the world will know we are his disciples. And St. Francis reminds us daily, "Let us begin, for up to now, we have done nothing."



International Council¹ International Council Meeting – 2008

By William Wicks, SFO
National Historian

As you receive your TAU-USA Winter edition, representatives of national fraternities from all over the world will have met in Hungary – a country that not too long ago was a member of the Communist block of the Soviet Union – a sign of hope for religious freedom. The logo of this gathering is shown above.

The council meets every three years, and every six years (this year - 2008) is an election chapter; the international presidency will be elected. The Minister General (at this writing) is Encarnación del Pozo, OFS, of Spain.

Our representative to this meeting is Anne Mulqueen, our International Councilor. Anne will report on the responses, by our Regions, to a survey - answers to questions about the SFO as presented by the International Presidency. She will address the results to members of an English speaking language groups. The group, with other language groups, will address these, and other issues presented to them by the presidency, and will report on them to the general assembly.

The theme of the gathering is: *Profession of the Secular Franciscan and sense of belonging to the SFO.*

Brief History on the International Organization

Presently, the international organization is composed of lay Secular Franciscans representing the nations of the world. This wasn't always the case. In fact, the international council, as we know it today, was not established until October 4th, 1973, when it became official by the edict of the Ministers General of the four friar jurisdictions.

There were international congresses as early as the late 19th century, although the United States did not participate until the Congress of 1950 held in Rome, where both friars and lay Franciscans attended. A second International Congress was held ten years later, in Munich, Germany.

¹ Information taken from History of the Secular Franciscan Order, Volume II, 1943 – 1978 (to be published)

U.S. Pushes for an International Organization

In the Spring of 1946, National Chairman, Fr. Thomas Grassmann, O.F.M. Conv., pursued the quest for an International Organization. Early in April he met with the four Commissaries General and proposed to them a plan for an international federation of the Third Order patterned after the fashion of our National Board, established in 1922. At the request of the Commissaries General, he met again with them a few days later with a plan [a tentative constitution] to be submitted to the Ministers General. Inspired by Fr. Thomas' plan, the Commissaries General composed an experimental constitution, approved by the Ministers General. The introductory paragraph is quoted here: *In these times of religious and moral reconstruction it has been found opportune, as agreed among the Most Rev. Ministers General of the three families of the Seraphic Order and the Third Order Regular, to establish in the city of Rome an International Council of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis of Assisi.* However, it is not known if this International Constitution was promulgated with "authority." It is noted, that in 1957, International Constitutions were approved and promulgated as the "official" General Constitutions of the Third Order.

Resolutions produced by the 1950 International Congress addressed many specifics such as age of profession, temporary profession, youth, apostolates, and the establishment of a world Third Order day. But the paragraph of the resolutions that received the most attention was Votum 10, which begged a response from the Ministers General. The response defined, in detail:

- The Importance and Timeliness of the Third Order.
- Religious and Social Activities
- Burdens and Duties (a detailed exposé of the responsibility of the Franciscan hierarchy toward the Third Order)

The editor of the Franciscan Herald and Forum called it a *Magna Carta*.

The World Council

The World Council that was established in 1973 is similar to the International Council of today: lay leadership, with the various nations represented. The Council was based on an International Capuchin organization that preceded it by approximately three years. Manuela Mattioli of Caracas, Venezuela was the first Minister General. She was followed in turn by Emanuela De Nunzio of Italy, then presently, by Encarnación del Pozo.

“WE MUST BE SIMPLE, HUMBLE AND PURE”

By Stephen Pastick, SFO
Queen of Peace Region

I stumbled upon this saying of St. Francis of Assisi (we Franciscans are always stumbling), “We must be simple, humble and pure.” Being much moved by the statement and having made it a personal mantra in my daily prayer life, I wondered where and in what context had St. Francis said or had it written down. After some detective work, I found it in *“The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful.”* Perhaps I was drawn to this saying because the two letters to the Faithful were mainly directed to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi. I am one of these, though we now call ourselves Secular Franciscans. The first letter to the faithful is the Prologue to our Rule. Much of this first letter is contained in the second.

Why did St. Francis feel the need to write a second letter? Scholars feel that he loved and worried about the Third Order, as it was a legitimate offspring of his, sprung from his great heart. Some feel that he was concerned with the direction the Third Order was taking and felt it needed some guidance. (Prophet that he was, St. Francis may have had future Franciscans in mind and wanted to help keep us on track, too.) The Third Order had been around since 1209, but it was not until 1221 that we received our first Rule of Life. That Rule of Life is now felt not to have been written by St. Francis, but rather a cleric working for Cardinal Hugolino, who was later to become Pope Gregory IX. It is very prescriptive in that it tells one what to wear, what to eat, what to drink. There is no mention of the Gospel or anything that reveals much about the charism of St. Francis. The more we discover who St. Francis was, and what he was all about, and then integrate that into our lives, the more we will become the Franciscans that St. Francis envisioned. So what I came to deduce after reading through the Second Letter is that it really contains a hidden, unofficial Rule of Life, that specifically tells us what “we must” do. In this letter, Francis is quite emphatic about it and always speaks in the plural. He considered himself one of us, a lay person. He may be our father but he was our most holy brother and servant. Over and over he inclusively says “we must” or “let us.” He is with us in our time and in our space. We may not be bound to observe this unofficial Rule, but we may be most wise to learn from it and carry it and clothe ourselves with it as we can.

Here is a listing of the articles of this unofficial Rule:

1. “Let us love God, therefore, and adore Him with a pure heart and a pure mind....”
2. “Let us praise Him and pray to Him day and night....”
3. “We must also confess all our sins to a priest, and receive from him the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
4. “Let us perform worthy fruits of penance.”
5. “Let us love our neighbors as ourselves.”
6. “Let us then have charity and humility.”
7. “Let us give alms since this washes our souls from the stains of our sins.”
8. “We must also fast and abstain from vices and sins and from any excess of food and drink, and be Catholics.”
9. “We must also visit churches frequently and venerate and show respect for the clergy.”
10. “Let us firmly realize that no one can be saved except through the holy words and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
11. “We must hate our bodies with their vices and sins.”
12. “We must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.”
13. “We must observe the commands and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
14. “We must also deny ourselves and place our bodies under the yoke of service and holy obedience.”
15. “We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh.”
16. “We must be simple, humble, and pure.”
17. “Let us hold ourselves in contempt and scorn, since through our own fault all of us are miserable and contemptible, vermin and worms.”
18. “We must never desire to be over others, rather we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God’s sake.”

Here then are 18 unofficial articles coming from the lips of St. Francis himself and directed to members of the Third Order. We are not legally bound by them, but we may very well be spiritually bound to them. Take note of St. Francis’ closing words of *The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful*: “I, Brother Francis, your little servant, ask and implore you in the love which is God and with the desire to kiss your feet, to receive these words and others of our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and love, and observe them and put them into practice. And to all men and women who will receive them kindly and understand their meaning and pass them on to others by their example: If they have persevered in them to the end may the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit bless them. Amen.” In the never ending quest to better understand who we are called to be, here is a vehicle to help us, (serving as an addendum to the Pauline Rule), in this search of our identity and the living out the mission to which we have been called to be faithful.

The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, The Complete Works: Francis and Clare, pp. 66-73

Book Reviews

By Patti Normile, SFO

***“song of the sparrow: new poems and meditations”* by Murray Bodo, OFM**

A treasure was recently given to me. Just a couple of days after seeking Murray Bodo's *Song of the Sparrow* on my bookshelf to reread, I was given a renewed version of his 30-year old gathering of wisdom and poems. *song of the sparrow: new poems and meditations* flows from the marrow of Father Murray's Franciscan spirituality. *song of the sparrow: new poems and meditations* is quartered into the four seasons of the year beginning with "Autumn" and the shedding of self to enable transformation into Christ-likeness. The book concludes with "Summer," a time of growth in desire for God. Murray tells us that "Summer" was written in the 50th year of his life as a Franciscan friar, his 70th year on his journey to heaven. Secular Franciscans recall Murray's, *The Journey and the Dream*.

As always, Murray's meditations remind us of the power of words, the growth-producing delving, the results from journaling. He writes: *I write and you leap onto the page, O Lord. When I cannot write will you leap back into my heart?* The meditations invite the reader into the depths of our own being through the explorations of a mystic and the pragmatism of a 12-year old school boy wondering about God. Every page or so Murray bursts forth with a brief poem. I have an image of Murray being like an underwater swimmer in a sea of prose, who after a certain time is compelled to rise to the surface for poetic breath. The poems gather the profound paragraphs into memorable clutches of thought.

It is a book that tempts the reader to read cover to cover at a single sitting. Yet after reading a few pages, one knows that would be a sad treatment of this gift of faith and wisdom. A paragraph or page at a time is all this poor sparrow can absorb.

Murray concludes with a call to all Franciscans: What are the images of our world that have been skewed and turned to purposes other than what God intended them to be? What has become deformed and ugly and needs the Franciscan vision to see it aright again?

Saint Bonaventure says that justice makes beautiful that which has been deformed. What is it in our world that is deformed and needs justice to make it beautiful again? Saint Francis made beautiful the fact of thirteenth century leprosy by embracing lepers and seeing Christ in them. What do we need to embrace in Christ in order that its face may be made beautiful by our love, our vision of Christ within what we thought was repulsive? Perhaps we need to begin, as Saint Francis did, with

ourselves and embrace ourselves and see the beauty there first of all. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008.

***Care for Creation* by Ilia Delio, OSF, Douglass Warner, OFM & Pamela Wood By Patti Normile, SFO**

As I finished reading Care for Creation, a Franciscan spirituality of the earth, I found myself cradling the book in the palm of my hand in a way that mirrors the lovely cover of the book on which a miniature earth globe is held by caring hands. It is that kind of book - a treasure of Franciscan wisdom created by Ilia Delio, OSF, professor and chair of Spirituality Studies at Washington Theological Union and author of several books; Keith Douglass Warner, OFM, lecturer and researcher at Santa Clara University, California; and Pamela Wood, art therapist, spiritual director and retreat facilitator in Portland, Oregon. Their combined writings provide sound science and thought-stimulating theology combined with individual and group prayer and meditation focused on a Franciscan format for repairing our damaged Earth.

As I read, I began to think of Care for Creation as an "owner's manual" for our beleaguered planet. Care for Creation gives the reader an image of the effect of America's rampant consumerism in terms of acreage needed by Americans compared to others: "Due to our high-consumption lifestyle, the average American has an annual footprint of twenty-four acres, the greatest per-person impact in the world. It would take five "Earths" full of resources to supply the entire human family with an American lifestyle. For reference, the global average is about seven acres per person, but even that level of consumption cannot be maintained indefinitely." [p. 159]

However, Care for Creation is not about hopelessness and despair, but about realization and contemplative action based on the call Francis heard, "Francis, go rebuild my oikos [house] - my creation; as you see, it is all being destroyed." [p. 145] Linking the Incarnation to Mother Earth as well as to human life, the authors allow the reader to view the caring for all life in the way that Jesus or Francis would. Not only would the Earth be repaired, so would humans as they would rediscover the spiritual rather than the material facets of life.

Care for Creation takes me back to my childhood when Mom and Dad would remind me as we picnicked or hiked, "Always leave a place better than the way you found it."

With suggestions for group as well as individual prayer and extensive bibliography and resources, Care for Creation makes an excellent resource for fraternities, families or individuals. It might well be the source of focus for a Quinquennial Congress! St. Anthony Messenger Press

Continued from page 27.

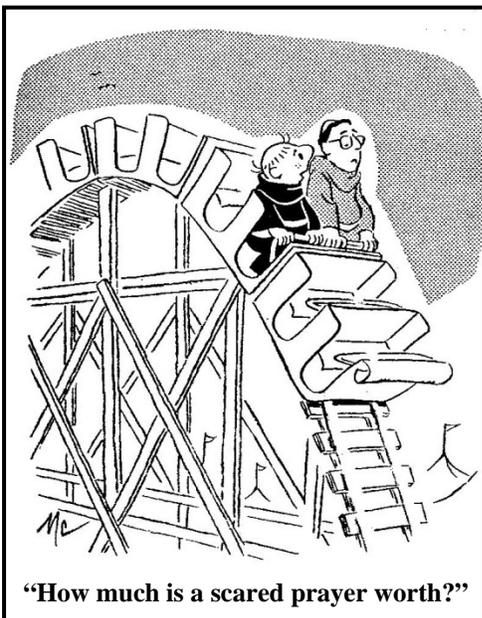
- Strategies and methods to be effective Franciscan peacemakers in our everyday lives.
- A potential for a new sense of excitement and deepening of faith.
- How the processes of globalization can either lead to peace-building or violence; as Franciscans, we work to build peace.

This program is being offered as a result of a collaboration between the *Franciscan Action Network*, *Holy Name Province Franciscans*, and *Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service*.

The goal of our action is to increase the spiritual depth and skills of Franciscans and Franciscan-hearted people so that the peace of Christ might more fully enter our world.

As a recent graduate of the *Engage Peacemaking Program*, not only was it a rewarding experience, but a very eye and heart opening experience as well. We tend to take for granted the ways of violence in our everyday lives; especially in the media. The *Engage Peacemaking Program* creates an awareness of the many ways that violence courses through the veins of our lives. By becoming more aware of the language we use and the way we speak to other people, this is where we as Seculars can begin to be peace in the world.

Brother Juniper



“How much is a scared prayer worth?”

By Fred McCarthy, SFO

- Some items for your use are on the NAFRA website at: http://www.nafra-sfo.org/meetings_and_resources.html:
- On the "Meetings and Resources" page, you will now find five articles on the Chapter written by Bob Stronach.
- Below the 2008 Chapter materials, you will also find the presentation and notes from the CNSA meeting last month.
- Under the "Resources" section of that same web page, you can click on "Forms" and you will find the forms for doing the demographic reports for CIOFS.
- The Formation page has been updated with the current commission members.

Vickie Klick, SFO, Webmaster

- The new formation Commission is now posted on the website: <http://www.nafra-sfo.org/formation.html>
- Please feel free to contact any of us with your questions, suggestions, and concerns.
- The Formation Commission will meet Dec. 2-5 to begin reviewing our formation process, its content and our Formation workshops to best assist the regions and local formation ministers.
- Formation is a service to our Order, so we want your input and suggestions.
- We are planning a National Formation Workshop at Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville IL, for May 28-31, 2009. This workshop will build on the foundations of the On the Road presentations, but will include much new material. We plan to develop the final structure this December and will keep you all posted.

Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO
Formation Chair
509-582-7606
rfitzsfo@verizon.net

Quote:

Mercy is a rare word, one hardly spoken. What are merciful actions? Not judging another; speaking with kind words; thinking compassionate thoughts about others. May acts of mercy come your way.

Caroline Myss and Peter Occhiogrosso

Our Stories

Prayerful Drumming

Native American Drumming, as a prayer form for praying the Canticle of Creation

By Lee Ann Niebuhr, SFO
La Verna Region

As a Secular Franciscan living in Northern Wisconsin, I have many unique opportunities to experience alternative prayer styles. Since my parish, Holy Family, is adjacent to the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa Reservation, I have been invited to participate in different aspects of the Native American culture. One of the most powerful of these experiences for me was participating in a drumming circle. Once a month our church, along with Marywood Spirituality Center, hosts a drumming circle. One early fall evening, I decided to join the drummers to see what this kind of spiritual exercise would feel like.

As the early evening shadows lengthened, drummers from a variety of faith traditions and backgrounds gathered in a circle in front of the altar. With the typical generosity of the Ojibwe people, those who didn't have drums were provided with a drum, shaker or alternative instrument to play. The first song announced was, "The Heart Beat." Friends and strangers alike began beating in the rhythm of the heart. As the beat was repeated over and over, I began contemplating the beating of the hearts of those in our drumming circle. Several minutes later, my vision and accompanying prayer widened, as I prayed for all beating hearts in every land. I hoped the sound waves generated by my beating drum could in some way enter their hearts and let all of us become hearts that beat a song of love and respect for one another. Later I considered, with great regret, the many times my heart did not beat a song of love and respect. Finally, looking up at the crucifix above the altar, at the One whose sacred heart continually beats a song of love and forgiveness for each of us, I was overcome with gratitude and wept.

When the evening was over and night had descended upon us, I learned that drumming as a prayer form is one of the most powerful methods of meditation I have experienced. I truly felt the drumming was another way of expressing St. Francis' "Canticle of Creation." Sending hope, forgiveness, healing out to all creation on the sound waves of the drum is truly a beautiful form of prayer.



Navajo Holy Family by Fr. John Giuliani

Our Stories

The Cherokee Indian Legend

Unknown

Do you know the legend of the Cherokee Indian youth's rite of passage? His father takes him into the forest, blindfolds him and leaves him alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shine through it. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a MAN. He cannot tell the other boys of this experience because each lad must come into manhood on his own.

The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him. Maybe even some human might do him harm. The wind blew the grass and earth, and shook his stump, but he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could become a man!

Finally, after a horrific night, the sun appeared and he removed his blindfold. It was then that he discovered his father sitting on the stump next to him. He had been at watch the entire night, protecting his son from harm.

We, too, are never alone. Even when we don't know it, our Heavenly Father is watching over us, sitting on the stump beside us. When trouble comes, all we have to do is reach out to Him.



Signs Along the Way!

By Patricia P. Balinski

Seven signs bombarded me along the roadway to San Pedro Center in Winter Park, Florida. Like a

time capsule releasing messages, my resolve became strengthened to make a Franciscan Hermitage. There, with prayer, silence and solitude as companions, I hoped for an outline to put peace and order into my life.

Driving to this experience, I decided to take a slight detour from the familiar route taken to our Secular Franciscans' meetings at San Pedro. I noticed how the clouds resembled patches of cotton peppering an azure blue sky. The trees along the boulevard seemed manicured and especially green, like shamrocks following a spring rain.

Stopping for a traffic light put a pause into my thoughts and it was here I saw the two women – my first sign.

The older woman walked purposely. Her left hand clutching a shopping bag to herself, while her sweater once draped over her shoulders silently, slowly fell behind her to the ground. The swinging motion of the other arm moved as if to propel her aged body one more step forward.

She passed the bus stop where an obese young woman sat. Her voluminous body was confined to a wheelchair. With an assistant at her side, they waited for transportation.

I saw myself in these women – gray haired with tinges of color; a wrinkled face wan from a day's hard work, going forward to reach home. I felt the weight of everyday struggles, job, family, deadlines and attitudes made me so obese that my flesh overflowed the wheelchair's confinement.

I felt abandoned. Lord, would this Hermitage bring me closer to you? I wondered.

Sign two was outside a church. Its weekly pronouncement read, "Just know that I am here always." It was signed "God."

Chuckled to myself. He is sending me unspoken messages. I wondered if there were any more 'Burma Shave' signs to come. For whatever reason, remembering He is always with me and that there is nothing the two of us can't handle made me feel a little better.

There it was – sign three. Big as life itself. The shop's painted window read "Battery Shop For All Applications."

That's what I need Lord, a heavy duty battery to ease me from a sluggish, almost non-existent prayer life to a turn over the juice of a great one-on-one conversation. You speak with me listening. Let the Martha in me step aside. Let the Mary in me listen with an open heart.

This new road had different curves, angles and road construction, which slowed me down. Sign four – Slow down. I need that too, Lord, in order to bring us closer. That 'T' intersection gave me a choice. Turned right and soon knew I was headed away from an encounter with You. That wasn't going to happen. A timely round-a-bout thru a strip plaza's parking lot put me back on focus. Now, heading East toward the Retreat Center, another church's proclamation became sign five. It read: "There is no place like home."

I inhaled a deep breath, exhaled and then took another breath. The sigh I gave caused the cumbersome weight of today and all yesterdays to be lifted. Like the chestnut-skinned woman's sweater fell, my baggage weight slipped off me onto the car's floorboard.

My heart and head felt at peace. My even breathing broke the silence as I drove. Oh Lord, I thought just as I saw with my own eyes, just a few feet from the curb. It was there – sign number six, Cinema Café.

Well I was told 'meals included – snacks and beverages provided.' You think, will my Cinema be a Walk-with-Patricia featuring the reruns of good and bad times and how I've survived? Will this weekend be like the old Ralph Edwards' TV program 'This Is Your Life?' Will I find You there, Lord? Will I hear Your voice in the breath of a gnat or will it be as loud a cry as that of a newborn? Will I hear You before the three days end?

My destination is now only two miles away. Soon, God's messages would merge into a residential area and then onto a long driveway where a sign will tell me where to go.

To my right, the descending sunlight haloed a billboard, "Spring into Action." It became sign seven. That's it, Lord. I can handle the silence one minute at a time. I can handle prayer, as I've been praying since starting this journey. That leaves solitude. Well with You at my side – assisting along the way – we will just have to try mental telepathy. I can definitely handle that.

Postscript: Coming to terms with myself, I went to this Franciscan Hermitage to hear His voice telling me His plans for me. It wasn't through a gnat, nor a baby's cry. His voice spoke through those around me. His plan contained three words: "*Become Christ Centered.*"

Humor Page

By Dolores Cullen, SFO



Photo by Frances Wicks, SFO

SAY WHAT?

“Since it's the early worm that gets eaten by the bird - sleep late, Lord, keep your arm around my shoulder - and your hand over my mouth.”

No matter how busy people are, they are never too busy to stop and talk - about how busy they are.

After a long career of being blasted into a net, the human cannonball was tired. He told the circus owner he was going to retire.

“But you can't!” protested the boss. “Where am I going to find another man of your caliber?”

What's with advertising a “free” gift? Aren't all gifts free?

Today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut that held its ground.

Gallagher opened the morning newspaper and was dumbfounded to read in the obituary column that he had died. He quickly phoned his best friend Finney.

"Did you see the paper?" asked Gallagher. "They say I died!!"

"Yes, I saw it!" replied Finney. "Where are ye callin' from?"

Talk is cheap because supply exceeds demand. Blessed are they who can laugh at themselves. They shall never cease to be amused.

Did you hear about the problem at the weekly poker game with Vasco da Gama, Christopher Columbus, Leif Eriksson and Francisco Pizarro? They never seem to beat the *straights* of Magellan.

Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.

I don't *suffer* from insanity - I enjoy every minute of it.

The usher is the only person in the parish who does not know the seating capacity of a pew.

Many folks want to serve God - but only as advisors.

A little girl was diligently pounding away on her grandfather's word processor. She told him she was writing a story.

"What's it about?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "I can't read."

All of us could take a lesson from the weather. It pays no attention to criticism.

OK . . . so what's the speed of dark?

The probability that someone is watching you is proportional - to the stupidity of your action.

Save the earth. It's the only planet with chocolate.

The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right time, but also to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

Procrastinate now!

Timid Mr. Puddles asked a librarian, "Where will I find the self-help section?" She said, "If I told you, it would defeat the purpose."

An elderly woman walked into the local country church. The friendly usher greeted her at the door and helped her up the flight of steps.

"Where would you like to sit?" he asked politely.

"The front row please," she answered.

"You really don't want to do that," the usher said. "The pastor is really boring."

"Do you happen to know who I am?" the woman inquired.

"No," he said.

"I'm the pastor's mother," she replied indignantly.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"No," she said.

"Good," he answered.

Little Weeds



Attitude of Gratitude

By M. Marko, SFO
camontcu@aol.com
Brother Jacoba Community
St. Peter's in the Loop, Chicago, IL

The ATM I usually use has recently been upgraded so that it will now provide a receipt that includes pictures of the checks just deposited. Well, I carried that first receipt around with me for several days, showing friends and acquaintances how cool it was. And they would respond, “Yeah. Cool.” But the looks in their eyes ran the gamut from, “Poor thing’s gotta get out more!” to “No sudden moves near the fat lady!” I don’t care. I think it’s cool. If nothing else, it reaffirms a conviction I’ve long held: the lower one’s thrill threshold, the more exciting one’s life.

I consider myself a realist. Which has, on occasion, made me seem cynical. But, over all, I try to be positive. Every situation is like a coin. It has two sides, a positive and a negative. Yes, there are times when the negative has got to be addressed and dealt with. But very often, it can simply be ignored and the positive focused on. I opt for this. There are so many good things in life, in the world, all around us, a negative outlook seems self-defeating to say the least.

Some folks will tell you that if you always expect the worst, you’ll be pleasantly surprised if things work out and not caught broadside when they don’t. But you know what I’ve seen? If you expect the worst, there’s a much better chance of its happening. I think it’s called self-fulfilling prophecy or something like that.

I’m fortunate in that I’ve been given two very special gifts: appreciation and gratitude. Actually, I wouldn’t be surprised if God had given these to everyone; but one is on one’s own when it comes to accessing them. So, perhaps, the gift I’ve been given is access. In any event, it does make life a lot nicer.

Sometimes, the words (appreciation and gratitude) are used almost interchangeably. And they are certainly closely related. So closely, I’d say, that you can’t have one without the other. But they do have different meanings. Appreciation is being aware of something’s value and enjoying it; gratitude is being thankful for same. If you appreciate something, I doubt you

wouldn’t be grateful for it; and if you’re grateful for something, you must appreciate it. The thing to remember is that *everything good* calls for appreciation and gratitude.

Sure, getting that job you wanted, the new baby, Mother’s recovery, a friend’s marriage – all call for appreciation and gratitude. But there are things that happen every day, things that are constant, which also merit a little A&G. Our five senses, the ability to walk and take care of ourselves, sufficient food for nourishment, shelter from the stormy night (and day!), friends and family who love and support us, the most wonderful cat in the world (sorry: Muppy insisted!). We have so many good things in our lives everyday, an attitude of gratitude should be as automatic as breathing.

If you’re like me – raised properly – you have the “thank you reflex.” If someone holds the door for you, if someone passes you the salt, if some scootches over on the bus, you say, “Thank you.” It’s automatic. When I leave myself a reminder of some sort on my own answering machine, I always close with, “Thanks.” Then I hang up and think that was dumb since I was talking to me. But it’s a reflex.

I don’t think this means it’s not sincere. It’s just more volitional than emotional. You’re grateful because you know you should be; but you don’t necessarily feel it. On the other hand, when you really feel appreciation and gratitude, wow! They’re easily as much of a trip as whatever it is you’re appreciating and being grateful for. But such a high needn’t be reserved for the “big” things in life.

I appreciate appreciation; I’m grateful for gratitude. And I thank God for my access to both. If I have anything in common with Francis, it’s this. Seeing creation and all its inhabitants as gifts from God was one of his greatest motivations. He appreciated everything and everyone, he was grateful for everything and everyone, and he respected everything and everyone. I’m sure he knew there were bad things and people in the world. But he also knew even they had a positive aspect. He chose to focus on that.

From a purely human standpoint, a positive outlook makes a lot more sense than a negative one. It’s better for one’s mental wellbeing and one’s overall health. It’s also a heckuva lotta more fun than grouching all the time. Yes, there are roaches crawling around – but just look at all the butterflies God gave us!

Hey – anybody wanna see a really cool receipt?



Franciscan Action Network: Calling Seculars to Be Peace

www.franciscanaction.org
By Carolyn D. Townes, SFO
Secretary, Our Lady of the Angels Region

The Action Commission of the *Franciscan Action Network* met September 3 and 4, in Washington DC, for a day and a half of prayer, sharing, visioning and planning the future of the network. And of course, we shared meals; it would not be Franciscan if we did not break bread together! A gathering of the Action Commissioners, members of the Board and the staff of FAN comprised the twenty-five member power group. The members included five Secular Franciscans plus our National Minister, **Patrick Mendés** and National Vice Minister, **Tom Bello**, who is also Vice President of FAN. The National Fraternity is a member of the network, which includes all of the regions and their local fraternities. The Seculars also included **Stephanie Sormane**, Minister of the Mother Cabrini Region; **Jan Parker**, Minister of the Saint Clare Region; **Ken Beattie**, Minister of the LaVerna Region; **Dan Mulholland** of Troubadours of Peace Region, and myself.

After opening with prayer and doing a brief check-in by FAN President of the Board of Directors, **Sr. Margaret Mary Kimmins, OSF**, **Russell Testa**, FAN Executive Director, led us through a PowerPoint presentation introduction to the current situation and view of FAN.

So, what is the Franciscan Action Network? FAN is a grassroots, faith-based legislative advocacy organization with a growing national base of organizations and persons who are inspired by the witness and example of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. FAN's mission is to bring a coordinated and effective voice to matters of

justice, peace and care for creation. “Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.” Rule, Art. 15

“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.” Rule, Art 19

One of the discussions was how to keep people connected and engaged in peacemaking efforts. This is a question to also ask ourselves as Secular Franciscans. We speak of peace and we profess peace but how are we living out what we speak and profess? I hear so often that these peacemaking issues are not really relevant to us ~ that we are not going to go out with placards and signs; that we are not willing to go to jail for a cause when we have families to take care of; that we cannot attend every march or rally gathering. Well, yes, this is true. This is not what our Rule is calling us to do; the Holy Rule states that we *promote justice by the testimony of our human lives...* It does not state that we are to go out and march with signs, but to promote peace and justice in the ordinariness of our lives. We have more opportunities in our day to day living to exhibit peaceful living than we realize.

When we think about the violence in our language on a daily basis; how we speak to people, including ourselves, the reality of it is astounding. This is just the tip of the iceberg, yet this is the root of our living lives as peacemakers. We cannot live peace without being peace. One of the initiatives of the network is the *Engage Peacemaking Program* ~ a 10-session intense immersion experience and spiritual journey for a small group of 12 – 18 people to become Franciscan Peacemakers. During the sessions, the group learns:

- How conflict and violence are a part of our life and world, filling gaps absent of love that we must not ignore.
- How injustice is allowed to grow in our society by cultural, social, political, economic and personal choices made on a regular basis.
- The Christian and Franciscan spirituality that must be part of the response to the world's anguish with regard to injustice and violence.

How conflict can be transformed by peace-making communications, conflict resolution and strategic action in our families, churches, neighborhoods, nation and world. (Continue on page 22).



Watching the Snow Fall

By Faith Libbe, SFO
Staff Editor

As all of creation inspired Francis to praise God, surely the beauty of snow gave him one more reason!

Last December, I flew from Orlando to Philadelphia. I was returning to the place of my roots (northeastern U.S.), as my niece, Amy had asked me to be her sponsor for Confirmation. I never expected, however, the extra blessing that was in store for me. A resident of Florida for many years, I had almost forgotten the joys one could experience in a cooler climate. This recollection began on the drive from the Philadelphia Airport to my Mom's house in the country. All of a sudden, I noticed beautiful snowflakes beginning to fall from the sky. Even though it was only snow flurries, my heart filled with delight! I hadn't seen snow in years.

Arriving at Mom's, the beauty of the woods spread out before me. Although the trees were bare, to me their starkness against the winter sky was beautifully striking. I saw the pond in the distance, still and serene, as a few more snow flurries danced in the sky.

The time had arrived for Amy's Confirmation and before I knew it we were driving to the Church. It was quite chilly outside, but I felt the warmth of the Spirit of God permeating the Church, surrounding our precious youth. I was blessed and honored to share this blessed event with my niece and family. On the drive back to Mom's, snow flurries filled the sky, once again delighting my heart, on that cold winter night.

The next day the forecast called for snow. The song, "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow," was truly on my heart! I began my morning prayers in my favorite room to pray at Mom's. It is a room with windows all around that makes me feel as if the woods in all their glory are somehow a lovely extension of the room. Yes, this is my favorite place to pray at my Mom's (other than outdoors) because I feel one with God's creation in the beauty I can see right outside the windows. The bird feeder right outside the window welcomes all types of beautiful birds. Beyond the bird feeder, once can see the barn next door and the lovely horses grazing in the field. In the midst of my morning prayer, the snow began to fall...joy!!

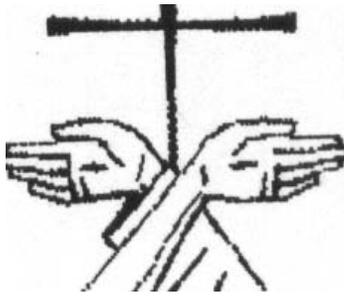
As the day began to unfold, I was "mesmerized" by the beauty of the snow falling in the woods. I thanked God for the gift of being able to be still amidst the coziness and warmth of my Mother's home. A truly contemplative experience for me, I watched a beautiful "winter wonderland" in the making.

I reflected on various ways God's creation appears all the more beautiful against the contrast of the snow. My Mom's holly bush looked stunning with its red berries against the backdrop of snow. The evergreen trees were equally stunning, their boughs laden with snow. The male cardinal was also a magnificent sight against the snow.

Although St. Francis "roughed it" and experienced the harshness and chill of a snowy day, perhaps he too had occasion, to contemplate its beauty on the hills of Assisi. As all of creation inspired Francis to praise God, surely the beauty of snow gave him one more reason!

"Ice and snow bless the Lord; praise and exalt Him above all forever." Daniel 3:70





What Do We Do as Secular Franciscans?

By G.W. Irving, SFO
Los Tres Compañeros Region

Recently I have been a bit troubled to hear so many of my Secular Franciscan colleagues wondering aloud, “*What do we do as Secular Franciscans?*” And then, I remember something I learned long ago, and that is, that leaders should continually call their members back to the central mission of their organization.

Secular Franciscans function in the world as Christ-like people doing their normal jobs in a Christ-like way. We, as Secular Franciscans, have the advantage of employing the teachings of St. Francis to use the Gospels to find our way in a highly complex and ambiguous world. We have the advantage of our life-long commitment to learn, through the example of St. Francis, how to go from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel. We have the advantage of monthly SFO gatherings, where ongoing formation continually shows us new or different ways of looking at the world and our place in it. We have the luxury of sharing with our sisters and brothers the triumphs and frustrations of our daily lives and listening to each of them share their joys and sorrows.

We know that our monthly gatherings renew us spiritually and mentally for our journey, and we remember that we can sometimes learn more about what we are supposed to do by listening than by talking. It is through listening that we learn by the example of others; and it is through listening that we learn what God is calling us to do. It is through trying and, perhaps, failing, and then trying again with the help of others, that we achieve what we are called to do.

So as I ponder this question about what SFOs do I suppose I’m not really “troubled,” but reminded that our pilgrimage in this world is a continual rebirth and renewal of how we employ our Franciscan values and virtues in a confusing world. Each of us possesses

knowledge, skills and abilities that, in combination with those of others, can solve very complex problems. It is in solving these problems in the work place, or at school, or the home environment, in a Christ-like manner that distinguishes us as Secular Franciscans. We may never know the good that we do simply by being a Christ-like person trying every day to do the right thing.

Marie Amore, SFO, has said it so well, “*As Secular Franciscans, it’s not so much what we do as who we are!*” We should be like Christ in the manner of St. Francis in all that we do. *It sounds so simple that we sometimes forget that we may be the only Gospel that others may ever read – and that’s what Secular Franciscans do!*

Christmas Blessings to Our Readers!



Watercolor by P. S. Errazuriz, OSB

May the Babe of Bethlehem, who we all know as Savior and Lord, bless you in this Holy Season. May He bless you with health and happiness and use you to build His kingdom by your being and doing, now and forever.

Peace and Good from all of us,

Fr. Lester, Julie, M. Marko, Dolores, Francine, Fred, Bob & Mary, Delia, Faith, Dan, Bob H., Clare, Marjo, Randy, and Frances

Thank You!

A special thank you to **Marjo Gray, SFO**, for five years of service to the Order, as Subscription Coordinator for TAU-USA, and continued prayer for your improved health.

Welcome! Randy Heinz, SFO,
New Subscription Coordinator!
TAU-USA

Regional Roundup



Franciscans of the Prairie Region

Our Lady of the Angels Fraternity reports that, recently, a part of the St. Boniface Cemetery in Edwardsville, IL was dedicated to the Secular Franciscan Order for the burial of Seculars and their families. A beautiful life-size statue of St. Francis was erected for this occasion.

Holy Trinity Region

Our Lady of the Presentation Fraternity sponsored an International Day of Peace Education and Prayer Service, a community wide, interfaith, multicultural, Franciscan peace and justice celebration for world peace, at the Presentation Ministries Center, in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Sunday, September 21, 2008. Mayor Mark Mallory of Cincinnati proclaimed the event as the Secular Franciscan International Day of Peace Day.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region mourns the loss of Vincent Carsano, SFO, Regional Vice Minister. Vince went to be with the Lord on October 14th. On behalf of the National Fraternity, Patrick Mendés extends our sympathy and prayers. “May the angels lead him to the Kingdom of God and may our heavenly Father receive Vince into that place of joy to live with Him forever and to pray for us. Let us give thanks to the God who loves us, for making our brother Vince a part of our lives and for the joyful service he lovingly gave our Order. God give us His peace!” Vince will be truly missed. May the Lord Himself comfort his family and his fraternity.

St. John the Baptist Fraternity, of the Greater Waterville, ME area, gathered on October 3rd for the Transitus, with Brother Rex Norris, SSF, as leader, followed by a simple soup supper. On the feast, the fraternity attended Mass, followed by Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours. At 2 p.m., we gathered at the local animal shelter for the blessing of the animals.

Our Lady of the Angels, Solanus Casey & Tau Cross Regions

FLIC - An Overview

By Bob Campbell, SFO,
Regional Formation Director - Tau Cross Region

35 Seculars and 1 Capuchin Friar from 3 SFO Regions (Our Lady of the Angels, Solanus Casey and Tau Cross) gathered at Mount St. Alphonsus Retreat Center, Esopus, NY, from August 11 through 15, for FLIC 2008. This was the “reincarnation” of former gatherings called SELF. First and foremost, it was truly “Franciscans Living In Community.” Whenever Franciscans get together, it’s like a family gathering. Some of the people knew each other from previous gatherings, but there were many who met for the first time; nonetheless, we were all IMMEDIATELY brothers and sisters.

The Retreat Center is a former Redemptorist Seminary, built over 100 years ago. It’s a castle-like building, overlooking the Hudson River - truly beautiful and in harmony with our Franciscan spirit.

FLIC is NOT a retreat – it’s a gathering, so we do the things we do whenever our local fraternities gather: some prayer, some formation, a bit of business announcements, and a LOT of socializing.

We had Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer and Mass every day. Father Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap., was with us the whole time and gave – as always - inspiring homilies on Franciscan spirituality. Brother Salvatore Patricola, OFM Cap., a Deacon, came on Wednesday and led Holy Hour which was awe-inspiring. Carol Gentile, former National Minister, the principal speaker, gave a presentation every morning on the theme: Call and Community. Those who know Carol know how that went: informative, inspiring, breath-taking!

Our other speakers, Joan Geiger (Tau Cross Regional Councilor), Otto Schaefer (former Solanus Casey Regional Formation Director, now involved in prison ministry) and Lori Pieper (renowned for her research on our Patroness, St. Elizabeth of Hungary), also gave excellent presentations.

Every evening, as well as all afternoon on Wednesday, was “free time” for socialization – snacks, walks, talks, and, on the last night, “flicks at FLIC.” One of our brothers created our new theme song: “Flic-a-di-dodah.”

At the end, some of the new candidates for profession shared how valuable it was for them to EXPERIENCE Franciscanism being lived out in real life. This was applauded and affirmed by all!

Maximilian Kolbe Region

On Sunday, October 26, 2008, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Fraternity celebrated the 70th Anniversary of canonical establishment with a Mass of Thanksgiving at Our Lady of Angels Church in Cleveland, Ohio. The main celebrant was Fr. Michael Joyce, OFM Cap., Spiritual Assistant. Concelebrants were Fr. Eric Gauchat, OFM Cap., former Spiritual Assistant and Fr. John Cregan, Pastor of Our Lady of Angels Church.

Approximately 100 guests were present for the Liturgy and a bountiful reception followed. Guests included members of the First, Second, and Third Orders of St. Francis and extended family and friends of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Fraternity.

Special recognition was given to nine members who were professed 50 or more years ago. They included **Gerald Corrigan** and his wife, **Catherine Corrigan**, **Margaret O'Neill**, **Nancy Sweeney**, **Mary Ellen Grecol**, **Mary Cotner**, **Lois Hillenbrand**, **Bernard Wirtz** and his wife **Mary Ann Wirtz**. Bernie and Mary Ann currently serve on the Region Council as Minister and Secretary.

We gratefully and prayerfully acknowledge those Seculars and spiritual assistants, living and deceased, who have guided and inspired us through the years. Above all, we thank God, from whom all blessings come.

Our Lady of the Angels Region

Lena Delutis, SFO (almost 102 yrs. old) went to be with the Lord in April of 2008. She was a member of St. John Vianney Fraternity in Colonia, NJ.

Norman Reilly, SFO passed away in March of 2008, in the 49th year of his profession. He was a member of St. Thomas More Fraternity in New York City, NY. The fraternities will miss these saints.

The Lazarus Program, a ministry that buries the unwanted dead with love and dignity had a funeral Mass for five abandoned infants on December 7, 2007.

Results of the Regional Election held on Nov. 1, are:
Regional Minister: **Ronald L. Pihokker, SFO**
Regional Vice Minister: **Diane F. Menditto, SFO**
Regional Secretary: **Kate Asselin, SFO**
Regional Treasurer: **Richard Spana, SFO**
Regional Formation Director: **Virginia Chin, SFO**
Councilors:

Central New Jersey: **Alexander Kiczek, SFO**

Manhattan: **Julia McCants, SFO**

North Jersey: **Andrew Klutkowski, SFO**

Westchester: **Sheila Tuohy, SFO**



St. Anthony of Padua by artist Sunhee Joo, SFO
[www. sunheehart.com](http://www.sunheehart.com) or sunheejoo@aol.com

+++

St. Clare Region

Mary Wainscott, SFO, Regional Formation Director, is facilitating a monthly class based on the text, "Build with Living Stones: Formation for Franciscan Life and Work." The first class was held on August 20, 2008.

Our region celebrated the **Feast of St. Louis**, patron of the Secular Franciscan Order, on Sunday, August 24th at St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish Church in St. Louis. The celebration began at the regular parish Sunday Mass at 10:30 a.m. We brought our fraternity banners, were given special seating and were recognized by the pastor at the beginning of Mass. We then invited everyone present, all parishioners included, to a Feast Day Dinner. The celebration closed with a Holy Hour, including special prayers for the Feast of St. Louis, and Benediction.

Next, the region will celebrate the **Year of St. Paul** by sponsoring a special professional production on the life of the saint entitled "The Journey of St. Paul."

Mother Cabrini Region

The annual Mother Cabrini Celebration took place on Sunday, November 16th at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Rockford, IL. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Donald Blaeser, OFM, Regional Spiritual Assistant, and concelebrated by Fr. Peter Sarnicki, OFM Conv, Pastor of St. Stanislaus and Spiritual Assistant of the host fraternity. Fr. Peter conducted a tour through St. Stanislaus School, which featured displays of Polish crafts, costumes, and various mementos, along with a Polish museum of historical artifacts. As part of the tour, the "2007 Quinquennial Quilt" was available for viewing. It was a blessed day for all of us.



Franciscan Living

God, Where Are You?

By Francine Gikow, SFO
Staff Editor

Inevitably, there comes a period in every Secular Franciscan's life, sometimes during certain occasions and sometimes for years, when God seems distant. It has been described as "darkness," "dryness," or a "desert." We plead with God to know the touch of His compassion, to experience His consolation again, but there is no answer. Our soul cries out as in the psalms: *"How long, Lord? Will you utterly forget me? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1-2)*

All of our usual methods of renewal don't seem to be working. We pray more, but the prayer is dry and, seemingly, without reward. We double our efforts in the apostolate, but we are not able to see the face of God in the people we meet. Everywhere we turn, life is difficult, unrewarding and bland. We yearn for God even more, but He is not there. We are deserted and it is devastating to us because, we have committed our lives to this very Way of Life.

This darkness is a mystery. We know not why or for what reason God, in his infinite wisdom, seemingly withdraws from us.

Is this darkness a way that God entices us to love him more? After all, isn't there a saying that "absence makes the heart grow fonder?" Does God remove himself from us so that we appreciate Him more...so that we yearn for Him more? Perhaps.

It may seem like a test: to see how strong we are in our faith. Like Job, can we still have that hope in Him? Can we holdfast to what we profess and promise? Are we

being purified like refined gold and silver or are we pliable like rubber, ready to bend every which way or even break like fragile glass?

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta endured many years of darkness. Yet, few in her community were even aware of her spiritual dryness. They only saw the "fruits" of her relationship with God: the goodness of God evident in her life. Sometimes, it is only through these "fruits" that we know we are still in relationship with God. We may no longer have consolations but, instead, might see evidence of God's love for us through the goodness of His ways.

You might be able to discern His love for you when everyday responses are inspired by Him. (Remember how your heart sings when you recognize His action in your life?) You might even see Him working through you to care for others. It humbles you when you see it and strikes you with awe!

God in His infinite wisdom still speaks to us, perhaps not directly with personal consolations, but indirectly through our lives and through each other. His working in the world changes the way we think about Him, our relationship with Him and with His people.

"Stand and consider the wondrous works of God! Do you know how God lays his commands upon them, and makes the light shine forth from his clouds?" (Job 37:14-1)

No, we don't know how God makes the light shine forth from His clouds. We don't know the mind of God or how He works but we see the "fruits" of Him. It is still a mystery. It has to be a way of love, trust and hope.

Sometimes, I think the Secular Franciscan needs to be stubborn. Stubborn in the commitment to our Way of life, and to Christ. Stubborn in not giving up when God is silent, distant or seemingly absent. But stubbornness only goes so far. That's when our fraternity takes over. We grow in the love of God by the example of others enduring the same darkness and we find companionship in the journey. In short, misery likes company! But this is holy company designed to assist us in our commitment. Mother Teresa once said we are not called to be successful but to be faithful.

Job finally comes to the conclusion of his suffering and says:

*"I know that you can do all things,
And that no purpose of yours can be hindered.
I have dealt with great things that I do not understand;
things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know.
I have heard of you by word of mouth,
but now my eye has seen you." (Job 42:2-5)*

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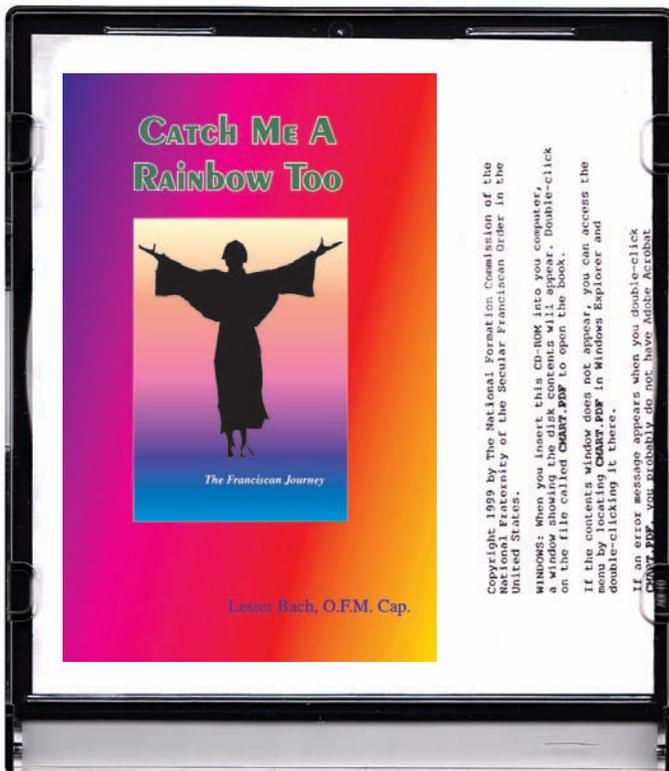
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