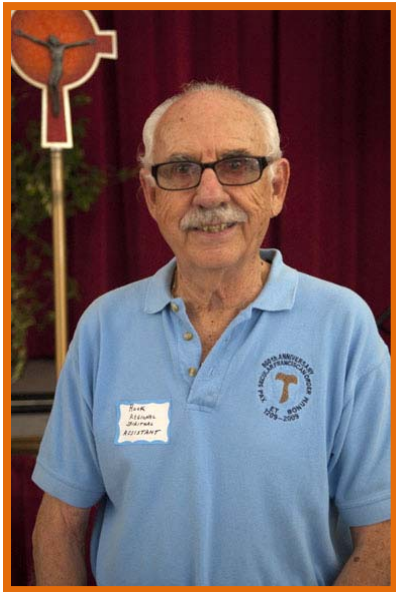


Classic Franciscan



Rock DeSpain, SFO

Let Us Begin, Rock!

By Julia Pearson, SFO
Human Interest Editor

"Let us begin, for up to now we have done nothing," St. Francis challenged his brothers as he lay on the cold ground with Sister Death waiting quietly near. Roscoe "Rock" DeSpain, Jr., a twenty-first century Franciscan, finds the Little Poor Man's words a fitting call and guide to radical conversion when he rises with each new morning.

The Franciscan spirit has always been the home for Rock's soul. A cradle Catholic, he was born in St. Louis, Missouri, and grew up with a brother and two sisters. His grandmother, who lived with the family for some time when he was young, was a Secular Franciscan. Catherine O'Farrell was professed in her native Ireland, and Rock has memories of his grandmother, colored with her fraternity meetings, prayer and church life.

In adulthood, the pain of his first marriage ending took Rock on a path away from, and then close to, the warm security of his Catholic faith. He met his wife, Jan, on November 28, 1975, and they were married on the same date a year later. Both were divorced Catholics and made the decision to go through the annulment process, providing the time for healing from their earlier divorces. Their combined children blessed their new family: Wendy, Christine, Patricia, Kathleen, and Rock

III. When their son passed away, his widow, Imelda, has been another daughter in the DeSpain fold. Rock felt his deep love and belonging in the Franciscan gospel life when his eyes flooded with tears upon hearing the prayer of St. Francis sung in church, knowing that "this is what I want to be."

The evolution of his spirituality and growth as a Franciscan continued after Rock and Jan moved from Illinois, where he had spent most of his life as a contractor, to California, in 1989. Starting in 2000 and ending in January of 2009, he served three terms as Regional Minister of the St. Francis Region in Southern California. During visitations in the region with the Regional Spiritual Assistants, Rock could see the spirituality in the articles of the SFO Constitution. He also felt his point of view broadening from a legalistic to a more pastoral one, saying that "the Holy Spirit is out there before your eyes."

In June of 2003, at a 25 year anniversary celebration of the Rule, Fr. Mike Higgins, TOR, then General Spiritual Assistant, urged Seculars to "take spiritual ownership of your own order." Heeding this call, Rock was among the fifteen students in the first class for lay Spiritual Assistants, taught by Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv.. The class was completed in June 2006, and, in July, Rock was certified as a lay Spiritual Assistant and then assigned to the local fraternity, San Damiano Fraternity in Palm Desert, California. From 2006 to 2008, Fr. Steve Gross delegated Rock to take his place as pastoral visitor five times each year. In May of 2008, the SFO Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, sent a letter to all the National Councils, giving a practical interpretation of lay Spiritual Assistants. This led to a Mass of Installation, in January 2009, for three Secular Franciscans to become lay Regional Spiritual Assistants. Rock views the Ministers Provincial as twenty-first century Franciscan visionaries: Fr. Melvin Jurisich, OFM - succeeded by Fr. John Hardin, OFM, Fr. Matthew Elhoff, OFM Capuchin, and Fr. Christopher Dietz, OFM Conventual. From her eternal home, Catherine O'Farrell surely looks down and sees her grandson as part of this circle.

Quote

Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain.

(Jim O'Neill's JP Paper)