

2015: A BRIEF REVIEW FROM THE NATIONAL MINISTER THE GOOD AND THE BAD

by Tom Bello OFS, National Minister

At the 2014 National Chapter, the National Fraternity voted as its Theme for 2015: “Be the joyful face of Christ to all!” That is the challenge of perfect joy in the face of bad and good.

I pray that your 2015 has been better than my 2015. The Lord brings crosses and suffering to all of us, so I am not complaining, but simply reporting.

Please permit me to start with the good, just as the Bible does, for in Genesis Chapter One, God sees that everything is good. Only in Genesis Chapter Three do we human beings fall.

The good was mostly every single meeting that I attended with my brothers and sisters at every level of fraternity.

Although it occurred in November 2014, I attended my first International Chapter in Assisi Italy and met brothers and sisters from all over the world. We are a vibrant and YOUNG International family to which I pray we can reach out in many ways, especially in twinning with other National fraternities.

At the National level, I mention specifically three gatherings that I was unfortunately unable to attend because of health issues, but from which I have received glowing reviews, plus, very gratefully, many cards and prayers:

One, the Summer Seminar on Servant Leadership at Saint Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania.

Two, the JPIC Peace Retreat at Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois.

Three, the Formation Retreat at the Franciscan Prayer Center in Independence, Missouri.

I pray that an article in the *TAU-USA* might capture some of the joy, fellowship and formation from each of these National gatherings of 2015 and that we can continue to gather nationally, because our National family is very strong, if not so youthful as the International family.

We need to communicate and share more to be better sisters and brothers to one another across this great land of the United States.

Regionally, I was blessed to attend two excellent Regional Chapters before my health failed: one in the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region, largely in Florida, and the other in the Franciscans of the Prairie region, largely in Illinois.

Both of these Regions modeled caring, organized and responsible servant leadership, formation and apostolic works that I pray every Region can show.

I have also attended my own local fraternity meetings at St. Thomas More fraternity in Arlington Virginia, where I began my Secular Franciscan call, and where I pray I will end it in this world. Many of these good sisters and brothers have journeyed together with me since the 1980s, and that long-time constant contact is so richly meaningful.

I pray that all of us always and all ways will do all we can to sustain the vitality and love of our local fraternities.

Fraternity to me is family. It is not always necessary to agree, but we all need to love and share, gather, grow and pray with one another.

We are blessed with so many brothers and sisters so committed to the Lord following the Secular Franciscan Way of Life!

We come from all walks of life, political persuasions and personal opinions, but when truly called, we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord, and we actually walk with the Lord and one another during our fraternal gatherings that I have attended in 2015 at every level.

This is so good, and it is the greatest good, for it comes from God for our salvation and the salvation of all.

The bad, of course, is the second part of the Prologue to the Secular Franciscan Rule, when we do not act like brothers and sisters.

In this review, I will not single out any person, fraternity or region individually. Nor have I observed, thank God, really unFranciscan behavior by Secular Franciscans directly before my face, but I have heard of this happening too often at every level.

Perhaps this is only malicious gossip or perhaps we all need to grow up, get along and act more like Christ!

As National Minister, I pray every day for myself and other brothers and sisters, individually or even in fraternity, who have been permanently professed as Secular Franciscans in the United States and who do not pray, act and live as ones called by God to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare.

To me this is the most important bad.

Also very bad was the loss from the National Treasury of monies that could have been much better spent in many other areas.

This brief review is not the best place to discuss this loss and possible remedies and National guidelines going forward. The NEC will do this together with the National Fraternity gathered in National Chapter, with its full “legislative, deliberative, and elective powers” (Article 68.1 of the General Constitutions)

October 13-18, 2015, in Clinton, New Jersey, and any National guidelines, soapproved, will be shared with the National family.

“*Siempre adelante*” (Always Forward!) has been the decision of the NEC and the National Fraternity for the 2016 Quinquennial. We have already proceeded to identify St. Louis, Missouri, as our location, and a Quinquennial Committee is working with the NEC to make the 2016 Q the best ever!

Please plan now to attend June 30 to July 4, 2016, at the Renaissance St. Louis Airport Hotel, a beautiful facility right next to the airport.

I conclude this brief review of 2015 with my prayers for your Peace and all of God’s Good.

“Be the joyful face of Christ to all!”

REMEMBERING THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER THROUGH WILLS, BEQUESTS, DONATIONS AND PRAYERS

Preserving and extending our Secular Franciscan Order and way of life *is* possible. Each of us can play an important part at our national, regional and local levels, and even at the international level. This can be done in many ways, including a bequest in our wills.

Suggested beneficiaries:

- Your Local Fraternity
- Your Region
- National Fraternity (NAFRA)
- International Fraternity (CIOFS)

There are several types of bequests you can make to support a fraternity such as: *General Bequests, Specific Bequests and Percentage Bequests*.

Donation can include stocks, annuities and IRA distributions. You can help secure the future of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America by making a tax-deductible gift now or in the future.

Please consider your legacy and include your local fraternity, your region, your national fraternity and the international fraternity. If you wish to direct your contribution to a specific category such as scholarships, youth or formation you may do so.

Please consider praying St. Francis’s *Prayer Before the Crucifix* for all of us daily.

**All-highest, glorious God,
Cast your light into the
darkness of our hearts.
Give us right faith, firm
hope, perfect charity
And profound humility,
With wisdom and
perception, O Lord,
So that we may do what is
truly your holy will.
Amen.**

God is blessing you! Pax et bonum.

