

Sharing The Vision

News from the National Executive Council (NEC)

by National Secretary, Jan Parker, OFS

NAFRA Theme for 2015

Be the joyful face of Christ to all!

“This Order has no walls. It flows seamlessly from one nation to another, one brother or sister to another.” International Councilor Mary Stronach said it beautifully. She was her speaking of her experience last November at the General Chapter held in Assisi, Italy. Mary, I feel the same way!



Mary and I were among five National Fraternity members who attended this international gathering of 170 Secular Franciscans from more than 80 countries. I do not know all that each one left behind when they traveled to Assisi – what anguish, what joys, what their culture offers, how different it is from mine — but how easily I could relate to each brother and sister! Our Franciscan hearts connected. We rejoiced and celebrated this unity. The world became small.

Just how small is our world? Pictured here are Yodit Tesfaghebriel, OFS, from Eritrea and Theresa Mukatipa, OFS, from Malawi, our sisters in Africa. They recognized me from our 2011 National Formation Workshop video — unbelievable! We launched into a conversation about our fraternities, our formation programs, and the joy of following Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis. Throughout the General Chapter everyone seemed to have similar encounters and conversations.

Above and beyond the friendships formed and the work of the Chapter that was accomplished, one thing became very apparent - our National Fraternities can certainly help each other. My sisters in Africa had somehow seen the Formation Workshop video, but they did not have the book that went with it. They asked, “Could you help us get a *For Up to Now* manual?” Jude Obibuzor from Nigeria shared with Tom Bello the difficulties getting a National Fraternity established in Nigeria, while Honorius M. Chilufya shared that Zambia enjoys one of the largest Secular Franciscan memberships in Africa. What can we learn from each other?

Upon our return from the General Chapter, several of us covered the costs involved to mail two *For Up to Now* manuals to Africa and one to Taiwan, and we asked ourselves what more could we do to stay connected? This desire was addressed in the very first motion made at our January 2015 National Executive Council (NEC) meeting. Tom Bello moved that we “explore how our National

Fraternity, and possibly some of our Regional Fraternities, might do some kind of partnering or brother and sister relationship with the English speaking Seculars in Africa.” Mary Stronach seconded the motion, noting that “twinning” was encouraged by the International OFS Council (CIOFS). Discussion followed as to what this support might look like. All agreed that, as the need is great, Regions should be invited to consider twinning as well, and perhaps in this way NAFRA could support more than one African fraternity. The motion passed unanimously, and Tom recently sent an invitation to all NAFRA Regional Ministers asking if their Region might be interested in this “twinning” effort.

Our General Constitutions (GC) speak clearly of our unity with brothers and sisters around the world, stating that the international fraternity IS the Secular Franciscan Order: “*The international fraternity is constituted by the organic union of all the Catholic Secular Franciscan fraternities in the world. It is identical to the Secular Franciscan Order.*” When we say we belong to the Secular Franciscan Order, it is to this worldwide Order that we belong! One of the purposes of the International Council is “...to increase the sense of unity of the Secular Franciscan Order while respecting the pluralism of the persons and groups, and to strengthen the bond of communion, collaboration, and sharing among the national fraternities.” (See GC Articles 69-71) We can do our part as members of the worldwide OFS, and not only to contribute to our Order, but to become instruments of healing in our world. What a unique opportunity we have been given! There is much to learn from each other. Will your Region accept the invitation to “twin” with our OFS brothers and sisters in Africa?