

# TAU-USA

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF  
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN  
ORDER

Summer 2017 ISSUE 92



Roma - Collegium Seraphicum  
4-12 november 2017

CIOFS Logo by Santocono Rosaria, OFS from Catania

## Mission to Share the Vision

The TAU-USA, a publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States, is a vital communication link between the NAFRA leadership and all candidates and all professed Secular Franciscans throughout the United States. The articles within the publication, while sharing the Secular Franciscan charism and vision, are intended to inform, inspire, and challenge.



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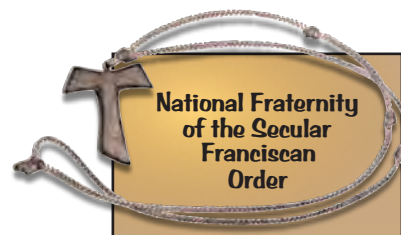
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TAU-USA is published quarterly. All candidates and professed Secular Franciscans receive the newsletter without charge. For subscription or change of address information, write to:

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Subscriptions per year cost \$4.00 for U. S., \$6.00 for Canadian, \$15.00 for Overseas.



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### Note:

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## NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

### National Minister's Message – Summer 2017 TAU-USA by Jan Parker, OFS

May the peace of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit fill you with joy!

This past June, our General Minister, Tibor Kauser, OFS, wrote a letter addressed to “all my sisters and brothers in the Secular Franciscan Order, all over the world.” That letter is copied below. It is Tibor’s hope, and mine, that it truly will be read by *every Secular Franciscan in the world*.

Tibor’s letter was written on Pentecost and is obviously inspired by the Holy Spirit. His message is strong in love and in truth. It is strong in its sincerity. It is a strong call to each of us to live our vocation fully. Please read it, and take it to heart.

In his letter, Tibor also introduces to us to a document called the *Instrumentum Laboris* (literally, a working tool.) This is a significant document that outlines 12 proposals for our worldwide Order. We are all invited to give input on these proposals. Please see the article on page 5 of this issue of the TAU-USA to understand the importance of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. A copy of the *Instrumentum Laboris* is posted on the front page of our website at [www.nafra-sfo.org](http://www.nafra-sfo.org). Again, your thoughts on these 12 creative proposals are most welcome.

As we contemplate Tibor’s Pentecost letter, and as we look to the future of our Order, let us be fully open to the grace of the Holy Spirit who, as Tibor reminds us, is the real General Minister.

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts. 1.8*

*“Oh breath of God, unite us in action!”*



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

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Circ. n. 33/14-20  
Prot. n. 2981  
Rome, June 4, 2017  
**Pentecost**

*To all my sisters and brothers in the Secular Franciscan Order, all over the world*

*“... filled day by day with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit”<sup>1</sup>*

My dear Sisters and Brothers!

May the Lord give you his peace!

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!"<sup>2</sup> On the Feast of Pentecost let us listen to St. Paul; rejoice and rediscover, that we are filled, day by day, with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit, as also Saint Francis has experienced it. God always provides for us

the best we can use in order to love our neighbors in a deeper manner, to accomplish our duties better, to walk on the way of our secular franciscan vocation, as salt of the Earth and light of the World.<sup>3</sup>

I invite you all to open our eyes, our ears and our hearts, so that we can receive the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who is to fill us, to console us, and to lead us individually,

<sup>1</sup> 1Cel XI 26

<sup>2</sup> Ph.4.4

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 5.13-14

in our families and in the fraternities. It is the Holy Spirit, who fills us with life, without Him we would not have life. Because of Him we can live our vocation, can live our family lives and our lives in the fraternity. Let us always be fully aware of this, and live "the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple."<sup>4</sup>

1. "As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world."<sup>5</sup>

This is the motto of the coming General Chapter, and I take the opportunity to invite you to consider, what does it mean for us to be sent into the world?

We must have a clear vision about our identity. It is much more important to have a very clear knowledge on who we are, than to know what we are to do. Our identity is whom God wants us to see. Without knowing who we are we will never know what we shall do, and will make lots of mistakes, also if with a good intention.

"It is not good for the man to be alone."<sup>6</sup> It strongly belongs to our identity that we are to live in different kinds of communities. "No man is an island."<sup>7</sup> We, secular franciscans are living in our families, in our fraternities, in our working teams, in our parish communities: such a richness and treasure, where God has invited to us to experience, to celebrate and to spread his love!

### **Family life**

The most important community, that gave the most important part of our being, of our identity, is our family. Everyone was born into a family. Except some rare and sad stories, each of us has an experience of the family. We have the experience of the love of our father, which is the image of the love of our Heavenly Father. We have the experience of the love of our mother, which is the image of the love of the Holy Virgin, who is the heavenly mother for all. "From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church".<sup>8</sup>

Our families, as being domestic churches, have to be places of prayer, where we can convey the faith and love that we have received and thus have to share it with our children. Through our whole life, through the example of our spiritual life, through the example of our love to our husband/wife, through the example of our work, through the example of our dedication to the fraternities, to the poor and needy, to the social affairs, we live our identity as the children of God, and share all these goods

with our children. By bringing up our children we are instruments of God who is working in our children, too, and thus we are perpetuating the people of God.

### **Fraternity life**

Our fraternities - particularly our local fraternities - are the places, where we can live our vocation, where we can find the source of life, by accepting, living and giving the love of God. We have to open ourselves in the fraternities, to make them real fraternities, that is to share our lives with our sisters and brothers. The goal is not to live a nice fraternal life but a true and honest one. We have to open ourselves. We shall not be afraid to expose ourselves to one another, to share our treasures, but also to accept and not to hide our weakness, our shortcomings! We have to be so close to each other that our souls can touch one another. We have to take the risk of being opened, we have to take the risk of the conflicts. Sincere and opened fraternal life means to be ready to share all that we have. However, real fraternal life also means to be opened to the fraternal warning and fraternal correction. Remember, my dear sisters and brothers, that the Holy Spirit is working through these fraternal relationships in the fraternity. We have to take the risk of hurting each other and also of having wounds, but these wounds help us in the reconciliation. There is no real fraternity without reconciliation. As brothers and sisters of penance, we always have to live together with our fragility, with our wounds, being always ready, however, to ask and to give forgiveness. There is no Pentecost, no renewal in the fraternity if we close ourselves from each other and limit our relationships to a kind of tea party.

However, it is not only for us, it is not for our good feelings. It is because we bring it out to the world, regardless we are aware or not. We bring out what we receive and experience there. It is our deep responsibility how the Holy Spirit can fill our fraternities with life, with life that we will bring out and make visible to our neighbors. Let us give space to the Holy Spirit, my sisters and brothers, to shake, to move our fraternities, to renew our fraternity life! God is not willing to make us sit in a comfortable place, He wants us to live a vivid life, that brings fruits.

### **In the ecclesial community**

The Apostle warns us: "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you"<sup>9</sup>. We understand it, and it is correct, that each one's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But it is worth to consider, that we, as the body of Christ when we think about the Church, are the temple of the Holy Spirit, too. Our communities are temples of

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<sup>4</sup> LG 9

<sup>5</sup> Jn. 17.18

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 2.18

<sup>7</sup> John Donne: Meditation XVII., 1624, and Thomas Merton, 1955

<sup>8</sup> LG 11

<sup>9</sup> 1Cor. 6.19

the Holy Spirit, too. St. Paul's trinitarian spirit can lead us to a new approach of our role in the Church. We have to let the Holy Spirit dwell among us, dwell in the ecclesial community.

We shall be such stones of the Church, that are ready to receive Christ as being the cornerstone, and are ready to be a place for the Holy Spirit. It is particularly our duty, as secular franciscans, to bring our spirituality into the parish communities and to other ecclesial communities, so that it will be filled with joy, with humble attitude of serving one another, with creative love, with an attitude that respects and strives for the care of creation in all our activities, with an intention to focus the parish life on the poorest and the most needy inside, but also outside the members of its community.

As a temple of the Holy Spirit we have to fill the life of the Church with what we can give: the fraternal love, the respect of each other, the attention to everyone, the good news, that we all are children of God by the sacrament of the baptism, and God has made of us his people.

### **In the society**

Each secular franciscan is a citizen of a certain country. Each secular franciscan is living in a town or village. Each secular franciscan is working (or used to work) for the good of the society. We are not hermits, we are inserted to a wider community of our fellow citizens by God. It is our responsibility and a part of our vocation to strive to form part of our society always in a better way, in the spirit of service, and to do our best to "build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively"<sup>10</sup>.

We have to seek the good of all, particularly in the service of the smallest, the poorest, the most marginalized, those, who do not have the essential to live a life with human dignity, regardless these essentials being material or spiritual ones. We have to take care of the created world, because since the beginning of times, the Spirit of God has been present over the creation<sup>11</sup>. We have to do our best, each one of us according to the possibilities, to create a spiritual and material environment responding to the initial project of God, by seeking the best solutions to the problems and to the tasks we are facing in our daily life.

However, it is also a part of our vocation to bring the Holy Spirit where civil liberty or religious freedom is misunderstood, and thus practiced in a wrong manner. Also, we have to bring the Holy Spirit, where culture is not a praise and fruit of the talents, the knowledge or the beauty for the good of the people, for the care of creation or for the protection of life, but on the contrary, such things are called culture, which are to ruin dignity, to mislead the ignorants, the uneducated, the illiterate, to

exploit the natural and human resources, and which are praising the immediate experience, the instant joy, leading downwards instead of searching the way up high to God.

### **2. How to manage an order**

In November in Rome, we will conclude the topic, that has been opened to a worldwide discussion in 2014 at the General Elective Chapter in Assisi: 'How to manage an international Order like OFS?'

What is the Order, who is the Order? We are the Order, we all, sisters and brothers, all over the world, who want to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis<sup>12</sup>. The Secular Franciscan Order is not only the presidency, not only the international council, not only the international fraternity, but "it is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world"<sup>13</sup>. It is our common task to learn, how can we animate and guide this great union of our fraternities, which is not only a spiritual family, but has also the reality of a kind of an organization. Therefore, the management of the Order does not regard only to the International Council, or to the CIOFS Presidency. Management has to be a common management at all levels.

We have to learn from God and from each other, how to deal not only with the 'heavenly' things, like prayer life, sacramental life, devotions, but also with the 'earthly' things, like organize meetings, give proper formation, improve communication. None of these two parts can live without the other. We have different experiences and different skills, practices. This will be the time to share them, to teach each other and to learn from each other. We have to remember, that each and every one of us will be the instrument of God towards the others. Therefore I ask all of you to read the *Instrumentum Laboris* carefully, discuss it in the different councils and fraternities, so that those who will be present at the General Chapter, will be able to enrich the common experience and will be able to help the entire Order to find the project of God for the next three years.

Saint Francis said, that the General Minister of the Order is the Holy Spirit<sup>14</sup>. It is always very important to know this, but now in particular, when we are facing the XV General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order. We will meet to strengthen our identity, to celebrate the diversity and to build the unity in the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. This will be our mandate, we have to work on this in November in Rome, and also after having returned back to our local fraternities. All what we have to do will not be completed by the end of the General Chapter, moreover, it will be the beginning. We have to go back to our fraternities, sharing the gift of God and the fruit of our work, so that

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<sup>10</sup> OFS Rule 14

<sup>11</sup> cf. Gen. 1.2

<sup>12</sup> OFS Rule 2, GG.CC. 3

<sup>13</sup> OFS Rule 2, GG.CC. 3

<sup>14</sup> 2Cel CXLV 193

ALL levels of the Order and each single sister and brother be filled more with the Holy Spirit and be able to live a more authentic secular franciscan life, and so that ALL councils on the different levels be able to accomplish the service of animating and guiding in a better way. This is not a goal for itself, but in order to live our vocation better, and to bring Christ, the risen Lord to the world.

Next year we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the renewed Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Paul VI. has given this Rule to us on June 24th 1978. We have to remember: it is a gift. It is a free gift of God, and a free gift of the Church. We have to appreciate it, and we have to keep it as a treasure. But keeping it as a treasure does not mean to lock it up in a safe place, on the contrary! We have to make it a living thing. I repeat the words of the pope Saint John Paul II.: "Study, love and live your Rule, because its values are truly evangelical ones"<sup>15</sup>. It has to be a part of our formation, to read often and to study the basic document of our life. It has to be a part of our life, a daily nutrition.

### 3. "... filled day by day with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit"<sup>16</sup>

What does it mean to be filled with the comfort and grace of the Holy Spirit? Do we really recognize, how much less we could live without Him? We need Him, in order to not be afraid when the storm is coming and our boat is in danger, and to call the Lord instead of being frightened<sup>17</sup>. But we also need the Holy Spirit to step out from the boat, to leave our security, to leave the safe and well-known ambit of our life, and to do what we could not imagine to do before, to start to walk on the surface of the water<sup>18</sup>. Miracles are out there, not when sitting in the boat.

My dear sisters and brothers, we need to be filled by the Holy Spirit. By that Spirit, whom Jesus gave to the disciples when they were gathered. By that Spirit, who filled the disciples when they were together with many and proclaimed the good news. By that Spirit, who has made the Church from a group of weak and uneducated persons. By that Spirit, that likewise makes of us what we can call 'fraternity', and makes of us an Order. Let us open us to the Holy Spirit so that He can fill us and make of us a true fraternity! Let Him fill our assembly, too, when we celebrate our General Chapter!

I wish to conclude this letter with a personal thing. Believe me, I feel very much, how much I need the Holy Spirit to fill me with his wisdom and with the love of God, so that I may fulfill my duties. I need the Holy Spirit to guide me and to fill me with his life-giving power and with his strength. I need the Holy Spirit, the real General Minister, to reinforce me in the difficult

moments and to keep me cautious when I forget to take care and be prudent.

Finally, and at all, I need your prayer, my sisters and brothers. I ask you to pray for me, and I also ask you to pray for the entire Secular Franciscan Order, so that the Holy Spirit may renew our life, our service.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Fill us, day by day, with your comfort and your grace!

Your minister and your brother

Tibor Kauser

CIOFS Minister General

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### TAU- USA Cover Illustration



*"As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world"* John 17,18

The LOGO has been given to the OFS by sister **Santocono Rosaria**, Franciscan from Catania.

#### **A brief description of the project:**

By the descent of the Holy Spirit, Jesus accomplishes what was anticipated in the high "priestly" prayer of John 17. In this way, the great promise of the Decalogue is realized, according to God's will to create a "people of priests."

The Holy Spirit is the strength that is involved in this great project, started with Jesus but destined to overwhelm the whole world.

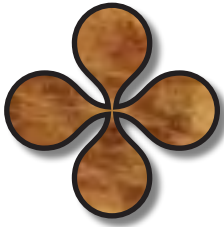
As the Father is in Jesus, so he is in the Father, they are one thing even in them, so that the world believes that the Father has sent Jesus, who let them know his name, so that the love with which he has loved him is in them too, and Jesus in them.

<sup>15</sup> pp. John Paul II. to the International Council of the OFS, 1982. Sept. 27th

<sup>16</sup> 1Cel XI 26

<sup>17</sup> cf. Mt. 8.25

<sup>18</sup> cf. Mt. 14.29



## **CIOFS Submits Report on Management of the Order (MOTO) Initiative *YOUR Input Is Important***



By Mary Stronach, International Councilor

The *Instrumentum Laboris*, a report from CIOFS on the “Management of the Order,” which General Minister Tibor Kauser, OFS, referred to in his Pentecost Letter, is ready for your review.

After three years of surveys, meetings and reporting by 45 National Fraternities around the globe, our International Fraternity’s Management of the Order (MOTO) Committee has submitted a report summarizing proposals and recommendations in eight priority areas: formation, fraternal life, building a fraternal and evangelical world, leadership, communications, finance, spiritual assistance, and Franciscan youth.

Tibor asks all members of the Order to read this report carefully and to consider the proposals. How do they impact the Order at *all* levels? Which proposals should we prioritize? What can we do at each level to address these priorities? What can our regional and local fraternities do to support the Order in ensuring proper implementation of the priority recommendations?

The *Instrumentum Laboris* will be a working document for the General Chapter in November 2017. The next step is for the National MOTO Committee, the National Executive Council, the regional fraternities and all local fraternities to review the proposals in the *Instrumentum Laboris*, in preparation for our own NAFRA Chapter in September 2017. When you read the the report, you'll note that many proposals are listed there, many more than can be reasonably accomplished. Prioritizing and deciding which proposals to recommend to CIOFS will be an important subject on our agenda at Chapter.

As International Councilor, I am charged with reporting our recommendations to the General Chapter in November. All the International Councilors from around the world will then review the proposals and make final recommendations to the Presidency. These recommendations will be given a timeline and will go back to our national fraternities to share and implement.

As our General Minister said in his letter, “Management has to be a common management at all levels... [With your help and input] the General Chapter will be able to enrich the common experience.... We will meet to strengthen our identity, to celebrate the diversity and to build the unity in the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order”... and to animate and guide the Order at all levels.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* has been uploaded on the NAFRA website.\* *Please download it and bring it to your fraternities to discuss and evaluate.* Your suggestions and recommendations are important to us so we can accurately reflect the thoughts of our OFS-USA National Fraternity to the international level. The National MOTO Report we submitted to CIOFS is also on the website for your convenience.

*Please send your thoughts, recommendations and general input to our National MOTO Committee, care of Mary Stronach, at [stonach@kateriregion.org](mailto:stonach@kateriregion.org).*

In a related matter, your National MOTO Committee has reviewed the second set of surveys that were sent to our English, Korean and Spanish brothers and sisters. Those who responded to the second survey (432 members) shared the same concerns and priorities as the initial group (2,009 members), as given in the National Report to CIOFS.

*\*Our website address is [www.nafra-sfo.org](http://www.nafra-sfo.org). The **Instrumentum Laboris** and related documents can be found by clicking on the banner at the top of the page.*

# Sharing The Vision

## News from the National Executive Council (NEC) to the National Fraternity (NAFRA)

Just one year ago, more than 600 Secular Franciscans experienced an amazing revival in the Spirit at our 2016 Quinquennial Congress (Q). The next thing we knew, we were given a new theme, “*O Breath of God, unite us in action! Bo ruach Elohim!*” What happened next? The Lord answered. God’s Breath blew like a Pentecost wind across our National Fraternity, igniting little flames everywhere, and uniting us in action.

This is truly the vision your national servant leaders see as we look back on these past 12 months. We see and experience the fire of the Holy Spirit in our visits with you, and in our visits to the many Regions and local fraternities. We should not be surprised that the Breath of God is stirring us internationally as well! The members of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS), some of whom you met at the Q and some of whom were pictured at work in the last issue of *TAU-USA*, are also on fire with new ideas and new directions. Our worldwide Order is *united in action!*

You can see much of this for yourselves in the pages of this *TAU-USA*. There are reports from every level of fraternity. Yet we know this is only the tip of the iceberg. Unseen, unheralded works of Love and Perfect Joy abound. This too,

is the Breath of God stirring in the lives of our brothers and sisters.

Thanks to each of you for being such beautiful instruments for the Breath of God – what music we hear! Thank you for sharing your reports of God’s music-making in the pages of this newsletter, but even more importantly for letting God’s song be written on the pages of your lives.



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*Note:* If you missed seeing all that happened this past year, just look back over the last three issues of the *TAU-USA*, easily downloaded from our website: [www.nafra-sfo.org](http://www.nafra-sfo.org)



## ✱ ANNOUNCEMENTS ✱

*We joyfully announce the following, and thank our new servant leaders!*

### **New 2021 Quinquennial Chair**

Susan Simeone, OFS, of the St. Thomas More Region will chair the 2021 Quinquennial Congress. Susan co-chaired our very successful 2016 “Q” in St. Louis, Mo., and we welcome her back! She will now lead us in the first steps of forming a committee, finding a venue and setting the date.

### **New Website Development**

Lee Potts, OFS, of the St. Katharine Drexel Region will take the lead in developing our new NAFRA website. Lee will work with Vickie Klick and the Computer Committee in a transition to a new look, a new web address, and a debut of a new national OFS-USA logo.

### **New National Multicultural Councilor**

One of the recommendations from our CIOFS Visitors was regarding the appointment of a Councilor *“to lead ways to follow up everything regarding the ‘multicultural’ fraternities, where other languages besides English are being used. It is not only a matter of translating documents, but it should aim to promote among these fraternities, the sense of belonging to the one and only OFS in the USA.”* In response the NEC has appointed Willie Guadalupe, OFS, to the position of Multicultural Councilor. Willie is eager to work with our Regions to insure unity in our diversity.

### **New National Guidelines Task Force**

Over the years our National Councils have written guidelines to address a variety of issues and circumstances, as well as guidelines for elected officers and events. Many of these guidelines are unknown to our membership until a question arises or a problem develops. The NEC has appointed Kathleen White, OFS, to lead a task force on National Guidelines. The goal is to collect the guidelines that have been approved, bring others forward for approval and post all of these on our website for easy access.

### **New National Historian**

Dianne Ambrose, OFS, of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region is our new Historian. This spring Dianne joined National Archivist Sharon Deveaux for a work session at our National Archives at St. Bonaventure University in New York. Dianne will continue the work of Bill Wicks as she begins Volume 4 of our OFS-USA history. If you missed Volumes I-III, don't miss the History Book Sale going on now! See related article in this TAU-USA.

### **Appeal from Nigeria – Outreach Coordinator Needed**

We have received a request for assistance from Br. Bonaventure Nwokike, OFM Cap, Guardian of Padre Pio Clinic in Nigeria. We are praying for someone to come forward to be a coordinator of this outreach.

If you can assist, please email Mary Stronach at [stronach@kateriregion.org](mailto:stronach@kateriregion.org) or Jan Parker at [jansfo@yahoo.com](mailto:jansfo@yahoo.com)

### **2017 NEC / NAFRA CALENDAR**

- T** Thursday, July 27 – Sun. July 30 - JPIC Retreat & National Gathering on Youth in St. Louis
- T** Thursday, Aug. 17- Sun. Aug. 20 - Regional Formation Directors Gathering in St. Louis
- T** Saturday, Sept 23 - Mon. Sept. 25 - NEC meeting at Mount St. Francis, Indiana
- T** Tuesday, Sept. 26 – Sun. Oct. 1 – National Fraternity Council Chapter at Mount St. Francis, Indiana

# Oh Breath of God, Unite Us in Action



## The Holy Spirit unites us in action!

Fraternities from around the country share stories of how the Holy Spirit is uniting them in action to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, console the sorrowful, help the poor, reach out to the lonely, or care for the earth.

## Serving With Joy



Members of the St. John the Beloved Apostle Fraternity serving with joy at the Diocese of Arlington's Christ House Food Pantry, Alexandria, VA.

## JPIC Groups - Outreach Programs



by Pat Serotkin, OFS

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Frankfort

Our 44 active fraternity members are in seven JPIC groups and currently actively involved in the following outreach projects:

- Donations and prayers for Dr. Tom Catena's medical efforts in Sudan
- Through Catholic Charities, providing gift cards for refugees to the U.S.
- Supportive letters to the incarcerated
- Diaper collection and monetary donations for Waterleaf
- Donations to Ronald McDonald House
- Correspondence with detained immigrants at Kenosha County Detention Center
- Personal hygiene contributions to Robbins, Illinois
- Prayer blankets to comfort those in need
- Cards sent to the incarcerated Franciscan Associates
- Collectively meeting for an adoration hour in support of specific ministerial needs
- Collection and proper disposal of prescription and non-prescription drugs
- Selection and packaging of items for distribution to the homeless

As a whole fraternity, we sponsor Christian Help in Kermit, WV, Franciscan Outreach, Port Ministries, Mercy

Home; through Unbound, we are sponsoring an adult woman.



## Franciscan Bags of Love



by Kathy Ramsey, OFS

Our Lady Poverty Fraternity, in the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region, prepares Franciscan Bags of Love which contain food, hygiene items, and eating utensils for those who reveal St. Francis to us in the homeless and the poor. Included also is a postcard with a picture of St. Francis and on the back it has a listing of community resources.

Each person takes a bag to carry with them in their car and to provide to Jesus as he is revealed to us in the poor. Each bag is given with love – respecting the dignity of the person by introducing themselves, asking their name, touching their hands, and small conversation. The fraternity has also bought and distributed \$5 gift cards for low budget eateries giving the individual the dignity of selecting their own food.



## OH BREATH OF GOD, COME FILL THIS PLACE

by Patrick J. Chalmers,, OFS

Timber Ridge Rehabilitation and Nursing Center of Ocala, Florida values relationships.

They host our Queen of Peace OFS Fraternity Eucharistic Service on a bi-monthly schedule. Queen of Peace Parish Pastor, Father Patrick Joseph Francis O'Doherty, provides authorized Eucharistic Ministers for delivering Holy Communion to residents. Our Fraternity delivers prayer, hymns (songs) with piano accompaniment, and Sunday Mass Readings (per USCCB schedule for the week of the service).

Usually, our Service brings approximately 30 residents into unity with us, our parish, and thus the Universal Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. And, with the Staff of Timber Ridge Rehabilitation and Nursing Center who tell us that this Communion means so much to the residents ... true joy and tears of gratitude often show on resident faces.

The real presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ unites us overwhelmingly in the Holy Spirit filling us with the Fire of His Love in Unity with the Holy Trinity and our Holy Church.



## Butterfly Garden

by Jean B. Waters OFS

As a volunteer, I plan, plant, and maintain a native plant butterfly garden in a public park. I belong to St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity in Tampa, Florida. The garden is located at Hillsborough River State Park near Tampa. It contains over 25 varieties of plants native to the area. Most of there are butterfly hosts and nectar plants, especially for the Gulf Fritillary and Monarch caterpillars and butterflies. However, it is also great to see hummingbirds when they also are attracted to the flowers.



## Socks and Suds

by Diane Creedon, OFS

Our Lady of Angels Fraternity, Burlingame, CA, would like to share with you photos of our annual collection of socks and suds for the homeless that we deliver to the Homeless Help Center of SVDP Society in South San Francisco. The Fraternity gathers for a Christmas Party with their families and the Capuchin Franciscan Friars and work together filling the socks with soap and shampoo. The parish has taken the idea on as well, and work to bring the prepared socks to where the homeless can take showers.



## Franciscan Bags

Franciscans Joe and Joan Harclerode from St Clare Fraternity in Punxsutawney PA have been doing this rewarding and loving ministry since 2011. They provide a meal of soup and bread to those recuperating from surgery or illness.

## Blessing Bags



by Janice and Mike Novello, OFS

Our members purchase toothbrushes, toothpaste, washcloths, soap and insert them in a quart size plastic bag. Enclosed is a holy picture and a message that states "Thank you for your service – The Portiuncula Fraternity of the Secular Franciscans." Before sealing each one, we pray for the person who will open it and use the contents. We call these "Blessing Bags." We bring them to the Veterans Voluntary Service office at Bay Pines VA Hospital in St. Petersburg where the staff distributes the bags to homeless veterans.



## Visiting the sick and bringing them Holy Communion

by France Staudenmann, OFS

St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity, Shrine of St. Anthony, Ellicott City, Maryland

I have been serving as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion at the Adventist Rehabilitation Hospital in Rockville for the past eight years. My model is Mary at the Visitation, carrying Jesus to her cousin Elizabeth, her heart overflowing with joy and gratitude, then caring for her elderly cousin while remaining in constant adoration of her Son.

The patients I visit have undergone life-changing events such as head traumas, heart or back surgeries, strokes or amputations.

I visit up to 15 patients twice a week: on Sunday and Thursday

On the way from our church to the hospital, I ask Jesus to fill my heart with his love and compassion, and to let me smile, as he would, when I enter each room. I also ask the Holy Spirit to put his words in my mouth, especially when I enter the room of a new patient. Most patients welcome me.

On occasions, patients refuse my visit. I say a prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, slowly, all the while imploring God to soften their heart. I end the prayer by saying the words, "O Lord, touch gently this life which you have created

## Safe Haven Box



Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity members are working on a very special project – raising money for a *Safe Haven Box* in the Akron area. Under Ohio law, an unwanted infant, or one whose parents are unable to care for the child, can be left anonymously. There are restrictions but this is a good start to save these children. These boxes are built into doors or walls of buildings, such as police and stations, hospital, et cetera. The cost can be up to \$2700.00, but the fraternity members want to work to obtain the funds for a Box. The editor has not learned of any other fraternity in the Region working on a project like this.

## Prison Ministry

by Mike Coleman, OFS

I am a Member of Sacred Heart Fraternity, in Virginia Beach, Virginia and a member of St. Mark's Prison Ministry, a program that visits the Deerfield Correctional Center in Capron, Virginia. We visit, we pray, and conduct a communion service, and we just hang out. If Father is with us, he will celebrate mass and hear confessions, The men all want to talk. I think they expect us to judge them and when we don't they are relieved.

Over time, I've come to see these men as just those guys, humans, not inmates. Men I've come to know, to enjoy spending time with, to enjoy praying and celebrating mass. Last year I had the pleasure of being at Deerfield for both a Baptism and a Confirmation. To see the other inmates celebrate this was awesome.

The most significant outcome of volunteering is the relationships formed with the inmates. Although I didn't expect it, it did happen, I've come to care for them and to more clearly see them as brothers.



## Red Door Ministry

by Patricia Serotkin, OFS

Lady Poverty Region has several outreach apostolates sponsored by various fraternities. A list of them is available at: <http://www.ladypovertyregion.org/ministries>

The one that I will highlight is The Red Door Ministry. Several of our Pittsburgh-area fraternities participate in this apostolate. The program is based at Saint Mary of Mercy Church, located in downtown Pittsburgh. The project began during the Great Depression. The program provides a bag lunch, Monday through Saturday, to more than 100 people daily. Our fraternities have the privilege of making and distributing lunches at The Red Door on the 1st and 4th Saturday of each month. For additional information about this program see: <http://www.ladypovertyregion.org/the-red-door>

The patron saint of the homeless is St. Benedict Joseph Labre – a third order Franciscan.



## Immigration Action

by Donna Hollis, OFS, Our of Guadalupe Region



The photograph is of an immigrant family in the retreat center dining room. A volunteer is holding an infant that was born just two weeks before arriving at the center.

Earlier this year, large numbers of immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia crossed the border near El Paso, Texas. In Las Cruces, local families and the Holy Cross Franciscan Retreat Center helped the immigrants by feeding them, providing clean clothes, medical assistance, and warm beds. The goal was to ultimately unite them with family or friends throughout the United States.

Secular Franciscans in the Las Cruces and El Paso Fraternities helped support the immigrants by working at the Holy Cross Retreat Center. The immigrant families who did not know each other before their journey, began to bond with one another. They shared stories of being threatened and mistreated, of leaving all behind, and hope of finding a better life for their children and themselves.

The Secular Franciscans in both Las Cruces and El Paso will continue to be part of this effort to support and aid the immigrants. It is our ministry to give sanctuary to those in need.

## Dorothy Day Place

St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity, Rockville, Md.  
by Genie Dutton, OFS



Dorothy Day Place is a shelter for men and women administered by Catholic Charities in Washington, D.C.

Once a month, ten members our fraternity provide a meal for twenty female residents. We feed the hungry and homeless, a gratifying work of mercy that is most welcome by the recipients.

Other fraternity projects include: monetary donations to Amazon Relief to help relieve poverty and disease deep in the Amazon jungle, the Franciscan Missionary Union, and Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration.

Members also participate in the Gabriel Project for pregnancy assistance for the families and babies through volunteer Angel Friends who befriend and interact with the families on a personal basis, arranging for Baptism for Catholics and providing necessary items for babies. Some parishes have baby showers for Gabriel Project.



### Some personal reflections

In the last few months (*April, May, June*) I experienced surgery. It has happened before. This time it was a total reverse left-shoulder joint replacement followed by several weeks of re-hab - with more to come! I had no access to a computer for at least two months. To my chagrin, I realized that I caused no little frustration to many people. They were waiting for answers about questions or requests for the appointment of fraternity spiritual assistants.

Which led me to reflection about dealing with requests and offering a response. Helping Franciscan folks, when I can, goes with the territory.

I recognized that the *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the SFO (OFS)* will not wear out from over-use. It contains lots of good information in its 67 pages. Among those pages are the process for establishing a new fraternity (Pages 37-41) or appointing spiritual assistants (Pages 6-9 - i.e...*what to do and who does it.*).

At times the *OFS Constitutions and Statutes'* in the book: *Essential Documents of the OFS*, experience a similar fate. With each new fraternity election difficulties seem to arise. Outgoing (or re-elected) fraternity councilors can give knowledgeable assistance by sharing ideas and using appropriate books with newly elected members. (*Cfr. The inside back cover of TAU-USA contains texts to order and their costs. Councils and spiritual assistants need such texts*)

Using the *Pastoral Handbook* can help to deal organizational issues! I trust Franciscans to choose resources that help things run smoothly. Secular Franciscans collaborate and find ways to follow the OFS Rule and Constitutions.. They learn to develop ways that help councilors conduct fraternity meetings and business and enhance personal and fraternity growth.

As fraternity business runs smoothly we can invest more time and energy on well-tuned and helpful formation sessions. **Prayerfulness**, plus energizing fraternity members to **action**, can blossom at regular gatherings. Growth is a possible result

### What about FORMATION?

Formation is a lifetime pursuit for all of us. What we learned and practiced, last year or last week or yesterday, will need refinement today. There are ***special programs for initial formation, formation for the newly professed, and ongoing formation for all professed members.***

As far as I know, from my experience and that of others, no one is automatically excused from ongoing formation after profession!

Intellectual learning and practical implementation of that learning is always needed and essential. Neither learning nor practice are enough by themselves. They need to be practiced together throughout our Franciscan lives. Anyone, at any point, who thinks "*I know everything I need*" is already in trouble.

How we **learn and act** when we are 25 years old changes a lot by the time we reach the ages of 30, 40 or 50 etc. Our country faces new challenges; our church changes with new leadership; we face unexpected events in our families; natural aging gives a different look to life; violence moves us to struggle with solutions that are life-changing and supportive for victims of violence. *Conversion* is normal for us.

Personal attempts to avoid ongoing formation is not wise. New times and experiences recognize a need for *conversion* as a part of daily life (*Cfr. OFS Rule #7*) Without it Franciscan life can become stagnant.

If we become passive about ongoing formation, we may fail our permanent profession. *Conversion* stories have a personal flavor, but it is a common experience for all of us. Even a simple tool like sharing stories with others at gatherings can be helpful and challenging. The personal stories may look different for each of us. But sharing them can strengthen us in our *conversions*. At all times we listen with respect and warm concern. Stories that are shared remain within our Franciscan family unless the person says otherwise.

### More ...

The initial pages of *For Up To Now (FUN Manual)* cover ways and means that formators need to address the formation people they guide. It is a good tool for the Seculars who are part of the formation teams. The manual offers a plethora of helpful material for working with people in various stages of formation.

When intellectual insights are not joined to practical implementation in daily life, OFS formation is a farce. Formation never ends but changes as we live our lives as Franciscans.

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Here are some qualities (*A limited list*) that continue to develop as the OFS Rule is lived:

Peace - love - forgiveness - understanding - dialogue - being good listeners - involved in ministries of love - design ways to help the needy - being faithful to prayer and contemplation - continuing formation at all levels - enriched prayer life - dealing with various political opinions which may need change to be in accord with the Gospel - recognizing personal limitations while we realize that the Trinity can move us beyond them - avoid arrogance - collaborate with other dedicated groups - social ministries - quiet time - willingness to share experiences in living the OFS Rule. Etc.

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Quotes from **FOR UP TO NOW**  
Chapter: "*Fraternity and Francis*" - Page 17

*Life in fraternity, as the ideal and normative situation for gospel living has the following components:*

- + *A particular structure (OFS Rule 20-22)*
  - *a real fraternity (not a club or sodality) existing on various levels*
  - *animated and guided by the leadership of a council.*
  - *fulfilling a particular ecclesial, apostolic and Franciscan function*
- + *A necessary vitality (OFS Rule 23)*
  - *brought alive by adequate formation*
  - *deepened through the permanent commitment of its members*
  - *matured through dialogue and harmonious problem-solving.*
- + *Sustaining forces that nourish fraternal life (OFS Rule 24-26)*
  - *regular and frequent gatherings of the Fraternity and its council*
  - *on-going support of its members*
  - *adequate spiritual assistance*
  - *pastoral and fraternal visits*

Formation at all levels finds expression in a change of attitudes, opinions, love for others etc. If people in formation look the same after several months, something is missing in their formation. Understanding is good but it is only a half-way point without personal conversion in practice!

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### Words of Pope John XXIII

*There is an immense task incumbent on all people of good will, namely, the task of restoring the relations of the human family in truth, in justice, in love and in freedom - the relations between individual human beings, between citizens and their respective political communities, between individuals, families, intermediate associations and political communities on the one hand, and the world community on the other. This is a most exalted task, all will agree, for it is the task of bringing about true peace in the order established by God.*

*Pacem in Terris* - Pope John XXIII (OFS)  
- Paragraph #163 - April 11, 1963



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# FORMATION COMMISSION

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## SACRED SILENCE/LOVE IN ACTION

by Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS

It is summer. The days are longer and warmer, and Brother Sun beckons. Along with everyday busyness, my calendar shows weekends filled with extra outings: a charity run, a parish social, a visit from family who live out of state, a retreat, a fraternity picnic or two, a national workshop. It is exhilarating to anticipate and exhausting to imagine.

Did I say retreat? In the middle of the gatherings, there is time dedicated to stepping back from the craziness to a place of peace and prayer, rest and refreshment, sacred silence, solitude. Solitude allows us to understand just who we are. It is an aid to conversion, transformation, and finding our true self. Solitude for Franciscans is not fleeing the world or being alone, it is being with God. Everyone needs to develop a rhythm between solitude and engagement. *It is all but essential for us to set aside a time and place to be in solitude so we can be receptive to God's presence through Scripture, prayer, and silence. This requires perseverance, especially for those who are not naturally inclined to solitude.*



Francis was a person of solitude. *When he was exhausted from his preaching, he would look for the secrets of solitude and a place of quiet.* (Campion Murray OFM, *An Introduction to Franciscan Spirituality*). *Francis "sought out a place of rest and secret solitude. He desired to free himself for God and shake off any dust that clung to him from the time spent with the crowds. It was his custom to divide the time given him to merit grace and, as seemed best, to spend some of it to benefit his neighbors and use the rest in the blessed solitude of contemplation.* The Life of Saint Francis (FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 261).

When we go away to pray, we develop a personal relationship with God. We are accepting an intimate invitation. Scripture tells us that after a long day of carrying out their mission, Jesus called the apostles to retreat. "And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves" (Mk 6:31-32). The crowds followed them. Jesus had "compassion on them" and "taught them many things" (Mk 35-44). The culmination of this passage? Come to the table of plenty!

When we return to our daily routine after a time of prayer and solitude, we cannot help being changed by the experience. We become prayer by bringing the presence of God with us. God increases in our lives, while the "I" decreases. Time shared in sacred silence readies us to serve all our brothers and sisters with love and compassion. This is ultimate hospitality, love in action. With this understanding, I can look at my packed calendar with excitement, gratitude, and joy!

### Some questions for reflection:



How would I describe solitude? Am I comfortable with silence and solitude? Do I feel a need to make space in my life for silence and solitude? Where do I encounter God? Retreat, refresh and return to your friends, family, and fraternity. Share your experience.

Peace and Every Good  
The National Formation Commission

*When you pray gather up your whole self and with your beloved enter into the chamber of your heart.  
Remain alone with him there. . . .St. Bonaventure*





# JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



## HANDLING CONFLICT THAT LEADS TO PEACE

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National JPIC Animator

*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. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.*

OFS Rule, Article 19

Imagine a fraternity or region where there are no conflicts. Everything is hunky dory, and everyone gets along splendidly. There are no disagreements and no differing opinions. Every gathering is filled with sunshine and roses, with the exact same beautiful Tau cross around everyone's neck. Everyone prays the Divine Office in complete sync, no one is faster or louder than another. Everyone is on the same page, using the exact same breviary; with all the ribbons in the right place. The opening hymn is sung magnificently – all the verses sung on key in perfect pitch. Who needs musical accompaniment when you all sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir? Your formation is stellar and everyone has amazing conversion experiences. All the members of the council are on the same page when it comes to formation, fair share and the annual chapter. Yes, can you just picture it? It is all so...

...Boooring! And completely unheard of. If you've heard of it, please let me know!

This little imaginary fraternity or region had me chuckling too. I mean, really! One of the things I love about Holy Mother Church and our Franciscan Order is the diversity — of people, opinions, experiences, personalities, conversion stories and the way we can sing off key and not have our ribbons on the proper page in our breviaries; not knowing where to flip to when there is a feast. Not to mention the folks on the mobile devices who don't know where to scroll when the breviared-people begin with the Antiphon. But that is what makes us Franciscan. That is what gives us our wonderfully unique flair. We are never meant to be like each other except in our beliefs on the tenets of the Church and the Order. We each have our own gift, talent, style and ability. Because of our individuality, conflicts will arise. There will be differences in style of leadership and behavior. We are not cookie-cutter Franciscans. We are all wonderfully and uniquely made by our loving and merciful God, who does have a great sense of humor, I might add.

Conflicts are going to happen, and that is a good thing. If there are ten people in the room with the

same opinion, then nine of those people are unnecessary. Conflicts are inevitable. Destructive conflicts are not. Yes, there are constructive conflicts and destructive conflicts. What is your conflict management style? Is it constructive or destructive? When a conflict arises, do you look for the nearest exit or do you batten down the hatches and go on the attack? Do you tend to avoid conflicts at all costs or do you welcome them, knowing they can lead to new and exciting possibilities?

I invite you to think about your conflict management style. Ask yourself if you practice constructive or destructive conflict management. Our approach to handling conflict is usually not who we are; it is what we have been taught. That means we can learn a better approach to dealing with conflict. We can learn to handle conflict constructively. What happens in a conflict depends on what the people involved decide to do. More often than not, what we decide to do borders on violence – harsh words, hurt feelings, retaliatory behavior. Pope Francis said it best in his 2017 World Day of Peace Message: *“The family is the indispensable crucible in which spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness. From within families, the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society. An ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue.”*

Did you catch that last line? Allow me to paraphrase: **True fraternity is based on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue.** Yes, there will be differences; and some of those differences may even lead to conflicts. But we are called to dialogue with respect, not walk off in a huff grumbling under our breath. When a conflict arises, take a few moments and invite the Holy Spirit into the dialogue, that you may truly listen to one another with respect and an open heart and mind.



## Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity

### WITH ATTENTIVE EYE, OPEN MIND AND HEART

by Mike Carsten, OFS

Recently in my day job, I had the honor of escorting one of our neighbors in downtown Detroit to his final resting place at the National Cemetery in Holly, Michigan. Carl was a veteran of the Korean war and lived in Section 8 housing in the inner city of Detroit. He was someone I was able to serve in life and honor in death. Carl was given a full military funeral with a flag-draped casket. The two-gun salute, sounding out in the silence, demanded an acute awareness of lives lived and lost.

The National Cemetery in Holly is a beautiful place. My own father is buried there. In going to the cemetery, whether to visit my dad or escorting one of our seniors, I am reminded of pilgrimage. Immediately upon entering, I find myself slowly moving in silence along a roadway that is lined with American flags, surrounded by perfectly placed white headstones shimmering and gleaming in the sunlight. Row after row after row.

After Carl's memorial service, I went to visit my dad. While standing in silence among all the headstones, I noticed (maybe for the first time) that there were many different religious symbols marking the top of each stone, most of which I did not recognize. I looked out across the vast white rolling field of thousands upon thousands of headstones and marveled at the amazing diversity of beliefs that were represented. In that moment, there was no need to debate the worthiness of individual belief systems. No need to defend my own beliefs. Just the silent witness of shared experience, unity in diversity and love of country. I was standing in the most ecumenical-interfaith place I have ever experienced. It is a Sacred Place.

I quote the following as found in the *Pilgrim's Companion to Franciscan Places* (printed by Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs):

*James Postell, teacher and architect, provides a rich explanation of sacred place:*

*Sacred has to do with both an inner and outer presence – a spiritual power, an intersection of Heaven and Earth.... Place implies human significance, human action derived from history, belief, ritual, and everyday... activity. According to Postell, sacred places are perceived as sacred and serve to mark important geographic, cultural, political, and religious transitions involving spiritual power. As such, their presence requires an attentive eye and open mind and heart.*

My pilgrimage to the National Cemetery allowed me a moment of insight. I was able to see and experience our “unity in diversity” as a nation in the signs and symbols we employ at death. I pray that with your help we together can work with attentive eyes, open minds and hearts to educate and raise our awareness as Franciscan sisters and brothers of the ecumenical and interfaith efforts taking place in our communities, in our parishes, in the Church, and in the Franciscan movement. We then may accept all people as a gift of the Lord.



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

## EMBLEMS FOR HEADSTONES AND MARKERS



Emblem (98) MUSLIM (Islamic 5-Pointed Star) is not shown due to copyright.

### ECUMENICAL INTERFAITH WEBSITE

Click on the links for the summer newsletter.

Email: [www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org](http://www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org)

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# FRANCISCAN LIVING

## HUMILITY

By Francine Gikow, OFS

As I was praying about the shooting of the politicians at the baseball field, I considered why there is such animosity, incivility, and malicious hatred in politics in our country. I believe the answer lies in humility – or the lack thereof. Why? Because when we listen with an “agenda,” ready to pounce on the other to assert the righteousness of our beliefs, then we are filled with our own pride. As Father Lester Bach, OFM, states: “If I presume I am infallible, I do not need dialogue – I act with arrogance.”<sup>1</sup> That is pride.

Pope St. Gregory the Great expands on this idea when he says: “They regard [whom they are teaching] as inferiors, to whom they do not deign to listen as they talk; indeed they scarcely deign to talk to them at all – they simply lay down the law.” He goes on to say, “Yet the reason for all disturbance, if we look to its roots, is that no one finds fault with himself.”<sup>2</sup> This is pride, and not humility, which attributes everything as gifts from God. Francis believed that the only “things” we actually own are our sins; everything else is gift.

St. Francis outlines how we are to relate to one another in his *Early Rule*: “Let them revile no one. Let them not grumble or detract from others, for it is written: “Gossips and detractors are detestable to God (cf. Romans 1:29), Let them be modest by showing graciousness toward everyone. Let them not judge or condemn.”<sup>3</sup> Sound familiar?

With roots in pride, gossip can also be deadly and malicious in its intent. It was only recently that I was confronted with the serious realization of the sins of detraction and calumny in my own life. Although both are considered sins against truth, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

*“He becomes guilty...of detraction who, without objectively valid reason discloses another’s faults and failings to persons who did not know them, [and]...of calumny who, by remarks contrary to the truth, harms the reputation of others and gives occasion for false judgments concerning them.”<sup>4</sup>*

I was convicted! I had not considered the harm I was doing by gossiping about a politician and tearing apart his or her reputation – whether it was true or not. I realized that by using gossip with calumny and detraction, I was sinning because of pride. I put down

other people to make myself feel important, for I knew “what was right!” I judged and declared them guilty... although now I realize that *I* was the guilty one.

Gossip, detraction and calumny are sins against truth and humility. In his *Salutation of the Virtues*, Francis extols humility by saying, “Holy Humility confounds pride.”<sup>5</sup> Let’s take a closer look at this statement. Humility “confounds” pride. Hmm. To “confound” means to cause confusion in someone or something that goes against their expectations. Humility actively works against pride by its element of surprise; humility exhibited by someone is not something that we have come to expect. It is counter-cultural. It surprises. It makes people question. It offers a different way of acting and being. It is God’s way of teaching.

Pope Gregory understood this when he went on to say, “For true doctrine tries both to teach by words and to demonstrate by living example – humility, which is the mother and mistress of virtues. Its goal is to express humility among the disciples of truth more by deeds than by words.”<sup>6</sup> Again, sound familiar? Francis taught more by his deeds rather than by his words. He confounded people! His radical lifestyle attracted others and convicted them. He attracted others to the credibility of his message by his actions.

There is a story where Francis once said to his companion, “Suppose,.. I go to the chapter, preach and admonish the brothers, and, at the end, they speak against me.... So, in the end, I am thrown out in disgrace, looked down upon by everyone. I tell you, unless I hear these words with the same expression on my face, with the same joy, and with the same resolution for holiness, I am in no sense a Lesser Brother!”<sup>7</sup>

That’s a tall order, but it is our challenge. To be “lesser” is what we professed. In the words of Francis:

“We must never desire to be above others, but, instead, we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God’s sake.”<sup>8</sup> Humility confounds. It can convert. In any event, it is the path of Christ in our world today.

*“Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him!”<sup>9</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Lester Bach, OFM *The Franciscan Journey*. Lindsborg KS: Smoky Valley Printing. 2010. p.150.

<sup>2</sup> St Gregory the Great, “The Moral Reflections on Job” as quoted in *The Liturgy of the Hours, III, (LofH)* New York,

<sup>3</sup> Armstrong, Hellman and Short. Francis of Assisi: Early Documents: The Saint I. (FA:ED) Hyde Park, NY: New City Press. 1999. p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> CCC, 2477.

<sup>5</sup> SalV (FA:ED I.) p.165.

<sup>6</sup> LofH, 304.

<sup>7</sup> LMj (FA:ED II.) p.572.

<sup>8</sup> 2LrF (FA:ED I.) P.48.

<sup>9</sup> LtOrd in FA:ED I, p.118.

2017 SUMMER SEMINAR

# 'Who's my neighbor?'



*The Secular Franciscan Summer Seminar took place in the Disepio Institute at St. Francis University, Loretto, PA.*

**By BOB STRONACH, OFS**

Small containers of colored sand helped set the tone for the 8th Summer Seminar for Secular Franciscans, held July 6-9 at St. Francis University in Loretto, PA. The topic: "Multiculturalism and Diversity: Who Is My Neighbor?"

"This sand represents you," noted Mary Stronach, OFS, co-presenter with Carolyn Townes, OFS. "Pray on it. Breathe your essence into it."

Then she had each participant pour his/her sand into a glass vase, creating layers of color.

The vase of sand, with the colors seeping and mixing, now represents "all of us here," Mary said. "We're part of one



another." And at the conclusion of the seminar, "I challenge you to take your sand back. It won't be just you anymore. You'll take some of us with you."

As National Spiritual Assistant Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, was about to pour his container of sand, he quipped: "You've made this a sacramental. Wonderful!"

The blending of the sand helps visualize the heart of what multiculturalism and diversity is all about; that is, allowing and accepting, even celebrating, differences.

*continued on next page*

***Friar Christopher pours his container of sand into the mix.***



**Co-presenter Carolyn Townes, OFS.**

*continued from previous page*

A “circle of diversity” session, with participants rotating and pairing off one-on-one, allowed each person to talk about him/herself and his/her experiences without being interrupted.

“I felt a sense of freedom in opening up...,” participant Bill told the group afterwards. “A profound sense of freedom.”

Participant Julie noted that at first she felt frustrated, unable to ask questions that she thought would spur on the conversation, but then realized the value of just listening

longer. It kept her from trying to control the conversation with questions that would “direct the conversation where I wanted to lead it” instead of really listening.

A friar who ended up listening to a couple of people he knew from the local fraternity “learned something new” about them. “There’s a depth I didn’t realize.”

Such listening, presenter Mary noted, leads to empathy and understanding and acceptance. “It’s a good start to talking about diversity.”

Co-presenters Carolyn and Mary explored the topics of multicultural-

ism, assimilation, culture, culture shock, diversity and unconscious bias.

They concluded that in a healthy multicultural society, “you allow and accept differences.”

“Not just accept,” but “celebrate” differences, quipped participant Rosemarie.

Furthermore, added participant Don, “when I accept something, it becomes part of me.”

Presenter Mary noted that cultural competence “is the ability to interact with and accept cultural differences,” and, the reality is that it’s a gradual, on-going process.

Presenter Carolyn put some emphasis on “unconscious bias”, proclaiming that “we all have it.”

“Unconscious bias is reflected in automatic thoughts we have and associations we make...”

“The trick is not to act on those thoughts,” and instead, (pointing to Duns Scotus’ concept of “haecceitas”) be aware of “our this-ness” and “their this-ness,” allowing us to “move into oneness.”

Automatic negative thoughts are natural and human. “We don’t beat ourselves up about it, but we’re aware of it.”

The group reflected on the story of Francis and the Sultan, with a friar



**Mary Stronach gives instructions for the “circle of diversity” session.**

spiritual assistant saying that Francis went out “to be in relationship” with Muslims, “to live among them”. It was another logical step for Francis, just as he had lived among and cared for lepers. It reflected his kinship with all of creation. Francis sets the tone for Franciscans of all stripes today -- “to be with your brothers and sisters in the world.”

In other words, “we’re called to live among them even when they’re different than ourselves.”

It’s about “oneness”, about “being present with others,” Carolyn noted. “... We must break the barriers if we call ourselves children of God.”

The presenters referred to a number of sections of the OFS Rule that point to relationship with others and the world – such as Article 13 that prods Secular Franciscans to accept all people as a gift of God and to place themselves on an equal basis with all people; or Article 14, which calls for building a more fraternal and evangelical world; or Article 15, to be in the forefront of promoting justice; or Article 18, respecting all of creation; or Article 19, to seek unity and harmony through dialogue, and to bring joy and hope to others.

“Mindful awareness” is how Carolyn summed it up, coupled with “purity of heart.”

She encouraged everyone to read an article of the Rule every day. “It’s absolutely glorious!”

Quoting Pope Francis, she said “diversity is a beautiful thing” in that “differences can unify us instead of divide.”

Remember, Carolyn added, “God created us in his image and likeness. All of us.”

As Franciscans, “you don’t want our diverse-ness to divide us.” Even



Co-presenters Mary Stronach, OFS, sporting a Star Trek t-shirt, and Carolyn Townes, OFS.

so, “we have problems. Conflict is inevitable. Destructive conflict is not.”

To that end, “we must agree to disagree agreeably. It’s okay if you don’t agree with me.”

“And that, my brothers and sisters, is very counter-cultural.”

When listening to someone you think you don’t agree with, be open. Ask for more information, such as: “That’s interesting. Tell me more about that.”

The important thing to remember is to have dialogue, not two monologues. “*Speak to one another, not at.*” It’s important to have empathy. “Step into the shoes of your brother or sister. It’s being present.”

She emphasized: “Being mindful means you suspend the judgement and are present, right now, right here.”

Don’t be afraid to share stories. “Our stories allow us to embrace our differences... Stories can break down conflict.”

People open to meeting others who are different can appreciate the beauty of diversity, Mary said; or, as

Mark Twain put it: “Travel is fatal to prejudice and bigotry and narrow-mindedness...”

Mary illustrated the conflict of being different by showing a brief segment of an original Star Trek episode, where two aliens were fighting aboard the Starship USS Enterprise. Both were literally colored half black and half white – except that one was black on the left side and the other, black on the right. That difference was the basis of their hatred for one another, along with how one was viewed as oppressor and the other as second-class citizen.

Star Trek wasn’t afraid to tackle social issues of the day, Mary said, and reflected Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry’s vision of IDIC – infinite diversity in infinite combinations.

The seminar covered reasons why people migrate – such as fleeing war or political conflict, or seeking a better life for their families – and explored the Vatican’s concern for and action on behalf of migrant people. As church leaders in a Vaticano video pointed out, the church is promoting “protection and integration

of migrants... to reduce suffering... and allow them to live happily and productively.”

Group discussion sprinkled the seminar, delving into such issues as the roles of government, church and OFS in immigration, “middle class” and other socio-economic stereotypes, and “who has the power?”

They shared tips and tools for understanding diversity in community and fraternity, and for better com-

munication, for “mindful communication.”

“In this world of diversity we cannot be apathetic,” National Minister Jan Parker, OFS, noted in summing up what to her was at the heart of the conference. “We cannot be lukewarm. There is too much at stake. We must be prophets of unity, bearers of truth and proclaim an unlimited Christ. As our Holy Father Pope Francis says, ‘Go to the peripheries!’”

The presenters asked everyone to develop a simple personal “action plan for a more sensitive fraternity or community.” One personal plan (by Beth Price, OFS, of Our Mother of Sorrows Fraternity, Grand Rapid, MI) drew cheers and applause:

***“As a Secular Franciscan encountering an individual uniquely different from myself, I intend to rejoice in a new encounter with the Divine.”***

## SEMINAR CANDIDS



**Beth Price, OFS:**  
*“...a new encounter with the divine.”*

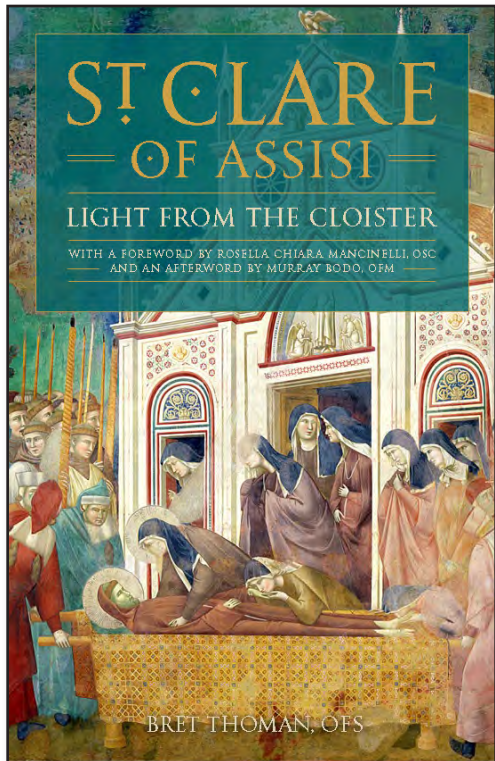
**Pat Serotkin, OFS, and Fr. Joe Lehman, OFM Conv., co-chaired the summer seminar.**





# St. Clare of Assisi: Light From the Cloister

by Bret Thoman, OFS



*“Bret Thoman, OFS’s new book on St. Clare is a lovely, simple and intelligent book on a lovely, simple and intelligent woman.” Tibor Kauser, OFS, Minister General of the Secular Franciscan Order*

*“What the historian cannot do, the writer, the poet, the man of letters can do ... This is what Bret Thoman does ... poetic, literary, even spiritual.” Marco Bartoli, Author of “Clare of Assisi”, Professor of Medieval History, Rome*

*“rich in historical context, wide in the hidden details of her life and deep in the unique spirituality of Clare. Thoman is a gifted Franciscan author who brings Clare to life in a way unprecedented in other Franciscan writings. This book is a treasure and, like his book on Saint Francis, will become a classic in the area of Franciscan studies ... this book is essential.” Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF, Villanova University*

*“Bret Thoman has a great gift for storytelling ... descriptive language that invites the reader into the scenes by his terrific style of narrative ... This book inspires!” Sr. Ramona Miller, OSF*

*“Bret Thoman’s new book on St. Clare is just great. I learned so much about the time and people. I feel he pulled together in a compelling way her life in one book, and captured and summarized St. Clare’s spirituality so well ... Great job!” Sr. Bernadette Marie Cappola, OSC*

*“Excellent! Rich! Beautifully written.” Sr. Kathy Warren, OSF*

## Endorsement

by Fr. Murray Bodo, OFM

St. Clare studies have grown beyond my imagining since 1979 when I wrote my first tentative words about St. Clare. Each book on her that came out delighted me, from textual studies to biography to this lovely new narrative Bret Thoman has given us. It is a story that incorporates discoveries from the deep well of Clarian research. This is a book that is accessible to anyone who loves a good story, an old-fashioned well-made story of a love driven by profound contemplation of the Poor Christ of the Gospel.

But the book does more than tell a story. It is an excellent compendium of sources for the life and spirituality of St. Clare and her sisters at San Damiano. It is a readable book that is filled with new and useful information about St. Clare, her milieu, and more particularly, the life and mores of Medieval Assisi, the Medieval Church, and Medieval society. And all of this is contained within a story that begins, as would an historical novel, with these enticing words:

*Early in the morning at dawn, Ortulana was awoken when the first rays of light penetrated the narrow window of her towering castle in upper Assisi. The noblewoman arose and looked out the window to the east, the orient. The light was just beginning to break through the darkness of the night as the sun arose behind the mountain called Subasio. Her city, then known as Ascisi (“Ascending”), was home to a son who had just risen just ten*

*years earlier. His name was Francis. A daughter was about to rise. And her name would be "light." In time, the great son and daughter of Assisi would dispel the darkness of their city and illuminate lands far, far beyond.*

That lovely opening paragraph not only gives the reader a sense of presence, of "being there," but the whole of the book foretold. The rest of the book will be an opening up of how that story unfolded, and the narrative keeps pace with whatever new information is given the reader. For example, Clare's family being a family of knights, when they return to their castle in Assisi after their exile in Perugia, a neighboring city, Thoman tells us this significant information:

*As their first objective was defense, they re-built their fortified castle next to the cathedral. As knights, the men were well-versed in the art of warfare and military strategy and they knew how to use their weapons. They had to be ready for war, as another attack against them or Assisi could come without warning, so they trained frequently for battle in tournaments and jousts. They also sometimes joined the ranks of other allied cities when called upon to defend their territories, too.*

Besides such concrete material as this, the whole narrative is interwoven with quotes from the first medieval life of Clare, called "The Legend" (meaning "to be read," because it was intended to be read aloud for the edification of the people who for the most part had no books of their own, or who could not read).

The Biblical "Song of Songs" is also quoted throughout, and Clare's own writings and the testimony of her own sisters and others are skillfully incorporated into the story to give the book heft and credibility. In addition, there is a plethora of endnotes that sort through controversies among scholars about certain facts, or that fill the reader in on matters best inserted into endnotes so as not to interrupt the flow of the narrative.

As the opening paragraph of the book implies, the story of Francis is very much a part of the story of Clare, and Thoman makes Francis's entrance into the story a natural development of where Clare's God-story is leading her. For example, when Clare heard Francis preach:

*Clare was spellbound. She stood there in the cathedral enraptured as the words of Francis struck her to the core. She had never before heard anyone speak like him before. She had never heard such a sermon about the Incarnation and poverty in that way.*

*That night, Clare could not sleep as she lay in her bed. She could not stop thinking about Francis. There was something new and inspiring about him. His and the brothers' lives and actions corresponded perfectly to her thoughts about religion and faith. The way he was filled with the spirit was like a magnet and she felt drawn to him. Francis lived the Christian way of life that had been calling to her.*

And from that beginning the whole incredible story of Clare becoming the first Franciscan woman unfolds in all of its beauty, its difficulties, its conflict with five different popes, and its ultimate confirmation of her and her sisters' way of living in Gospel poverty by Pope Innocent IV two days before she died.

Though St. Clare and her sisters were contemplatives who lived within the enclosure of the monastery of San Damiano, the story of their lives, their struggles and triumphs, is dramatic.

It is an inner journey, a Christian Romance as extraordinary as the Romance of the Quest of the Holy Grail, and at the same time as extraordinarily ordinary as the lives of Francis and his brothers who, like Christ's Knights-Errant on the road, did daring deeds as they preached and lived out, simply and daily, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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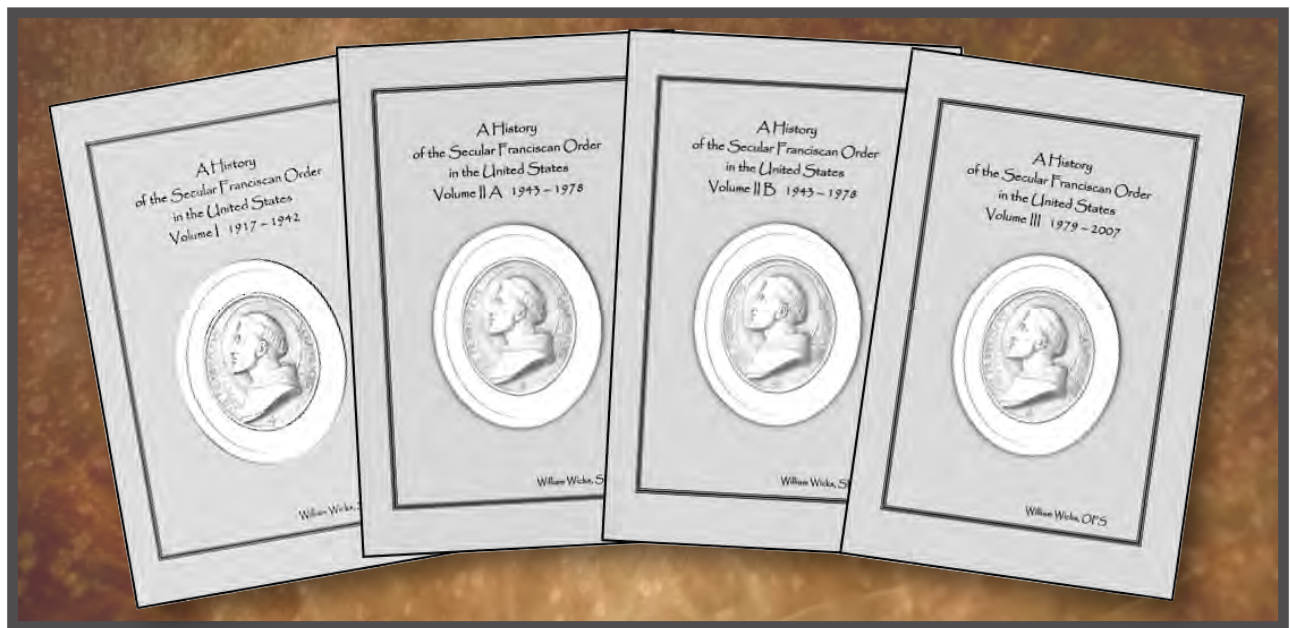
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