

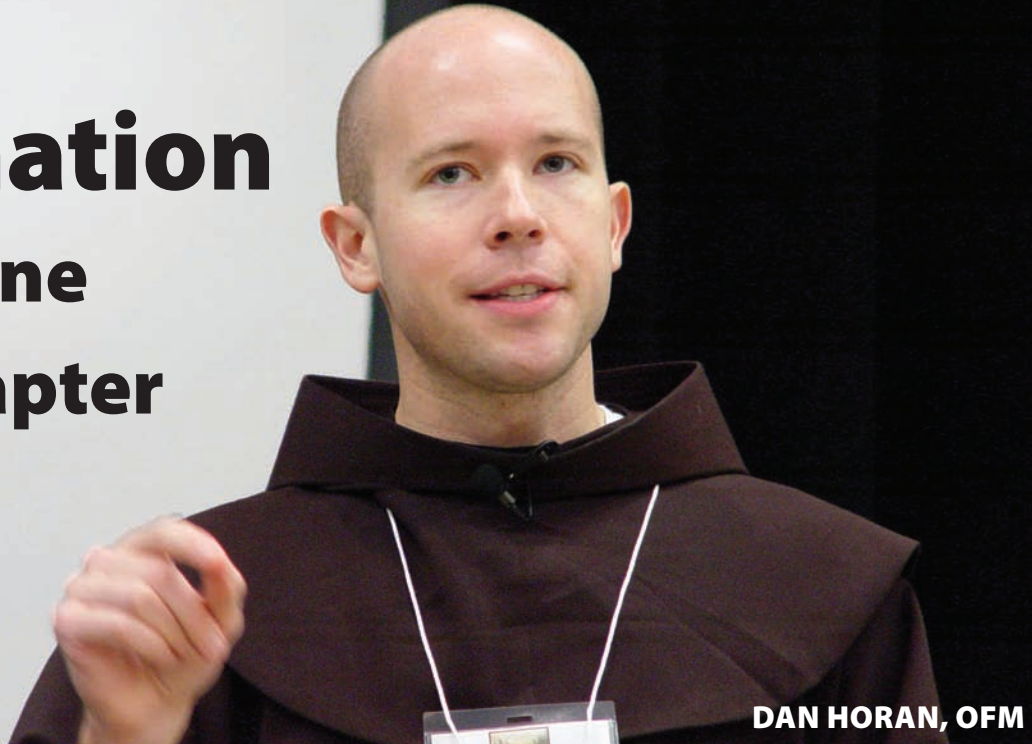
**2013 CHAPTER**  
**zeroes in on**  
**relationship**  
*with God, others,*  
*all of creation*

*By Bob and Mary Stronach, OFS*

**Oct. 15-20, 2013**

**Savior Pastoral Center, Kansas City, KS**

# A day of formation sets tone for chapter



DAN HORAN, OFM

**“Relationship stands at the heart of the Gospel... Relationship is at the heart of our entire tradition.”**

Speaking to a group of over 80 Secular Franciscan leaders, friars and guests from around the country, Father Dan Horan, OFM, challenged the audience to live the theme of the annual chapter – *“Be the Bridge: Accept all people as a gift of God.”*

Bridges imply relationship – first and foremost, that all important relationship with God; what Friar Dan calls **“dating God”** (the subject of his first book). And then, there is that special relationship we should be developing with our fellow man, and finally the challenge of establishing that kinship with all of creation.

How do we build these bridges, these relationships? We can learn about relationship through the Gospels, says Fr. Dan, who was ordained in 2012 and is already a prolific author with five books published. God makes himself known through the proph-

ets in the Old Testament, and now, God speaks through his Son. Friar Dan pointed to St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure who noted that God disclosed who He is through creation.

“If you want to know how God loves, love the unloveable, touch the untouchable.”

Jesus is not just God; He is the Son incarnate, he continued. The Son makes present who we are because Christ is fully God and fully human. For us to be fully human is to be like Christ. As Franciscans, to live the Gospel following St. Francis means to live the priority of God.

When you reflect on it, the young St. Francis “was not unlike women and men who are in college today... not super involved, go to Mass a couple times a year, go to bars, tailgating, a good guy to hang out with, not all that concerned about life except perhaps for his family and friends. We can relate to that... Francis was not born a saint.” What we are before

God, THAT we are... nothing more and nothing less.

Over time, however, Francis developed his uniqueness – to live the gospel more completely.

**BY TAKING** the Assisi saint’s name, Pope Francis has a challenge. Will he live up to his name? “What blows our minds is the way he (Pope Francis) models... preaching by deeds, getting close to the people, embracing people.”

This should come naturally to us by our baptism and profession, he said. Christ calls us to conversion at every point in our lives. Take, for example, St. Peter. He experienced conversion many times... When Christ was persecuted, Peter denied Christ three times.

What was the beginning of Francis conversion? Was it the leper? Reading the scriptures? At Mass? His prayer before the San Damiano cross where Christ told him to rebuild his church? Francis’ reply to Christ’s request – to rebuild the local church with stones and mortar -- had almost



nothing to do with being Christian. “But, it had a lot to do with his relationship with God.”

When Jesus asked Peter three times, “Peter, do you love me?”, Peter initially replied, “Lord, you know I love you.” By the time Christ asked him the third time, Peter was more than frustrated, he was angry and distressed. But, Father Dan noted, Jesus was talking of three kinds of love: filia (brotherly love, which comes easily and requires little work), eros (passion-driven love) and agape (the love of Christ, sacrificial love, which is hard work). Jesus meets Peter where he is. He says to Peter, you love the way you can right now, when it’s easy; but later, when you are challenged, can you love that agape love? “Did Francis love that way? Can we love that way?”

Father Dan used the image of dating God as a way to build a relationship with Him. Dating is active, he said. It is a human relationship. Some

people say that God is so different from us – not human. That is true, and false. God knows a lot about us. We have to remember that the Word became flesh – the Incarnation was God’s plan forever. It was not because of sin that Christ came. Yes, God becomes human to redeem us, but, He chose us in Him before the foundations in love. He destined us for adoption. It was God’s plan for all eternity. Because of the Incarnation, God, through Jesus, knows what it means to be in a human relationship

Friar Dan compared our spiritual growth, our relationship with God, as going from “dating” to “being a

spouse,” which requires more effort, and doesn’t come as easily as it did in the dating phase. But it is in this agape love that we find transformation.

He encouraged each attendee to think of his or her whole life as prayer, as “on-going conversion” -- and that you “need dating to keep it exciting.”

THE DAY of formation morphed into an experience of relationship-building using a tool known as “one-on-ones” -- or as outgoing JPIC Chair Kent Ferris put it, “sacred conversations.” Everyone paired off with someone else and spent time learning about the other, both his/her uniqueness and things in common.



# Physician Receives 'Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Award'

## FOUNDED MINISTRY TO HELP ALLEVIATE POVERTY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

A visit to East Africa in 2001 changed Dr. Margie Sweeney's life. The poverty she saw, and the realization, she said, that God was calling her, led the family physician to found the non-profit charity, Helping Hands Healing Ministries, Inc. (HHHM) to help alleviate poverty in developing countries.

For her efforts and example, Dr. Sweeney received the Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award during the annual chapter.

National Minister Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, presented the JPIC Award, a glass statue of a pair of hands enveloping the globe, along with a \$2,000 prize. JPIC Chair Kent Ferris, OFS, cited several of her projects, such as assisting a school in Zambia with electrical hook-ups, starting a dairy farm in Tanzania to provide nutrition to 400 people, offering tuition assistance for various students in Africa, and more recently, making a series of medical mission trips to Haiti.

A professed Secular Franciscan herself, Dr. Sweeney is minister of St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity in Tampa, FL. She resides in St. Cloud, FL with her civil-engineer husband, Michael. They have a son, Patrick, and a daughter, Kelly.

Her trip to Africa was memorable for another reason. She landed at Nairobi, Kenya on Sept. 11, 2001. She didn't know about the terrorist attacks back in America until a nun came up to her at the airport and said she was so sorry.

"I gained a new level of faith and trust in God," she told the 80 chapter attendees, representing over 13,000 Secular Franciscans across the U.S. and Guam. "I had a new attitude of gratitude."



**MARGIE SWEENEY, MD, OFS**

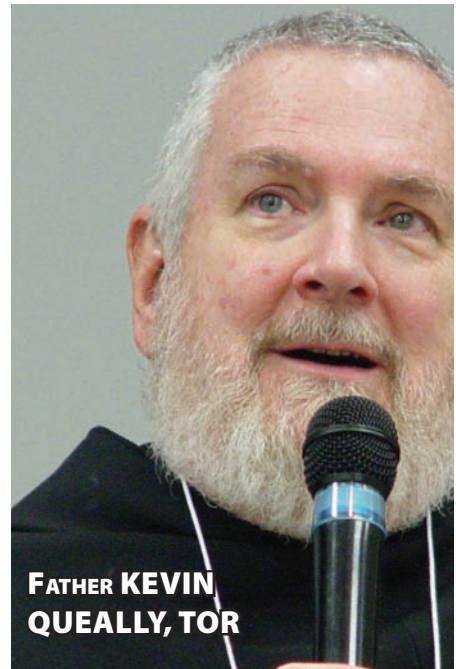


*Dr. Margie Sweeney, OFS, second from right, poses with medical mission team in Haiti in 2013 during their 4.2-mile mountainous trek to get to hard-to-reach patients. BELOW: Dr. Margie gives milk to Haitian children in wake of 2010 earthquake.*



# The business of the chapter

DEACON TOM BELLO, OFS



FATHER KEVIN QUEALLY, TOR

The business of the National Fraternity occupied a good portion of the chapter, with various officers, commissions/committees and certain guests giving presentations. There was also an invitation to spiritual growth, recognizing, as National Secretary Jan Parker put it, the national gathering as a sacred space.

National Minister Tom Bello, OFS, in his welcoming remarks, tried to establish a sense of family and relationship, taking time to introduce officers, commission/committee appointees, regional ministers and delegates, and special guests, such as Fr. Patrick Castro, OFM Cap., representing Guam Secular Franciscans; Deacon Joan Verret from the Episcopal Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF), and Bro. C.J. Boylan of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

COMMUNITY PRAYER dotted the days, along with Mass and spiritual bolts hurled by homilists seeking to prod our Franciscan response to the Gospel. For example, during the opening Mass, National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, warned



Bro. C.J. Boylan, OEF, and Dc. Joan Verret, TSSF, and Jim Flickinger, OFS

against worrying about superficial things, as the Pharisees did, instead of addressing important issues, such as “who we are inside.” “Sometimes, as Franciscans, we become too legalistic. We should listen to Pope Francis’ message of compassion, mercy, love and care. We have to be filled with life in the spirit, filled with love.”

He quoted St. Teresa of Avila who said that to be absorbed in externals of faith is to be absorbed in emptiness. “Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you...God alone suffices.”

The order shouldn’t be shrinking, he said. “We should be growing. We have

to be who we are called to be – filled with love, compassion and mercy.”

(At the Mass, newlyweds Bob and Cyl Maljan-Herbelin, OFS, renewed their wedding vows in front of their brothers and sisters. They met at the national gathering several years ago and married in February 2013.)

The next day, National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap., struck a similar tone, referring to Pharisee concern for rules over spirit. He acknowledged most of those present were in leadership positions, in effect becoming “interpreters of the law,” as they make visi-



*The chapter provided daily opportunities for praying in community.*

tations to local fraternities, answer questions about the Franciscan Rule and Constitutions, even help decide who should be professed.

“The danger is we can lose sight of the function of the order. We have to ask ourselves, are our members holier today? Are we animating our members? Are more people attracted to the order because they see it as a means to holiness?”

Fr. Patrick Castro, OFM Cap., a spiritual assistant from Guam, offered the third Mass, quickly prodding: “When was the last time we died to ourselves and came alive in Jesus Christ?” While opening ourselves up to the Lord “leaves ourselves vulnerable, St. Francis did not live a day without Jesus Christ...without developing his relationship with the Lord.”

Father Matthias was back the following day, spurring everyone to be bridges to all people -- “the rejected, the humble, the lepers among us” -- and to not be afraid of stretching “ourselves to great lengths.” Part of stretching is being open to God’s surprises. When St. Francis got the message to “rebuild my church, he didn’t say, please, no more surprises. No more stretching...”

“God has called all of you to more...and the Eucharist will fortify us to stretch further.”

The chapter’s final Mass saw National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Stephen Gross, OFM Conv., pointing to the need to improve our prayer life. When reading or reciting prayer, it’s not quite prayer yet. It’s more of a tool. True prayer, prayer of the heart, brings us “before the awesome presence of God.” He referred to the Latin saying, *si cor non orat in vanum lingua laborat*, which means, “If the heart does not pray, in vain does the tongue labor.”

“We need to train the heart” not to succumb to distractions. “There’s some pain, but we need to grow and stretch.”

#### AN OFS DISASTER TEAM

Amazon Relief founder Jim Flickinger, OFS, announced he would like to establish a Secular Franciscan Disaster Response Team that could serve people in need in the wake of a disaster. A number of people volunteered to work with Jim and his wife, Lois, OFS, to determine what direction to take.

#### GUAM JOINS NAFRA

The delegate body unanimously voted to accept St. Padre Pio community in Guam as an emerging fraternity under the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States.



*Jan Parker, OFS, and Sylvia Paoli, OFS, brought music to the liturgies.*

## Take a Cue from Example of Pope Francis, U.S. Order Urges NATIONAL FRATERNITY ISSUES STATEMENT TO ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

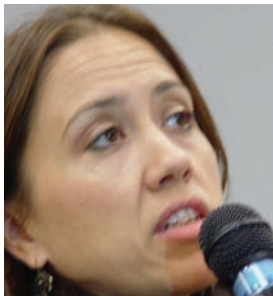
Leaders of the Secular Franciscan Order have issued an appeal to “all people of good will” to take a cue from the example of Pope Francis and embrace the world in love in their everyday lives.

“Pope Francis embraces the ideals close to the heart of Saint Francis of Assisi himself, including love for the poor and marginalized, care for creation, and peace-making,” the Order’s national chapter said in a statement while meeting in Kansas City, KS, Oct. 19. “He vividly shows us that no individual is far from the heart of God, and thus, no individual may be rejected.”

The leaders, representing more than 13,000 Secu-

lar Franciscans across the U.S. and in Guam, cited the pope’s “bold peacemaking initiatives,” including the “daring call to the world to fast and pray” over the war in Syria. “We wish to affirm and promote the spirit of non-violence and reconciliation embodied by his words and witness... We support his efforts to embrace the world in love and to remind us of our call to be accepting of all people, recognizing that in mercy there is also justice.”

They added: “As Secular Franciscans we pledge to work together to build a society which embraces these Gospel values. We therefore commit ourselves to prayer and compassionate action.”

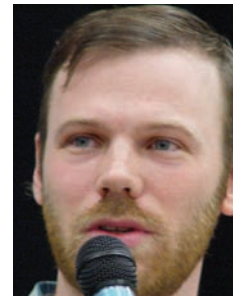


**Kim Smolik, Ed D, exec. dir. of Franciscan Mission Service:** “FMS is a pathway to live out the Franciscan charism.”



**Carolyn Townes, OSF, is the new national Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation (JPIC) chair.**

**Rhett Engelking, OFS, is overseeing the launch of FAN’s Franciscan Earth Corps for youth. He is also NAFRA’s new national JPIC vice chair.**



### FAIR SHARE FOR CANDIDATES

With the International Fraternity expecting fraternities to contribute fair share for candidates as well as professed members, the National Fraternity voted for U.S. fraternities to start doing the same, effective January of 2015, based on 2014 membership numbers.

### DEVELOPMENT FUND

National Councilor Mary Frances Charsky, OFS, made a “Live and Give; Give and Live” pitch for the NAFRA Development Committee, appealing for donations to the Donor Fund. The committee also promotes bequests and is hoping to establish an endowment fund for the OFS.

### CNSA ENCOURAGES

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) encouraged

regional fraternities to foster a relationship with Franciscan provincials and provincial spiritual assistants, and plans to appoint a Secular Franciscan spiritual assistant to CNSA by 2015 (noting the move away from the term “lay spiritual assistant” to the more precise “Secular Franciscan spiritual assistant”).

### FAN SUPPORT

The National Fraternity unanimously voted to continue membership in Franciscan Action Network, with an annual donation of \$1 per professed member.

### PRISON GUIDELINES

The delegate body unanimously approved national guidelines for Secular Franciscans involved in prison ministry. There should be no OFS formation for individuals while they are

incarcerated. “It’s a personal ministry,” noted National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Stephen Gross, OFM Conv.

### 2014 BUDGET

The National Fraternity unanimously approved a \$269,800 budget for 2014 after tweaking a few line items.

### CHARITABLE DONATIONS

The national body approved the following charitable donations:

- \$1,000 to Franciscans International from the Donor Fund.
- \$4,000 to Franciscan Mission Service from the Donor Fund, earmarked for “FMS expansion.”
- \$2,000 to Amazon Relief from the Charitable Projects Restricted Fund.
- \$1,000 to Franciscan Family Apostolate from the Charitable Projects Restricted Fund.

## CHAPTER CANDIDS



YouFra Chair Rob Breen thinks youth are attracted to the Franciscan charism. "The fraternity model can be transforming for young people."

## Be merciful

The best way to follow Christ is by having mercy.

That suggestion by National Minister Dc. Tom Bello, OFS, helped to open the chapter. He referred to Pope Francis' motto, "Misericordiam atque eligendo", and the Holy Father's interpretation, "by 'mercy', by choosing him."

"We are all sinners, yet we were all chosen by Christ 'mercy' us," he said.

The idea that God chose us in mercy percolated as the chapter considered a theme for 2014. The result:

***"Be the merciful presence of God."***

