

Communio

That All May Be One

Newsletter of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region
Secular Franciscan Order

Spring 2011

St. Francis and penance

By Bret Thoman, SFO

One of the most challenging parts of St. Francis's life for many today is his understanding of penance. It is troubling because we live in a culture which places great emphasis on care for the body. One does not have to look farther than the myriad health-food stores, gymnasiums, diets, and the amount of money spent on healthcare.

But when we read reverent biographies of Francis and come to the parts about his attitude toward his own body, it can seem disturbing. Francis is known to have called his body "Brother Donkey," which he subjected to severe disciplines (2 Cel 126). In his "Letter to the Faithful," he wrote, "All those who love the Lord with their whole heart ... and hate their bodies with their vices and sins ... produce worthy fruits of penance."

"Many people, when they sin or receive an injury, often blame the Enemy or a neighbor," he wrote in Admonition X, "but this is not right, for each one has the real enemy in his own power; that is, the body through which he sins." Strong words. Clare is known to have fasted so rigorously that both Francis and the bishop of Assisi commanded her to eat. To understand Francis's attitude toward penance it is helpful to review some background on the penitential movement.

When Francis left his family and set out on his own to live his new way of life, he began imitating the penitents who lived around Assisi. He took on a traditional life of penance that had been around for many centuries.

A wonderful book describing the history of this movement in the Church and in the origins of the

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The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate



Annual Regional Gathering 2011 — to BE together

By Jerry Rousseau, SFO

July 22–24 should already be on your calendars. This is the weekend of our next Annual Regional Gathering at Ridgecrest, N.C. Our theme is “Living an evangelical life: A call to BE.”

Registration materials have been sent to each minister or chosen leader, and you should make it a priority to discuss this at your next fraternity meeting(s). This year’s event is shaping up to be a blessed and



Spirit-filled gathering. No elections, no visitations, just a time to spend

with our brothers and sisters from throughout our region in community.

In addition to our very own Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv., regional spiritual assistant, we will be privileged to hear from Sister Ilia Delio, OSF, as keynote speaker. Sister Ilia, a renowned author and lecturer, will address our assembly several times. If you have never attended an Annual Regional Gathering, now’s the time to begin making this one of your annual events. Make plans now so as not to miss out.

A slight change in our process for this year is the requirement that each fraternity send a \$5-per-person surcharge to our regional treasurer, Greg Savold, SFO, to hold your space and to help defray the expenses for Sister Ilia. Since we expect that many people will be interested in hearing Sister Ilia’s talks, we are asking for this additional fee. Information regarding this is in the registration packet. The remainder of the registration process will be as in past years.

The deadline for registration is June 21, so get your reservations in early.

Jerry Rousseau, SFO, minister of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, is a member of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

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submit prayer requests

The Ed Campbell Scholarship Fund

The Ed Campbell Scholarship Fund was established in memory of Channel of Peace fraternity member Ed Campbell, SFO, about five to six years ago. Ed ardently supported the Annual Regional Gathering (ARG) and believed that every fraternity in the Region should be represented.

Channel of Peace Fraternity proposed this fund, which the Regional Executive Council (REC) approved.

The purpose of this fund is to make scholarship money available from the Region so that at least one member of every fraternity can attend the ARG. The goal is to encourage 100 percent participation from the fraternities in the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region. Funds will be made available to those fraternities unable to send any member due to financial limitations.

Money is provided based on need — either full scholarship (total cost of ARG) or partial scholarship (to make up the difference of what a member can afford to pay). At present, all requests are submitted to the regional minister.

All fraternities in the Region are generally represented. Ideally, rather than requesting financial aid from the Region, the sponsoring fraternity should assist the member who will represent the fraternity but cannot afford the cost (or part of the cost) to attend the ARG. That is one of the inherent purposes of the fraternity's common fund. However, we receive a number of requests for scholarships that are outside the fund's initial intent. Therefore, the following guidelines will be followed:

1. Ed Campbell Fund scholarships should be limited to the total sum of \$600 (this is the budget amount for income).
2. Requests should be made from the minister/leader of the fraternity to the regional treasurer, utilizing the "Ed Campbell Scholarship Fund" request form, included in the ARG registration package.
3. After the request deadline the scholarships will be awarded in the following priority: a) for a member of a fraternity being sent to represent that fraternity — initial intent of the fund; b) for a member of a fraternity already being represented whose common fund cannot totally support the local member's desire to attend. Local fraternities are expected to defray at least part of the cost.
4. After the request deadline, the regional treasurer will notify the local fraternities regarding the outcome of their requests. Should a fraternity not be represented it will be encouraged to send a representative with the assistance of a regional "scholarship."

Region members are encouraged to make donations throughout the year to the Ed Campbell Scholarship Fund. That money is accounted for on a separate income line in the regional treasurer's report. With a few exceptions, most of the fund is derived from donations of Regional Executive Council members who designate their expenses be paid to the "Fund" in lieu of personal reimbursements. **T**

Congratulations

New Council

Sacred Hearts of

Jesus and Mary Fraternity

Hilton Head Island, S.C.

Feb. 5, 2011

Minister: Judy Haupt, SFO

Vice Minister: Maureen Cronin, SFO

Secretary: Catherine Kenney, SFO

Treasurer: Virginia MacKenzie, SFO

Formation Director:

Christine Sheridan, SFO

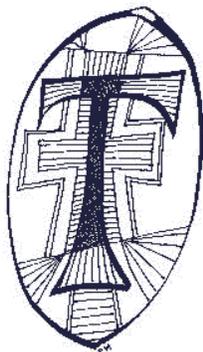
Councilors:

Daniel Cronin, SFO,

Rhoda Haight, SFO

Minister's Message

March 9 found us, once again, entering the season of Lent. During this time we are asked to fast, give alms, and prepare for the final judgment (Matthew 25:35–40). To aid us on this journey I offer the following reflection:



Lord, teach me how to let go.

I cling to my pain and curse those who caused it. Show me the joy of forgiveness.

I cling to my pride and refuse to change long-held ways. Show me the delight of singing new songs.

I cling to my worries and imprison myself in fear. Show me the freedom of trusting you.

Lord, teach me how to let go of all this so I can embrace you.

You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Nehemiah 9:17).

If we are to experience daily conversion (Art. 7 of the *Rule*), we must ask ourselves, “Who am I following during this season of Lent?” St. Francis is our example. In modern terms, Francis is our GPS. Our vocation and our faith lead us on the journey. Let us spend time reflecting on Father Francis’s life during this season, and may each one of us allow the Spirit of God to lead and guide us toward his kingdom.

On a personal note, a lot has happened since my last message (winter *Communio*). I completed my radiation treatments on Jan. 18. I am told that it will be four to six months before we know if this was successful or not. Meanwhile, I ask for your continued prayers.

Your Regional Executive Council held a very productive meeting on Feb. 12 (look for a recap of the minutes on page 9).

Madeline and I escaped to Hawaii for 30 days (Feb. 20–March 22) to celebrate 50 years of marriage (actual date is May 20). This was planned several years ago as a gift to one another. We thoroughly enjoyed this special time, reminiscing about our life together during these past 50 years. We have been truly blessed! We even survived the tsunami. God also blessed us with the ability to put aside all thoughts and concerns of outside influences during these days. Therefore, if you experience a flurry of activity from me over the next few weeks, you will know why.

In closing, I ask that we join in continued prayers for our brothers and sisters in Japan. May our merciful Lord grant all of them his strength and comfort over these next months of challenges and decision making. May they experience his profound hope and love.

Once again, I thank you for your support, your communications, and your prayers.

Peace and All Good,

Jerry

Jerry Rousseau, SFO, minister of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, is a member of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

Between Cannara and the village of Bevagna, [St. Francis] encountered a large flock of doves, crows and other birds. He swiftly ran to the spot and greeted them as though they were endowed with reason and began to preach, urging them to praise their creator. The birds opened their wings joyfully, allowing him among them. They waited for his blessing before flying away and from that day on, wrote Thomas of Celano, he carefully exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures to praise and love the Creator, because daily, invoking the name of the Savior, he observed their obedience in his own experience.

Susan Lamb and Tom Bean

*The Natural World of Saint Francis of Assisi:
Landscapes, Plants, & Animals that Saint Francis Knew and Loved*

Editor's Journal



As I write this, it's still March, the month in which we honor St. Joseph as Mary's husband.

When I bought the booklet, *The Franciscan Crown: The Joyful Mysteries in the Lives of the Virgin Mary and Saint Francis of Assisi* by Robert Melnick, OFM Conv., and Joseph Wood, OFM Conv., I was surprised to discover that St. Joseph has a special connection to the Franciscan family. After the seven joys of Mary in this booklet, there's an eighth meditation: the "Joy of Mary's Marriage to Joseph":

In 1399, the Franciscan Order began commemorating the betrothal of Saint Joseph with a liturgical office that was later developed into the feast day of Joseph as the "Husband of Mary" (now a solemnity celebrated on March 19th). In 1741, the Franciscans requested that Pope Benedict XIV consecrate the whole Seraphic Order to Saint Joseph. Before opening the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII (a Secular Franciscan) declared Saint Joseph the "Paternal Patron of the Universal Church." This proclamation formally recognized Joseph's role as inseparable from Mary's role as "Mother of the Church."

We're told that after Jesus was born, "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Surely, Joseph did the same. Paul Claudel (1868–1955), the French poet, dramatist, and diplomat, wrote that, "The Word is the adopted son of silence, for St. Joseph passes through the pages of the Gospel without uttering a single word."

Like any betrothed man, Joseph probably had ideas about what his married life would be like: They'd have children, maybe a big family. Then he found out that Mary was pregnant — and he knew he wasn't the father. According to the law, he could have had her stoned to death; but he decided to act mercifully and divorce her.

Then an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife. Another decision. If he did what God asked, his life wouldn't be what he'd originally envisioned. What, after all, did it mean to be foster father to a child conceived "through the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20)?

For one thing, it meant was that he and Mary would be Jesus's first teachers. At some point, perhaps, they told Jesus the circumstances of his birth. If they did, Jesus knew that his mother could have been killed for being pregnant out of wedlock. I like to think that, knowing the compassion Joseph had for Mary, Jesus offered that same compassion to the woman caught in adultery.

Like Joseph, we may have to change some of our plans to answer God's call. As Secular Franciscans, that might even include letting a cherished personal ministry go so that we can be fully involved in our fraternities, including our fraternity apostolates.

Let us be as open as Joseph.

Pace e bene
Joanita

Joanita M. Nellenbach, SFO, Communio editor, is a member of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity in Hendersonville, N.C., and spiritual assistant to Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

Congratulations
Newly Professed
St. Thomas More Fraternity
Wilmington, N.C.
March 23
Millie Poletti, SFO
March 27
Debbie Kotas, SFO
Marie Mallon, SFO



BSSF Formation Highlights

By Faye Martin, SFO

During Initial Formation, an Inquirer or Candidate may encounter an unexpected impediment, which begins interfering with their presence and participation in their initial formation classes and fraternity gatherings. Occasionally, I am asked how one decides when the impediment becomes a genuine obstacle to his/her formation. Whatever the impediment, discerning a vocation to the SFO involves the same process.

The International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), reminds us that if we do not respect who and what we are, neither will those who “Come and See.” Secular Franciscans have a vocation to the SFO Order, which has its own *Rule* and *Constitutions*. In the past, we may have seen ourselves as a ministry, which we are not. *We are called with a specific purpose and mission. Our vocation calls us to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in the temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the will of God. A vocation demands our entire life and denotes availability* (“Our Vocation”)

Those who usually join our formation classes are Catholic men and women, *who take the Gospel call to discipleship seriously and seek to actualize it in their lives in terms of how they presently understand it. They are far from idealized perfection, but they are willing to openly explore what ongoing Christian conversion means to them in practical terms. They have some sense of the demands, the gifts, and the responsibilities of Christian community. And they are committed to developing a strong relationship with God in prayer and action* (“Leader Guide 5”).

Our Region recommends six to 12 months, but cannot be less than six months, for the Inquiry phase. Two years, but not less than 18 months, or more than 36 months, are recommended for the Candidacy phase. This is meant to be understood that they participate in the monthly initial formation classes and fraternity gatherings each month. If they should need to miss an initial formation class, he/she is expected to make up the class before the next class. Each fraternity is responsible for providing a formation program and a time frame that will lay a solid foundation for our Secular Franciscan way of life for each individual in Initial Formation.

At the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming the Inquirers each receive copies of “The Four Pillars” document and “The Spirituality of St. Francis” document. During Initial formation, the Inquirers and Candidates are expected to begin integrating and internalizing our Franciscan identity, which are found in our *Rule*, *General Constitutions*, and “The Four Pillars,” into his/her life.

During the Inquiry phase, the Inquirer continues to develop his/her understanding of basic Catholic doctrine and the use of Sacred Scripture in coming to know the person of Jesus. With the help of the formation team the Inquirer seeks to discern if he/she is suitable and has a vocation/call to the SFO.

During the Candidacy phase, the Candidate is prepared for a lifetime commitment to live the Rule of the SFO and his/her continued suitability. By now the Candidate’s suitability, participation, and responsibility within the fraternity, should be much more apparent.

Our *General Constitutions* provide the basic eligibility rules for becoming a Secular Franciscan. The discernment of one’s vocation, suitability, and readiness is based on less obvious signs. Suitability is outlined in our “Leader Guide 5” document found in our *BSSF Guidelines*. “Discernment of a Secular Franciscan Vocation” can also be found in our *BSSF Guidelines*. At the end of the Inquiry phase and the Candidacy phase, the individuals are asked to make a retreat. The Inquirers and Candidates must ask themselves, “*Is the Secular Franciscan way of life for me?*” *It must be recognized that it is a different question than, “Am I called to a*

Franciscan spirituality?” This latter question is one of personal preference and spiritual nuance. The former question, however, addresses a specific spiritual context that is not only personal but also communal, and carries with it certain expectations and responsibilities (“Leader Guide 5”).

It is expected that Secular Franciscans participate whenever the members gather (monthly meeting, day of reflection, retreat, Transitus, Profession . . .) as a fraternity. During these gatherings, Secular Franciscans are expected to share the responsibility using their time, talent, and gifts for the fraternity. How well does the Candidate demonstrate these characteristics?

When the Candidate is interviewed, the members of council must ask themselves, “*Can this Candidate live a Secular Franciscan way of life? Can he or she do it in this historical context with these brothers and sisters?*” *There is really no way for the members of council to shirk this task. The fraternity members are responsible for and to one another; and the life, strength, and growth of any Franciscan community is only as strong as the sum of its membership* (“Leader Guide 5”). It is important that fraternity councils recognize that not only are they the guardians of their fraternities but of the entire Secular Franciscan Order.

All concerned must have faith that when a determination is made, it is God’s Spirit we are following. — Anne Mulqueen, SFO.

Faye Martin, SFO, is regional formation director of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, councilor to the Sts. Francis and Clare, Emerging Fraternity, in Knoxville, Tenn., and a member of Channel of Peace Fraternity in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Commissions are out. JPIC is in.

By Jon Strickland, SFO

I am often asked at fraternity meetings, church discussion groups, days of reflection, and at the Annual Regional Gathering, “What is JPIC?” JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) is the Secular Franciscan Order’s coordinated effort to animate and invigorate the order with the concepts of the Church’s social teachings regarding those three topics.

This used to be the focus of the Family, Work, Ecology, and Peace and Justice commissions. All of these have now been “rolled over” into the National JPIC Commission.

JPIC calls us to focus on Jesus Christ with a preferential love of the poor, providing us with a mission call to bring about the restoration and healing of relationships at every level of the church and society — personal, interpersonal, with creation, and, ultimately, with God. Any Spirit-inspired initiative that helps us, as Franciscans, become more fully human, grow in relationship with our own self, with others, and with creation is, essentially, a part of JPIC.

Former SFO National JPIC Chairperson Pat Brandwein-Ball, SFO, wrote that JPIC is based on “the wholeness of the rule, is headed by a coordinator, [and] has a foundation in Franciscan theology.” From it, works of charity and involvement in issues of our times spring forth. This brings to light insights expressed in our *General Constitutions* where our definition as Secular Franciscans is grounded in our everyday circumstances, our very presence in the world. Our SFO Rule and Constitution are derived, impacted by, and provide our fraternal reply to the “Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity” from Second Vatican Council.

Our regional JPIC is a program of conversion to inspire and inform our Christian communities and our SFO fraternities in the practice of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to protect



God's creation, to bring forth a more just society, and to nurture a more fulfilling spiritual life.

JPIC is the process of acquiring the values and knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills, and behaviors to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment. E-mails to fraternity JPIC contacts offer practical opportunities for us to apply the Gospel values of simplicity to our everyday lives. These goals are accomplished by:

- highlighting simplicity as a key feature of Christian discipline and as a joyful means of finding the spiritual fulfillment that consumerism cannot offer;
- drawing attention to Church teachings on the integrity of creation, social justice, and the dignity of every human being;
- offering creative new ways of observing the Christian disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that can make a difference in the inequalities of our world;
- fostering a conversion of heart, leading into a deeper baptismal commitment to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, Francis, and Clare, by living in right relationship with God, creation, and the entire human family.

Our SFO commitment to JPIC differs from social action or a social ministry program. Instead of discreet actions, temporary programs, or individual projects within the Church's overarching ministry program, JPIC involves changing our lives by allowing its principles to become part of everything we do.

The Regional Executive Council, during its November meeting, approved the "JPIC Vision and Mission Statement," which includes the following objectives:

- providing timely and engaging educational resources that highlight the foundations of Catholic social teaching and real-world applications;
- promoting increased knowledge of the Church's social mission;
- supporting fraternities and individuals in making the connections between the signs of the times and the demands of the Gospel locally and globally;
- developing skills of theological reflection and social analysis needed in a globalizing world;
- encouraging greater awareness of and engagement with justice issues;
- fostering a transformation of mind and heart through materials created.

Living as a disciple in a globalized world requires both greater awareness of local and global justice issues and ongoing faith formation. The process will be based on:

- Participatory Peace — involvement in building bridges with local, regional, national, and global actors through individual empowerment, prayer, and study.
- Peace Ecology — moving from a culture of conflict and war to a culture of peace based on a personal and corporate commitment to common core values, tolerance, and coexistence.
- Peace Building — creating of positive, creative, nonviolent actions to spread Gospel values in political, economic, cultural, and social spheres.
- Education — researching and creating innovative approaches and programs to address current issues, keeping that information up-to-date, and ensuring that it is distributed to the order.

Anyone with questions about the Regional JPIC program or process can contact me at JonStrick@comcast.net.

Jon Strickland, SFO, is coordinator of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's JPIC program and a member of San Damiano, Emerging Community, in Athens, Ga.

REC: Communities take next steps

By Christine Washington, SFO

With the blessing of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Regional Executive Council (REC), three communities are moving forward.

During its Feb. 12 meeting, at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Spartanburg, S.C., the REC approved canonical establishment of Stigmata of St. Francis, Emerging Community, in Duluth, Ga. The council also granted provisional approval for canonical establishment to St. Pio of Pietrelcina, Emerging Community, in Decatur, Ala. Provisional approval was given pending the profession of the community's candidates in April. These communities now begin the process of canonical establishment, which can take up to one year.

In addition, we approved Sts. Francis and Clare, Newly Forming Group, in Knoxville, Tenn., becoming an Emerging Community. Let us praise God for his goodness and keep our brothers and sisters in prayer as they celebrate these milestones on their Franciscan journey.

The REC gathering covered other business, as well:

- We went over, in depth, the formal process of a few important functions for members of our REC. This included the:
 - process to appoint a spiritual assistant to a fraternity,
 - process for canonical establishment,
 - visitation process.
- We discussed, or had reports on, other important council functions, such as:
 - duties of our area councilors,
 - "On The Road Again" Formation Workshops,
 - JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) Commission,
 - upcoming ARG (Annual Regional Gathering).

Our Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis REC had a wonderful gathering filled with joy and fellowship. It's in this spirit of St. Francis that we are working towards serving you, our brothers and sisters. We pray that God's ineffable peace reign in our hearts and minds.

Christine Washington, SFO, is the secretary of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Regional Executive Council and a member of St. Joseph of Cupertino Fraternity in Bessemer, Ala.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION

SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS (V) AND ELECTIONS (E) (PROPOSED)

<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>V/E</u>	<u>FRATERNAL / PASTORAL VISITOR</u>
Apr. 10*	St. Simons, Ga.	V	Jerry Rousseau/Joanita Nellenbach
Apr. 12*	Winston Salem, N.C.	V	Paula Zanker/Pat Wilkerson
Apr/May	Garden City, S.C. (EC)	V+	Judy Haupt/Joanita Nellenbach
May 1*	Aiken, S.C.	V	Sara Nell Boggs/Audrey Binet
May 1*	Greensboro, N.C.	E	Jane Farris/Pat Cowan
June 4	Athens, Ga.	V	John Knippel & Jerry Rousseau /
June 12	Hickory, N.C.	V	Jerry Rousseau/
June 12	Bessemer, Ala.	E	Willie Guadalupe/
June 18	Columbia, S.C. (EC)	V	Sara Nell Boggs/Audrey Binet
June 25*	Spartanburg, S.C.	E	Charles Meyer/ Joanita Nellenbach
July 14	Asheville, N.C.	V	Sara Nell Boggs/

ARG July 22-24 (Sister Ilia Delio, OSF, featured speaker)

Writing Franciscan

Reviewing books on environmental stewardship, holiness

Christian discipleship calls us to creation stewardship

Care for Creation: [a franciscan spirituality of the earth] by Iliia Delio, OSF; Keith Douglass Warner, OFM; and Pamela Wood. St. Anthony Messenger Press (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2008). 226 pp. Paper, \$18.95.

By Jon Strickland, SFO

Ecological, political, and economic turmoil challenge us to forge something meaningful out of the raw materials of our daily experiences. Authentic Christian discipleship is marked by something analogous to a presence of God that stabilizes and destabilizes, comforts and discomforts.



Such an experience is the result of reading *Care for Creation: [a franciscan spirituality of the earth]*. The authors combine good science, solid theology, and practical applications viewed through Franciscan tradition to an understanding of the greatest crisis of our time — the destruction of the Earth by two centuries of technological, cultural, and economic revolution. Defining a contemporary Franciscan spirituality of creation, Sister Iliia, Brother Keith, and Pamela Wood, challenge us to walk more closely with Jesus, through St. Francis’s guidance, to renew the face of the earth.

Sr. Iliia, our featured speaker at this year’s Annual Regional Gathering, holds doctorates in pharmacology and historical theology, and has served as chair and professor in spirituality studies at the Washington Theological Union. She writes and lectures on integrating Franciscan theology and spirituality with contemporary questions. Brother Keith lectures at Santa Clara University in California in the interdisciplinary Environmental Studies Institute, researching sustainable agriculture and environmental policy. Pamela Wood is an art therapist, spiritual director, and retreat facilitator who develops experiential activities that help individuals and groups deepen their faith and take action on behalf of creation.

Care for Creation re-examines the traditional worldview emphasizing mankind’s dominance of creation. Taking a theological and practical approach, the authors decipher the tense relationship between science and religion in four themes: Creation and Incarnation (relationship between Earth as God’s creation and Jesus as the Incarnation of God); Creation as Family (implications of Francis’s “Canticle of Creation” for our time); Creation and Contemplation (contemplative prayer in discovering awe and respect for creation); and Creation and Conversion (conversion in the Franciscan tradition).

Weaving a thoroughly researched synthesis of ecology, theology, and reflection, the authors provide insights into the impact those areas have on our daily lives, the needs emerging in the sphere of nature, and our understanding of the meaning and purpose of life.

A central lesson is the call for “a sustainability revolution” — a lifestyle that meets our present needs without misusing resources, transforming how we think about ourselves, our

relationships with other humans, and our relationship with the rest of creation.

The environmental crisis is broad-ranging. We consume everything at an alarming and unsustainable rate! Fresh water, fossil fuels, and other natural resources are limited. We need a better understanding of how we use these resources and the impact that consumption has on the Earth and its future.

With this knowledge we can redesign our economy, our consumption, and our lifestyles toward a sustainable future. A reflection exercise ends each section, offering prayer, meditation, spiritual practices, group activities, and hands-on approaches designed to bring the ecological and theological insights into the reader's daily life, nurturing a deeper Franciscan spirituality and a deeper understanding of how that spirituality impacts the earth.

Environmental and economic crises have brought us to a point of no return. Knowledge alone does not result in a change of heart, attitude, or behavior. *Care for Creation* blends rational, relational, and contemplative ways of knowing to build on the authors' understanding of contemporary scholarship in science, theology, and the Franciscan tradition, offering insights into the monumental issues and problems that besiege our planet.

This timely book presents a Franciscan spirituality of creation by considering the relationship between the Earth as God's creation and the Incarnation, the implications of Francis's "Canticle of Creation," the role of contemplative prayer, and the conversion that is necessary for humanity to face these challenges. The authors, presenting the classic themes of Franciscan tradition — creation, community, contemplation, and conversion — articulate an engaged and involved Catholic Christian response. *Care for Creation* is a very positive resource for anyone seeking inspiration for a spiritual practice of environmental work.

Jon Strickland, SFO, is coordinator of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's JPIC program and a member of San Damiano, Emerging Community, in Athens, Ga.

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Holiness in ordinary circumstances

***This Sacred Moment: Becoming Holy Right Where You Are* by Albert Haase, OFM. InterVarsity Press (Downers Grove, Ill., 2010). 120 pp. Paper, \$15; Kindle edition, \$9.60.**

By Joanita M. Nellenbach, SFO

I found Father Albert's writing several years ago when I read *Swimming in the Sun: Discovering the Lord's Prayer with Francis of Assisi and Thomas Merton* (now out of print), then fell in love with *Coming Home to Your True Self: Leaving the Emptiness of False Attractions*.



Father Albert is adjunct professor of spirituality at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and trains spiritual directors for the Catholic diocese of Peoria, Ill. He was a missionary to mainland China for 11½ years.

In *This Sacred Moment*, he focuses on holiness as "a selfless openness to God's call in this sacred moment."

And which moments are sacred? "Indeed the present moment as it unfolds before me is an expression of God's will for me," Father Albert says. "That's why this moment—and every moment—is sacred."

It's good news that we can be holy in the simplest of actions. We must pay attention, he says, to what is going on around us so that we can be aware of God's call.

"The call of God is like a knock on the door of the present moment in

which we find ourselves,” Father Albert says. That knock can be “the blank stare of a relative with Alzheimer’s disease ... a word of advice or encouragement given by a spouse or trusted friend ... a coincidence that remains in the forefront of our awareness....” He adds that, “Our response to such knocks shows just how close we are to God and holiness.”

To become more attentive to God’s call, he offers chapters on understanding God’s will, “Principles of Ongoing Discernment,” “Practices of Ongoing Discernment,” “The Obstacle of the Ego” and “The Gospel’s Antidote” to it, as well as indicators of selflessness and openness.

In “Discovering Our Story in Scripture,” he explains several prayer methods: individual and group *lectio divina* (sacred reading), and imaginative prayer, in which you read a Gospel passage, then place yourself in the scene, picturing yourself as each of the characters. For example, if you’re reading the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1–11) and are picturing yourself as the woman:

Do you have trouble relating to her? What is going on within your heart as you and your sin are publicly paraded in front of everyone? What is your feeling toward the scribes and Pharisees who bring you to Jesus? When has a sin of yours been made public against your will? How did you respond? What happens inside of you as you hear Jesus say, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again”? Ponder your reactions for insights into yourself, your past, your attitudes and your behaviors.

Each chapter ends with reflection questions.

As a Secular Franciscan, I found a lot in this book to reflect upon and put into practice. We are called to go from “gospel to life and life to the gospel.” Father Albert notes that, “Francis of Assisi’s use of the Gospels ... as his guide for how to live reveals a keen insight: living according to the gospel illumines the path to freedom from the ego and a holiness that is timeless.”

Although this book offers much in the way of personal reflection, Father Albert repeatedly states that all of that is so that we can ultimately better hear God’s call to empty ourselves in service to others. He tells of a

Reviewing a book

You’re invited to share a Franciscan book with other members of our Region. Books are reviewed to let our members know the book is available and to interest them to seek out the book. We look for a Franciscan focus. The authors should have Franciscan credibility.

If you’d like to write a book review: **Visit** your local bookstore or a Web site such as amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com to ensure that the book is in print.

Contact *Communio* editor

(sfowriter@att.net) to be sure that the book hasn’t been reviewed in a previous issue or that no one is reviewing it for the next issue.

Suggested material to include in your review:

- Overview of the book.
- A sentence or two about who the author is, such as: Sister Ilia Delio, OSF, is a research fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. If the person has written other books, you could include one or two of these titles.
- Points that stood out for you in this book.
- What our members could learn from this book.
- Quotes from the book to back up your opinion.
- What, if anything, that helped you grow as a Secular Franciscan.

Maximum length: about 600 words

At the end of the review, please include a sentence about yourself, such as: Suzie Smith, SFO, is a member of Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga.

cloistered nun who described to him the huge amount of time she spent in self-reflection, apparently to the point of self-absorption. “Sister, though God may have done great things for you,” he replies, “the important thing is what you are doing for God and for your community. Are you growing in selflessness and unconditional love?”

I think that’s a question we can all ask ourselves as members of our fraternities.

Joanita M. Nellenbach, SFO, Communio editor, is a member of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity in Hendersonville, N.C., and spiritual assistant to Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

PRESIDENCY OF THE SFO INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL



ONGOING FORMATION PROJECT

From MONTHLY DOSSIER for FEBRUARY 2010

SECTION I: MONTHLY THEME

Topic I: Profession in the SFO

Ewald Kreuzer, SFO

Profession in the SFO: Gift and Commitment,
by Fr. Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap,
(n. 1-3) Summary and comments

n. 1. Those who make Profession in the SFO say: “*Since the Lord has given me this grace, I renew my baptismal promises and consecrate myself to the service of His kingdom*” (Formula of Profession). *The Holy Spirit is the source of the vocation of Secular Franciscans (Const, Article 11), since they are urged on by the Spirit to reach the perfection of charity in accordance with their own secular state (Rule, Article 2). The candidates declare their intent to live the gospel life after the Holy Spirit has been invoked upon them: “Lord, watch over these your servants. May the Spirit of your love penetrate their hearts, so that your grace will strengthen them to keep their commitment to the gospel life.” (Ritual, page 23).*

Although it seems that we are “making” the Profession, it is indeed the wonderful work of our Lord. Before we decided to serve Him, He had already chosen us to follow Jesus Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis within the Secular Franciscan Order.

n. 2. Profession comes about through God’s intervention. Today Christ lives and acts through the Church. Therefore, Profession is simultaneously the action of Christ and of the Church. The language of the Constitutions is significant (42,1), defining Profession as a *solemn ecclesial act* (action), it is *by its nature a public and ecclesial act*. Profession is not only an action, it is also an event, or rather, a saving *kairos* (καιρός), a moment of salvation.

Similar to the sacraments of the Church, Profession is a public and ecclesial act. The SFO is no “secret service” but a public international association of the faithful. Profession is the “entrance” into a Franciscan Fraternity, the beginning of a common spiritual journey.

n. 3. By Church the Ritual understands a particular liturgical assembly, made up of the people and the community of brothers and sisters, in other words, of the local fraternity of the Secular Order. *The local fraternity makes the presence and action of the Church visible primarily in the Profession. The local fraternity into which the candidate is incorporated is “the basic element of*

the entire Order and a visible sign of the Church, a community of love” (*Rule*, Article 22; cf. *Const.*, Article 47.1).

The Holy Spirit guides each Professed member directly into a concrete form of community: the local fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. We are not alone on our journey. We are members of a family, the worldwide Franciscan family, and within this family, we are member of the SFO. This is a very personal and specific vocation. Let us be thankful for it.

Questions for reflection and discussing in fraternity:

1. Why is the Holy Spirit the source of the vocation of Secular Franciscans (Const., 11)?
2. In which way is Profession simultaneously the action of Christ and of the Church?
3. Why is the role of the local fraternity important for the SFO Profession?

Father Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap., is general vicar of the Province of Messina, Italy. Ewald Kreuzer, SFO, of Austria, was elected in 2008 as presidential (international) councilor for the German-speaking areas of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The complete monthly dossier is available at www.ciofs.or/en.htm.

For February 2010:

SECTION II: SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

Topic 1: “The Presentation of the Lord.

Jesus, light of the world and the grace of SFO profession”

SECTION III: SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Block 1: “Pope Benedict XVI Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace:
If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.”

Father Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, who wrote these sections, is CIOFS general spiritual assistant for the Third Order Regular. He is a member of the Province of St. Mary of Guadalupe, Mexico.

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region by Area

Area 1

Bessemer, Ala.; Decatur, Ala.; Athens, Ga.; Blairsville, Ga.; Conyers, Ga.; Duluth, Ga.; Jonesboro, Ga.; Franklin, N.C.; Chattanooga, Tenn.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Nashville, Tenn.

Area 2

Augusta, Ga.; St. Simons Island, Ga.; Asheville, N.C.; Charlotte, N.C.; Hendersonville, N.C.; Hickory, N.C.; Aiken, S.C.; Charleston, S.C.; Columbia, S.C.; Greenville, S.C.; Hilton Head Island, S.C.; Spartanburg, S.C.

Area 3

Burlington, N.C.; Elizabeth City, N.C.; Fayetteville, N.C.; Greensboro, N.C.; Morehead City, N.C.; Raleigh, N.C.; Wilmington, N.C.; Winston-Salem, N.C.; Garden City, S.C.

St. Francis and penance

Continued from page 1

Franciscan movement is *St. Francis and the Third Order* by Father Raffaele Pazzelli, TOR. He notes that the origins of the practice of penance are found in the Bible. In the original Greek language of the New Testament, John the Baptist and Jesus urge their followers toward *metanoia*, which means “change of heart.” In Matthew’s Gospel they say “*Metanoete!*” which was later translated into Latin as “*Agite poenitentiam!*” (literally “do penance”), and then into English as “Repent, the kingdom is at hand!” (Matthew 3:1; Matthew 4:17). Thus, the original biblical meaning of penance is to repent, or to have a change of heart and turn from sin.

Later, penitential practice shifted from interior conversion to external acts that accompanied the experience. This started in the first few centuries A.D. as a way for Christians who had committed serious sins (like murder, sorcery, renunciation of the faith) to reconcile to the Church. For them to reintegrate into the Church community, the local bishop assigned them penances that they were to do for one to three years, or even a lifetime. These often included fasting, prescribed daily prayer, particular dress usually involving a hair shirt and/or tunic, and other practices. Such actions were to effect a conversion in the Christian, after which they could be reconciled with the Church.

Around the sixth century, the practice of private reconciliation/confession, i.e., directly to a priest, spread from the monasteries of the British Isles into continental Europe and eventually became the normative way a Christian received forgiveness for sins, as it remains today. From that time onward, involuntary penance fell into disuse.

About the same time, Christians who had committed no serious sin, but who desired to imitate Christ and his Passion more closely, took on many of the same penitential practices voluntarily. Voluntary penance was a grass-roots movement among lay persons not associated with an established religious order or monastery. It took different forms, like living as a hermit or recluse, either alone or in small communities, or associating as an oblate or *conversus* with a church or monastery. It could involve married or single people, consecrated or laypersons, men or women. They maintained many of the established penitential practices of fasting, daily prayer, penitential garb, refraining from military service, or avoiding occupations like merchants or public servants.



When Francis began his conversion, he identified with the lay penitents living around and passing through Assisi. Early in his conversion, he desired this way of life. After he publicly renounced his father in front of the bishop, he became a penitential oblate under the resident priest of San Damiano. He dressed in the penitent’s garb, served lepers and the poor, and gave alms. It was in this penitential life that his first followers joined him. When asked who they were, Francis and his followers referred to themselves as “*poenitentes de Assisio*” (penitents from Assisi). It was not until they went to Rome

and Pope Innocent III granted oral approval of their way of life that they began calling themselves “*fratres minores*” (friars minor). Later, the Franciscans emerged from within the penitential movement, and the Friars Minor became a distinct religious order within the Church.

Francis’s view of penance

Having established that Francis did not intend to start a new order, but desired to live as a lay penitent around Assisi, we can talk about his understanding of penance. Here many modern narrators, downplaying this part of Francis’s and Clare’s lives, conclude that they were “medieval” (in a pejorative sense) and excuse them for their extreme body punishment. They

often cite the story where Francis asks God's forgiveness for excessive penances. They seem to conclude that Francis and Clare were great saints despite their ascetic practices, for which they were influenced by medieval body-hating.

First, Francis's understanding of penance is the same as the biblical sense of conversion of heart and turning away from sin. He begins his "Testament" with his description of penance as serving lepers: "The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world." Here we clearly see a change of heart — a metanoia — that Francis experienced while working with lepers. He was transformed interiorly, and this is what penance meant to him.



Although commonly confused with penance, what Francis, Clare, and their followers regularly practiced is more properly called asceticism. They both fasted often: Clare ate very little, and Francis mixed food with ashes or bitter herbs to kill the taste. Francis wore a hair shirt (a rough garment worn on the skin underneath the habit), while Clare kept a small rectangle of horsehair under her clothes. They deprived their bodies of sleep: Francis sometimes slept on stones, while Clare slept on a bed of vine branches or on the bare floor, using rocks for pillows. Francis responded to temptation by rolling around naked in thorn bushes or snow to punish his body, and they both subjected their bodies to other corporal disciplines.

Franciscan asceticism's harshness should be understood in its historical context. Life was cruel in the Middle Ages and has been aptly described as nasty, brutish, and short. Franciscans attempted to live penance and asceticism as personal sacrifices in conditions that were already harsh. Therefore, we should see their sacrifices as relevant to what people in their culture were used to. Everyone's life was harsh, even barbaric; to make sacrifices was much more so.



It is important to take into consideration, as well, the medieval class structure. Life was a little easier on the nobility but doubly harsh for the peasants. Christ identified with the poor, so the early friars lived like poor peasants. This made its way into Francis's *Rule*. For example, Francis's earlier *Rule* (Chapter XV) forbids travel on horseback. In those days the nobility rode horses, while the peasants walked or rode mules. So, the friars walked. Additionally, the friars often shunned meat, but not for health or moral reasons; like the peasants, they ate vegetables. Meat was expensive and therefore reserved to the wealthy, while the poor peasants ate mostly what they grew.

Sometimes asceticism is confused with dualism: the spirit is good, the body bad. This is probably where the negative reactions come in when reading about the life of Francis. There is a big difference between dualism and Franciscan asceticism. Alongside Francis were the heretical Cathars, who embraced dualistic beliefs, judging creation (and the body) as evil. In Admonition V, Francis wrote, "God had created you and formed you to the image of his beloved Son according to the body, and to his likeness according to the spirit." Francis, therefore, recognized the human body as part of creation and in the image of God; he believed it to be good. He had

fraternal affection for all creation and considered people, animals, and creation his brothers and sisters.

Body, penance, sacrifice

So what did Francis mean when he spoke negatively about the body? Actually, he meant the flesh. The understanding of “body,” in the sense of “flesh,” is taken from the Bible. In Galatians 5:16–17, Paul wrote, “I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. For the flesh has desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other....” He adds in verses 19–23: “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness.... In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Cf. also Ephesians 4:22–24; Romans 8:1–13).

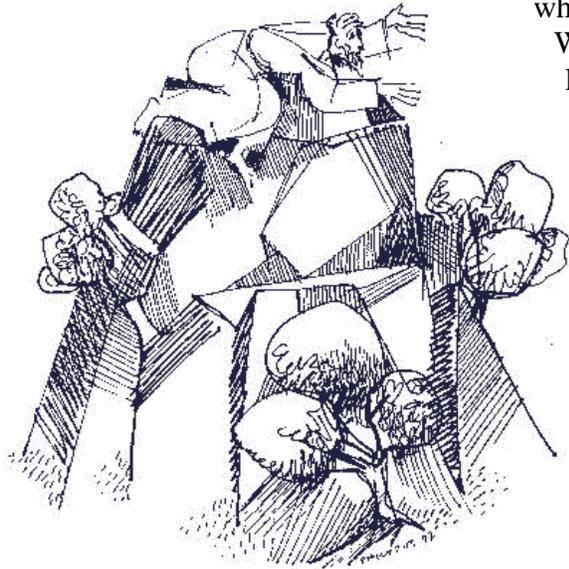
Francis and his early followers, through ascetic practices, were trying to live in the Spirit by subduing the body, or flesh, which they recognized as housing sin. They were not punishing their bodies because they believed them evil; rather, they were trying to discipline and purify the senses, atone for sin, and win grace for others.

Some deny ascetic practices, claiming that the New Testament states decisively that Christ performed the only sacrifice needed, and we cannot add to it: “Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). However, the New Testament contains frequent verses telling us to imitate Jesus in his suffering: “As Jesus has loved us, so are we to love one another” (Romans 12:1). “Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 16:24). Paul even makes a startling reference to penance when he says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col 1:24). The early Franciscan tradition of self-mortification was a way of imitating Christ.

These practices were acts of sacrifice, and they knew that love involves sacrifice. One need only look at Pope Benedict’s first encyclical “*Deus Caritas est*” — “God is Love.” He distinguishes between two types of love in the Greek language: “eros” and “agape.” He describes eros as an initial feeling, such as that which attracts man and woman before marriage. Once they decide to marry, the love must grow into agape, a more mature form of love involving sacrifice, where good feelings do not always accompany love.

We are called to follow Christ in imitation of his loving sacrifice. Everyone who has ever loved a child or spouse certainly knows that sacrificial love.

I think the most important sign of Francis’s ability to associate his asceticism with the sacrificial love of Christ appeared when he received the stigmata on Mount La Verna two years before his death in 1226. Francis received this gift after a life of intensive prayer, penance, and service to others. According to Thomas of Celano’s “Life of Francis,” Francis is said to have spent a 40-day fast on the Tuscan mountain, during which he asked the Lord for two gifts. The first was to feel in his soul and body the pain Jesus felt during his Passion. The second was to know in his heart the love Jesus felt for all people. Immediately after



making this request, Francis was imprinted with the stigmata, accompanied by excruciating pain, and he felt an intense joy and spiritual consolation.

It is a mysterious event and striking that Francis asked to feel pain and love at the same time — that he connected the two. This is not masochism. If it were seen apart from the context of Christian faith, it might seem so. In faith and simplicity, however, Francis understood the connection between the two because he lived much of his converted life focusing and meditating on Christ and the events surrounding his life, most importantly the Passion — Jesus’s suffering and death. Francis understood that Christ had to suffer for the salvation of humanity, and he wanted to imitate that. Christ’s suffering was connected to his love for humanity.

The meaning for us

How are we to comprehend penance in the modern world? First, we understand penance as a call to conversion, which is its biblical meaning. Then, we attempt to integrate this into our lives. To live today like Francis and Clare eight centuries ago may not be necessary, practical or relevant. However, we can certainly let their experiences shape our lives today.

Penance can be any sacrifice — voluntary or involuntary — offered to God. We can voluntarily initiate the sacrifice, such as in fasting, prayer, almsgiving, or other renunciation. Or, we can choose to offer up something unintended or unexpected, such as illness, financial loss, personal misunderstanding, or any other difficulty. When these events are united to the cross, the Lord’s grace can fill them and use them to his purpose. In a mystical way, God can transform suffering and work his grace within it. The negative becomes positive. Once we begin trying to live a life of penance, the Lord always shows us more — he shows us what to do next. We start small, and it can lead to very big things. As the cross was the precursor to the Resurrection, so can the Lord make all things new. “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 9:28).

Penance, Christian sacrifice, and ascetic practices make sense only in the light of Christian faith. Without faith, it seems foolish to deny oneself life’s pleasures and happiness. The proper context of penance is within the cross of Christ; our penance must be united to the cross. And it makes sense only as much as the Passion and death of Christ make sense. As Christ’s cross has the power to save, to give life, to make miracles, so does a believer’s penance. It can be used for good.

That is what Francis, Clare, and countless other saints have done. They have united their works, prayers, sacrifices, and penance to Christ’s Passion, and through them God continues to work out his plan of salvation. The Christian sacrifice is not a historical event that took place two millennia ago; it continues in the Church today. In light of Christian faith, however, we hope in a resurrection. Our faith does not stop at the cross; rather Calvary is a step on the road to the Resurrection.

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Francis understood that the one universal every creature shares is the natural world. He lived in a landscape of great beauty, but then so do we all. Cultivating *oecologicae*, ecological consciousness, can lead us toward the path Saint Francis took (p. 4).

Susan Lamb and Tom Bean
*The Natural World of Saint Francis of Assisi:
Landscapes, Plants, & Animals that Saint Francis Knew and Loved*