

# Communio

That All May Be One

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

Fall 2016

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## Blessed John Duns Scotus (1266–1308)

Memorial: Nov. 8

One of the most influential and important philosophers and theologians of the High Middle Ages, John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan friar and priest, is known as *Doctor Subtilis* (Subtle Doctor) because of his brilliant, complex, and nuanced thought. He advocated strongly that Mary was conceived without original sin. His argument appears in Pope Pius IX's 1854 declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Pope John Paul II beatified John Duns Scotus on March 20, 1993.



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**D**uns Scotus believed that all creation in each aspect of its individuality bears this thisness, that every blade of grass, every rock, every tree is unique and unreplicable. ...

Additionally, when we follow Duns Scotus's Franciscan outlook, our view of God also begins to change. ... It's about the dignity of particularity. I'm not just some human who happens to be Dan, but I'm Dan who is unique, irreplaceable, unrepeatable, and individually loved by God. And so are you. We all are. This view of what it means to be a particular person centers on God's overabundant generosity and love. We didn't just happen by chance or after the fact or as 'plan B.' No, we each came into existence because God loved us as we are from the beginning" (p. 31).

Daniel P. Horan, OFM,

*Dating God: Live and Love in the way of St. Francis*

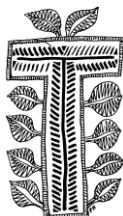
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## The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





## Editor's Journal

A pilgrimage is supposed to be an image of life, Father Murray Bodo, OFM, tells us in *The Place We Call Home: Spiritual Pilgrimage as a Path to God*.

What I've learned on pilgrimages is to live in the present moment, which is also good for life in general.

In September, while I was in Assisi, I found out where was the public library (Biblioteca Comunale) and decided to go there to do some writing. The library is on Via San Francesco, which ends at the Basilica of St. Francis. My first visit was to be on a Tuesday, the same day Pope Francis would be at the basilica to give an address during the last day of the Spirit of Assisi, an annual peace conference celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

I knew there'd be security at the basilica, but the library is before you get there.

Oh! Police at the start of Via San Francesco. The whole street was closed until 6 p.m. unless you had an official pass, which I didn't. My library visit would have to wait until the next day.

This turned out to be a gift.

I decided to go to San Stefano, my favorite church in Assisi. Built in 1166, it's one of the oldest holy buildings in the city. Tradition has it that the church's bell rang of its own accord as St. Francis was dying.

But it's my favorite because it's simple and out of the way, on a steep side street. San Stefano is a great place for prayer and meditation because it doesn't attract the hordes of tourists who frequent the more famous churches. Sometimes, though, there are other blessings, as well.

About five minutes after I entered the church, three men and a woman came in. Two of the men sat down and the woman and the other man stood behind them. They took out music booklets and began singing in German. I recognized the first tune, from the movie "Brother Sun, Sister Moon," though I couldn't tell if they were singing the same words.

Glorious voices! I was treated to a 30- to 45-minute concert. Their other songs included "Ubi Caritas" and the "Kyrie."

When they finished, I told them how much I'd enjoyed it and asked if they were a professional quartet. No. Just friends vacationing together.

Bert, who seemed to be the leader, and Till, an actor, teach in the music school of the University of Frankfurt, Germany. Dieter and Martha, a married



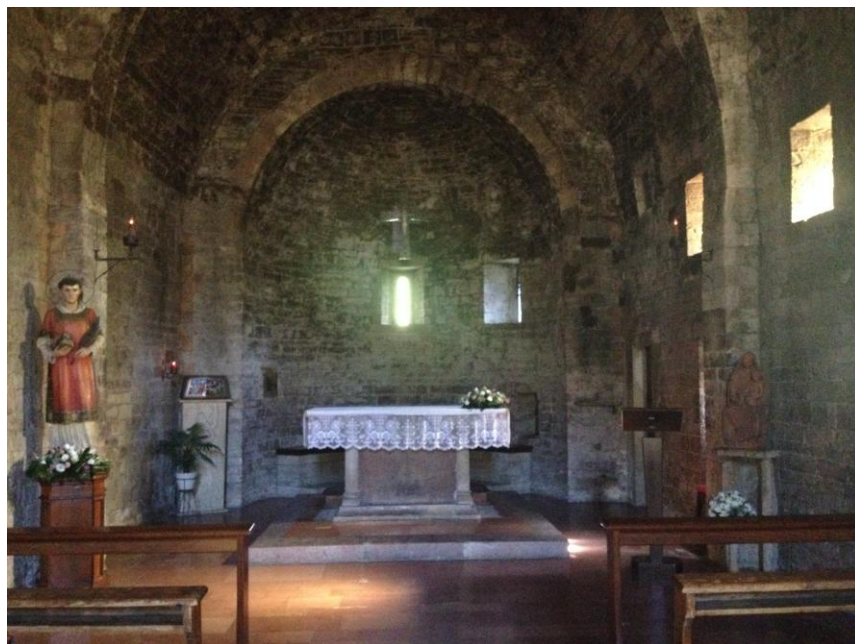
**The Church of San Stefano, built in 1166.**

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couple, are friends of theirs.

I told them I'm a Secular Franciscan, and Till said the music booklets were what are used for the Transitus of St. Francis in his church back home.



**The interior of San Stefano**

So they sang "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" again. Dieter shared his book with me. I could figure out the pronunciation from listening to them, and I joined in on the chorus.

Another man had come in. When we finished, he asked if they would sing something so he could sing along with us. I don't know the name of the first song, but we concluded with "Salve Regina," in Latin.

This man was Dr. Vincenzo Vasson, a recently retired gynecological surgeon. He'd just arrived in Assisi that day or the day

before, having hiked the 1,600 kilometers (994 miles) from Champagne, France. It took him more than 70 days.

His wife, he said, was arriving by car that day. "She doesn't walk," he said, which I took to mean that she doesn't hike.

"You're a hero to me," Bert told him.

When they left, I went back to my original pew and started writing. A couple came in and sat down across the aisle. The man went up and knelt at the altar to pray. I looked over at the woman. Then the man returned to his seat, and — yes, it was — Paul DiStefano, OFS, and his wife, Jenna, from Blessed John Duns Scotus Fraternity in Garden City, S.C. San Stefano is the church where they were married a few years ago.

And I would have missed all of this if I'd gone to the library.

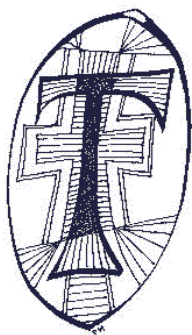
*Pace e bene*  
*Joanita*

*Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, is Communio editor. She 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.*

### **Communio**

**is published quarterly for the members of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America**





## Minister's Message

Dearest Sisters and Brothers,

May the Lord give you peace!

“And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.”

St. Francis of Assisi, “The Testament” (1226), 14,  
*Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume I, The Saint* (125)

These words of St. Francis were what I picked earlier this year at my fraternity's annual Extraction of Francis's Spirit celebration. (Although I know that the Holy Spirit really chose them for me.) So, as I read these words daily, they become imprinted in my mind. Hopefully, they also imprint in my heart and assist me in my daily conversion; not to mention my role as your regional minister.

As you all know, our Region has new servant leaders, elected in August, to serve for the next three years. Also, many local fraternities have elected new servant leaders and other fraternities will have elections next year.

Oct. 7–9, when Hurricane Matthew was coming up the Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina coasts, your Regional Executive Council (REC) met in Hiawassee, Ga., for a retreat and business meeting. Stephen Smith, OFS, of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity, Blairsville, Ga., and his wife, Mary, hosted us at their home. Cricket Aull, OFS, from that fraternity, was our retreat leader.

This extended time together in such an intimate setting gave us the opportunity to get to know each other better as we focused on the theme of “Bringing New Life to Our Region.” We looked at needs for the Region, as well as individual needs. To offer our new area councilors ease of serving in their responsibilities, we will have them observe a “seasoned” REC member during a visitation and an election, before they act in those roles for the first time.

May you be open to new opportunities for growth as we all work together to best serve each other. I am excited about a new technology endeavor. Dianne Ambrose, OFS, our new regional formation director has set up a Zoom Room, an online conference, to allow our formation directors to get together monthly with her.

Please pray daily that the Holy Spirit help us in our seeking of a regional spiritual assistant and to send us the one who will be a true beacon and guide to walk with us on our Franciscan journey.

For those of us who attended our Annual Regional Gathering, our offertory collection on Aug. 13, was in memory of Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv., our regional spiritual assistant from 1999 until his death on Dec. 1. Your generous contributions totaled \$1,339.00 for the Franciscan Education Burse for his Province, Our Lady of the Angels. The Franciscan friars thank us so much and want you to know that you are remembered in their prayers. They ask us to “please continue to pray for vocations.”

Remember in prayer all of the people who were affected by Hurricane Matthew. Many in Haiti lost their lives, many lost their homes. Members of many of our coastal fraternities evacuated, then returned home to no electricity, downed trees, limbs, flooding; one had a tree fall on their home in St. Simons, Ga.

Thanks be to God for his generous love for us! May the Lord bless you and keep you!

*DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's minister, is a member of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head Island, S.C.*

Peace and all good,  
DorothyAnn

## **Introducing the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis (BSSF) Regional Executive Council (REC), Elected Aug. 13**

### **Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS**

Professed: May 7, 1999, Pax et Bonum Fraternity, Camden, N.J.

Current Fraternity: Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Hilton Head Island, S.C.

- minister, 2005–2011
- formation director, 2002–2005

BSSF Region:

- appointed regional minister, November 2015–August 2016
- elected Area 2 councilor, August 2013–November 2015
- appointed Area 3 councilor, April 2012–August 2013

### **Vice Minister: Carmen Madero, OFS**

Professed: Oct. 5, 2005, Immaculate Conception Fraternity, Jonesboro, Ga.

- Served as vice minister

Current Fraternity: St. Anthony of Padua, Fayetteville, N.C.

- Minister, 2012 –present
- secretary, 2009–2012

BSSF Region:

- appointed vice minister early 2016
- appointed Area 3 councilor, 2014–2016

### **Secretary: Barbara Garrison, OFS**

Professed: April 22, 2007, Channel of Peace Fraternity, Chattanooga, Tenn.

Current Fraternity: Channel of Peace

- councilor at large, 2014–present
- minister, 2011–2014
- appointed secretary, 2009–2011

BSSF Region:

- Area 1 councilor, 2013–2016

### **Treasurer: Kenneth Brooke, OFS**

Professed: June 23, 2012, Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity, Duluth, Ga.

Current fraternity: Stigmata of St. Francis

- minister, 2015–present

BSSF Region

- New to REC

### **Formation Director: Dianne Ambrose, OFS**

Professed: Dec. 9, 2007, in San Damiano Fraternity, Athens, Ga.

Current Fraternity: San Damiano

- Vice minister, 2015–present
- formation director, 2012–2015

BSSF Region: New to REC

### **Area 1 Councilor: Lori Moran, OFS**

Professed: Dec. 8, 2002, Immaculate Conception Fraternity, Jonesboro, Ga.

Current Fraternity: Immaculate Conception

- Current formation director

- has served as secretary, treasurer, and councilor at large

BSSF Region:

- Area 1 prayer coordinator
- spiritual assistant to The Spirit of Francis and Clare Fraternity, Conyers, Ga.

**Area 1 Councilor: Lannie Newman, OFS**

Professed: July 16, 2006, Queen of Peace Fraternity, Miami, Fla.

Current Fraternity: St. Joseph Cupertino, Bessemer, Ala.

- councilor, 2011–present
- vice minister, 2008–2011

BSSF Region:

- New to REC

**Area 2 Councilor: Sara Nell Boggs, OFS**

Professed: Oct. 26, 1999, St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity, Spartanburg, S.C.

Current fraternity: St. Michael the Archangel

- Served as formation director

BSSF Region:

- Formation director, 2013–2016
- Area 2 councilor, 2007–2013

**Area 2 Councilor: Janet Hulshof, OFS**

Professed: July 13, 2008, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Augusta, Ga.

Current fraternity: St. Elizabeth of Hungary

- in second term as formation director

BSSF Region:

- New to REC

**Area 3 Councilor: Bob Pearson, OFS**

Professed: May 3, 2015, Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, N.C.

Current fraternity: Franciscan Family of Greensboro

- coordinates fraternity's Just Faith program, 2015–2016
- fraternity prayer liaison

BSSF Region

- Area 3 prayer coordinator

**Area 3 Councilor: Carolyn Peduzzi, OFS**

Professed: Oct. 25, 2009, Father Solanus Casey Fraternity, Morehead City, N.C.

Current Fraternity: Father Solanus Casey

- elected minister, 2015–present
- assumed office of minister in 2014 (previous minister moved to new Region)
- vice minister, 2012–2014

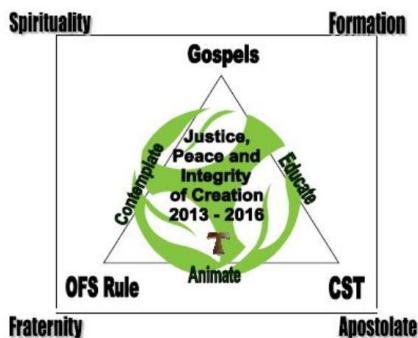
BSSF Region: new to REC

“Franciscans are expected to develop a perspective that builds on the gospel way of St. Francis of Assisi. There are many books and articles about his life and spirit. To capture the heart of Francis is an ongoing process. New insights and wider awareness of his spirit keep growing. We are expected to keep the Franciscan spirit fresh and pass it on” (123).

Lester Bach, OFM Cap.,

*Giving Life to the Words: Secular Franciscan Constitutions ... A Spiritual Commentary*

## Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC):



## Reflections on the Year of Mercy

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

On the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, the Church closes the Extraordinary Year of Mercy.

I must admit, I truly enjoyed this special year where mercy was front and center in the life of the Church. I was blessed to do weekend retreats and days of reflections on the theme of mercy during this year. What a blessing to consciously and purposefully immerse oneself in mercy — for study and as a practice.

I am a bit sad that this extraordinary year is ending. But is it really?

It's true that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, will officially close the year; but as Franciscans and Christians, mercy never ends. Jesus taught, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." As long as we walk this journey called life, we are to be merciful. Like love, mercy isn't something you feel every once in a while; it is a decision you make every single moment of your life.

How do we choose mercy? One small way is to practice habitual acts of mercy. Instead of performing random acts of kindness, choose habitual acts of mercy. Make the practice of mercy more of a daily habit rather than random or whenever the mood strikes. Choose to be a merciful presence as you speak peace and listen kindly.

Pope Francis wrote that it is his burning desire that we as Christians reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. "It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty," he said. "And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy" (*The Face of Mercy*, 15).

At our recent Annual Regional Gathering, I spoke of "**mindful mercy-ing**" as that reawakening the conscience Pope Francis wrote about: the deliberate and present-moment act of being mercy to one another. There is no shortage of ways to be the merciful presence of God. With Jesus and St. Francis as our models, we need only look to their lives for how to live out the Gospel and be mercy. We must study and know the Gospels for us to know mercy.

"In order to be capable of mercy," Pope Francis wrote, "we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us. In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle" (13).

As we close out the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, let us keep the practice of mindful mercy-ing in our hearts and minds throughout the remainder of our journey called life in Christ.

May the Lord give you his peace.

*Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's JPIC animator, is a member of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head Island, S.C.; the National JPIC Commission; the International Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation; and the Franciscan Action Network Commission.*

### Secular Franciscan Websites

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region — [www.bssfso.org](http://www.bssfso.org)

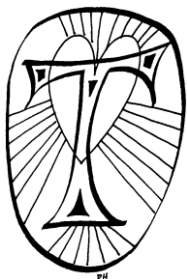
National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States (NAFRA)

[www.nafra-sfo.org](http://www.nafra-sfo.org)

Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Sæcularis (CIOFS)

International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order — [www.ciofs.org](http://www.ciofs.org)

## From the heart of the regional formation director



By Dianne Ambrose, OFS

Greetings to all of my brothers and sisters.

First, I would like to introduce myself to you. As your newly elected regional formation director, I am pleased to be of service to you for the next three years. I am a member of San Damiano Fraternity in Athens, Ga. A widow of six years, I live alone with my one-eyed 14-year-old black cat, Mr. Zeke.

I was very fortunate to attend my first Quinquennial, held in St. Louis, Mo., last summer. Father Lester Bach, OFM Cap., was one of many great presenters.

He stressed the importance of dialogue in the local fraternity. He stated that people in dialogue are somewhat open to changing opinions, that it's crucial to keeping the mindset of bringing us together even when we disagree.

Father Bach discussed the difference between debate and dialogue. Debate is when people oppose each other and try to prove the other person wrong. People in dialogue are trying to have an understanding of each other. They are open to the spirit and to actually listening to one's brothers and sisters.

He had us remember Article 19 in our Rule, which tells us that we are "bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly" and that we "should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone...."

We are called to conversion (Article 7), which includes being in constant dialogue with ourselves. If we are going to bring peace, we must also have peace within. We are called to relate to ALL people and to creation.

Strive to bring joy and hope to all in your fraternity. Share your lives with each other. Get to know one another. Even if you think you know a brother or sister, they may be in a different place that day than they were before in their lives. When someone makes a mistake, address it and move on. Knowing your fears makes you human.

I also encourage you to look at the General Constitutions, Article 26. We "should promote mutual understanding and ... see to it that the atmosphere of [our] meetings is welcoming and that it reflects great joy." We should commit ourselves to create an environment of faith and hope.

I'd like to leave you with this thought: The toolbox God gives us as Franciscans is filled with humility, simplicity, and a sense of humor.

Peace,  
Dianne

## Fraternity's apostolate brings joy to member in assisted living

By Evelyn Lauer, OFS

Wearing tan slacks, a white blouse, and a blue canvas sun hat, Maureen Bahr, OFS, rode slowly down a quiet lane in her motorized wheelchair. It was a beautiful sunny day, with large billowing clouds, and a light breeze. Little did Maureen know the afternoon would bring on a perfect storm of visitors.

Maureen, 85, is a resident of the Davis Community, an assisted living and nursing home complex in Wilmington, N.C. She has lived there for several years.

In 1998, she became a professed member of Padre Pio Fraternity in Raleigh. Four years later she transferred to the Franciscan Family of Greensboro (fraternity). More recently, she has been taken under the wing of the St. Thomas More Fraternity in Wilmington. Mike Yamat, OFS, and



I, members of that fraternity, stopped by to visit Maureen as part of the fraternity's "Visit Our Own" apostolate to sick members and those who can no longer participate in fraternity activities.

Her smile was big when she saw us, recognizing Mike right away. And he had brought along three little gifts: the church bulletin, a key chain with the words "Practice Hope" printed on one side of the attached disc, and a rosary he had picked up on a recent trip to the Philippines. Maureen seemed to glow as she thanked Mike and then carefully put the gifts among her treasures in a Ziploc bag.

We hadn't been there 15 minutes when a voice called out, "Mom." It was Kathy, one of her eight children, along with Kathy's son. A resident of France, Kathy was in the United States for two weeks to visit with her mother and other family members.

"The message must have gone out," Maureen said, looking around at the growing number of people.

A few minutes later, Jim Klein, a eucharistic minister from St. Mark Church, walked up the path to pray with Maureen and offer the Sacred Host, as he had done many times before.

Reminiscing about the past, Kathy said her mother was born in Brooklyn to Irish immigrant parents. After high school, she went to Georgetown University, where she eventually met her husband-to-be.

"Dad was an agricultural economist," Kathy said. "His work took him and his growing family to such countries as Panama, Chile, and Peru." He worked to help government officials determine the right type of crops to cultivate in each country, she added.

Kathy also recalled how her father almost died in the crash of a small plane in the jungles of Panama. After several days he was rescued, thanks to a friend who, in a dream, heard the words, "Come find us," and took off in another small plane. From the air, the downed plane was finally spotted when a flash of sunlight bounced off one of its windows.

"It was a miracle," Kathy said.

Eventually, the family moved back to the United States, settling finally in Asheboro, N.C., where Maureen taught English as a second language for many years.

Like their mother used to be, all of Maureen's children are redheads. "We have a family picture of all us kids lined up, and we all had red hair," Kathy said, laughing.

Not wanting to interfere with the family reunion or the task of the eucharistic minister, Mike and I said our good-byes, but not before I asked Maureen one last question: "Do you have a favorite prayer?" She thought for just a moment and said, "St. Francis."

*Evelyn Lauer, OFS, is a candidate in St. Thomas More Fraternity in Wilmington, N.C.*

## Chaotic day teaches lesson for life

By Carole King, OFS

In 24 hours, I literally was forced out of *every* comfort zone I had.

A flight alone (I have a phobia of flying), delayed because of a problem with the plane, subsequent late landing, a nearly missed connecting flight, running half a mile to the gate (FYI, older chubby persons should NEVER run!).

Asthma attack and injured ligament in knee because of running; sitting next to a businessman wearing half bottle of cologne (bad for asthma). Three minutes after pilots promised a smooth flight, the fasten-seat-belt sign comes on with severe turbulence warning.

Rent car with a leak in the tire on a 40-minute drive. Show up at a conference *without* the speaker. Wendy burger — only meal of the day. Check into a hotel under renovation, can't use

front entrance, only the side facing woods.

Leaky tire replaced with donut tire. Leaving at 2:30 next a.m. Car alarm warning to check spare tire — in middle of drive on very dark highway (no way!!).

Miss airport exit in tunnel at 3 a.m. Find car-rental return (having *never* encountered spikes in the entrance to the parking lot), takes 20 minutes to realize they are one-way spikes. Barely make it to the gate on time for flight home.

Those are just the highlights! If someone had told me what I was going to experience in that 24-hour time period, I would have laughed at their silliness and said, “No way!”

In all that nonstop mayhem, it never occurred to me to ask why. It *did* occur to me to pray, and pray I did! I begged and pleaded, I praised, blessed, and offered up my suffering — I even gave thanks (just a tiny little bit). I uttered more Our Fathers and Hail Marys than I’d ever prayed before in a continuous stream, throughout plane rides, shuttle rides, and the car ride to beat all

car rides.

It’s only now, after the fact, that I am looking back on the entire event and trying to find meaning — some kind of a lesson to be gleaned.

And that keeps bringing me back to the whole comfort-zone thing. When God asked me specifically to step out of that first comfort zone, I chose to say “yes,” with the knowledge that if I believe what I claim to believe, I have to trust that he will give to me whatever I need to accomplish what he asks. And he did. I was able to get onto an airplane for the first time in 20 years.

I’m not sure, but I think this comfort-zone thing is an ongoing process. Maybe it’s what we mean as Franciscans by “ongoing conversion.” Following God’s call, doing his will — somehow, we fall into the trap of thinking that because God gives us what we need to do his will, it’s always going to be easy, and filled with wonderful, joy filled blessings. We think that everything is just going to fall into place, that we won’t be put into awkward, scary, complicated and uncomfortable settings.

I liked my comfort zones! I liked doing what I thought God was asking me to do, but from *within* my zone. With this last trip, I was unceremoniously dumped out of that comfort zone — and then some!

So maybe serving God from within a comfort zone is kind of fake, like just sticking your toes in the water and calling it swimming. Maybe to effectively serve God you just have to jump in — and not worry about the water temp, or how deep it is, or what might be lurking on the bottom.

St. Francis jumped right in, even though he didn’t know what to expect. He picked up rocks and began to “rebuild the Church.”

That’s where trust comes in: not the trust that tries to make God bend to our will, like “I know I won’t get hurt because I’m doing God’s will”; or, “I know this is going to turn out the way I want because I’m doing God’s will.” It is the trust that says, “I’m in God’s hands; no matter what happens, ultimately all will be well.” Think of St. Francis going to see the sultan. That, my friends, is trust!

It seems like the lesson to be learned here can be taken from our Blessed Mother. Her “yes” to God didn’t give her a free ride through life; it was not trouble free, carefree, or pain free. On the contrary, her “yes” to God brought her greatest joy, and her greatest suffering. She never



took her eyes off of the One from Whom and to Whom all things flow.

So we don't get a free ride, but we do get the ride of our life that will take us through the joys and the sufferings, sustained by the grace that comes from our "yes."

*Carole King, OFS, is formation director of St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity in Aiken, S.C.*

## Writing St. Francis book is labor of love

By Bret Thoman, OFS

"No one could even talk about how holy she [Clare] became unless the Holy Spirit helped them to speak." Sister Benvenuta, who lived with St. Clare in San Damiano, spoke these words under oath while being interviewed during Clare's canonization process.

If that was true for her, I think we could say the same about Francis. While writing my new book, *St. Francis of Assisi: Passion, Poverty, and the Man Who Transformed the Catholic Church*, I cannot say for sure that the Holy Spirit "helped [me] to speak," but I will say that I hope that was the case.

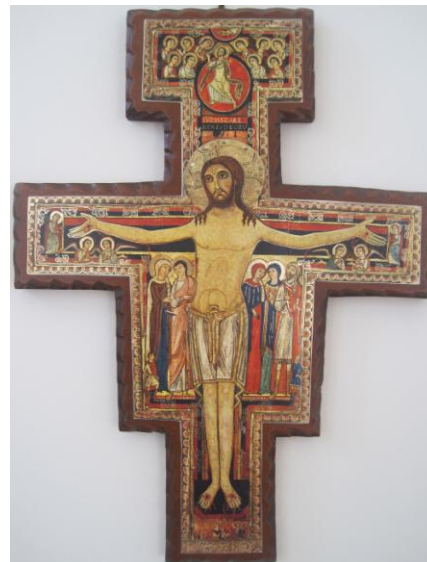
For some people, writing is difficult, even laborious. For me, it is sometimes so. However, this book on Francis was not challenging to write; it flowed very naturally and easily, and much of the writing was even fun.

St. Francis has been instrumental in my life for more than 25 years. His life story and intercession led to a huge change in my own life and later influenced my decision to convert to the Catholic faith. I have been a devoted follower and student of St. Francis ever since.

So this book is the result of all those Franciscan elements that formed me: my conversion, my later vocation as a Secular Franciscan, the friars and ministers who taught me about Francis, my certificate in Franciscan studies, a master's degree in Italian, 13 years leading and accompanying pilgrimages to Italy, and living in Assisi and now Loreto. Each of these facets of my life has contributed to this book — some more, some less.

First and foremost, my book on St. Francis is the fruit of my vocation as a Franciscan. Without being part of the Franciscan family — as a professed Secular Franciscan and spiritual son of Francis — I do not think I would have connected with him as closely as I did; and the Francis who appeared within the pages would have risked being simply a series of dry facts, deeds, and stories, largely devoid of spirituality and substance. Instead, I tried to portray a "Francis" who was real and authentic.

It is said that if you really want to get to know someone, you should visit the place where they grew up. Therefore, I attempted to bring to life the actual time and place in which Francis lived. Francis's conversion did not take place in a vacuum; instead, it happened in central Italy during the High Middle Ages (11th–13th centuries) as feudalism was coming to an end and the era of the commune and the marketplace was in full swing. Studying Italian history and living in Assisi — as well as on numerous pilgrimages to Rome, Mount La Verna, and the Rieti Valley — provided me with intimate knowledge of the setting and context in which Francis lived and which I sought to portray.



**The San Damiano Crucifix, from which Francis heard a voice telling him to "repair my house" was originally in the Church of San Damiano, on the plain below Assisi. It is now in a side chapel in the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi.**

The framework, including facts and theology, came mostly from my certificate in Franciscan studies. I will always cherish my studies in the now-defunct Institute for Contemporary Franciscan Life, a program offered by St. Francis University (I believe the courses are going to be offered online). The various elements of Franciscan topics I studied, including spirituality history, prayer, and the life of St. Clare, found their way into this book.

However, I must say that the person of Francis in my book was influenced most of all by the Franciscan men and women I've known in my life. More than reading or studying, it has been the Franciscans I've known personally who have embodied the spirituality of Francis, and their lives are so often reflected in the character of Francis in my book.

Initially, they were those who instructed me in my formation. Therefore, this book is deeply indebted to my formators: Cricket Aull, OFS, and the late Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv. (1943–2015). I learned so much by listening to them and watching them as they “preached the Gospel at all times, and when necessary used words.”

Later, my life here in Italy has led to countless friendships with Franciscan friars, Poor Clare nuns, other Secular Franciscans and their families, who are all seeking to follow a rule of life based on Franciscan spirituality.

Thus, the Italian Franciscans, together with my OFS brothers and sisters back home, have all given a real face to the eight-century-old body of Francis that is conserved underneath the great basilica built in his honor in Assisi. Every time I look into the eyes of a Franciscan, I see the face of St. Francis. And this is the Francis who informs my book.

My book, accepted for publication by TAN Books, one of the largest and oldest Catholic publishers in the United States, was released in July. They have a very large readership and have taken a great liking to the book. The owner of the company, Conor Gallagher, flew out to St. Louis for the Quinquennial in July to help me launch the book.

And, already, I have received positive endorsements from Tibor Kauser, OFS, minister general of the Secular Franciscan Order; Father Daniel P. Horan, OFM; Sister Ilia Delio, OSF; Father Murray Bodo, OFM; and Father Albert Haase, OFM. Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., the preacher to the papal household, endorsed it. Bishop Gregory Hartmayer, OFM. Conv., bishop of Savannah, Ga., wrote the foreword. Of course, I should say also that Jerry Rousseau, OFS, our former regional minister, liked it, too.

Obviously, the book is not about me, it's about St. Francis. However, even Francis himself always pointed to Someone Else. Thus, this book is really about what happens when one gives him/herself totally to our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. It's about conversion.

And in this, by pointing to Francis, who, in turn, pointed to him on the Cross, I do hope that it was the Holy Spirit who “helped me to speak.”

P.S.: Speaking of Clare, I'm almost finished with a book about her. Stay tuned.

*Bret Thoman, OFS, a member of Immaculate Conception Fraternity, Jonesboro, Ga., is director of St. Francis Pilgrimages. He and his family currently live in Loreto, in Italy's Marches Region.*



**Sculpture by Norberto Proietti, in front of the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, shows Francis returning to Assisi from his journey to join a Crusade. A voice in a dream had told him to “return home and you will be told what to do.”**





## Fr. Solanus Casey Fraternity Celebrates

Members of Fr. Solanus Casey Fraternity, Morehead City, N.C., joined parishioners of St. Mildred Church in Swansboro, N.C., in October for the blessing of the animals. “We had an assortment of dogs, cats, two ducks, and one loon,” Carolyn Peduzzi, OFS, fraternity minister, said.

The fraternity celebrated the Transitus of St. Francis during its October fraternity gathering. “We initially had some difficulty as early October is festival time in both Morehead City and Swansboro but we persevered. It was spiritual and I believe it summed up the Pillars of Spirituality, Formation, and Fraternity. As we always bring articles for our Apostolate, “Family Promise,” we actually covered them all!”

In September, the fraternity had a combined social and gathering. “It was well attended by our members, who shared the meal and the joy,” Carolyn said. “Our significant others (non-Secular Franciscans) always enjoy the spirituality and fellowship that we share.”

“First and foremost, for Francis poverty is Gospel poverty, the poverty of Jesus Christ, ‘who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself ...’ (Philippians 2:6–7).

This *kenosis*, or self-emptying of Christ, is Franciscan poverty. Jesus had to hand over divinity in order to know dependence on the Father. Francis had to hand over his possessions, and more important, possessiveness itself, in order to know dependence on the Father” (39–40).

Murray Bodo, OFM,

*Enter Assisi: An Invitation to Franciscan Spirituality*





Villagers and missionaries gather outside St. Henry Church in Kiwala after Saturday-morning Mass.

## To the Nations experience proves unforgettable

By Dr. Theresa Christie, OFS

I had wanted to go on a mission trip for some time and had been offered several previous opportunities to go with various church groups. However I wanted to go with a Catholic group; so, when I heard the “To the Nations” presentation by Stephen Smith, OFS, at the Annual Regional Gathering in 2015, I just knew this was my call. And I am so glad that my husband, Martin Hadman, and I said “yes”!

Arriving in Entebbe, Uganda, at 0-dark-30 the morning of June 17, we 17 missionaries (15 Americans, two Canadians) were cheerfully greeted by Stephen, a member of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.; and Moses Kasozi and the LifeTeen Uganda team. They had just dropped off a mission group that was returning to the United States.

We loaded one minibus with duffle bags of medical supplies, clothing, and luggage; it was busting at the seams! Then we boarded the bus that we would travel in for the next 11 days.

Our first stop was for a sunrise Mass in the open-air chapel at the Shrine of Our Lady, Queen of Peace, near Kampala. Then we were invited to the rectory for a breakfast of eggs, toast, bananas, and coffee.

Then, we were off to the equator. Entebbe is north of the equator. After a quick stop at the equator, we went on to Masaka, which is south of the equator.

Taking a shower after I arrived, I fell and shattered my wrist. I experienced, firsthand, healthcare in Uganda. If you have money, you can be seen at one of the private clinics. I was treated at the private clinic of the department chair of orthopedic surgery. My wrist was X-rayed

at another private clinic, then set, splinted, and eventually casted back at the surgeon's clinic. All in all, the experience was good.

People ministered to me throughout the trip. Everyone prayed for healing for me and all were confident that God would restore me to health and full function.

**Day 2.** We arrived in Kiwala, where the previous group had prepared the foundation for a house that we would assist in building. First, though, we attended Mass with the villagers. The church was packed but they made room for the missionaries from America and Canada. No stained-glass windows, no organ, some holes in the roof; but the people were joyful and certainly made a joyful noise.

We were able to have daily adoration and were blessed to have Father Dios celebrate Mass with us daily at mission base before we started the work.

After Mass, we were taken to the construction site, where we were to build a two-room house for Josephine and the six children she cares for. In Uganda there are many orphans, and the women of the villages take in children who have no one else to care for them.

**Day 3.** Morning Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows Cathedral in Masaka. The two-hour service was vibrant with song and dance — even the priests were dancing at the altar! Then we attended an XLT (eXaLT) sponsored by LifeTeen Uganda. This is a revival of sorts attended by several



**Dr. Theresa Christie, OFS, and one of Josephine's children, Mateo, who is about 3 years old.**

hundred children, teens, and adults. From 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., there was singing and dancing, inspirational talks, introduction of the missionaries. Adoration and Mass concluded the uplifting experience.

**Day 4.** We returned to Kiwala to continue building Josephine's house. In the evening, we were introduced to the "street boys." These are mostly young boys (teens and preteens), though there is occasionally a young girl in the group, as well. Orphaned for various reasons, they're now living on the streets. They gather in designated places, established by Moses Kasozi and LifeTeen, where they are greeted with love and respect. Given an opportunity to wash their hands, they're then fed and ministered to. We were able to witness to them, pray with them, and show them the love that God has for all his children.

**Day 5.** Back at Kiwala, we worked on Josephine's home and visited a villager who lives at the top of a very steep hill. It was quite a trek to the home of Patrick and his family. The state owns their house and is evicting them. They have nowhere else to go. We are hoping to be able to provide a house for Patrick and his family.

**Day 6.** At a school sponsored by LifeTeen and To the Nations Missions: Uganda, the children welcomed us with song and dance and gave each of us a hand-picked bouquet

of flowers. The auditorium is a clearing on the school grounds.

Many of the children have no shoes or school uniforms. They are fed a meal of at school; for most of them, this is their only meal of the day. Five days a week they have porridge similar to Cream of Wheat and fortified with vitamins and minerals; the other two days, they have beans and rice.



The work that is being supported there has enabled the schools to not only increase their enrollment but also to increase the pass rates on the state exams from 25 percent to more than 90 percent. The children are so grateful for everything being done for them.

At this school, we were able to provide a volleyball set and new soccer balls for the physical education department. We taught the students about hygiene and abstinence. The older girls were given “sani-packs” containing clean underwear and reusable sanitary pads. Students and missionaries prayed and talked with each other. We also opened the new kitchen that will increase the efficiency of cooking the daily meal.

**Day 7.** We returned to Kiwala where we held a health clinic for about 500 men, women, and children with various ailments. Everyone was given deworming pills; many were treated for malaria.

**Day 8.** We visited two other schools. Again we were greeted with song, dance, and flowers. We once again distributed sani-packs to the older girls, in addition to education on abstinence and hygiene. We gave soccer balls to these schools, as well.

**Day 9.** Returning to Kiwala for home visits, we were welcomed into the homes of several families and prayed for their intentions. Later, we visited the street boys during their daily meal. We also held a medical clinic for them, mostly cleaning and bandaging wounds.

**Day 10.** At the public and Catholic hospitals in Masaka, we provided medical supplies and baby formula. Mass in the outpatient clinic’s waiting area was filled with the infectious joy of the Ugandan people as we all praised God.

Later, we celebrated Mass at a local prison and gave the inmates loaves of bread and packages of sugar. This was the first time that many of them had interacted with white visitors, so there were many handshakes during the kiss of peace.

**Day 11.** Our last day in Uganda. We returned to Kiwala, for the blessing of Josephine’s completed home and to bring bunk beds for this house, and for two others built by previous groups. Afterward, back at the mission base, we packed up and headed to Kampala and the airport at Entebbe, which included a stop on the equator and a visit to the Uganda Martyrs Shrine.

This was the site of Pope Francis’s November 2015 visit and his open-air Mass for the people of Uganda. We learned that two other popes — Paul VI and Pope St. John Paul II — have also visited Uganda.

I have to say that this was the experience of a lifetime. Have often heard that once you start going on mission trips, you will be hooked, and I can tell you that it is absolutely true. My husband and I will be heading back to Uganda with To the Nations Missions: Uganda next April.

*Dr. Theresa Christie, OFS, is minister of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity in Augusta, Ga.*



**Missionary group member Martin Hadman talks with a local youngster during the construction of Josephine’s house.**

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR  
SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS AND ELECTIONS  
November 2016 thru May 2017

	* confirmed	V+ follow-up visit	(observers in parentheses)
<b>2016</b>	<b>Fraternity/Location</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors E Presider/Eccles. Witness</b>
*Nov. 18–19	St. Francis of the Hills, Hendersonville, NC	V	Sara Nell Boggs/Willie Guadalupe
*Dec. 2–3	Mother Cabrini, NFG, Anderson, SC	V	DorothyAnn Rowland (Janet Hulshof)/Audrey Binet
<b>2017</b>			
Date TBD	Seven Dolors of the BVM, Franklin, TN	V+	
*Feb. 11	Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary, Hilton Head Island, SC	E	Janet Hulshof (DorothyAnn Rowland)/Audrey Binet
Feb. 18	Blessed John Duns Scotus, Garden City, SC	E	Carmen Madero (Carolyn Peduzzi)/Joanita Nellenbach
Mar. 8	Channel of Peace, Chattanooga, TN	E	Lannie Newman (Barbara Garrison)/Faye Martin
*Apr. 2	Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, SC	E	Carolyn Peduzzi (Carmen Madero)/Fr. David Hyman
Apr. 12–13	Five Georgia Martyrs, St. Simons Island, GA	V	Janet Hulshof (DorothyAnn Rowland)/Audrey Binet
May 6	St. Clare of Assisi, Aiken, SC	V	Sara Nell Boggs/Willie Guadalupe
May 8–9	Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, NC	V	DorothyAnn Rowland (Bob Pearson)/

**OFS**

It's our Order's abbreviation after our names or in other writing and refers to Ordo Franciscanus Sæcularis, the official — Latin — name of our Order.

In English, we're still the  
**Secular Franciscan Order.**

## Book Review

### New biography paints warm portrait of the Poverello

*St. Francis of Assisi: Passion, Poverty, and the Man Who Transformed the Catholic Church*  
by Bret Thoman, OFS. TAN Books, Charlotte, N.C., 2016; hardcover, 256 pages.

By Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

At the Area 1 Retreat in May, Father Steve Gross, OFM Conv., told us that we “need to know the real flesh-and-blood Francis” by reading what Francis said and wrote.

In *St. Francis of Assisi*, Bret Thoman, OFS, has presented us with just such a living, intimate portrait.

Bret, director of St. Francis Pilgrimages and a member of Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga., has based this book on Francis’s words and those of his early biographers in such texts as the three-volume *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. These he has interwoven with his extensive knowledge of 13th century life in Assisi.

We meet Francis, a man with hopes, dreams, doubts, longings — someone not so different from us (at least at the outset) and who shows us who we can become if we’re open to listening to what God is saying to us.

That doesn’t mean that we’re going to receive the stigmata or that we’ll be canonized, but we all have the opportunity to grow in holiness and our love of God. — if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. And that’s what Francis did. He had to grow in his vocation, just as we do. It wasn’t any easier for him than it is for us.

Bret says that he “used a little creativity and imagination in some of the details” (xix). He’s incorporated his imagination seamlessly into what we know from the original sources. We are taken into Francis’s thoughts as we journey with him.

I found that I was, indeed, journeying with Francis, and I felt closer to him than I had in some other biographies of him that I’d read.

“The more profound journey, however,” Bishop Gregory Hartmayer, OFM Conv., bishop of Savannah, Ga., notes in the Foreword, “is the spiritual one, as Francis struggles with the conflicting voices of his dreams and his parents’ prophecies that he would ‘one day be something great.’”

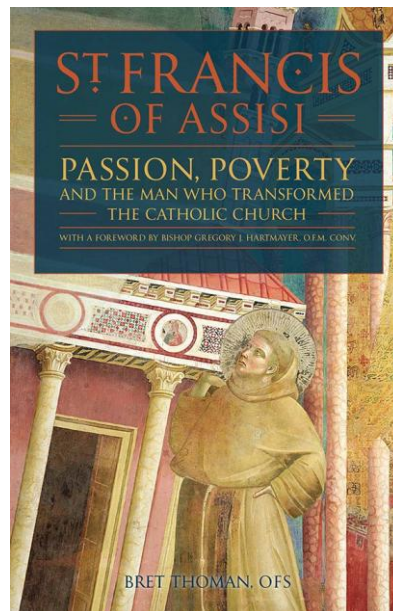
Early in the story, Francis dreams that he’ll “marry a most beautiful bride and become the lord of a magnificent palace filled with knightly arms and glittering shields, and many knights would follow him” (21). That fit right in with his and his parents’ beliefs that he was destined to become a great knight or even a prince.

Setting out to join a Crusade, he had another dream. Again the voice spoke, this time asking, “Francis, who can do more for you, the lord or his servant, a rich man or a beggar?”

“Francis responded ... that a lord or a rich man could do more.” The voice asked, “Then why are you serving the servant?” (26)

The voice told him to return to Assisi. He knew he’d be in disgrace with his father and the local citizens. “How would he become a great prince ...? Had he misinterpreted the first dream? Was the Devil playing tricks on him?” (27)

Only later, praying before the crucifix in the run-down little Church of San Damiano, looking at Christ, Francis heard a voice that gave him his mission: “‘Francis, go and rebuild my house,





which, as you can see, is totally in ruin.’ The voice then repeated itself two more times.”

Francis listened constantly in prayer and in all he saw around him, including in hermitages and other remote locations. God and he were present to each other. Francis delighted in nature, and nature ministered to him:

“During the cold months, the heat of the fire warmed his body and his inner being; he always kept the embers lit as long as possible. How he rejoiced on those first spring days when the power of the Mediterranean sun warmed the land on which he often lay. During the hot summer months, the coolness of the caves refreshed his body. ...

“As Francis descended into the barrenness of the caves in solitude and silence, he felt like he was entering something much bigger than himself. It was almost as if he were descending into the womb of the earth where he felt God comforting, nurturing, and protecting him. In the caves, he was filled with a powerful—almost overwhelming—sense of God’s power, goodness, and love” (146).

I like the way Bret tells us about life in Assisi by including Francis in events, such as what happened to someone diagnosed with leprosy. Francis loathed and avoided lepers, as did most people; but leprosy infected rich and poor, so it’s quite possible that one or more of Francis’s friends would contract the disease. Reading Bret’s description of how lepers were treated, I could understand the tender-hearted Francis wanting to accompany his friend on the procession into his exile and living death.

Of course, no biography of Francis would be complete without the story of the wolf of Gubbio. Bret tells the story of the wolf by having Francis recall that incident as he is being captured by the Saracens.

Don’t pass by the interesting and informative footnotes, which provide much additional information and background; as in the footnote on the wolf: “It can be considered an allegory for Franciscan peacemaking. However, the bones of an actual wolf are still preserved today in a church near Gubbio. They are believed to be the same wolf that Francis tamed” (172).

Being so close to Francis, I felt that he had become my friend. That must be why the account of his death had me close to tears. The book contains eight pages of Bret’s color photos of

locations important in Francis’s life. There is also an excellent index. This biography is a wonderful way to get to know Francis on a deeper level and to journey with him.

*Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, is Communio editor. She 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.*

## **Newly Professed Congratulations!**

### **Channel of Peace Fraternity**

Chattanooga, Tenn., July 31

Tony Ferraraccio, OFS

Kathy Stephens, OFS

Andrea Tierney, OFS

Brian Tierney, OFS

### **Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity**

Blairsville, Ga., Aug. 6

Monica Jean Hiler, OFS

Robert Hiler, OFS

Helen Neff, OFS

### **St. John Vianney,**

### **Newly Forming Group**

Lithia Springs, Ga., Aug. 15

Sponsoring Fraternity:

Immaculate Conception,

Jonesboro, Ga.

Javier Cortez, OFS

Cindy Kasmier, OFS

Clifford Kasmier, OFS

Nance Plachta, OFS

Leslie Riney, OFS

Bertha Rivera, OFS

Ana Marie Ruiz, OFS

Maria Seay, OFS

Ana Valenzuela, OFS

**Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis  
Regional Executive Council Roster**

**Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS**

**Vice Minister: Carmen Madero, OFS**

**Secretary: Barbara Garrison, OFS**

**Treasurer: Ken Brooke, OFS**

**Formation Director: Dianne Ambrose, OFS**

**Spiritual Assistant:**

**Search In Progress**

**Area Councilors**

**Area 1**

**Lori Moran, OFS; Lannie Newman, OFS**

**AL: Bessemer;**

**GA: Athens, Blairsville, Conyers, Duluth, Jonesboro;**

**TN: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville**

**Area 2**

**Sara Nell Boggs, OFS; Janet Hulshof, OFS**

**GA: Augusta, St. Simons Island;**

**NC: Asheville, Charlotte, Hendersonville, Newton;**

**SC: Aiken, Charleston, Columbia, Greenville,  
Hilton Head Island, Spartanburg**

**Area 3**

**Bob Pearson, OFS; Carolyn Peduzzi, OFS**

**NC: Burlington, Elizabeth City, Fayetteville, Greensboro,  
Morehead City, Raleigh, Wilmington, Winston Salem;**

**SC: Garden City**

**Archivist: Sara Nell Boggs, OFS**

***Communio* Editor**

**Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS**

**Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Animator**

**Carolyn D. Townes, OFS**

**Multicultural Commission Chair**

**Willie Guadalupe, OFS**

**Youth/Young Adult Fraternal Animator**

**Position Available**

**Prayer Ministry (online prayer requests)**

**Area 1: Lori Moran, OFS**

**Area 2: Dorothy Huebner, OFS**

**Area 3: Bob Pearson, OFS**

Fraternity prayer coordinators submit prayer requests.

**Congratulations!  
New Councils**

**Fraternity of Brother Francis**

Newton, N.C.

July 9

Minister: Carole Marmorato, OFS

Vice Minister: John Martin, OFS

Secretary: Xiomara Palma, OFS

Treasurer: Judith Hudson, OFS

Formation Director: Rita Borst, OFS

Councilor: Eric McIntire, OFS

Councilor: Douglas Miller, OFS

Councilor: Roger Stewart, OSF

**Franciscan Martyrs of  
Siroki Brijeg Fraternity**

Blairsville, Ga.

Sept. 10

Minister: Patricia Tomczyk, OFS

Vice Minister: Stephen Smith, OFS

Secretary: Jerry Gerbig, OFS

Treasurer: Ron Tomczyk, OFS

Formation Director:

Madeline Rousseau, OFS

Councilor: Doreen Dunlap, OFS

Councilor: Joan Furst, OFS

Councilor: Caroline Richbourg, OFS

**The Spirit of Francis and Clare  
Fraternity**

Conyers, Ga.

Sept. 18

Minister: Charlotte Alesi, OFS

Vice Minister: Philip Westcott, OFS

Secretary: Patricia Wilson, OFS

Treasurer: Janie McIsaac, OFS

Formation Director: Joel Alesi, OFS

Councilor: Patricia Holcombe, OFS

Councilor: Carol Ann Takken, OFS