

Communio

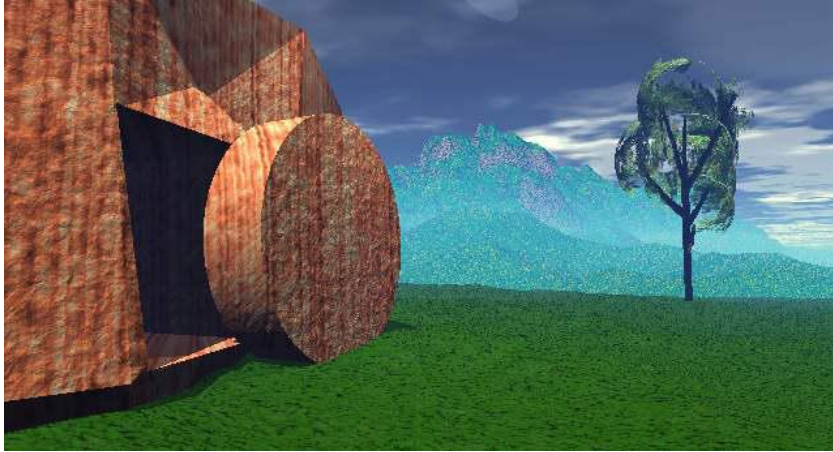
That All May Be One

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

Spring 2015

Lady Poverty and the Resurrection

“Francis ... turned to the pursuit of prayer and began to invoke Jesus, the teacher of poverty: ... Nor was this loyal spouse (Lady Poverty) absent from



Your burial. For she would permit You to have nothing connected with ointments and linen that was not lent by others. Nor yet was Your most holy spouse missing from Your resurrection: for, rising gloriously in her embraces, You left behind in the tomb everything that had

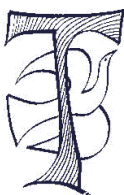
been lent for the occasion of Your burial. You carried her with You to heaven, leaving to the worldly all that belonged to the world. And You bequeathed to Lady Poverty the seal of the kingdom of heaven, for the signing of the elect who wished to walk the path of perfection.

“Oh, who is there who would not love this Lady Poverty above all things? I beg You that I be signed with the entitlement that is hers to give. I desire to be enriched with the treasure she is. O most poor Jesus, I petition You, for the sake of Your name, that this be the property my brothers and I will have for ever, namely, never to be able to own anything under heaven. And let this flesh of mine, as long as it lives, be sustained always, though in utter frugality, by fare that comes from others.”

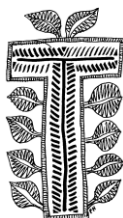
Ubertino da Casale (1305),
“The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus,” Book Five, (pp. 160 & 162)
Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume III, The Prophet

The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





Editor's Journal

There can never be too much good Franciscan reading material, so this is my shameless plug for a venerable publication that has taken on a new look at the beginning of its 65th year.

I've subscribed to *The Cord: A Franciscan Spiritual Review* since 2012 and have always enjoyed the articles. I liked the 6-by-9 size. Color cover, but few illustrations inside, which didn't particularly bother me. So, when I found out a few months ago that the format was going to change, I was curious, to say the least.

Must say I was pleasantly surprised to get my first issue of what is now *Franciscan Connections: The Cord — A Spiritual Review*.

It's now 8½-by-11, full color with plenty of photos and other art. Among the articles in the first issue are: "What is the Franciscan Imagination?" by Brother William J. Short, OFM; "The Globalization of Indifference," by Father David B. Couturier, OFM Cap.; "Beauty in the Franciscan Tradition" by Sister Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ; and "Clare and the Franciscan Missionary Charism," by Sister Margaret Carney, OSF. In the "Franciscan Roundtable" (news briefs), the Poor Clares at Travelers Rest, S.C., are mentioned for their work in spiritual direction.

And we have an interview with Tibor Kauser, OFS, our new minister general, reprinted from *FRATERNIZED*, the national magazine of the OFS in Spain. Tibor is 55, an architect, and has a wife and family.

I've heard Secular Franciscans say that our priority is, "My family, my job, and the OFS," as if OFS was an add-on to the rest of our life. But I think it's my family and my job lived within the OFS way of life." So, I'm glad to see that our new minister general seems to agree.

The interviewer, Xavier Ramos Pozo, asked, "How do you combine work, care for the seculars and your availability to the Order?"

"The question is not to combine," Tibor replied. "We have only one life, everything is a part of that life, and if we are always praying to the Lord, He will guide us. In daily practice it's not that simple, but if we have a strong priority of values, He will help us. If we concentrate on who we are instead of what we have, it's easier most times to know how to proceed."

He'll be at St. Bonaventure University, July 20–24, for, "Assisi in the Time of Francis: Birthplace of the Secular Franciscans," so those of us who are going will have the opportunity to meet him in person.

This journal comes from Franciscan Institute Publications at St. Bonaventure University.

*Pace e bene,
Joanita*

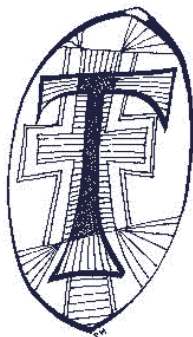
Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, is Communio editor. She is a member of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity in Hendersonville, N.C., and spiritual assistant to Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

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Minister's Message: Be the Joyful Face of Christ to All

A look at the Franciscan Charism (Part 1)



“Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). Many of us began our Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday by being signed with ashes and hearing these words proclaimed.

As we approach the paschal mystery and the celebration of the Easter season, let us reflect on our Franciscan charism.

These excerpts that I will share over the next few months are taken from a talk given by Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., on the occasion of the Chapter of Mats celebrating the 800th anniversary of St. Francis’s primitive rule of 1209.

Father Cantalamessa’s reflection spoke about the “dawning of a charism” that occurred when Francis received verbal permission for his Rule of 1209 from Pope Innocent III. This primitive Rule is the source of the Franciscan charism — the moment when it buds forth, so to speak, “in its pure state.”

Francesco Alberoni, former professor of sociology at the Catholic University of Milan, has noted that the birth of such movements is linked to the appearance of a charismatic leader who, breaking with tradition, draws his adherents into a heroic adventure, and produces in those who follow him the experience of an inner rebirth, a “metanoia” in St. Paul’s sense. There is, Alberoni says, an undoubted analogy between the birth of these movements and the phenomenon of falling in love. This was certainly the case for Francis and his followers: they were in love with God.

Luckily for us, the contents of the primitive rule are among the best known and least controversial things in the whole of Franciscan historiography, despite the fact that the text has been lost. We know directly from Francis about the tone of the primitive Rule. In his “Testament” he states: “And after the Lord had given me brothers, no one showed me what I ought to do, but the Most High himself revealed to me that I should live after the manner of the holy Gospel. And I had it written down in few and simple words, and our Lord the Pope confirmed it for me.”

Celano writes: “When Blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily adding to their number, he wrote for himself and his brothers, present and to come, simply and with few words, a form of life, or rule, using for the most part the words of the holy gospel, longing only for its perfection. But he did insert a few other things necessary to provide for a holy way of life” (Thomas of Celano, “First Life of St. Francis” Chapter XIII, 32).

The “few words” Francis put into writing included the Gospel texts that had struck him during his famous hearing of the Gospel during Mass and on other words of Scripture, such as the passages about Jesus sending the first disciples out on a mission, with instructions to carry “neither gold nor silver, without a staff, bread or shoes, and having no second garment” (“Legend of the Three Companions,” Chapter VIII, 25). It is thought, not without reason, that some of these texts are the ones contained in chapter one of the earlier Rule.

But these were only partial examples. Francis’s real purpose is encapsulated in the expression that was to recur in all succeeding iterations of the rule and which the saint would repeat in his “Testament:” “to live according to the form of the holy Gospel.” His purpose is a simple and radical return to the Gospel; i.e., to the life of Jesus and his first disciples. In this first phase, Francis did not analyze the contents of his choice. Following his instinct to live the Gospel “without gloss,” he took it as a whole, as indivisible.

We, however, can highlight some of the specific contents of his choice, on the basis of what we observe him setting out to do, before and after his journey to Rome and his meeting with the

pope. We can speak of the three “p’s” in Francis’ life: preaching, prayer, and poverty.

The first thing Francis does is to go himself and to send his companions out to villages and towns to preach penance, exactly as he had heard that Jesus did. Jesus inserted times of prayer into his preaching: at night, during the day, at daybreak or dusk. He started with prayer and returned to prayer after his journeys. And now, the little group gathered around Francis did the same. Prayer was the noble framework surrounding all the day’s activities.

All of which went hand in hand with a lifestyle that was poor in the broadest sense of the word, meaning that it was made up of radical material poverty but also of spiritual poverty; in other words, of simplicity, humility, and the avoidance of honors. Francis later included all of this in the name “minores,” which he gave to his brothers.

One important fact stands out: this primitive experience was entirely lay. The great historian Joseph Lortz, in *Francis, the Incomparable Saint*, has forcefully stated that, “at its core, the piety of the Catholic saint, Francis of Assisi, is not clerical.” According to Father Cantalamessa, no more apt definition could be found for the primitive group gathered around Francis than “itinerant charismatics.”

What can we learn from this initial moment in the dawn of the Franciscan movement? The first thing we need to do is take up the correct perspective. When Francis looked back, he saw Christ; when we look back, we see Francis. The difference between him and us is all there, and it is enormous.

“Question: In what, then, does the Franciscan charism consist? Answer: Looking at Christ with the eyes of Francis! We do not cultivate the Franciscan charism by looking at Francis, but by looking at Christ through Francis’ eyes” (“Vocation: God’s Call,” p. 10; *For Up to Now: Foundational Topics for Initial Formation*).

Christ was everything for Francis. He was his only wisdom and his life. For Francis, Christocentrism was an experience, lived in real life and in a real way. There is no need to multiply quotations to prove this.

At the end of his life, to a brother who tried to persuade him to have the Scriptures read to him, Francis replied: “But I have already taken in so much of scripture that I have more than enough for meditating and reflecting. I do not need more, son. I know Christ, poor and crucified” (Celano, “Second Life of St. Francis,” Chapter LXXI, 105).

Brothers and sisters, can we say the same?

May you have a Blessed Easter. Peace and All Good,
Jerry

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

Newly Professed Congratulations!



Barbara Bell, OFS, professed
Feb 7, in Channel of Peace
Fraternity, Chattanooga, Tenn.

St. Thomas More Fraternity
Wilmington, N.C., Jan. 29
Maureen Clare Maus, OFS

**Our Lady of the
Blessed Sacrament Fraternity**
Burlington, N.C., Feb. 7
Nievelis Bitmann, OFS
Mary Dansby, OFS

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: Becoming a Mindful Listener

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

By the time you read this, our region will have completed all three on-the-road workshops on the conflict management training program, “Restorative Circles.”

I want to thank the team from the Georgia Conflict Center for its willingness to train the members of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region. The center’s director, John Lash, and his team did an outstanding job and were very receptive to the ways of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Also, I want to thank all those who took the time to come out for the day-and-a-half to learn and explore this way of being in fraternity. I want to



give a special shout out to Sara Nell Boggs, OFS, our regional formation director, who said, “Sure, why not,” when I approached her at the Annual Regional Gathering last August with the thought of turning this year’s formation workshops into Restorative Circles workshops. It’s all formation, and it’s all peace and justice!

The consensus of Sara Nell and my BSSF JPIC Formation Team is that we need to keep the momentum going. I have had several conversations with Sara Nell, John Lash, and members of the region about next steps. It would not be fair to stop here; we must continue with the process. My thought was to pick one key component from the Restorative Circles process, “Franciscanize” it, and make it our default for conflicts within our Franciscan communities. That key component is listening.

For the last two years I have talked about “active listening” as one of the five components of the PEACE Principles. When we can truly and fully listen, we are being and animating peace. There is no action more loving than to actively listen to another, especially when that other person is hurting or in distress.

As human beings, we all have needs. American psychologist Abraham Maslow laid out a hierarchy of needs. Within that hierarchy is the need to belong, to be a part of a community. As Secular Franciscans, we have that community; we call it fraternity. A

Franciscanizing Restorative Circles

Begin every Circle with prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Combine the Circles technique with material from the *Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership* (2010 edition), especially the section on “Communication” (pp. 72–91).

This includes:

- Communication
- Ground Rules for Communication
- Communicating in a Group
- Skills Used When Communicating
- Action Format
- Communication Self-Evaluation Form
- Roadblocks to Communicating
- “Listen” poem
- Great Reasons to be a Better Listener
- Hints on Listening
- Listening Accurately
- Listening Problems
- Responding Skills
- Using Responding Skills
- Guidelines for Improving Responding Skills
- Engaging in Dialogue
- Dialogue Checklist
- Dialogue Guidelines

fraternity is a family you were not born into but were professed into.

As in all families, conflicts arise. “Conflicts are inevitable, violence is not,” to use the Georgia Conflict Center’s motto. Avoiding conflicts is an act of violence. Allowing conflicts to sit and fester is an act of violence. Allowing conflicts to escalate to the point of anger is an act of violence. We must have another default to this kind of insidious violence. I believe active listening can shift conflicts into growth opportunities — opportunities for learning and being peace.

Mindful listening is not only listening actively but also listening without judgment or resistance, being fully present to the speaker; making a conscious effort to hear and understand what the speaker is saying. Mindful listening is an art and a skill that must be practiced daily.

We have practiced not listening so much that we now need to unlearn the art of not listening. Mindful listening is a skill that we all need to cultivate. As we become better listeners, we become better bearers of peace and justice. Over the course of the next several months, I will be speaking more about our Franciscan way to deal with conflicts within our fraternities, our homes, our workplaces, and the communities we frequent. It promises to be an exciting journey, and I invite you to open your hearts and your minds to being and animating a new way of peace.

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, is a member of the Our Lady Queen of Angels, Emerging Community, in Columbia, S.C.; regional and national animator for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation; a Franciscan Action Network board member and action commissioner, as well as a promoter for Pace e Bene’s Campaign Nonviolence.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR

SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS AND ELECTIONS

April 2015 thru July 2016

* confirmed

V+ follow-up visit

| 2015 | Fraternity & Location | V Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors | E Presider/Ecclesiastical Witness |
|--------------|--|---|--|
| *April 11-12 | Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC | V Jerry Rousseau/Willie Guadalupe | |
| *April 12 | St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Elizabeth City, NC | E Paula Zanker/Pat Wilkerson | |
| *May 9 | Immaculate Conception, Jonesboro, GA | E Barbara Garrison/Faye Martin (Fr. John Koziol) | |
| *June 7 | St. Maximilian Kolbe, Charlotte, NC | E Jerry Rousseau/Willie Guadalupe (Msgr. Richard Bellow) | |
| *June 12-13 | Crucified Christ, N. Charleston, SC | V DorothyAnn Rowland/Lori Moran | |
| *June 13-14 | St. Joseph Cupertino, Bessemer, AL | V Barbara Garrison/Faye Martin | |

ARG August 7-9, 2015 - Ridgecrest, NC – Pastoral and Fraternal Visitation

| | | | |
|-------------|---|-------------------|--|
| *Aug. 21-22 | St. Michael the Archangel, Spartanburg, SC | V Jerry Rousseau/ | |
|-------------|---|-------------------|--|

Terra dei Fioretti (Land of the Little Flowers) — Shrine of Loreto: An opportunity to pray in the Holy House of Mary

By Bret Thoman, OFS



Statue of Our Lady of Loreto (detail opposite) in the Holy House, located inside the basilica.

“The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family.

The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently” (OFS Rule, Art. 9).

Since September, my family and I have been living in Loreto, a charming little town of 10,000 on the Adriatic Sea. We organize pilgrimages here, and we help the friars and nuns in their retreat center next door to the apartment we rent.

Famed throughout the world for preserving the Holy House of the Virgin Mary of Nazareth, the city of Loreto has been an important destination for pilgrims for



nearly eight centuries. The “house of Mary” is composed of three walls of stacked stones originally affixed to a cave in Nazareth, which would have served as the fourth wall. It is believed that Mary grew up within these walls and that the Annunciation took place here. Today, Mary’s house is conserved inside a magnificent and ornate basilica.

Last month, my wife, Katia, and I took advantage of some ridiculously inexpensive Rome–Tel Aviv airline tickets and spent five days in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Though we didn’t make it up to Nazareth, we did see photographs of the grotto of Mary within the Basilica of the Annunciation there. Tradition says that this grotto was the site of Mary’s cave-home. In fact, the three walls that are now here in Loreto would fit perfectly within a sunken space around the cave.

Further, studies have shown that the stones making up the three walls here in Loreto are from that region in Palestine and were worked and cut according to first-century Palestinian methods. Also, there are numerous writings, or graffiti, on the rocks typical of the Judeo-Christian community in Palestine before the fifth century A.D.

For many centuries, tradition held that angels had miraculously flown from Nazareth to Loreto carrying the Holy House. There are numerous artistic depictions and statues of flying angels throughout the house and the basilica.

However, recent research has demonstrated that the Holy House of Loreto, like many relics from the Holy Land, was transported by ship at the time of the Crusades. At the end of the Crusades, pilgrims and crusaders returning to Europe brought back a number of relics, which

now fill cathedrals and basilicas along the Adriatic Coast. These include relics of St. Mark in Venice and St. Nicholas in Bari.

The Holy House was brought first to Croatia in 1291 and then, on Dec. 10, 1294, to a field of laurel trees (in Latin, *Lauretum*) renamed Loreto. The feast of the “Translation of the Holy House” is celebrated on this date each year.

Perhaps, however, the Holy House was moved here by “angels,” after all. Recent research shows that a Greek family named “Angelos” actually financed the expedition and paid the crusaders to move the house to Italy as part a wedding dowry for their daughter, who married Philip of Taranto in 1294.

There is virtually no doubt that the stones in Loreto came from the grotto now underneath Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth. Whether or not the house really was Mary’s is not so certain. The site was identified, according to tradition, by the Apostles in the first century, and the first basilica in Nazareth was built by Constantine’s mother in the fourth century. What is certain is that the Holy House of Mary in Loreto is a special place of prayer, devotion, and pilgrimage, and that countless graces and miracles are received here.

And over the centuries, millions of pilgrims and dozens of saints have venerated the house of Mary. Sick pilgrims travel here from all over the world, assisted by charitable souls and agencies dedicated exclusively to this work. Innumerable pilgrims receive graces; some experience true miracles.

Testifying to the countless miracles, graces, and increased faith is a huge hall inside the basilica, filled with “ex-voto” offerings. “Ex-voto” gifts are traditionally given to a church housing a saint after fulfillment of a vow made to that particular saint (*ex voto suscepto* “from the vow made”) or out of gratitude or devotion for blessings or graces received through their intercession. As pilgrims exit the basilica, they can see a large plaque affixed to the wall listing the many saints and blessed who have visited the sanctuary from every century since the 13th. There are well over 100.

Over the years, pilgrims have told Katia and me of the graces they have experienced at the Holy House. Just this past fall, a priest who was with us on pilgrimage told the story of a priest-friend of his. When this man was young, he felt the desire to become a priest; however, he was afraid of loneliness. So, he went on pilgrimage in Italy, and while he was in

See LORETO, p. 14



The Shrine of Loreto: basilica which preserves the Holy House of Mary.

Chapter CL

His Devotion to Our Lady To whom he especially entrusted the Order

(Francis) embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honored her with his own Praises, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order, and placed under her wings the sons to be left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end.

Thomas of Celano, “The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul” (Second Life of St. Francis), 198;

Francis of Assisi, Early Documents:

Peace and Justice, Prayer and Contemplation in action

By: Carole King, OFS

As a Secular Franciscan, am I not called to stand for peace and justice? Am I not called to imitate our mother Mary and to let prayer and contemplation be the heart and soul of all I am and do? (cf: OFS Rule Chapter 2, articles 8, 9, 14, 15).

Most of us are good; we want to be good; our intentions are good. Yet, many good people are closing their eyes to the evil around them! I'm thinking here particularly about abortion.

How many times have you heard, or may have even said, "Personally, I'm against abortion but..." That's closing your eyes. We tend to push what's uncomfortable into the background of our minds and then ignore it. Yes, we get upset when we read the stories; we feel badly for the lost babies; we think it's a terrible atrocity!

We all have different gifts to use for the kingdom of God. Not all of us are able to do the great and mighty works needed in this war for the sanctity of life. Yet, there are those of us who would rather not do anything at all. We would rather avoid that which is awkward and uncomfortable.



It's easier to ignore it as we go about the busy-ness of our own lives: "I don't have time." "Pray in front of a clinic — that's just not for me." Too cold. Too hot. My leg hurts. We have many excuses, but not one single excuse justifies the loss of innocent life. I stand at the front of the line for excuses, have made nearly every excuse in the book.

But just a couple of weeks ago, I was invited to participate in a prayer vigil in front of a Planned Parenthood clinic. For the first time, I didn't have an excuse. I'm still not sure why, other than the fact that I was invited by someone I truly love, respect, and admire.

I invited others to join me. Out of more than 20 invitations, two accepted. The ones I'd asked face to face looked sympathetic, yet very uncomfortable. When I shared with my mother what I was going to do, she admonished me: "Be careful! Don't stand out in the open!" All of this points to avoidance, something I realize that I had done up to now.

There was a good turnout for the vigil, and it was very respectfully and peacefully done. I think that a few poorly done prayer vigils and the few verbally abusive and violent episodes that were given a lot of publicity have dissuaded a lot of people from peaceful and prayerful protest.

Here was a group of brothers and sisters in a gathering committed to preserving love, dignity, and respect for all. We stood together as the sun began to settle behind the planet. There was a chill in the air, but the warmth of human fellowship mingled with the glow of candles as the flame was passed from one to another.

Even though many were strangers to me, I felt a strong sense of belonging — a gathering of the body of Christ, fully present to the Spirit of the living God. Humanity assembled to fight for humanity yet to come. Many smiled as the candles were lit and the musicians warmed up.

Our Hispanic musicians kindly played two of my favorite Spanish hymns, and we all sang out together as we prepared to enter the spiritual battle in prayer. The time came and the vigil began with a very moving hymn.

The speaker was strong and inspiring, but the highlight was the prayer. This gentle blanket of prayer poured out from our souls and became a rampart of protection in battle. With the

intercession of our Blessed Mother, our rosary was a peaceful weapon against the evil one. As we began to pray the rosary, there was a faint yet unmistakable scent of roses. I felt her presence as she came and prayed for and with us.

Glancing up at the sky as we prayed, I noticed a large, intensely bright star to the east of us, just above the trees. There were no other stars, and the moon had not yet risen. That star remained there throughout our prayer. After the last hymn, at the end of our vigil, I looked back up and the star was gone. What a beautiful reminder of the night of the birth of Christ when that great star gave direction to those who were seeking him.

How appropriate that our prayer was lifted through the mother of our King, the mother of the human race, who stands with us for life. This night was a small glimpse into the enormity of what must yet be done. It was a small glimpse into the awesome power and presence of God and how his Spirit flows through each soul as we work together in the body of Christ.

I felt as if I had awakened from a very deep spiritual slumber; I felt a great kindling of zeal.

This reminds me of the Prologue of our Secular Franciscan Rule:

“All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. Mk 12:30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) ... and produce worthy fruits of penance

Oh how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because ‘the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them’ (cf. Is 11:2)....

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brothers to him when we fulfill ‘the will of the Father who is in heaven’ (cf. Mt 12:50).

We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give life to others by example.”

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

Save These Dates

2015

July 9–12: Summer Seminar
St. Francis University, Loretto, Pa.

July 20–24: Summer Enrichment Program
St. Bonaventure University,
St. Bonaventure, N.Y.

Aug. 7–9: BSSF Annual Regional Gathering,
National Visitation, Ridgecrest,
N.C.

Aug. 20–23: JPIC Retreat
Belleville, Ill.

Aug. 28–30: National Formation Workshop,
Independence, Mo.

Oct. 13–18: NAFRA Chapter of Elections, Clinton, N.J.

2016

July 1–6: Quinquennial Congress
Inverness Hotel, Englewood, Colo.

August 5–7: BSSF Annual Regional Gathering
Chapter of Elections,
Ridgecrest, N.C.

“As Franciscans, we are called to recognize the inherent sacredness of life and to recognize the image of the Lord Jesus in all our brothers and sisters. By becoming man, Christ raised the status of all that had been created. ... In assuming flesh, Jesus became the ‘first-born of many brothers and sisters.’”

Benet A. Fonck, OFM, editor, *Called to Make Present the Charism*, p. 69

Congratulations — New Councils**Fr. Solanus Casey Fraternity**

Morehead City, N.C., Jan. 8

Minister: Carolyn Peduzzi, OFS

Vice Minister: Joan Davis, OFS

Secretary: Rodney Strickland, OFS

Treasurer: Barbara Zaik, OFS

Formation Director: Pat Boni, OFS

Councilor: Gail Halada, OFS

Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity

Duluth, Ga., Jan. 11

Minister: Ken Brooke, OFS

Vice Minister: David Rohr, OFS

Secretary: Jan Murina, OFS

Treasurer: Larry Skriván, OFS

Formation Director: Dcn. Tom Shaver, OFS

Councilor: Dcn. Ed Rademacher, OFS

Councilor: Joanne Rademacher, OFS

Our Lady Queen of Angels, EC

Columbia, S.C., Appointed Feb. 7

Leader: Terrence Chisolm, OFS

Vice Leader: Donna Rock, OFS

Secretary: Doris Kowalski, OFS

Treasurer: Charles Hood, OFS

Formation Director: Catherine Hood, OFS

Councilor: Carolyn Townes, OFS

Our Lady of Good Counsel Fraternity

Greenville, S.C., Feb. 21

Minister: Judy Bruce, OFS

Vice Minister: Mary Pat Morris, OFS

Secretary: Marsha Wiggins, OFS

Treasurer: Valerie Baronkin, OFS

Formation Director: Leslie Owens, OFS

Councilor: John Bruce, OFS

Councilor: LaDonna Sexton, OFS

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity

Augusta, Ga., Jan. 10

Minister: Theresa Christie, M.D., OFS

Vice Minister: Helen Balogh, OFS

Secretary: Rebecca Bresnahan, OFS

Treasurer: Richard Balogh, OFS

Formation Director: Janet Hulshof, OFS

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Secular Franciscan Websites

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region

www.bssfsfo.org

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

www.nafra-sfo.org

Consilium Internationale
Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (CIOFS)
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www.ciofs.org

Writing Franciscan

Taking in Scripture in the manner of St. Francis

The Gospels According to Saint Francis by Hilarion Kistner, OFM. Franciscan Media (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2014), 144 pp.; paper, \$13.99; audiobook, 24.99.



By Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

St. Francis wasn't a Scripture scholar, but he apparently had a good memory.

"Once he had read something in the sacred books and understood its meaning," Father Hilarion writes, "Francis impressed it indelibly on his memory. Anything he had once grasped carefully, he meditated upon continually."

Francis refers to Scriptures often in his writings, but I was surprised at just how often.

"It is a statistical fact," Father Hilarion says, "that in about one hundred pages of printed text, Francis quotes or at least alludes to Scripture some six hundred times—*six hundred times in about one hundred pages of printed text.*"

Father Hilarion, a member of St. John the Baptist Province, is a Scripture scholar and editor of *Sunday Homily Helps*.

"What I hope we grasp from Francis is a way of looking at Scripture that will carry through the rest of our lives," Father Hilarion tells us in his introduction, "always looking anew for who God is, what God is all about, and what God wants in our life."

He describes how "Francis fell so in love with God and, therefore, his Word, that he wanted nothing more than to live the Gospel. In living the Gospel, he meant not only appreciating the four written Gospels but all of Scripture." He adds that "the heart of Francis's spirituality was the Holy Spirit of God, and as such, his approach to Scripture was totally under the influence of the Spirit."

We read the way in which Francis understood the Gospel and "how it formed the foundation of his own spiritual life." The book concludes with an appendix: "A Little Bit about Secular Franciscans."

Each chapter begins with prayer. Any of these would be an excellent beginning for our own daily Scripture reading.

That is how Francis began — with prayer. He and his first brothers, Bernard and Peter, went to the Church of St. Nicholas in Assisi, where they prayed, then consulted Scripture. Passages from Matthew and Luke told them to get rid of their possessions, to carry nothing with them, and to deny themselves, taking up their cross daily.

"Francis is saying the most important thing to do," Father Hilarion writes, "is to be a person of prayer within the community of believers, a person who is open to God in every way God wants to come into his or her life."

But how open are we?

"Everybody can read the words in the Bible," Father Hilarion says, "but only some discover there the Word of God and the meaning of that Word. And again, only the Spirit enables us to

discover that in the Scriptures, God is speaking to us, and to discover what it is that God is saying to us in Scripture.”

I think what this means is that we approach our “careful reading of the Gospel” (OFS Rule, Art. 4) with no expectations about what we’ll receive. “The words of Scripture are Spirit and life,” Father Hilarion says; “the Spirit is there to give us life. We will be able to receive the life of the Spirit when we allow the Spirit to lead us.”

“As he read the Scriptures, Francis realized he was being addressed by the Spirit of God, and he realized that he will hear what the Spirit tells him in the Scriptures only if he listens to the Spirit in his own mind and heart,” Father Hilarion adds. “Thus, Francis cultivates a life of prayer and listens to the Scriptures in the context of worship and as a member of the body of Christ.”

But we have to do something with what we take in from our Scripture reading. Here we encounter two Secular Franciscans: Bl. Franz Jägerstätter, who was martyred by the Nazis for adhering to the Gospel, even when everyone told him he was foolish to do so; and St. John Vianney, who heard the confessions of thousands of people, attracted to him because he could so empathize with them.

Father Hilarion says that if we ask how we can change the world; well, it’s the mystics who are going to do it, that mystics are those who are “one with God. You become God’s arms as he reaches out to embrace the world.” He elaborates on that:

“Francis became a mystic. Maybe we fear that word. But Francis is telling us, both in his writings and in his life, that we are all called to be mystics. Every Catholic, every Christian, every human being is called to be a mystic. We are to be one with our Father in Jesus by the Spirit and then embrace all of the world, all human beings, and all creation: That’s what a mystic does. A mystic has an experience of God, then begins to realize what life is all about.

“Since a mystic is one who experiences God, he or she knows that life is meant to be in union with God and union with everything that is of value to God. And if God created this world, everything he made belongs to him. If we belong to God, everything in this world belongs to us. We are called to be mystics by embracing God, and through him, embracing the world at large. This has tremendous ramifications for everything that’s going on in our world today, whether it’s our own private world, our family world, our neighborhood, our nation, or international affairs. That’s the way Francis saw his life, and he sums it all up very beautifully in what I would call the shortest love song ever written: ‘My God and my all.’”

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.

**Pilgrimage to the Holy Land
with Fr. Linus DeSantis, OFM.Conv.
Dec. 11-21, 2015**

\$3350: Ground & Airfare from Atlanta

**Visit Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem,
Tiberias, Sea of Galilee, Nethanya,
Carmel, Jordan River, Cana, Qumran,
Tabor, Emmaus, Jericho, Bethany,
Gethsemane, and more.**

**Contact Bret Thoman, OFS,
for more information:
tel: 770-402-4335 or
bret.thoman@gmail.com**

LORETO, from page 8

Loreto, he visited the Holy House. As soon as he closed his eyes, he felt the presence of a

woman touching him with her dress. He opened his eyes, but no one was there. At that moment, his fear of loneliness left him, and he entered the seminary.

Our Lady of Loreto is the patroness of aviators along with St. Joseph of Cupertino, whose relics are venerated in Osimo just 10 miles away, and St. Therese of Liseux. In 2010, Our Lady of Loreto was declared the patroness of all travelers flying into or out of Rome's Fiumicino airport, commemorated by a recently placed statue in the airport. Anyone with the name Lori, or some variation of it (i.e.; Lorian or Loretta) is the namesake of Our Lady of Loreto.

Since the 1930s, the Holy House has been administered by the Capuchin friars of this province, the Marches. It is a wonderful place to go often for Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, or confession.

Katia and I regularly take people's intentions and prayers to the Holy House. Please contact us with your prayer requests (bret.thoman@gmail.com).

Bret Thoman, OFS, is a member of Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga., and director of St. Francis Pilgrimage.

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Fraternity prayer coordinators submit prayer requests.

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