

Communio

That All May Be One

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

Fall 2015

St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Nov. 17)
Patroness of the Secular Franciscan Order



St. Elizabeth, daughter of the king of Hungary, married Louis of Thuringia when she was 14 and he was 21. They loved each other deeply and had three children. With a Franciscan friar as her spiritual director, she led a prayerful life of devotion to her family and to the poor.

After Louis died on a Crusade, his family threw her and her children out of the palace so that she could no longer engage in the charitable acts they regarded as “squandering” the royal purse.

Her husband’s allies, returning from the Crusade, restored her to the palace, as her son was the heir to the throne.

After ensuring her children’s futures, Elizabeth left the court joining the Secular Franciscans in 1228, the year St. Francis was

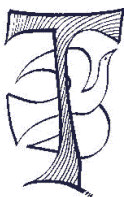
canonized. Until her death in 1231 she cared for the poor in a hospital she had founded. She was canonized in 1235.

From a prayer to St. Elizabeth of Hungary

“Enlightened by the supernatural light of an unshakable faith ... in your neighbor you beheld the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sole object of your love. After his example you found your delight in associating with the poor, waiting on them, drying their tears, comforting their minds, and assisting them with every loving service. ... O most lovable saint, so beloved of God, deign to be the heavenly protector of our soul and help it to render itself even more acceptable to God.” (*Secular Franciscan Companion*, pp. 60–63)

The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





Editor's Journal

Attending the Secular Franciscan program at St. Bonaventure University in July was an exceptional experience. My first time there, and my first time to also meet Tibor Kauser, OFS, our new minister general (read about the talk he gave, p. 12).

At lunch one day, I asked him what his thoughts were on how, sometimes, we have a hard time getting things done in the fraternity because people are busy with committees outside the Order.

"I've served on the parish council," he said, "but when it's time to serve the Order, I don't do those other things."

I'd like to suggest that it will always be time to serve this Order.

But what needs to be done?

We've received the excellent report (see p. 18) on the Regional Visitation, held during our Annual Regional Gathering in August. The report is filled with commendations but also recommends things like leadership development, work on the "twinning" program, mentoring newly elected leaders, and appointing a Youth/Young Adult fraternal animator. If you like working with youth, you might consider volunteering to serve in that capacity at the regional or fraternity level.

What council service can each of us give, both locally and regionally?

A number of fraternities in our region don't have spiritual assistants. We plan to begin a new course in early 2017. If you will have been professed at least five years by the time the applications are due next fall, check our region's website (www.bssfsfo.org) in a few months for the new invitation and application to take the course.

We may have family and work responsibilities, but whatever the reason, most of us don't have unlimited time to spend on service. Thus, we must decide how best to use what time we do have. I remember a Secular Franciscan saying a few years ago: "There's always someone in the parish or the community who can do what you do there; but you're the only ones who can do what needs to be done in the Order."

That's absolutely true.

In *The Franciscan Journey*, Father Lester Bach, OFM Cap., writes: "Our way of life **must take priority** in your life. When choices must be made between SFO requirements and that of other groups, SFO takes priority. However, we realize that family and other serious situations may occasionally take priority."

It's interesting that Father Lester doesn't say we need to make choices between fraternity

meetings and some other group's meeting. He says, "SFO requirements." Those certainly include regular attendance at fraternity gatherings, but they also include service on the council and in other areas of the Order, as well as everything else in our Rule, General Constitutions, Statutes.

OFS is, after all, lived 24 hours a day.

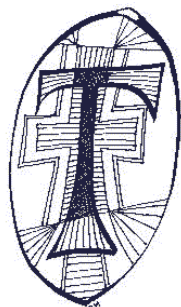
What are the ways in which each of us can serve the Order we've pledged our lives to?

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 3)

This is the conclusion of my minister's message that began in the spring issue of *Communio*. The excerpts that I share 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.

On the basis of my earlier comments, let us try to see how we today could implement those three fundamental aspects of the primitive Franciscan experience: Preaching, Prayer, and Poverty. The focus of Part 3 is on Poverty.

"For the poor" and "being poor"

The Old Testament is full of texts about God, who "hears the cry of the poor," who "defends the cause of the afflicted," and "brings justice to the oppressed." However, only the Gospel speaks to us of the God who makes himself one of them, who chooses poverty and weakness for himself: "Jesus Christ, rich though he was, became poor for your sake" (2 Cor 8–9). *Material poverty*, far from being an evil to be avoided, acquires the aspect of a *good to be cultivated*, an ideal to be followed.

Here is the great new thing that Christ has brought into being. In this way, the two essential components of the ideal of biblical poverty are now clear. These are: to be "for the poor" and to "be poor."

The history of Christian poverty is the history of the different attitudes people have taken up in the face of these two requirements. So-called "pauperistic" movements sprang up, from the beginning of the second millennium onwards. These placed the effective practice of poverty at the forefront, advocating the return of the Church to the simplicity and poverty of the Gospel.

This was achieved, in time, by the mendicant orders, in particular by St. Francis who strove to practice simultaneously a radical divesting of self and a loving care for the poor, the lepers and, above all, to live his poverty in communion with the Church, not in opposition to it. In modern times the ideal of a "poor Church" was overshadowed by concern "for the poor," translated into a thousand new initiatives and institutions.

It was the Second Vatican Council that brought the subject of "the Church of the poor" once more to the forefront of the debate. On this point, in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* we read: "Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path. Christ was sent by the Father to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart, to seek out and to save what was lost. Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery, and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder. She does all in her power to relieve their need, and in them she strives to serve Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, 8)

In this text, both aspects are reunited: being poor, and being at the service of the poor.

These developments are a challenge to us, Franciscans of today. We should not make the mistake of going back to the concept of poverty as it was understood in the religious orders before the time of St. Francis and in the universal Church before Vatican II; in other words, almost exclusively in terms of being "for the poor," for the promotion of social initiatives. For we Franciscans, a "preferential option for the poor" is not sufficient; we also need a "preferential option for poverty."

Living a Franciscan spirit of poverty

We need to ask ourselves: "What does it mean for we Franciscans to accept the grace of a *new Pentecost* invoked by Pope St. John XXIII?" We know that the first "Chapter of Mats" opened on the day of Pentecost in 1221. It opened with the singing of "Veni, Creator Spiritus"

(“Come, Holy Spirit”). This hymn has accompanied the Church at every great event that took place in the second millennium and continues to do so at the beginning of this third millennium.

For different reasons today, many people are alienated from the institutional Church. Many are no longer able to reach Christ through the Church. They must be helped to reach the Church through Christ, starting with him and with the Gospel. One does not accept Jesus out of love for the Church, but it is possible to accept the Church out of love for Jesus. This task is tailor-made for Franciscans. What predisposes us for this role is the legacy we have received from our Father Francis and the impact that our present day Pope Francis is having upon people throughout the world — that intuition of a universal brotherhood, extending to every creature, accompanied by the choice of minority.

We, followers of Francis, should be seen as brothers and sisters of every person, the enemies of none, and the companions of the least ones. Let us look at Christ — poor and crucified — with the eyes of Francis and share Christ with a world that hungers for his love and mercy.

St. Francis was moved to select the Tau for his order after attending the fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and listening to Pope Innocent III say that he himself would have liked to have been that “man dressed in linen, with a scribe’s inkhorn in his belt” and to have gone through the whole Church, in person, marking a Tau on the foreheads of those who agreed to embark on a state of true conversion (Innocent III, sermon 6). But, due to his age, the pope could not do this in person.

When St. Francis heard this sermon, he accepted this appeal and made it his own. From that day onward he began to preach penance and conversion even more intensely than before and to mark the Tau on the foreheads of the people who came to him. The Tau became his seal. With it he used to sign letters and drew it on the cells of the brothers. St. Bonaventure was able to say, after Francis’ death: “He had received the mission to summon all people to mourn and lament ... and to sign the Tau on the brows of those that weep and wail” (St. Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, 2). This was why Francis was sometimes called “the angel of the sixth seal”: the angel who personally carries the seal of the living God and stamps it on the foreheads of the elect.

Every time we get dressed in the morning and put on our Tau, let us reflect on the meaning of this symbol. Through this visible sign, we are claiming to be faithful to God and to live a life of penance and conversion. We are witnesses of God’s love for creation, both animate and inanimate, by our words, deeds, and actions.

“Let us begin ... to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have done little or nothing” (Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 103).

May you have a blessed autumn with its many solemnities and feasts.

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. He was recently elected as national treasurer for the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States and will continue his servant leadership in that capacity. He requests your continued prayers and thanks you for your love and support over the years.)

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)

International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order — www.ciofs.org



Spiritual Assistant's Words of Wisdom to the Regional Executive Council

By Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv.

My Sisters & Brothers peace be with you.

My sense is that we live in a parallel universe — sounds impressive. I've reflected that on a number of occasions our experiences, yours and mine, have mirrored each other. And the current mirroring experience is the "movement" on the council of key people: Jerry Rousseau and Willie Guadalupe accepting election to the National Executive Council; DorothyAnn Rowland and Frank Massey assuming different positions of ministry on the REC. In your life as members of the REC, you will undergo an adjustment on the council.

I lost two members of the St. Thomas More Board of Directors to good causes: my president has accepted the office and ministry of president of the University of Dayton. Another member of the board is to be chair of management at the Whitman School of Management.

Directives, programs, planning. What are you doing for Advent this year? Yes, in the midst of all the mundane aspects of our lives, we again come to know that the anchoring factor is our faith and our journey of growth and development of our religious life. The Incarnation is the touchstone of life with new life in grace and energy. If we want to invigorate our lives in and through our ministries, we best view them to be the grace-filled gifts they are.

And even more proximately, Nov. 1 we have the opportunity to invoke the names and gifts of the saints whose names we bear. We look to them and their contribution to Church as religious, martyr, confessor, doctor, missionary, or as one of the many other servant-leaders in the Church. Pope Francis has spared no energy raising women and men to the official roles of saints with serious thought and intent.

It is his gift to us to have mentors and models inspire us to new ways of living.

Because of what is available in the Church to use as guide to a grace-filled life, we are encouraged to consider and move forward to the ministry which will allow us to employ our light and salt to afford our sisters and brothers the added dimension of walking with one who so immediately provides the matter for transformation.

Each time we connect with someone or some organization, we are opening ourselves to possibilities of growing, learning, or developing. To engage is to invite into one's life.

Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv., is a member of Our Lady of the Angels Province, USA, which has its headquarters in Ellicott City, Md. He is Catholic chaplain at Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y.

[T]o say that each person has a vocation is to speak about the very core of who each person is as individually loved and created into existence by God. Francis knew this well. Toward the end of his life he was remembered to have said to his brothers concerning the way they were to live, "I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!"

The goal of our pilgrimage of life is ultimately God. But it is also a journey toward becoming who we are, or, as Merton said, "to fulfill our own destiny, according to God's will, to be what God wants us to be." To be a spiritual person is to be aware of this connection between who we are in God's eyes and how we live our lives. The decisions we make, the way we interact with others, the way we treat the environment — all these things flow out of who we are in relation to God.

Daniel P. Horan, OFM, *Dating God: Live and Love in the way of St. Francis*, p. 19

Region members elected to NAFRA (National Executive Council)

Two members of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region have been elected to the National Executive Council of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States: Jerry Rousseau, OFS, of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity, Blairsville, Ga., is national treasurer. Awilda (Willie) Guadalupe, OFS, of Immaculate Conception Fraternity, Jonesboro, Ga., is a national councilor.

The NAFRA (National Fraternity) Chapter of Elections, which took place during the National Chapter, Oct. 13–18, was held in Clinton, N.J., and hosted by Our Lady of the Angels Region.

NAFRA Statutes, Article 11.4, state: “Any individual elected to a national office may not hold an elected office at the Regional Fraternity level or the Local Fraternity level.”

Therefore, Jerry has resigned as regional minister, succeeded by DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, who was serving as an Area 2 councilor.

Willie will continue to serve as chair of the Multicultural Commission and as spiritual assistant to the JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) Commission, both of which are appointed positions.

The National Executive Council members are:

- National Minister: Jan Parker, OFS, O’Fallon, Mo. (previously serving as national secretary)
- National Vice Minister: Mary Bittner, OFS, Ypsilanti, Mich. (previously serving as a national councilor)
- National Secretary: Mattie Ward, OFS, New Hope, Penn.
- National Treasurer: Jerry Rousseau, OFS, Blairsville, Ga.
- International Councilor: Mary Stronach, OFS, Marcy, N.Y. (re-elected)
- National Councilor: Mary Frances Charsky, OFS, Binghamton, N.Y. (re-elected)
- National Councilor: Awilda (Willie) Guadalupe, OFS, Newnan, Ga.
- National Councilor: Joan Geiger, OFS, Bellerose, N.Y.
- President-in-turn, Conference of National Spiritual Assistants: Brother Bob Brady, OFM, Oakland, Calif. As with all spiritual assistants, this is an appointed position.

Seven Dolors Fraternity — 100 years and going strong

By Stephen D. Brace, OFS

Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary Fraternity in Nashville was canonically established on Nov. 28, 1915. The fraternity combined its centennial celebration with Mass and the Transitus of St. Francis for a festive Oct. 3 evening at St. Philip Catholic Church in Franklin, Tenn.

Some 40–60 attendees included Seven Dolors' members as well as Secular Franciscans from the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis and Five Franciscan Martyrs (Florida) regions.

Mass began at 5:30 p.m. with Father Bala Showraiah, OFM, Seven Dolors' spiritual assistant, as celebrant, assisted by Deacon Simeon Panagatos, OFM, fraternity treasurer.

The Transitus of St. Francis began shortly after Mass. The San Damiano Crucifix was carried to the altar, accompanied by Father Bala and Deacon Simeon. Michael Williams played the piano and Sofia Grey, OFS, Jaime Maravia, OFS, and Sara Hatcher, OFS, led the singing of hymns. Charles Meyer, OFS, Area 2 councilor, served as reader no. 1; Barbara Garrison, OFS, Area 1 councilor, was reader no. 2.

Bread is broken and distributed during the reading of the Gospel at the Transitus. Seven Dolors continued its special tradition of using bread called prosphoron, which I bake for the celebration. This bread is blessed, cut with a spear (actually a small wedge-shaped knife), and placed in a wicker basket. The Transitus ended with a nice touch: everyone in procession following the San Damiano Crucifix and Father Bala from the sanctuary to the activity center as Michael Williams played the violin.

Dinner in the activity center began the centennial reception of Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary Fraternity. Father Bala blessed the food and invited everyone to partake. After everyone had some time to eat, Charles Meyer read the letter from Jerry Rousseau, OFS, our regional minister, who was unable to attend because of inclement weather. (See the message following this article.)

Paul John, OFS, from Sts. Francis and Clare Fraternity, Knoxville, gave a speech honoring our centennial and also celebrating his fraternity's one-year anniversary (canonically established on July 27, 2014), thereby reminding us that every fraternity has its beginning and that our mission is to evangelize and build the Church.

Barbara Garrison gave a speech and provided a gift to Seven Dolors: a DVD of "Catching Fire, Becoming Flame" by Father Albert Haase, OFM, and a signed card from the members of Channel of Peace Fraternity in Chattanooga.

The last speaker was from Sister Margaret Lange, OP, who gave a great toast and expressed



Deacon Simeon Panagatos, OFS (left), and Father Bala Showraiah, OFM, prepare bread to be distributed during the Transitus. Deacon Simeon is Seven Dolors' treasurer; Father Bala is the fraternity's spiritual assistant. (Photo by David Weir, OFS)

blessing and hopes of our unique charisms to work together in the greater good of the Church and wishing us success.

Many people and entities to thank for the evening success, including the musicians, the catering by La Hacienda of Franklin, Tenn.; Copy Solutions Inc. of Franklin for printing celebration cards; artist Jim Clagg from Tacoma, Wash., who helped in designing Seven Dolors' new logo; Tracie Grace, an illustrator who created the program's cover artwork; Ann Hammers, OFS, who helped in selecting period music to play in the background; Kathy Taormina, OFS, spiritual assistant to the Queen of Peace Region, for the donation of Seven Dolors rosaries; Barbara Baltz, the Nashville archivist who assisted in locating Seven Dolors' old record book; and St. Elizabeth Greek Orthodox Convent for creating the icon of the Theotokos of Seven Sorrows with Christ the Pantocrator.

Stephen D. Brace, OFS, is minister of Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary Fraternity.

From Jerry Rousseau, OFS, regional minister

(Editor's Note: Inclement weather prevented Jerry from attending. Charles Meyer, OFS, Area 1 councilor, read the comments at the celebration.)

My dear brothers and sisters,

It is an honor and privilege to be here tonight to celebrate with you the 100th anniversary of the canonical establishment of the Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary Fraternity.

As Secular Franciscans, we are called to live a Gospel life — to move “from Gospel to Life and from Life to the Gospel.” St. Paul writes in the First Letter to the Thessalonians, (5:16–18: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances — for such is the will of God the Father in Christ Jesus for you.”

We certainly rejoice this evening as we gather for this celebration, an anniversary celebration that began appropriately with the Thanksgiving celebration of the people of God in the Sunday liturgy.

We pray constantly for all of the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order throughout the world, especially for those who are under persecution in places like the Middle East, Africa, and other regions. We pray also for those in our local fraternities like the members of the Seven Dolors fraternity and all those whose petitions are requested on the Regional Prayer Line.

We give thanks for the many servant leaders who have gone before us and for those who will come after us. We especially recognize those members of the Seven Dolors Fraternity who, by their example, showed us how to live a Gospel life. In particular, I remember my dear brother Richard Russo of this fraternity, whom the Lord called to himself much earlier than we would have chosen. But we are not in charge. God is.

From the very first time that I met Richard (I believe it was at one of our Area 1 retreats) we became brothers. We had a name in common and we often joked with each other about the spelling. We both had a love for hockey and would often engage in friendly banter about the status of our respective teams, the New York Rangers and the Boston Bruins. He was local treasurer and I was regional treasurer at the time.

Richard lived a Gospel life. He and Jimmy Crawford, OFS, would take sandwiches out to the homeless huddled under overpasses every week. Richard followed his dream and purchased a property to begin “Casey’s Kitchen” in support of the homeless. He lived Jesus’s words, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my people you do unto me.” His legacy remains.

Today we also want to give thanks to your minister, Stephen Brace, for his dedication and steadfastness in researching the history of the fraternity in the midst of many obstacles. What was lost has been found, and we are blessed with the richness of knowing more about the

original leaders of the Third Order of St. Francis in the Nashville area than was previously known. We also thank Stephen for coordinating this event.

We give thanks for all those who have served this fraternity over the past 100 years — especially those dedicated friars, like Father John Sullivan, OFM, provincial spiritual assistant, Sacred Heart Province; and Father Bala Showraiah, OFM, who have ensured that the Franciscan charism and spirituality remained alive within the membership. We thank the current fraternity council and those who will follow in their footsteps.

The will of God in Christ Jesus is what we are all called to follow. As Secular Franciscans, we follow in the footsteps of Christ by looking at the example of St. Francis and St. Clare and the many Franciscan saints and blessed who have come before us, as well as those in our midst. And of course we try to emulate the “fiat” given by our Blessed Mother at the Annunciation. **T**

Society of the Atonement founder modeled Franciscan spirit of unity

By Fred Arsenault, OFS

Unity, Father Paul Wattson, SA (Society of the Atonement), wrote in 1903, means the At-one-ment of man with God, and man with man in faith and works.

On Sept. 15, Cardinal Timothy Dolan opened the cause for the canonization of Father Paul (1863–1940), founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

The friars’ news release announcing the opening of the cause states: “It has been said that Father Paul had the heart of a Franciscan, and the passion to share the gospel like the apostle St. Paul. Father Paul published *The Lamp*, a monthly magazine devoted to Christian unity and the missions, and he produced ‘The Ave Maria Hour,’ a radio program that broadcast stories about the life of Christ and the lives of the saints which aired from 1935 to 1969.”

Both the founding of the Society of the Atonement and its ministry of Church unity are living monuments to Father Paul’s vision, tenacity of faith, and Franciscan spirit.

Father Paul believed that St. Francis had the “recipe” for Christian unity, and it could be summarized in one word — peace — or as the Poverello would say, “Peace and all good things.” How did St. Francis present “peace and all good things,” and what do these words mean in our Franciscan life? Closer to home, am I a person of peace who lives that graced reconciliation to be one in Christ?

Thomas of Celano, Francis’s first biographer, wrote: “In all of his preaching, before he presented the word of God to the assembly, he prayed for peace saying, ‘May the Lord give you peace.’ He always proclaimed this to men and women, to those he met and to those who met him.”

More than a social greeting, Francis offered “shalom,” whose source is God himself. In the Old Testament, shalom conveys completeness and wholeness. Might we say at-one-ness? Isaiah refers to the coming Savior as the Prince of Peace, and, in the New Covenant, Jesus is peace incarnate. In Jesus, Francis found fullness of peace which only the kingdom of God can truly offer.

The peace that we exchange at Mass, in a letter, or by greeting a fraternity brother or sister is a compelling sign of our Franciscan commitment to share the gospel message of welcome and reconciliation. Such peace, given by a gesture or in words, may be the only sign of peace another will receive that day. Our shalom is full of the power of God, his peace, and the answer to Christ’s prayer “that all may be one.” St. Francis is, as Father Paul believed, the apostle of unity.

Fred Arsenault, OFS, is a member of St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity in Fayetteville, N.C.

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC): Reflections on the Animate Peace Retreat, Floods

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

As I reflect on the National Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Animate Peace Retreat held this past summer, I am filled with so many loving and joy-filled memories. At the beautiful Our Lady of the Snows Shrine in Belleville, Ill., about 30 Seculars representing 18 regions gathered for a weekend of prayer, pauses, and peace.

Two of the highlights for me were the five-minute Franciscan Sacred Pauses: five minutes of falling still and listening to one's heart; and the Franciscan Five: five members who made a trip into Ferguson, Mo., to have conversations with a local Catholic deacon about the state of the town and what is being done to heal wounds and move forward.

The first national peace retreat for local and regional animators and other JPIC-hearted folks

absolutely exceeded my expectations. I expected the weekend to be very prayerful and it was. I expected there to be lots of pauses for the Holy Spirit to speak and there were.

I expected the members to share what was working for them and what was not and they did. I expected lots of joy and laughter and there was. It was a blessing-filled weekend, and I could not have planned for the energy, the passion, and the dedication that were experienced at that retreat.

It was so much fun getting to know my sister, Theresa Christie, OFS, from St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity in Augusta, Ga. Theresa also graciously led the music for our liturgy, making it a truly Spirit-filled celebration. Thank you, my dear sister!



Theresa Christie, OFS (left), and Carolyn Townes share time at the JPIC retreat.

I am grateful to my national vice-chair, Rhett Engelking, OFS, for adding the skills-building piece to the mix; as well as our national JPIC spiritual assistant, Brother David Buer, OFM, for providing a prayerful atmosphere as well as providing us with Father Joe Zimmerman, OFM, who shared his wisdom, as well as celebrated liturgy for us. It was truly a Spirit-filled weekend and I am so grateful to the Lord for providing the opportunity to be so truly blessed.

And the Floods Came...

“And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house.” (Mt 7:27)

I live in West Columbia, S.C. After several days of rain in September, I awoke to a nighttime power outage and no cable or Internet access. Thinking it was just the storm, I went on as usual. When the cable and Internet finally returned, I opened my inbox to messages of “Are you OK?”

Turning on the television, we saw the governor speaking about the state of emergency in Columbia. The nearly 20 inches of rain that fell over the course of those several days had wreaked havoc on the city. Our dams were breached, the roads began to crack and crumble, and people were literally swimming for their lives, leaving behind everything.

As I write this, the rains have ceased and the waters are receding, but the devastation

continues. People are in makeshift shelters and in dire need of the basic necessities of life. Because the water is contaminated, bottled water must be brought in to supply the needs of the residents of Columbia.

The Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region has donated money to Catholic Charities of the Midlands to assist with the growing needs of the people who have been affected by the devastating floods. Thank you for your continued prayers for the cleanup efforts in Columbia as we work to rebuild our city.

Wishing you blessings of peace and all good,

Carolyn

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, is the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's JPIC animator and National JPIC animator. She is a member of Our Lady Queen of Angels, Emerging Community, in Columbia, S.C., and the Franciscan Action Network Commission.

Immaculate Conception Fraternity celebrates Transitus

By Georgia Edwards, OFS

Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga., is blessed with a Transitus service every year because we meet at St. Philip Benizi Church, a Franciscan-led parish.

This year our remembrance of Francis's meeting Sister Death caused us to reflect on the recent growth and transformation of our local Franciscan family.

Fraternity attendees included Dennis Mallon, OFS, 60 years professed; and candidates Jeanne Starr, OFS, and Beverley White, OFS, and — as a rich sign of God's exploding call — more than a dozen members from St. John Vianney, Newly Forming Group, in Lithia Springs, Ga.

The service was led by Brother Roger Colton, OFM Conv., who, at 25 is the newest and youngest friar at St. Philip Benizi and an energetic participant on the Immaculate Conception formation team.

Also present was Father John Koziol, OFM Conv., St. Philip Benizi's pastor and our spiritual assistant, and a member of the first team of friars in the Atlanta area almost 25 years ago. With us were St. Philip Benizi parochial vicars Father Santo Cricchio, OFM, Conv.; Father Paul Miskiewicz, OFM Conv.; and Father Peter Tymko, OFM Conv.

This simple service reminded us we are all in transit, locked in God's beam of love, drawing us to him.

Georgia Edwards, OFS, is a member of Immaculate Conception Fraternity, where she coordinates JPIC activities, serves on the formation team, and writes the fraternity newsletter.



Participating in the Transitus are Brother Colton Rogers, OFM Conv. (left); Father Peter Tymko, OFM Conv.; Bernadette LaSorsa, OFS; Father Santo Cricchio, OFM Conv.; and Eleanore Lindelof, OFS. Fathers Peter and Santo, with Bernadette and Eleanore, carried the tunic and cord into the sanctuary and placed them on the altar steps as if carrying St. Francis.

New minister general urges passion for OFS vocation, attention to Order's concerns

By Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

"I invite you to love your vocation," Tibor Kauser, OFS, said, "to love what you are doing, to love each other, to love the Church, to love other members of the Franciscan Family. We have the same charism."

Elected last November as minister general of the Secular Franciscan Order, Tibor, who is Hungarian, was among some 40 Secular Franciscans attending "Assisi in the Time of Francis: Birthplace of the Secular Franciscans," held July 20–24 at St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, N.Y. Other attendees were from the United States, Canada, and Japan.

Tibor well knows the preciousness of the Secular Franciscan vocation. While Hungary was under Communist rule (Aug. 20, 1949–Oct. 23, 1989), the OFS was forbidden. All that changed in the fall of 1989.

"1989 was a good year for me," he said. "That was the year I was admitted to the Order and the year I got married."

He and his wife, Agnes, made their perpetual professions in 1991 in Padre Pio Fraternity (31 members) in Budapest. They have three children. Tibor, 55, is an architect with his own firm, which specializes in commercial buildings.

Asked how he balances the Order, work, and family, he replied: "I don't balance. The more you are praying, the more time you will have, the more collected and organized you will be. Sometimes I have much more to do in my professional work, sometimes I have much more to do in the Order. God will show me what I need to do."

Tibor spoke about spirituality of place and the work of the Secular Franciscan Order.

"What does spirit of place mean?" he asked. "God wants to meet us in certain places. Through the places of St. Francis, God wants to meet us. Pilgrimages is to places where God has met man" such as Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

"Moses met God on Mount Horeb," he said. "The place where you stand is holy ground because God meets you there. Where are the holy places now where we have to remove the sandals from our feet? What does it mean to meet God in certain places?"

Francis, too, sought places to meet God, including in solitude.

"God is leading us from our external place to an internal place," Tibor said. "A 'place' does not necessarily mean an exterior place. We have to be ready to move to our interior place. It's a miracle for me that God has set me in a certain place."

Then he spoke of what is happening in the OFS.

"God is making great things for the Secular Franciscan Order," he said, "and we have to be ready to go up the mountain."

Tibor recalled how robbers who attacked St. Francis asked him who he was, and he said he was the herald of the great King."

"Our Profession is about being heralds of the great King," he said. "We are to bring the good news to the poor *and* the rich. I invite you to be passionate heralds — passionate Secular



Tibor Kauser, OFS, minister general of the Secular Franciscan Order, makes a presentation to Secular Franciscans attending the program at St. Bonaventure University. (Photo by Carolyn D. Townes, OFS)

Franciscans. There is nothing sadder than a lukewarm Secular Franciscan.

“Be true heralds. This is not so we can feel fine about ourselves. Move out from the comfortable seat. Be authentic heralds, not only by words but by your whole self — a 24/7 job — in the workplace, when we have the children at home. All that we do, we have to do it with joy. The Gospel is joyful news. The joy means inner certainty that God loves me.”

Tibor spoke of the Order’s priorities: Formation, Communication, Franciscan Youth.



Tibor Kauser, O.F.S., and members of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region at St. Bonaventure: Faye Martin, O.F.S. (left), Channel of Peace Fraternity, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Joanita M. Nellenbach, O.F.S., St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity, Hendersonville, N.C.; Carolyn D. Townes, O.F.S., Our Lady Queen of Angels, Newly Forming Group, Columbia, S.C.; Helen Neff, O.F.S., Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity, Blairsville, Ga.

“Formation, formation, formation,” he said. “Franciscan spirituality. What does it mean to be O.F.S., to have a special vocation?”

The Secular Franciscan Order’s first priority, he said, is formation, and “formation means how to live our life inside and outside the fraternity: formation for the good of the fraternity and all of society — for service in fraternity and in society.” Formation even includes things like learning how to convoke and conduct a meeting and how to write an official letter.

Communication, horizontal and vertical: “The word doesn’t always get to the lowest level,” he said. “Sometimes communication doesn’t get to the highest level.”

Additionally, “Local fraternities should contact each other, visit each other, celebrate together,” he said. “National fraternities should contact other national fraternities. It’s very fraternal to share our lives.”

Franciscan Youth: “We have to reach out to the youth,” he said, “but we often do it in the wrong way. Franciscan Youth is very strong in the Mediterranean area and in Latin America but nowhere else. One mistake we make is that we look at Franciscan Youth as potential Secular Franciscans. Profession is the core of our way of living. Often, lifelong profession is too strong for Franciscan Youth.

“We are responsible for Franciscan Youth. There are many youth movements. Secular Franciscans are responsible for the Franciscan Youth; (but) we cannot do Franciscan Youth without the friars.”

There are 300,000 to 350,000 Secular Franciscans in 116 countries. Of those countries, 67 have national fraternities, others have emerging fraternities, and some have one or more local fraternities but have not yet moved to developing national fraternities.

Sometimes conditions for these fraternities are difficult.

In Ukraine, for example, there is civil war, but “the Secular Franciscans are living O.F.S. life: meeting in fraternity, conducting formation,” he said. “These were very poor people before the war, and they have even less now. Poor salaries, they may get paid only every two months and that might be three chickens. They help each other and those coming back from the war. This is an example of the O.F.S. living their vocation.”

Thousands of refugees arrive every day in Europe via the Mediterranean. “Secular

Franciscans in Southern Italy are helping these refugees, bringing them water and providing shelter.”

In the Holy Land, 10 percent of the population of Israel is Christian. There are three local fraternities: one in Bethlehem, two in Jerusalem. “Wherever you are going, you are among either Muslims or Jews. We have been invited to be a presence in the Holy Land.”

In Africa and Latin America, “OFSs have started reconciliation projects in Rwanda, giving land to the poor so they can grow food and giving loans to help the poor start new lives. Secular Franciscans are fulfilling their mission of reconciliation and helping the poor.” He added that “in some Latin American countries it is very hard to live Christian and OFS life, but they are doing it.”

These places, he said, “are holy ground. We are in very concrete places throughout the world.”

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.

Preaching the Gospel — sometimes with words

Story and Photos by Bret Thoman, OFS

Virtually everyone is familiar with the story about how St. Francis once went through town, accompanied by a novice, with the intention of “preaching.”

However, when the Seraphic Father hadn’t said anything by the end of the day, the novice confronted him. Francis responded gently: “When we witness to others the joy and beauty of our evangelical life in our simplicity, in addition to the care and concern we have shown for one another, we have preached by our example. Remember this, young friar: Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.

Though this last sentence is one of the most quoted phrases by St. Francis, our founder never actually said it, nor does it appear in any of the original 13th century sources. Yet, St. Francis *could* have said it. And, in fact, he did make similar statements:

“All the brothers, however, should preach by their deeds” (Rule of 1221: Chap 17:3).

“I also admonish and exhort these brothers that, in their preaching, their words be well chosen and chaste... in a discourse that is brief, because it was in few words that the Lord preached while on earth” (Rule of 1223: Chap 9:3).

Recently, I had an opportunity to follow our founder’s example and “Preach the Gospel at all



times and when necessary use words.”

I’ve just returned home to Loreto after a 10-day hiking trip through the Dolomite Mountains. Younger, much smaller, and different in geological makeup than the surrounding Alps, the Dolomites are unique for their rough appearance, breathtaking vistas, and cultural charm.

An Italian tour guide — a colleague and personal friend of mine — had

invited me to help accompany a hiking tour for a group of 15 Americans. Accommodations would be in first-class hotels with spas, meals taken in Michelin-starred restaurants, and fine wines would abound. How could I resist?

Before we left, Alessandro briefed me on the group dynamics. He said they were mostly business owners, high-powered executives, and other successful professionals who frequently traveled together to exotic destinations around the world. Religiously, they were mostly secularist or New Age. I should say that Alessandro and I share the same Catholic faith. However, he is used to working with people of a different worldview. Personally, my work with pilgrims in the footsteps of St. Francis does not afford me the same opportunities.

Yet, inspired by the words of Pope Francis to “get out of the sacristy,” I looked forward to the opportunity to evangelize. Nonetheless, I wondered how I would be faithful to Christ’s instructions not to “deny him” (cf. Matthew 10:33) on the one hand, and not appear to be engaging in obnoxious proselytism on the other. So, I settled on middle ground: I would preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words. I would make my faith apparent by wearing my Tau visibly and by making the sign of the cross before meals. However, I would not intentionally initiate discussions regarding the faith. Yet, if asked, I would do as St. Peter says and, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pt 3:16). The rest I would leave up to God.

When I met the group, it was immediately apparent that each person was, indeed, highly intelligent, quite accomplished in his or her career, and gifted with a wide range of knowledge on a vast array of topics.



After a few days, I began to get a sense of their values. As lovers of nature, some spoke of the earth’s “energy” we should respect, while others referred to how humans are harming the planet. When one of the participants found out that Alessandro, our guide, had seven children, her reaction was, “Is he Mormon, Catholic, or just plain stupid?” A frequent refrain was that there are just too many people in the world, as if human existence was an existential threat to nature. Consequentially, abortion and contraception seemed to be the ready solution to saving the environment.

I then began to realize that their fondness for nature was quite different from our Franciscan understanding of creation as having been created good by God (cf. Gn 1) and through and for the Word (cf. Col 1:15–16). In fact, I began to sense they had an inverted philosophical understanding of creation, as a type of pantheism or even nature worship.

In some aspects, this is a return to the pre-Christian pagan ethos that had as its form: the gods — the cosmos — humanity, and against which the Bible and Christianity countered with God — humanity — nature. In other words, in our Judaeo-Christian worldview, nature and the cosmos were created by God for the sake of mankind and not the other way around.

At any rate, I sought to try to meet them where they were, based on their values, not mine. When the topic of respecting the environment came up, I said, “You know, you’re right, it’s a big issue. In fact, our pope recently wrote an encyclical about the environment. Have you read it?” The response, “Yeah, I heard about that. Your new pope is great!” A perfect lead-in to

introduce the theology of Creation — and a friendly dialogue ensued.

I also used time to ask people about their families and children and to gauge where they needed healing in their lives. I found out very quickly that some of them had some big areas where they really needed prayer.

Toward the end of the trip, I had developed numerous friendships and found myself wanting to pray for them and their needs. And, on the last day, when we went around the table sharing what we liked most about the trip, I asked for forgiveness if I had been too invasive in my conversations. But, I said that I had been praying for each of them and their needs. Some seemed visibly moved and even came to me later asking for specific prayers.

Now that some time has passed, I have no idea if anyone will “convert” after our time together. Maybe some seeds have been planted, maybe not.

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Regional Executive Council Roster

Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS

Vice Minister: Frank Massey, OFS

Secretary: Christine Washington, OFS

Treasurer: Greg Savold, OFS

Formation Director: Sara Nell Boggs, OFS

Spiritual Assistant:
Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv.

Area Councilors:
Barbara Garrison, OFS
Julie Lorenz, OFS
Carmen Madero, OFS
Charles A. Meyer Jr., OFS

Appointed Positions

Archivist: Sara Nell Boggs, OFS

Communio Editor
Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Animator
Carolyn Townes, OFS

Multicultural Commission Chair
Awilda Guadalupe, OFS

Youth/Young Adult Fraternal Animator
Position Available

Prayer Ministry (online prayer requests)
Area 1: Lori Moran, OFS
Area 2: Donna Kaye Rock, OFS
Area 3: Bob Pearson, OFS
Fraternity prayer coordinators
submit prayer requests to Area coordinators.

However, surely a “going out” and a dialogue based on mutual respect and care and concern for one another took place. Maybe people noticed the joy, beauty, and simplicity of a Franciscan’s evangelical life. And perhaps, they had a glimmer of hope that there exists someone who is eternal and much more powerful than the environment and mountains, which he can easily move. And in all this, hopefully St. Francis was happy that a follower of his “preached the Gospel at all times and when necessary used words.”

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

“To be spiritual means that we are aware of a world within a world, a world of the Spirit that surrounds and is incarnate in the world we perceive with our senses. One way into that world is to on pilgrimage, to walk real roads, to travel across the physical geography of earth, a journey that begins in the mind and imagination.”

Murray Bodo, OFM,
*The Place We Call Home: Spiritual
Pilgrimage as a Path to God,*
p. 111

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR

SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS AND ELECTIONS

*confirmed V+ follow-up visit (observers in parentheses)

<u>2015</u>	<u>Fraternity/Location</u>	V Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors E Presider/Ecclesiastical Witness
*Nov. 7	Bl. John Duns Scotus, Garden City, SC	V DorothyAnn Rowland (Carmen Madero)/Joanita Nellenbach
Cancelled	Our Lady Queen of Angels, EC, Columbia, SC	V
*Nov. 18	St. Anthony of Padua, Fayetteville, NC	E Frank Massey/ Joanita Nellenbach (Margaret Horan)
*Nov. 21	St. Francis of the Hills, Hendersonville, NC	E Julie Lorenz/Fr. Roberto Perez
<u>2016</u>		
Jan. 9–10	Stigmata of St. Francis, Duluth, GA	V Julie Lorenz/Lori Moran
Feb. 12–13	St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Augusta, GA	V DorothyAnn Rowland/Barbara Smith (Dcn. Ed Radamacher)
*Feb. 20–21	St. Thomas More, Wilmington, NC	V Frank Massey/Pat Wilkerson
Mar. 19–20	Sts. Francis and Clare, Knoxville, TN	V Barbara Garrison/Deacon Ed Radamacher (Willie Guadalupe)
Mar. 20	The Spirit of Francis & Clare, Conyers, GA	E Julie Lorenz/Lori Moran
Apr. 7–8	Fr. Solanus Casey, Morehead City, NC	V Frank Massey/Joanita Nellenbach
Apr. 9–10	St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Elizabeth City, NC	V Frank/Joanita
Apr. 10	Five Georgia Martyrs, St. Simons Island, GA	E If activated
Apr. 15–16	Our Lady of Good Counsel, Greenville, SC	V DorothyAnn Rowland/Dcn. Tom Shaver (Margaret Horan)
Apr. 23–24	Seven Dolors of the BVM, Franklin, TN	V Barbara Garrison/Faye Martin
May 7	St. Clare of Assisi, Aiken, SC	E Charles Meyer/Audrey Binet (Dcn. Ed Radamacher)
May 10	Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, NC	E Carmen Madero/Margaret Horan (Sr. Kathleen Ganiel)
May 13–14	Immaculate Conception, Jonesboro, GA	V Barbara Garrison/Dcn. Tom Shaver
June 4–5	St. Maximilian Kolbe, Huntersville, NC	V DorothyAnn Rowland/ Margaret Horan (Willie Guadalupe)
June 12	Fraternity of Brother Francis, Newton, NC	V Charles Meyer/Audrey Binet
June 30–4, St. Louis, MO (Renaissance Hotel): “Quinquennial” — Fr. Daniel Horan, OFM		
July 14	St. Clare, Asheville, NC	E Sara Nell Boggs/Dcn. Ed Radamacher (Fr. Roberto Perez?)

Aug. 12–14, Ridgecrest, NC: BSSF Annual Regional Gathering — Chapter of Elections

Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation Report

NAFRA Visitation to the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region

Aug. 7–9, 2015

Mary Frances Charsky, OFS, national councilor, delegate of the national minister, Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, conducted the Fraternal Visitation concurrently with Father Kevin Queally, TOR, Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, who conducted the Pastoral Visitation.

Preparatory Information

The pre-visitation questionnaire and the annual report to NAFRA were completed and received by the visitors. We thank the Regional Executive Council (REC) for their diligent work and note the thoroughness of the responses. Both visitors were very impressed with the wealth of quality information that was provided to us ahead of time and at the visitation.

FRATERNAL VISITATION

The Regional Newsletter and Website

The regional newsletter, *Communio: That All May Be One*, is very well done. It is currently distributed on a regular basis and is available on the regional website. The recent newsletter includes a message from the regional minister, the JPIC coordinator, the editor, and several articles of interest. Other valuable sections include announcements of Professions and congratulations to newly elected local fraternity councils within the region. Dates to remember, Franciscan resources, and website information for CIOFS and NAFRA are noted.

A synopsis of the regional council gatherings is shared in the *Communio* with the exception of confidential information.

The regional website, www.bssfsfo.org, is very informative and inspiring about the region and the Secular Franciscan Order. It is frequently updated with the newsletters, announcements, information about the Annual Regional Gathering (ARG), and much more. A section of the spiritual assistance program is very impressive.

Apostolic Activities

The brothers and sisters of the region are active in a variety of apostolic activities on an individual basis and on the local fraternity level. At the ARG each local fraternity is invited to display the apostolate(s) that they focus upon and support. A large room is provided for the displays, photographs, and posters representing their efforts. Members are involved in many capacities and foster vocations through their presence in the workplace.

Formation

Over the past two years the region has completed the transition to new formation materials, mainly the *For Up to Now (FUN) Manual* in conjunction with *The Franciscan Journey*. The REC members led the effort to introduce all of our fraternities to the *FUN Manual*.

During their local fraternity visitations they schedule time to sit in on initial formation classes as well as the ongoing formation that takes place during the local fraternity gatherings.

Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv., regional spiritual assistant, and a team of Secular Franciscan spiritual assistants offer a course in spiritual assistance for professed members. Father Linus and team members invited and encouraged members to consider participating in the next course. Two new Secular Franciscan spiritual assistants were commissioned during the visitation weekend.

New Members and Fraternity Growth

The demographic information submitted shows two newly forming groups and one emerging fraternity. There has been significant growth in members and in new fraternities during the past

three visitations especially in the past 20 years which has brought the membership to almost double. In the past 20 years, they have grown from 17 to 30 established fraternities. The life and vitality of the region is very evident.

Five new fraternities have been established in the past 30 months. Two bi-lingual newly forming groups have been started. In December 2014, the Profession for their first Hispanic-speaking class of candidates was held with many members of other fraternities and the REC in attendance.

FYYA Chair

Although there is not a designated Youth and Young Adult animator, there were many brothers and sisters of that age group (18- to 35-year-olds) in attendance at the Annual Regional Gathering over the weekend.

JPIC Chair

A creative and dynamic JPIC animator serves the region as well as the National Fraternity. Carolyn Townes publishes and shares regular “Animator Notes” and coordinated the annual JPIC retreat and searches for the annual JPIC Award for both the BSSF Region and the National Fraternity. “Seasons of Caring for Creation, 1 Sept.–4 Oct.” and “12 weeks of Franciscan Peace, Oct. 3–Dec. 25” are recent examples of her contributions.

The Peace Retreat this summer in Belleville, Ill., was very successful and well-attended.

Fraternities

The fraternities in the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region are bonded to the OFM Capuchin, the OFM Conventual, and the OFM.

Commendations

- Very significant are the joy and the commitment of the brothers and sisters wanting to stay Sunday morning even after Mass to hear the Visitors’ closing remarks. When we consider the travel from five southern states to join together, we can say the spirit and the life of the region is very healthy!
- Most significant is that the Annual Regional Gathering (ARG) is held from Friday afternoon until Sunday at 11:45 a.m. with over 330 registered!
- The regional minister, Jerry Rousseau, demonstrates and models dedicated “servant leadership” in fulfilling his responsibilities. He assists the Regional Council to look ahead to the future.
- Both Visitors were very impressed by the amount of quality information that was provided to us before the Visitation and during the Visitation. We have a full picture of the region.
- Each member of the Regional Council has gifts and abilities that serve their brothers and sisters in the BSSF Region and the Order very well. Continue to be courageous and continue to show your talents!
- Acknowledging each member who registered by putting their names in the program for the ARG listed by fraternity and area validates members. Council members were identified. Deceased members were listed in the program. Newly professed were listed and newly elected councils were recognized.
- Including personal “Reflections and Franciscan Quotes” in the program is inspiring.
- Many “volunteers” were assigned to various duties throughout the weekend; it seemed that everyone had a job, big or small, to make it all work out smoothly.
- Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv. is an integral member of the region. He is loved and appreciated. We commend his commitment and devotion to the region and to the Secular Franciscan Order.

- Having a motivated JPIC animator is a blessing.
- A Eucharistic procession and adoration for 24 hours during the weekend of the ARG took place.

Spiritual Assistance

The region has developed a successful two-year spiritual assistants training course. Two classes have been completed: a third is planned to begin in 2016. Eight of the graduates have been appointed as spiritual assistants in local fraternities. The region is proactive in seeking qualified spiritual assistants for their local fraternities.

The Secular spiritual assistants and Father Linus held an SA enrichment session on Friday morning before the Annual Regional Gathering began. This is a valuable opportunity for all involved. Thank you for including me in this session and letting me know which book was going to be used before I arrived. This beneficial experience was appreciated.

Summation

The Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region is vibrant and healthy. They are doing a great job as a region. This region is blessed to have many spiritual assistants.

Strengths of the Region include:

- Having two newly forming groups and an emerging community,
- Continually updating the regional website,
- Communicating effectively through the quarterly regional newsletter,
- Appointing a multicultural chair to the REC,
- Addressing and including the Hispanic population in the region,
- Having a spiritual assistant liaison,
- Growth in membership continues,
- Having a successful spiritual assistant training program with SA enrichment sessions,
- Several deacons are members of the region.

Challenges include:

- Need to promote and train new leaders to accept the responsibilities of an office and/or council positions in fraternities,
- Need to pray for and discern appointing a Youth/Young Adult animator or chairperson.

Interest areas:

- Promoting servant leadership,
- Interest in the idea of “twinning” with another region or fraternity.

We thank Regional Minister Jerry Rousseau and the Regional Council for being so well-prepared before and during the Visitation. We thank the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region who set up and prepared for the gathering. We appreciate the clean-up crew too!

We encourage the Regional Council to keep striving to serve the Lord through your efforts as Secular Franciscans. Your “servant leadership” experiences are role models for local council members. Do not be afraid to share your ideas, skills, and God-given abilities for the good of the region and for the good of the Order while moving forward. Never be content to be where you are now; **always strive to grow and increase your Franciscan Spirituality**. Our mission is to share ourselves, to love others, to evangelize, to be holy and to build the kingdom of God.

We shared these ideas for the Regional Fraternity in the open forum part of the Chapter: Our purpose as Visitors is to revive (intensify, stimulate, encourage, and animate) the evangelical

Spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and the Rule, fraternity life and to promote a bond to the Order.

We explained the idea of “twinning” or forming a partnership with an emerging National Fraternity or region in Africa.

As Fraternal and Pastoral Visitors, we shared observations that we have made regarding local fraternity and regional fraternity accomplishments to celebrate. We gave updates on some National Fraternity (NAFRA) and International Fraternity (CIOFS) happenings.

Recommendations

Formation

The *For Up to Now: Foundational Topics for Initial Formation* (the *FUN Manual*) is the greatest formation gift and the most comprehensive tool for initial formation. The *FUN Manual* enhances formation at all levels. It is the most comprehensive manual that we will have in our life time.

Consider adding an adult learner piece to the training. The regional formation director was scheduled to participate in the August National Formation Workshop in Independence, Mo. Plan to follow up with her suggestions. We discussed coming up with additional ways to locate information in the *FUN Manual*. The ideas were worthwhile and can be implemented.

A chart was sent to the regional minister and the regional formation director that compares the *FUN Manual*, *Franciscan Journey*, and other Franciscan resources according to topics. This can be shared among the local fraternities, especially with the formation directors.

Consider following up with the local formation directors by offering workshops in each area to share ideas of how fraternities are implementing foundational topics of the *FUN Manual* into their formation programs. This refers to initial and ongoing formation programs.

Consider ways to include the concept of *conversion* in the formation program. The concept is included in our Rule, the *FUN Manual*, *Franciscan Journey*, and in the BSSF Spiritual Assistant Program in the area of attributes of a spiritual assistant and in the related SA course syllabus.

Leadership

Continue to nurture your future leaders; there are many among the ministers we met. Keep them involved and show your appreciation of their talents. Consider making, finding, and developing new leaders a priority. Remember, your terms of service will come to an end, and you need to be mentors for another generation of leaders. Consider sponsoring a potential leader to attend the future summer seminars at St. Francis University in Loretto, Penn. Your scholarship fund may help in this endeavor.

Local Visitations

When conducting Visitations, remember to be gentle, yet knowledgeable. Most fraternities are doing their best and need gentle guidance and encouragement to make modifications and improvements. The Secular spiritual assistants are so well-trained that what comes natural to you may be more challenging to others at the local fraternity level. As St. Clare recommended to her sisters as leaders, “be generous and merciful.” A suggestion is to be generous with your knowledge of the spirituality of St. Francis and be merciful when you notice areas that need to be improved.

“Twinning”

Continue to promote the “twinning” program and consider the possibility of communicating with, praying for, and/or assisting an emerging National or Regional fraternity in one of the English-speaking countries in Africa. Stephen Smith of (Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity) Georgia has been to Uganda twice on mission trips. He has interacted with

Franciscans there and plans to continue going back to Uganda next June. We are working with CIOFS and NAFRA on a proposal to assist the Secular Franciscans in Uganda to organize and become the “constituted” National Fraternity of Uganda recognized by CIOFS. Formation and communication will play an important part in this effort.

Audit and *Essential Documents*

Two reminders are given when we complete Visitations. First, we remind you to have an audit before the end of the treasurer’s term. Second, remember to have the *Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order* and the *Regional Guidelines* with you for each Regional Council meeting and at each Visitation or Election at local fraternities.

In closing, let us express our sincere appreciation to everyone in the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region for their fraternal assistance and cooperation. Thank you for sharing and caring.

We thank all of you for your kind and gracious hospitality. May the Lord keep all of you in his peace. Please know that we on the NEC keep all of you in our prayers. Please pray for us.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary Frances Charsky, OFS,
National Councilor, NAFRA, Fraternal Visitor

September 1, 2015

PASTORAL VISITATION

Documentation Review

This was accomplished by the Fraternal Visitor. All the books were in exceptionally good order. The most recent minutes were reviewed. The treasurer’s binder was reportedly in excellent shape. The regional treasurer is very capable and finances are attended to carefully and well.

Leadership

The Regional Executive Council in the region is very large, with two area councilors for each of three areas. They are very engaged in the work of tending to the needs of the brothers and sisters in the region. From the time the Fraternal Visitor and I spent with them, they seem more than capable and very knowledgeable of their duties. The members of the council work together well and seem very able to discuss thorny issues in a way that one can see the respect they have for each other. They are able to apply Franciscan values in all their discussions.

One area which might need a little attention, according to their own pre-visitation questionnaire, is the development of new leaders. There have been workshops and it has been the topic of conversation. Continue to work on this as you have been.

Formation

The *FUN Manual* is in use and, according to the regional formation director, its implementation is in progress. However, concern was expressed that it is difficult to use and, in the electronic edition, is not “user-friendly.” A table of contents in the electronic edition is needed, and the table should be linked to the chapters. Numbering the pages throughout would be a tremendous help as well. The region is strongly committed to having excellent formation.

In listening to the formation director as she spoke, as well as to regional and local leaders, ministers and others, I witnessed a strong commitment to having high-quality formation. This is taken seriously on both local and regional levels. Formation being part of the Regional Council meetings, and the regional spiritual assistant always contributes, sometimes electronically. The

region is committed to ongoing formation at all levels.

Formation workshops have been held throughout the region, in each of the three areas. Ways are being sought to help in the continuing implementation of the *FUN Manual*. The formation directors on the local fraternity level need assistance with using the manual effectively and in seeing how it can be useful to them while it assists the whole Order in making sure there is a worldwide common foundation in Formation.

Vocations, New Members, and Fraternity Growth

There is great growth in the region. The members still express concern about vocation, but the region is very healthy in its continued dynamism and growth. There are a number candidates and inquirers, and this is indicative of the health of the region. There is also one emerging fraternity and two newly forming groups at this moment. This is also a good sign of health and growth.

Communication

Communication is in fairly good shape in this region. The members of the REC are in very good contact with the local fraternities with the help and hard work of the area councilors. The local fraternities are kept up-to-date in many ways with the happenings of the region. The lowest rating in the pre-Visitation questionnaire was given to information from the local fraternities, adequate. Of course, communication is a two-way street, so it is important to know how communications from the REC are being received and implemented.

The regional newsletter is online, and it is expected that the local ministers also distribute it to those in their fraternities who do not have access to the Internet. The region's website is a rich resource, well-maintained, and full of good and helpful information.

Spiritual Assistance

The region is blessed to have a very active and engaged regional spiritual assistant in Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv. He is very knowledgeable and helpful to the REC and the entire region. The region is very blessed with his involvement, albeit he lives and works at some distance. He participates in regional events when possible and is present for important events. The program for training spiritual assistants is well-developed and is being carried out appropriately and with careful attention.

Prayer and Liturgies During the Chapter

The liturgies were very well planned, and the participation was excellent. The Morning and Evening Prayer went very well with a prayerful atmosphere. The Eucharistic liturgies were well prepared and fittingly celebrated. The Eucharistic adoration during the meeting is a wonderful practice and to be commended. Thanks for Father Linus for all he did in guiding these and welcoming me.

Summary

This is a very dynamic region. Everything I saw indicates an active, alive region with a fine Franciscan spirit. There is a great sense of being a regional fraternity, and a very good sense in the region of being a part of the National and International Fraternity as well.

Commendations

- The Regional Executive Council members are to be commended on their work for the region. They are a good example of Franciscan servant leadership. They seem to work together very well.
- The regional fraternity is growing stronger and so good things are happening. The REC

works hard to encourage and help the local fraternities in whatever ways possible.

- The formation director is very capable and works hard to help the fraternities and their formation programs. The *FUN Manual* is in process of being implemented.
- The regional chapter welcomes hundreds of members, this year over 300. It is a marvelous opportunity for the members to grow in their bonds to each other and to the regional fraternity.
- The spiritual assistant training program seems to be going very well.
- The addition of the multicultural emphasis and a person to promote it is excellent.

Recommendations

- Continue to work on leadership development and servant leadership.
- Insofar as possible, include “conversion” in your regional documents more. It is appropriate to highlight it as a key element of Secular Franciscan life. Some of your documents have no mention of it at all (OFS Rule, Article 7).
- Consider more assistance to the newly elected local ministers. Several times I heard that it is quite overwhelming for them at the start.
- Continue to work on and pray for vocations, while not forgetting to thank God for the ones you have!
- I know the Youth/Young Adult component is daunting. Don’t give up. The International Presidency continues to insist on its development here in the United States, so we have to continue to try.

Conclusion

I would like to thank Jerry Rousseau, OFS, regional minister; all the members of the REC, and all of the members of Brothers and Sisters of Saint Francis Region for your warm welcome. The Ridgecrest Center is a great setting, and you all did everything possible to make it all run smoothly. Particular thanks to Father Linus for your help, assistance, and welcome. It was very good to be with all of you! May the Lord bless and keep you all close in his care.

Respectfully Submitted,

Fr. Kevin M. Queally, TOR: TOR Representative to the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants to the Secular Franciscan Order

The SFO in the world is the body, and the Fraternities are the parts of the body that sustain it.

Each Fraternity has its own configuration and physical make-up, but it is not and cannot be isolated from the others. This could be stifling. It is damaging to weaken the sense of belonging to the entire Secular Franciscan Order and remain closed within the small environment of one’s own Fraternity, because it deprives us of that vital life the Order transmits.

The Fraternity is a living gift which should always be carried inside oneself, which is quite different from just having meetings: these only mark the rhythm of making the journey. ...

The Franciscan ideal of Fraternity derives its basis from the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Jesus Christ. The Trinity is unique in that no person of the Trinity is ever superior to the others.

For Up to Now (FUN): Foundational Topics for Initial Formation, “Fraternity and Francis & Fraternity as a Fundamental Element of St. Francis’ Spirituality,” p. 12