

# Communio

That All May Be One

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

Winter 2017

## Committing to the Franciscan Way

Wisdom from Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv.

“You have embraced the Rule of Francis. You’re called to know it through and through so that you can live it.

“We’re not generic Christians. We are Franciscan Christians. To be grateful for it, to celebrate it, to live it. That call is to us personally and specifically. We answer that call personally and specifically.

“Embracing Franciscan prayer, reading about Franciscan saints. That’s not to say there aren’t other ways, but we embrace the Franciscan to mold us and shape us as Franciscans.

“There’s something good about challenge. I like to invest myself in moving forward, helping heal, participating in a unique way of life.

“Let your souls magnify the Lord. People can see you — simple, humble — living the Lord’s will in a Franciscan way.”

2007 Area 1 Retreat



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### The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





## Editor's Journal

As we're now in 2017, fraternities may be looking at their goals for this year. One of the items that might be on the agenda is a fraternity apostolate.

Our Apostolate Pillar reminds us that "our apostolic life and fraternal life are integrally related. As Franciscans, when we minister, we minister to and with our brothers and sisters and we minister to the larger community. It is not only 'what we do' but also 'how we do it.'"

It can be a struggle. Many fraternities have members from several different parishes. Some members drive a considerable distance just to get to the monthly gathering. An extra trip for an apostolate might indeed be a sacrifice. And how do we come up with something that all members can — want to — participate in?

In this *Communio* we have stories of how several fraternities have embraced fraternity apostolates that take them into their communities, and that help them take care of what needs to be done in their own fraternities.

Many of us may have a personal apostolate, which is great because we're doing good in our parish or community. But that's in addition to the fraternity apostolate, not a substitute for it, because a fraternity apostolate has two purposes: to do good in the parish or community *and* to build fraternity.

As the Apostolate Pillar notes: "Our hearts are good and generous, but they need to meet together as a unit. When we choose an apostolate in which all participate, in some manner, we will come to know each other at a deeper level. When we live in relationship, we learn about the other — sharing values, telling one's story, telling about our relationships, and working with others.

"Working with another person reveals the strengths and weaknesses — whether a leader or a follower, whether insistent or compliant — in other words we learn whether we cooperate, share, truly listen, are open to change, respect the other, appreciate the person and the task. A cooperative spirit attentive to those involved and the objective of the task are the basis to pursue the apostolate. This pursuit is to communicate individuals working as a unit in peace and harmony — to feed, to clothe, to comfort — to make Christ present in the name of Francis.

"Then and only then will our vocation as Secular Franciscans be realized and the passion for our vocation become alive."

On our regional website ([www.bssfsfo.org](http://www.bssfsfo.org)), in "Regional Resources," you'll find the *BSSF*

*Regional Formators' Guidelines for Orientation and Initial Formation*. This has "The Four Pillars of BSSF Region," with ways to implement each Pillar.

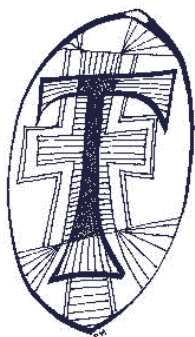
*Pace e bene*  
*Joanita*

*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: In the Cave of St. Michael



"When will I come to the end of my pilgrimage and enter the presence of God?" We pray this as Antiphon 1 every Week II Monday Morning Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours before Psalm 42.

Having had the opportunity, blessing, and privilege to be on my last pilgrimage with my husband, Alan, and then being faced with his sudden death in front of me less than one week after our return from Italy, those words are bittersweet for me.

With 40 other pilgrims, most of whom were from my parish, St. Peter Catholic Church in Beaufort, S.C., Alan and I visited Assisi, Lancia, San Giovanni Rotondo, Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano, Sorrento, the Amalfi Coast, Pompeii, Monte Cassino, and Rome.

I'd like to share with you Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano, a holy place where deep in a cave is a sanctuary of St. Michael the Archangel. It is the oldest shrine in Western Europe dedicated to the archangel Michael and has been an important pilgrimage site since the early Middle Ages.

Monte Sant'Angelo sul Gargano, a village located on the Gargano peninsula's southern coast, is built on top of a mountain ridge which runs east to west. Looking south, we had beautiful views of the sea 400 meters (one-fourth mile) below. To the north, a steep cliff goes down to a pleasant valley with some agriculture and the Foresta Umbra, part of Gargano National Park.

Shepherds grazed their sheep, goats, or cows here. Natural caves in the northern cliff face were used as shelter for the animals. Herders sheltered in the biggest caves.

According to tradition, St. Michael the Archangel first appeared at Monte Sant'Angelo in 490 A.D.

Elvio Emmanuele, a local nobleman, had lost the best bull of his herd. This bull used to graze alone and avoid the other animals. As it did not return to the barn one evening, Elvio and his servants were looking for it. After much searching, he found it kneeling in a cave. Elvio was already so angry that he took his bow and shot the bull with an arrow, but a strong and sudden wind turned the arrow around and struck the man instead.

Bewildered (and presumably bleeding), Elvio went to see his bishop, Lorenzo Maiorno and told him the whole story. The bishop ordered three days of prayer and fasting, and at the end Archangel Michael appeared and spoke: "You have done well to ask God what was hidden to men. Make it clear that everything happens for my will as I am the Archangel Michael. The cave is sacred to me and I decided to protect this place and its inhabitants. What will be asked for in prayer will be answered here. Go to the mountain and dedicate the cave to Christian worship."

The mountain was almost inaccessible and known as a place of pagan worship, so the bishop hesitated to obey the archangel's words.

The second appearance traditionally dates to the year 492, when the pagan city of Odoacre attacked the Christian city of Siponto, part of the bishop's diocese. On the night before the battle, the Archangel Michael appeared again to Bishop Maiorno and told him that his prayers would be answered. He was to have the battle start at the fourth hour of the day. This was done and the battle, accompanied by earthquakes, lightning, and thunderbolts, ended with Siponto's victory. This day, May 8, became the feast day called the Apparition of St. Michael.

The following year, Bishop Maiorano decided to obey the archangel and consecrate a church inside the cave. The night before this was to happen, the archangel appeared a third time and said: "I have built the church (the cave) and I have consecrated it; this is not your task. But the people may come and frequent the place, which is under my protection."

And so Bishop Maiorano and seven other bishops of Apulia walked to the shrine. Once inside the cave they found a cross atop a crude altar covered by a crimson mantle. On the floor in

front of the altar was a footprint thought to be from Archangel Michael. As a result, this cave, known as the “celestial basilica,” is a church not consecrated by human hands.

St. Michael made another appearance here in 1656, when Italy was hit by the plague. Archbishop Alfonso Puccinelli went to the cave to pray and fast. At dawn on Sept. 22, he felt an earthquake and then St. Michael appeared and ordered him to bless the stones of his cave, carving on them the sign of the cross and the letters MA (Michael, Archangel). Anyone with such a stone would be saved from the plague. The city was liberated from the plague and everyone who had such a stone survived, too.

Today, a sanctuary built on top of the cave can be entered from the village on the hill. There is an entrance building and a belfry. Inside the entrance a staircase leads down to the level of the cave. An atrium leads to the entrance of the basilica with its bronze doors. The cave



containing St. Michael’s altar and still used as a church, is at the far end of the basilica.

Monte Sant’Angelo was a popular pilgrimage site on the way to Jerusalem; pilgrims traveled from as far as the British Isles to visit the celestial basilica. Among the pilgrims were popes Gelasius I, Leo IX, Urban II, Alexander III, Gregory X, Celestine V, St. Pope John XXIII (when he was a cardinal), and St. Pope John Paul II. Other visitors included Sts. Bridget of Sweden, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas; as well as royalty: Louis II of Italy, Otto III, Henry II, Matilda of Tuscany, Charles I of Naples, and Ferdinand II of Aragon.

St. Francis of Assisi also visited the sanctuary but, feeling unworthy to enter the grotto, stopped in prayer and meditation at the entrance, kissed a stone, and carved a Tau on it.

Wonderful to be deep in such a cave, where St. Michael the Archangel appeared four times, and where Father Paul MacNeil, our pastor, celebrated Mass for us. We pilgrims prayed and offered an Act of Consecration to St. Michael to place ourselves, our families, and all that we possess under his most powerful protection.

All of this will forever be a part of my memory and a reminder of sacredness of place. I am in awe of the immensity of what God has allowed me to experience as I continue on my earthly pilgrimage.

How blessed are we to be on such a worthy earthly pilgrimage!

May God bless you and keep you and give you his peace!

Your sister in Christ and St. Francis,

DorothyAnn

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

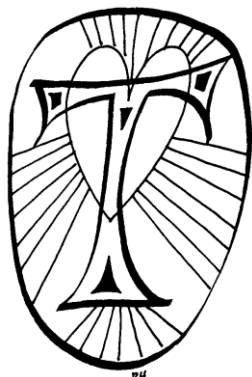
“Ask yourself: ‘Why am I doing what I’m doing? Is it the law?’

The law is not bad, but if we take a look at what we’re going to do — pray, which is prompted by the Rule — I see this as curative, nourishing, lifegiving.

“Not to get it done, but this opens me to a fuller life. They (Morning and Evening Prayer) provide a framework by virtue of time and topic.”

Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv.

## From the Heart of the Regional Formation Director



Greetings, Brothers and Sisters.

One of my major goals as your regional formation director is for the local formation directors to get to know each other, to have a free flow of ideas and support. And to make sure we are all using the same current information for formation from National and the Region.

One of the things I set up was a ZOOM Communication Room. At its meeting last October, the Regional Executive Council agreed to pay for the room. I will lead semimonthly meetings in this room for all local formation directors or their representatives, spiritual assistants, and members of the Regional Executive Council.

So, you ask yourself, “What is a Zoom Communication Room?” Zoom is a cloud video conferencing tool where participants can see and hear each other in real time. It can be used across the following devices: Windows, Mac, iOS, and Android. One can access it on a desktop, laptop, smartphone, or tablet.

There is not any special software to download, and it’s very user friendly. Whatever device you are using, you will need to have a Web camera and audio. Most devices have these built into them. If you do not have access to a “smart” device, you can also call in to hear and talk but can not be seen or see the other participants. The optimum usage is by being able to use the audio and video access.

The first thing you need to do if you are on a PC or Mac is to log on to <https://zoom.us> and click “Sign Up for Free.” Enter the email address you wish to use and click on “Sign Up.” You will receive a confirmation email. Click on the link to activate your account. Enter your name and password. Remember to keep your password handy so you will have it to sign on for meetings. Click “Activate” to activate your Zoom account.

If you are on a tablet or smartphone, go to your APP Store on iOS. Visit the Apple Store, search Zoom, and click to download.

For Android, visit your Google Play and search Zoom. Click “Install.” You will sign up for an account the same way as above.

The account and usage are free.

If you do not have access to any of these devices and only have a phone landline or cell you can call into the meeting.

A week before each meeting, you will receive an invite from me. It will have a link for you to click on that will take you to the room; or, further down in the message will be the phone number. You will then receive a reminder invite the day before our meeting.

We have a permanent room. Our meeting room Id. number is 6421174193. If you access by phone to call in, and are not able to see or be seen, dial 1-614-558-8656 and use the meeting Id. No. 6421174193.

We have had four meeting so far: one in October, which was very well attended; one in December and two in January. The first one in January was very well attended.

The format will be an opening prayer, introductions, topic, discussion, time for any other questions on your mind, and closing prayer.

If you have not been receiving invitations from me or synopses of the meetings, I do not have

### Zoom Room Meetings

7 p.m. to 8 p.m.

eastern time

Second and Fourth Tuesdays

February 21 and 28  
(third and fourth Tuesdays  
this month)

March 14 and 28

April 11 and 25

May 9 and 23



the correct email for you.

My email is [ambrosedianne6@gmail.com](mailto:ambrosedianne6@gmail.com); my phone number is 706-338-2402. If you want help in setting up Zoom, I will walk you through it step by step. Or, if you have any questions or comments about anything concerning formation from any brother or sister in the region, feel free to contact me.

Note: We can use the Zoom room at any time, as long as I am present. So, if you want to have face-to-face discussions with me, contact me by email or phone.

I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday, Feb. 21, at 7 p.m.

Peace,  
Dianne

*Dianne Ambrose, OFS, is the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis regional formation director. She is a member of San Damiano Fraternity in Athens, Ga.*

**Congratulations!**  
**Bl. John Duns Scotus**  
**Fraternity**

Garden City, S.C.

**Newly Professed**

Nov. 19

Dottie Evans, OFS  
Mary Lawrence, OFS  
Barbara Umbley, OFS

**New Candidates**

Jan. 21

Carol Bray, OFS  
Mary Sacavage, OFS



An apostolate for St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity in Spartanburg, S.C., is helping out at Miller Place, a residence operated by Mildred Miller for homeless people with disabilities. Some 15 people live there. Fraternity members and residents celebrate Christmas each year with a party at Miller Place; fraternity members also provide gifts for the residents. Yolanda Fernandez, an orientee who took this photo, put up a crèche. Esther Kelly, OFS, reads the story of St. Francis and the Christmas crèche at Greccio. Jane Rioux, OFS, plays Santa Claus.

## Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC): Nonviolence: Reflections on the World Day of Peace Message

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

For the 2017 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis chose the theme of nonviolence, following the recommendations from the Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference held in Rome last spring.

In his message, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” the pope begins by stating, “Especially in situations of conflict, let us respect this, our ‘deepest dignity,’ and make active nonviolence our way of life.”

In the light of a new year and new government leaders, this statement is particularly crucial. Leading up to and since the presidential election last November, words have been used as weapons of violence and hate. And although the words dissipate into thin air, the scars they leave behind can be agonizing and permanent.

The pope goes on to pray for “God to help us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values.”

This is my prayer as well because as someone once said, our thoughts become our words and our words become our actions. Those brutal and hurtful words moved from the thoughts of the speaker to the words of that speaker. Once those words are unleashed, like feathers in the wind, they are impossible to retrieve. We profess our values as those of the teachings of Mother Church, and, yet, we tend to hide those values on a nearby shelf when conflicts and differing opinions arise. I read an exercise that asked me to finish every sentence I spoke with “in Jesus’ name.” Would we be so quick to sling hurtful comments and criticisms if we were doing it in the name of Jesus, our nonviolent Prince of Peace?

“Conflict is inevitable; violence is not” (Georgia Conflict Center motto).

Yes, we will have differing opinions in our fraternities, on our councils, in our homes and workplaces.

But as Pope Francis states, “Certainly differences can cause frictions. But let us face them constructively and nonviolently, so that tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity, preserving what is valid and useful on both sides.”

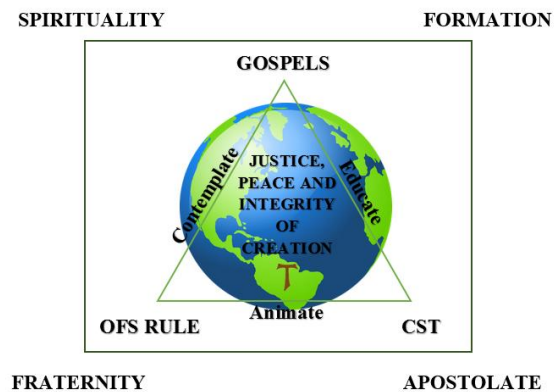
It is fine to disagree, but let us learn to disagree agreeably. We don’t need to vilify another just because they have a different perspective. Seek first to understand others’ perspectives before lashing out at them. That is Gospel nonviolence — the nonviolent action of Jesus and St. Francis. Through Gospel nonviolence, we show that unity is truly more powerful and more fruitful than conflict.

As we begin this brand new year, let us consider the following:

- How can you, as a Secular Franciscan, commit yourself to furthering the understanding and practice of Gospel nonviolence on the road to a just peace?
- What would Gospel nonviolence look like in your fraternities? In your homes? In your communities?
- How can you help your brothers and sisters to practice Gospel nonviolence?

I pray this year finds you living your call to be the peace you wish to see in this world and that your life radiates Gospel nonviolence. May the Lord give you his peace.

*Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region’s JPIC Animator and the National JPIC Animator, is a member of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head*



## Fraternity reflects on Creation, apostolates, fraternity services

By Carolyn Paduzzi, OFS

Photos by Peggy Hollandsworth, OFS, and Mary Lou Kimmel, OFS

In November our fraternity, Father Solanus Casey, in Morehead City, N.C., finished dialoguing on “Care of Creation,” from the “Season of Caring for Creation” provided to our Region by Carolyn Townes, OFS, our Region’s JPIC animator.



**Lainey Dottuso, from the Outer Banks Wildlife Center, introduces Baldy the screech owl to the fraternity.**

The “season” ran Sept. 1–Oct. 4 and was based on Pope Francis proclaiming Sept. 1 as a day of prayer for creation. It focused first on Christian worship of the Creator of all with a guide for daily living. The pope invited us to revisit the connection between justice, peace, and integrity of creation (JPIC).

To conclude our reflection on Creation, we invited Lainey Dottuso from the Outer Banks Wildlife Center to speak to us on caring for God’s creatures in our own backyards. She brought this delightful screech owl, Baldy, who is only 8 inches tall. I am sure St. Francis would have enjoyed this.

For Christmas this year, each member filled a shoebox with small

kitchen items and then decorated it as a Christmas present. These were presented to one of our apostolates, Family Promise, which is a shelter for families who find themselves homeless. We hope

that, as life improves for them, they can begin again and will be aided with new kitchen utensils.

An ice storm forced us to cancel our Jan. 8 Christmas social, but we did meet for a planned service re-organization on Jan. 15 to give members more ownership in the workings of the fraternity.

We used a service wheel displaying 14 services, which our members use to choose services they may contribute to fraternity life.

These include traveling library, refreshments coordinator, maintenance of fraternity scrapbook, pictures, prayer line, Mass cards, JPIC coordinator, church events coordinator, organize socials, sending birthday and get-well cards to fellow Franciscans, outreach, coordinator of Unbound apostolate, contact for Family Promise apostolate, liturgy reader coordinator.

Also, we reviewed our 2017 proposed budget and agreed to review it quarterly.



**Norma Krajzar, OFS (left); Carolyn Peduzzi, OFS; and Bob Sabisch, OFS, discuss the fraternity’s service wheel (on the table).**

*Carolyn Peduzzi, OFS, is minister of Father Solanus Casey Fraternity in Morehead City, N.C., and a Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region Area 3 councilor.*



## Fraternity retreat explores how Christ lives within us

By Frank Peluso, OFS

“Unwrapping the Gift: How Sts. Francis, Clare, and Bonaventure Help Us to See Christ Alive in Us” was the theme for Padre Pio Fraternity’s annual retreat, held Nov. 19 at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Raleigh, N.C.

Father Steve Kluge, OFM, associate pastor, facilitated the retreat, attended by 38 fraternity members and prospective members.



**Giotto’s fresco in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi shows Francis praying before the crucifix in the church of San Damiano.**

Starting with the questions, “Who are you, O Lord? And who am I?”, Father Steve illustrated his talks with Giotto’s frescoes in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

He showed how St. Francis’s “Prayer Before the Crucifix” tells about his approach to prayer; for example, “Most high Glorious God” indicates that everything good starts with God. Francis comes to God with a darkened heart not begging but asking to be enlightened.

We are Christ and Christ is the standard for prayer, Father Steve said. The answer to Francis’s prayer was that the Lord sent him to a leper.

“St. Clare’s approach to prayer was to contemplate the crucified Christ,” Father Steve said. “She centered on God’s love for us. Contemplation is giving God a space to work in us.”

There must be a desire to imitate Christ and give God permission to work in us so that we can be the body of Christ in the world.

During the retreat, quiet periods were spent on questions we need to ask ourselves throughout

our lives, such as:

- How would you describe God?
- How would you describe yourself in light of how you described God?
- What are four spiritual gifts you need God to give to you so that you can grow spiritually?
- How would you use these gifts?
- Is the person we see before us a gift or a threat?
- What are we before God?
- What has Christ used in your life to bring you close to being Christ?
- What is he using now?

Ask in prayer, “Lord, what would you have me do?”

Father Steve used the fresco of Francis’s Christmas crèche at Greccio to describe how Francis wanted us to realize that Christ really came as a human.

Then, Father Steve gave us 10 things to help us remember what we learned:

1. Know who you are and whose you are.
2. Make peace with your parents. One of Francis’ regrets is that he never made peace with his father.
3. Live Gently. “No one was afraid of St. Francis.”

4. Live simply. Ask yourself, "Do I want something or do I really need it."
5. Help the poor by sharing what you have. "Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received — only what you have given."
6. Desire to imitate Christ. "Lord what are you asking me to do today?"
7. Give birth to Christ with your actions.
8. Care for the gift of creation. Let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all Creation, and make justice and peace flourish.
9. Let's make peace with our mortality. Remember death is your "sister."
10. Always remember to preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words. "The deeds you do may be the only sermon some persons will hear today."

The goal of a Christian life is to take on the face of Christ. God's nature abides in us, and therefore we take our true self from him.

*Frank Peluso, OFS, is vice minister of Padre Pio Fraternity in Raleigh, N.C.*

## Secular Franciscans and Hispanics join in festivities

Story and Photo by Diane Salkewicz, OFS

St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity and the Hispanic community in Hendersonville, N.C., got together for celebrations in December.

I really need to begin with the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Sunday, Dec. 11, the day before her feast, dawned quite cold, but this did not diminish the fervor of all who prayerfully walked in honor of our Lady. A couple of us were able to participate, carrying a tapestry banner of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the procession escorting the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe from Martin Luther King Jr. Park to Immaculate Conception Catholic Church.

Such a joy to be a small part of this powerful witness of devotion to our dear mother. It also gave us an opportunity to reconnect with our Hispanic brothers and sisters and make some new friendships, as well.

Just five days later, on Dec. 16, more of our members took part in opening night of the novenario of Las Posadas, a novena preceding Christmas. Las Posadas means "lodging" or "accommodation" and refers to the inn in the Nativity story. Traditionally, a different home in the Hispanic community is visited each night during the novenario, with the visitors asking to enter.

The opening night took place in the Immaculata School gym. It was another really special



**Joanita Nellenbach, OFS; Jim Costello, OFS (center), and Mark Taylor, OFS, fill a piñata with candy for the eighth-night Las Posadas celebration.**

opportunity to join in this holy tradition of Las Posadas and enjoy an evening that was prayerful, social, and so much fun.

After sharing prayer and refreshments, the children were invited to break open two large piñatas. It was a pure delight to experience their excitement and exuberance. There were also packages of food for any family who might need them. Once again, more friendships were made as we all enjoyed this special evening together.

Our fraternity gathered on Dec. 17 to continue our annual tradition of filling small bags with gifts, donated by fraternity members, such as candy canes, crayons, and little books telling the Nativity story for the Hispanic children. We also filled two piñatas

with candy. The bags and piñatas would be part of the eighth night of Las Posadas, Dec. 23.

That night, we were in Immaculate Conception's parish center, St. Francis Hall; it was a night that will not soon be forgotten.

As we gathered for prayer and song, the hall was filled with music and the warmth of even more familiar faces of our Latino brothers and sisters. Scripture readings and prayers were offered in Spanish and English. Then, there was more singing, clapping, little ones dancing to the music, delicious food to share.

The children again joined in the excitement, breaking open those two piñatas. The little ones, and even some teens, shouted with joy as they scrambled on their knees and filled their pockets with candy.

Meanwhile, our members were passing out the gift bags; some balls made of plush fabric donated by a fraternity member were also a huge hit.

It was such a joyful evening for young and old, which left us all wishing we could do it all over again, "soon and very soon."

*Diane Salkewicz, OFS, is secretary of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity, Hendersonville, N.C.*



**Taking a break during a mailing in December: Front row: Diane Salkewicz, OFS (left); Lucy Nordlund, OFS; Mark Nordlund; Peake Dana, OFS. Back row: Tom St. John, OFS; Joanita Nellenbach, OFS; Greg Savold, OFS; Gene Ray MaGruder, OFS; Randy Hair, OFS; Mark Taylor, OFS.**

## Getting Out the Mail

The Free Clinics (TFC) provide quality healthcare for uninsured and low-income residents of Henderson and Polk counties.

St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity has had an apostolate for nearly a decade of doing the Free Clinics' mailings. In 2016, fraternity members (and spouses, too) compiled about 150 hours in this apostolate.

"They are an incredibly cheerful group and all of us smile a bit

brighter on the days they are here," a recent Free Clinics newsletter noted. "We are so grateful to the Secular Franciscans for their service and dedication to TFC and their community." T

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## Secular Franciscan Websites

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region — **[www.bssfsfo.org](http://www.bssfsfo.org)**  
 National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States  
 (NAFRA) — **[www.nafra-sfo.org](http://www.nafra-sfo.org)**

Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Sæcularis (CIOFS)  
 International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order — **[www.ciofs.org](http://www.ciofs.org)**



## The Christmas Tree of Our Lives

By Cricket Aull, OFS

Our lives are a gift from God to us. And, in turn, our lives are a gift we give back to God. The Christmas season has ended, but a good reflection for us might be to see our lives, or our souls, compared to a Christmas tree. We could ask ourselves these questions:

- There are live Christmas trees and artificial ones. Is my life really alive with the Spirit of God? Or, does it just look alive on the outside, but inside the Holy Spirit is not so living and active?
- Ornaments decorate the tree. What achievements or accomplishments have “decorated” my soul? Like the ornaments that decorate a tree and give it beauty and originality, our personal endeavors and achievements make a difference in the way our lives, or our presence, appear to others and bless others.
- There are lights on a Christmas tree. Does the light of Christ shine forth from my everyday living through words and actions, so that Christ’s love can illuminate and shed light into other people’s lives?
- A star or angel or some special object is on the top of a Christmas tree. What is placed at the very top of my priorities in life? Is it like a star that sheds light and leads others to Christ? Or is it something that simply points to me, my interests, and my desires?
- A Christmas tree is taken down after Christmas. When the tree, the lights, and all the decorations are put away until next year, do I still live in a spirit of giving, a spirit of peace, and a spirit of adoring Christ? And in my own personal way, do I still “give birth” to him in the world around me?



What are the obstacles in your life? Five things to remember:

1. Are you aware and thankful that God always provides what we need to help us? The Lord “will never fail you or forsake you. So do not fear or be dismayed” (Dt 31:8).
2. Are you using your obstacles as opportunities for growth? “We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him ...” (Rom 8:28).
3. What aid, encouragement, or support has God provided for you to help you through these challenges? “I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk; I will counsel you, keeping my eyes on you” (Ps 32:8).
4. Who are you being called to help through the obstacles or difficulties of life right now? “Each should please his neighbor so as to do him good by building up his spirit” (Rom 15:2).
5. What helps you keep your focus or your balance throughout your challenges and obstacles of life? What helps you, especially, to keep Christ at the center of everything? “Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee” (Is 26:3).

*Cricket Aull, OFS, a member of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga., offered these reflections during a retreat she gave for the fraternity on Jan. 14 at her home.*



BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR  
 SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS (V) AND ELECTIONS (E)  
 February through November 2017

* confirmed	V+ follow-up visit	(observers in parentheses)
*Feb. 11	Sacred Hearts of Jesus & Mary, Hilton Head Island, SC	E Janet Hulshof (DorothyAnn Rowland)/Audrey Binet
Feb. 18	Blessed John Duns Scotus, Garden City, SC	E Carmen Madero (Carolyn Peduzzi)/Joanita Nellenbach
Mar. 12	Channel of Peace, Chattanooga, TN	E Lannie Newman (Lori Moran)/Fr. Mark Scholz
*Apr. 2	Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC	E Carolyn Peduzzi (Carmen Madero)/Audrey Binet
Apr. 12–13	Five Georgia Martyrs, St. Simons Island, GA	V Janet Hulshof (DorothyAnn Rowland)/Audrey Binet
May 6	St. Clare of Assisi, Aiken, SC	V Janet Hulshof/Willie Guadalupe
May 8–9	Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, NC	V DorothyAnn Rowland (Bob Pearson)/

**May 19–20: Regional Executive Council Meeting, Spartanburg, SC**

June 8	Fraternity of Brother Francis, Newton, NC	V Sara Nell Boggs/Audrey Binet
June 10	Crucified Christ, N. Charleston, SC	E Janet Hulshof/Margaret Horan
June 11	St. Joseph Cupertino, Bessemer, AL	E Barbara Garrison/Willie Guadalupe
June 24	St. Michael the Archangel, Spartanburg, SC	E Janet Hulshof/Audrey Binet

**Aug. 11–13: Annual Regional Gathering, Ridgecrest, NC**  
**Br. William Short, OFM, featured speaker**

Sept. 2	St. Clare of Assisi, Aiken, SC	E Janet Hulshof/Audrey Binet
Sept. 9	Blessed Sacrament, Burlington, NC	E Carmen Madero (Bob Pearson)/Pat Wilkerson
Sept. Date TBD	Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg, Blairsville, GA	V

**CALENDAR, continued on page 14**

**CALENDAR, from page 13**

Sept. 19–20      St. Anthony of Padua, Fayetteville, NC      V    (Carolyn Peduzzi)/

**Sept. 26–Oct. 1: National Executive Council Chapter, Mount St. Francis, Ind.  
Host: Holy Trinity Region**

Oct. 11–12      St. Clare, Asheville, NC      V    Sara Nell Boggs/Joanita  
Nellenbach

Oct. 14–15      Spirit of Francis and Clare, Conyers, GA      V

Nov. 19      St. Thomas More, Wilmington, NC      V    Carolyn Peduzzi/

## Earthquakes and Suffering in Italy

Story and photos by Bret Thoman, OFS

It was Aug. 24 last year, at 3:40 in the morning. I was sleeping soundly with Katia in our apartment in Loreto. Suddenly, I was awakened by a combination of strange sensations and noises: the bed was shaking, an abnormal rumbling sound was coming from outside, car alarms were going off, neighbors were shrieking.

While I lay there disoriented and confused, Katia, lying next to me, knew what was happening: “Terremoto!” she shouted. An earthquake!

After the house shook aggressively for about 10 to 15 seconds, it started swaying for about the same amount of time. Finally, it stopped and everything became, once again, still. Eerily still.

Katia and I went downstairs and turned on our devices. The quake was so violent in Loreto, I was worried

how bad it was at the epicenter. And when the news reports came in, it was indeed bad. The first reports were that the magnitude was 6.2 and the epicenter was close to Perugia or Rieti — about 70 miles from where we live and not far from Assisi. I was worried. There was tremendous loss of life and property, they said. The damage was catastrophic, and some towns were razed to the ground. Assisi was unaffected, however.

Initially, the death toll was just two. But then it climbed to six, then 10, then 20. Eventually, it reached 299 people. Another 365 were injured, while approximately 2,100 lost their homes. It was a true tragedy.

There were some light aftershocks, which were normal, geologists said. That is, until October. At was 7:30 a.m., Oct. 30, the “big one” hit. We were downstairs when the house started shaking. We went outside and held onto the railing for support.

The news said it was a 6.6 near Norcia. They showed photos of the Benedictine church built



**Amatrice, a town in the province of Rieti, after the Aug. 24 quake.**

over the birthplace of St. Benedict — where we regularly took pilgrimage groups — completely leveled. By grace, no one was killed; damage from previous quakes had already forced people out of their homes.

It's now been more than two months without a big quake. Yet, things are not the same. People talk about it all the time and you can still see it on their faces. Hotels here in Loreto or at the beach nearby have taken in the “terremotati”: homeless victims of the earthquakes. Many are confused and depressed as their lives have been completely destabilized.

Franciscans in this region have also suffered, as about one-third of their friaries are either severely damaged or otherwise uninhabitable. The retreat center next door has taken in some of them.

The Poor Clares, too, have been hit hard. The sisters of Camerino had to abandon their church and monastery (which they spent 10 years rebuilding after the 1997 earthquake) and have joined the sisters in nearby San Severino. However, parts of their monastery there are uninhabitable, and the 26 sisters are sleeping in the guest house and in the speaking parlor and are cooking in a small kitchenette. It will be many years before their situation is rectified.

Yet, the friars and sisters are people of faith and, as much as can be expected, are serene.

However, many here are not. For when the land we live and walk on — our “terra firma” (“firm earth”) — shakes, it rattles the very foundations of our lives. And so the age-old question is asked: “Why does God allow suffering?”

In the olden days, people referred to natural disasters as “acts of God.” Some apparently still do. Speaking on Radio Maria (a reputable Catholic radio station here), a Dominican priest opined that the earthquakes were “divine punishment” against Italy for legislating homosexual civil unions.

Really?

Indeed, his comments earned a sharp rebuke from the Vatican: “Such views are pagan and pre-Christian, and do not respond to theology of the Church because they are contrary to the vision of God offered to us by Christ who revealed the face of God’s love,” responded Archbishop Angelo Becciu, a close collaborator with Pope Francis.

The archbishop’s response is certainly more Christ-like than the first image of God as a petulant and vengeful divinity. Yet, where was the “face of God’s love” that night when people’s houses came crashing down on them as they slept, or as they now wander around aimlessly with no home, business, or future?

St. Augustine saw the work of God not in the evil which he permits (though is never the agent of) but in the goodness that follows: “God would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil.” The supreme example of this would be Easter Sunday arising from Good Friday. Perhaps the affected people here can see God’s face in the gracious aid offered them by others of good will.

St. Paul saw the presence of God more directly in the midst of suffering when he wrote: “God encourages us in our every affliction.” Yet, he also suggested a higher purpose in it: “[and this is] so we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement



**Left: The Church of St. Benedict in Norcia in May 2016.**



**Below: The same church in November 2016.**

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

**Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS**

**Vice Minister: Carmen Madero, OFS**

**Secretary: Barbara Garrison, OFS**

**Treasurer: Ken Brooke, OFS**

**Formation Director: Dianne Ambrose, OFS**

**Spiritual Assistant:  
Search In Progress**

**Area Councilors**

**Area 1**

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

**AL:** Bessemer;

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

**TN:** Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

**Area 2**

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

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

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

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

**Area 3**

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

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

**SC:** Garden City

**Archivist: Sara Nell Boggs, OFS**

**Communio Editor**

**Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS**

**Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Animator  
Carolyn D. Townes, OFS**

**Multicultural Commission Chair  
Willie Guadalupe, OFS**

**Youth/Young Adult Fraternal Animator  
Position Available**

**Prayer Ministry (online prayer requests)  
Area 1: Lori Moran, OFS  
Area 2: Dorothy Huebner, OFS  
Area 3: Bob Pearson, OFS**

Fraternity prayer coordinators submit prayer requests.

with which we ourselves are encouraged by God” (2 Cor 1:4).

Indeed, for those who are spiritually mature and called, suffering can have a much greater end. In the further words of St. Paul, it can be a way of “becoming like him (Christ) in his death” so that we, too, “may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10-11).

Here, then, suffering is presented as a way of mystically and graciously co-suffering with God for the salvation of all. In suffering, we, too, can “become a living sacrifice” (see Rom 12:1) in order to “complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (see Col 1:24). In this, we “pick up our cross and follow Jesus” (Mk 8:34) — words that were at the foundation of the lives of Francis and Clare.

In the end, there are no easy answers to suffering. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers some more guidance (see CCC, para. 309). With Christian faith, hope, and charity suffering can make sense — a day at a time — as people seek to put the pieces of their lives back together.

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

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