

Communio

That All May Be One

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

Winter 2021



Zukiman Mohamad photo
(<https://stocksnap.io/photo/nature-water-QPVOOKPF6Y>)

Freshness for the New Year

“I will sprinkle clean water
upon you
to cleanse you
from all your impurities,
and from all your idols
I will cleanse you.
I will give you a new heart
and place a new spirit
within you,
taking from your bodies
your stony hearts
and giving you
natural hearts.
I will put my spirit
within you
and make you live
by my statutes,
careful to observe
my decrees.”
Ezekiel 36:25–27

The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

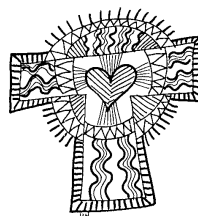
Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





Editor's Journal

In the winter 2020 *Communio*, I wrote about what I drew in my fraternity's Extraction. Since we didn't have an Extraction this year — we're meeting virtually rather than in person because of the pandemic — we decided to keep what we already had.

Fine with me; I can use another year with what the Holy Spirit guided me to pick.

The slip of paper that I pulled from the "Scriptures" basket, for example, has a quote from St. Paul's "Letter to the Ephesians," 4:22–24: "That you should put away the old self of your former life, ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth."

Unfortunately, unlike St. Francis, who jumped into action the minute God spoke to him, I haven't been as quick to do that. But I've been looking lately at an icon of Jesus. He looks back at me — not severe, just calm and patient, and saying, "What are you waiting for?"

Indeed. I'm not waiting any longer.

I suspect that many of us have something from last year, or elsewhere in the past, that we need to put away so that we can embrace newness. Of course, we'd all like to be done with the pandemic, but in the meantime, what can we do to start, even in a small way, new life?

We began the year by honoring Mary, the Mother of God. She, too, embraced new life for herself as she embraced a new life within her. She said yes and, as Murray Bodo, OFM, has written, and she feels the Spirit "rising from within her. ...

"She is now being led by that same spirit beyond her familiar world into a world that will be. She has become a pilgrim, one whose whole life will be faith in the unfolding of God's promise; and everything now will not be what it seems ... there is the Holy Spirit, who has come upon her, freeing her from the bondage of herself and simultaneously making her totally herself. The power of the Most High God now overshadows her and she is wholly God's servant, yet wholly herself" (*The Place We Call Home: Spiritual Pilgrimage as a Path to God*, pp. 82–83).

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Communio
is published quarterly for the
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United States.

Minister's Message

“We suffer all kinds of afflictions and yet are not overcome” (2 Cor 4:8).

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

Here we are, finally in the beginning month of 2021; much has transpired in the past year. And, of course, there is still much more that will occur in this year.

How do I (and you) handle and process all of the current situations that affect and have affected each of us in some way? What am I supposed to do? How do I respond to the stress of the pandemic, social isolation, division, and injustice that have pervaded our society?

The answer, it seems, is quite simple: Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Gospel values: what our Lord Jesus taught, what St. Francis chose for his daily creed of living and passed on to all of his followers. What every Secular Franciscan has said “yes” to in their Profession Rite.

There is so much division because _____. I ask you to fill in the blank. We, as Secular Franciscans, have much to do to exercise our calling to be instruments of peace, to live our Catholic faith and our Rule, to stand up for and speak out against the injustices done to all of God's creation.

Do you have the courage to put yourself in the other person's shoes, to see things from their perspective, one that is different from your own, to love them as God loves them and not be judgmental? Can I be a part of the solution and not part of the problem and seek the truth in any given situation?

I pray that each of us can be enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit as we move forward in 2021 and restore fractured relationships in our families, fraternities, neighborhoods, and wherever there is brokenness.

He has chosen you and called you by name. Are you listening? Are you ready to help right the wrongs, seek and work for the common good, have open meaningful dialog, and be converted daily to Gospel living? It is the core mission and message of our Catholic faith and Franciscan values, to live according to what Jesus taught and the example he set for us.

“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 3:15–16).

Be well; stay safe and protected. God bless you and keep you!

BSSF Region Minister DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, is a member of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head Island, S.C.

Mother Cabrini Fraternity Canonically Established

By Charlie Comberrel, OFS

On the feast of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, Nov. 13, Mother Cabrini Fraternity celebrated its canonical establishment during a Mass at St. Mary of the Angels Catholic Church in Anderson, S.C.

Friar Bob Menard, OFM, and Father Bob Higgins, St. Mary of the Angels' administrator, concelebrated Mass, assisted by Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS, Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region spiritual assistant.

Nanette Perron, OFS, fraternity leader, opened the celebration by welcoming visitors and recounting her own profession. She also spoke of Friar Aubrey McNeil, OFM, the fraternity's

first spiritual assistant, and his wish that a fraternity be established in Anderson. She concluded by reading OFS Rule, Article 22:

“The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.”

In Friar Bob’s homily, he recalled seeing a painting of St. Francis of Assisi espoused to Lady Poverty, inspired by one of the earliest Franciscan sources that we have: “It depicts Francis’s ability to have recognized the marrow of the Gospel and to have surrendered to the transformative power of the grace of God’s spirit, that enabled him to embody that spirit of the Gospel and transform it into life.”

He added that God espouses himself to his covenant people, and he mentioned God’s particular care for the poor. As Franciscans, we have been called to be brothers and sisters of the poor, sacramentally united and bound to the poor Christ. Mother Cabrini likewise came to the Americas to work with the poor.

The establishment documents needed several signatures. Bishop Robert E. Guglielmone, bishop of the Diocese of Charleston, S.C., and Regional Minister DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, had already signed. After Friar Bob’s homily, DorothyAnn stood by as Deacon Tom, signed as regional spiritual assistant. Signing as witnesses to the canonical establishment were Judy Bruce, OFS, minister of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Mother Cabrini’s sponsoring fraternity; and Area 2 Councilor Christine Lukesh, OFS.

The Mass concluded with the hymn “Immaculate Mary.” Friar Bob noted that this was particularly appropriate for three reasons: Mary shared most intimately in her Son’s poverty; this celebration took place in the parish of St Mary of the Angels; and, through Francis and Clare, and through Bl. John Duns Scotus’s theological support for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, we have a heritage of devotion to Mary.

After Mass, the newly established fraternity and guests socialized and enjoyed refreshments. Guests included Area 2 Councilor Betti Longinotti, OFS; John Bruce, OFS, Our Lady of Good Counsel’s treasurer; and Julie Lorenz, OFS, minister of San Damiano Fraternity, Athens, Ga.

Establishing a fraternity is a process that takes several years and moves through three phases: newly forming group, emerging fraternity, and finally canonically established fraternity. Mother Cabrini began this process in December 2014, with Friar Aubrey McNeil, OFM, as spiritual assistant and Our Lady of Good Counsel Fraternity in Greenville, S.C., as sponsor. At that time,

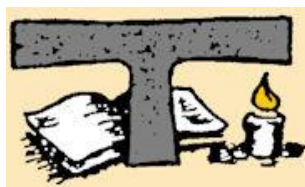


the newly forming group had five professed members, one candidate, and one inquirer. Today, the fraternity has seven professed members and three candidates.

Mother Cabrini apostolates have included two Lenten retreats promoted to the public in 2018 and 2019 and each attended by more than 50 people; donations of canned goods for the parish food pantry and pet food for the Franciscan blessing of animals; making Franciscan crown rosaries; painting spiritual messages on rocks; maintaining Friar Aubrey's grave site; and sponsoring a local YOUFRA (Franciscan Youth) group that was started by Friar Chris Dunn, OFM, during his time in Anderson.

After Friar Aubrey embraced Sister Death in 2017, Friar Mike Jones, OFM, stepped in as spiritual assistant until his transfer in July 2020. As of September 2020, our newly assigned spiritual assistant is Friar Bob Menard, OFM, from St. Andrew Catholic Church in Clemson, S.C. Mother Cabrini has been triply blessed to have had three such devoted friars as spiritual assistants over the past six years!

Charlie Comberrel, OFS, is formation director of Mother Cabrini Fraternity.



Regional Spiritual Assistant: A Reflection on the Gospel of Mark 3: 1–6 from an OFS Perspective

By Deacon Thomas Shaver, OFS, on Jan. 20

“Jesus entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so that they might accuse him.

“He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come up here before us.’

“Then he said to the Pharisees, ‘Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?’ But they remained silent.

“Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, Jesus said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.”

Today the United States inaugurates the 46th president to lead the country. Sadly, the campaigns of both parties during the elections contained ugly falsehoods, and accusations were made in both directions.

The above passage from the Gospel of Mark was proclaimed at today's Masses and spoke to me about healing and making hard choices when they might not be “politically correct.”

As I was proclaiming the Gospel at the 12 p.m. Mass, one phrase jumped out and struck me: “Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mk 3:5).

Instead of letting his anger get the better of him, Jesus was **grieved at the hardness of their hearts**. In other words, Jesus felt sorrow for the malice and hardness of the Pharisees' hearts, which was due to their ritualistic and strict adherence to the Law. What example can we take from this passage and apply to our own being and life?

While meditating on this passage, specifically how it speaks to me as both a Secular Franciscan and a deacon, I reflected on my general political conservatism and its touchpoints with the Gospel life. I was drawn to our Rule as an Order within the Catholic Church and how,

perhaps, my conservatism interacts positively and possibly negatively with the Rule and with the Church's teachings on social justice.

Let me be clear. My conservatism is rooted in my training as an accountant and business consultant. Often, I have to check myself on what I am considering, thinking, and acting upon, and how it interacts with the Gospel, which is the basis for our Rule and the Church's social justice teachings. Often, I have to remind myself that I am not called to be left or right, liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, but to be Christ-centered or as I think our seraphic father, St. Francis, might say, Gospel-centered.

As I reflected on these thoughts, I was led to Article 7 of our Rule. I have highlighted in bold print the specific thought that clarified and affirmed my thoughts.

"United by their vocation as 'brothers and sisters of penance' and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls 'conversion.' Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace."

As Secular Franciscans, we are called to "conform our thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of a radical conversion" daily. The takeaway for me from today's Gospel and Article 7 of our Rule is that first, it is "OK" to get angry, perhaps even throw a hissy fit; but in the final wash, to reconcile ourselves to our relationship with God and neighbor, doing what is right and just despite all the "legalism" and naysaying around us.

Like Jesus, perhaps we might find compassion and perhaps grieve for these folks, but still do as Jesus would have done. Isn't that what the expression, "from gospel to life and life to the gospel" (OFS Rule, Article 4), really means? To paraphrase the last sentence in Article 7, we fall down and pick ourselves up seeking the Father's mercy and grace, working at doing the right thing.

Going back to my initial reference to the inauguration of President Biden, we as Franciscans need to put aside partisan thoughts, seek dialogue, not debate. We can turn away from strict adherence to the way it's been and help heal, just as Jesus did for the man with the withered hand. Our goal should always be to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and stay focused on it.

An additional item:

Please consider the need for spiritual assistants within our region. We are down to about 10 spiritual assistants, which are not enough to serve 30 fraternities. While "altius moderamen" is in Canon law as an intended means to assure First Order and Third Order Regular friars' oversight and assistance to our Order, the reality of declining vocations and an aging population among the friars has placed the responsibility upon us for spiritual assistance.

Anyone who is interested please drop me an email at tshaverofs@gmail.com expressing your interest, and I will respond with information regarding the program.

Deacon Thomas Shaver, OFS, Brother and Sisters of St. Francis Region's spiritual assistant, is a member of Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity in Johns Creek, Ga. He serves at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Marietta, Ga.

New Franciscan Youth & Young Adult Chair

I would like to introduce myself. My name is Joe Vodenichar, OFS, and I'm the new Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Chair for our region.

I live in Greensboro, N.C., with my wife, Faye. We've been married 42 years have two daughters. I am a member of the Franciscan Family of Greensboro.

In the coming weeks and months, I'll be reaching out to all the ministers in our region about the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult program.

I look forward to helping all fraternities to get involved with the youth and young adults in their areas.

Peace and All Good
Joe

Congratulations, New Councils



St. Thomas More Fraternity, Wilmington, N.C., celebrated its "COVID" Chapter of Elections on Nov. 15, at St. Mark Catholic Church in Wilmington, in one of the parish's larger meeting rooms for appropriate social distancing. New council: Bill Walker,

OFS, vice minister (left); Bud Tascone, OFS, treasurer; Mike Yamat, OFS, minister; Linda Keir, OFS, secretary; Mary Hellmann, OFS, formation director; Marie Mallon, OFS, councilor; Patricia Wilkerson, OFS, ecclesiastical witness; Evelyn Lauer, OFS, councilor; Martha Roman, OFS, fraternal presider. Bonnie Laurino, OFS, fraternity member. Janet Glatt, OFS, could not attend but was elected councilor. (Photo by Greta Strittmatter, OFS)

Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity, Johns Creek, Ga., elected its new council on Jan. 20. V. David Rohr, OFS, formation director (left); Deacon Thomas Shaver Jr., OFS, treasurer; Sherry Kridle, OFS, secretary; David Walton Panter, OFS, councilor; Margaret Williams, OFS, minister; Jan Murina, OFS, vice minister; Kenneth Brooke, OFS, councilor; Joseph Perello Jr., OFS, councilor.



The Incarnation: God's Great Gift of Love

Christmas Day 2020

St. Margaret of Scotland Roman Catholic Church, Maggie Valley, N.C.

Homily by Rev. Dr. W. Becket Soule, OP, Pastor



Nativity of Jesus (manuscript illustration, 1500), New York Public Library Digital Collections

It is a mystery why God should come into the world in a form so easily confused with ourselves, odd and mysterious; that is, unless God has a higher opinion of us than we have of ourselves, or of God, or of each other.

We know how unlovely and how unloving we can be; no one knows our faults better than we do, for we are our own worst critics. God knows how hard we are on ourselves, and that is why the commandment tells us that we cannot love our neighbours or God until we learn to love ourselves. Can it be that God comes into the world in human form to teach us to love, not God, but humanity, beginning with ourselves? This may seem a strange, self-indulgent therapy, but love of God and love of humanity begin with love of self.

How easy it is to worship a God far distant and remote, and how difficult it is to love the person beside us or within us; but that, it seems to me, is the great mystery of Christmas: that if we are worthy of God's love, we are then more loving, lovely, and lovable than we think.

If we think we are lovely we may become loving and fulfill the prophesy when others seek us. If God has such confidence in us to become one of us, we should have such confidence in ourselves and in one another to run the risk of love in the world.

It is a risk, that is certain; I do not deny it. Supposing I love you and you don't love me? Nathan Pusey, the former president of Harvard University, once described his relationship to Harvard as, "It is the girl you kiss who doesn't kiss you back." Supposing I say, "I love you," and your reply, "Can't we just be friends?" Supposing love extends its hand and the hand is slapped and rejected? How can we love others, or even God, if we dare not love ourselves?

The courage of the Christian faith is not the courage to do great deeds or to believe impossible things, nor the courage to be a precise law-keeper or a generous philanthropist. The courage of the Christian, particularly at Christmas, is the courage to love, to remember that we love God because he first loved us, and to be reminded at Christmas that we are loved not because God is foolishly

generous or profligate, but because in God's eyes we are lovely and worthy of love because we are created in the image of love.

This is not just an exercise in self-esteem; this reminds us of why God comes into the world, and what, therefore, is expected of us; and this is what the poet Christina Rossetti meant when she wrote:

“Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, love divine;
Love was born at Christmas, Star and angels give the sign.
Love shall be our token, Love be yours and love be mine;
Love to God and all men, Love for plea and gift and sign.”

I think we would love to believe that it is all about ethics, belief, and behaviour; choose one of the above, mix with water, and call me in the morning, but it is not about any of those: it is all about love.

At least once a year, people yearn to believe that the God in whom they don't believe still loves them and still finds them worthy of his love, and lovable and lovely, and so much so that he comes again to them as one of them — us — in a shape painfully familiar, real, and intimate. Forget the theology; it is the affirmation that we are loved that counts. That is why this old story continues to appeal, the words continue to ring in our hearts, and for a moment we dare to believe in ourselves and in one another as much as God believes in us.

If you were God and you knew all you know now, would you come back in this particular form to this particular place? Not if you were smart — you would stay where you were. Thank God that you and I are not God, and that God has chosen for reasons beyond our deepest analysis to become as one of us that we may become as he is. He does that not because we are wicked or wretched, but because we are made in his image and we are lovely; and it is only when we realise that, that we can truly love God, and our neighbours as ourselves.

If what I have just said is true, even for a moment, we should be filled with joy and it should be infectious, contagious, and yet too often Christians have enough religious only to make themselves miserable. Guilt we know, but not grace or mercy, forgiveness or joy or love. Nietzsche correctly observed that “Christians should look more redeemed.” So, how can we do that?

Smile when you come to Communion; it is not a terrible thing we are giving you. It is the Bread of Life; and you should be glad to receive it, for it reminds you and me that we are beneficiaries of great love.

I was reminded of this very simple gesture many years ago when a friend observed that on Palm Sunday, when the clergy hand out sheaves of palms, our faces are glad and we smile and we seem to be happy about this very ambiguous thing. But then, when we administer the Holy Communion, everybody is very solemn and very sober. It is the cup of salvation, the bread of life, the source of joy, and Nietzsche was right, we should look more redeemed.

If we are happy and love God because God loves us because we are lovely, we should show it! Show it, and give thanks to God. Smile when you come to Communion, and show “Joy to the



Adoration of the Magi (manuscript illustration, 1500), New York Public Library Digital Collections

world! The Lord is come ...,” as the hymn puts it. It may be odd, but it is God, our God, who is odd, and it is true.

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days — and today most especially — he has spoken to us by a Son. Praise God! Joy to the world! Amen.

Likewise, our Franciscan theology teaches that God wanted, and still wants, to be with us because of his great love for us.



Adoration of the Magi (manuscript illustration, 1500), New York Public Library Digital Collections

“The Franciscan tradition on the Incarnation “develops from an insight of the Eastern (or Greek) Fathers, namely that the Incarnation is too important and too great an event to be initiated by sin. This insight stimulates a new understanding and hopefully an appreciation of the fullness of God’s love of creation”

“Blessed John Duns Scotus, OFM (c. 1265–8 November 1308), was one of the most important theologians and philosophers of the High Middle Ages. He was nicknamed *Doctor Subtilis* for his penetrating and subtle manner of thought. Scotus has had considerable influence on Catholic thought. ...

(Following in the footsteps of St. Bonaventure and other theologians) “Scotus will take the final step in establishing the Franciscan approach/school and our approach to God by explaining that the Incarnation was always the primary goal for all of God’s creation, a plan that could not be changed or altered by mankind’s activities.

“It was the desire of God to embrace and in turn be embraced, and this desire, not the sin of man, was the reason for the coming of Jesus, the fulfilment of the intention that became creation. Bl. John Scotus expresses

his understanding in his work, the *Primacy of Christ*, the theological foundation that stems from the lived reality of Francis of Assisi. ...

“Sure, we don’t deny that Jesus redeemed us and died because of sin, but Jesus was always God’s first intention or master plan and would have become incarnate (taken on our humanity) regardless of sin or anything else.

“Jesus came to show us the depths of God’s love and desire to love us, and to offer us the invitation to be loved by us in return. He gave us a true model of how to live life through love and respect for each other”. (“Franciscan Theology, Tradition and Spirituality” (pp. 7 and 12–13), *For Up to Now: Foundational Topics for Initial Formation* [The FUN manual]).

The Moral Duty to be Vaccinated

By David V. Cruz-Uribe, OFS

It has been just over a year since the first reports of a novel coronavirus outbreak in the city of Wuhan, China.

Since then, the Covid-19 pandemic has swept the globe: As I am writing this (Jan. 10, 2021) there have been about 90 million cases and 2 million deaths worldwide, including 375,000 deaths in the United States. The pandemic has had terrible consequences for everyone, especially the poor and marginalized.

One hope has been the development and release of vaccines. Pfizer and Moderna have had theirs approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and distribution has begun.

More than 6 million people in the U.S. have already been vaccinated. But, according to public health experts, at least 75–80 percent of the population must be vaccinated before we can begin to relax masking and social-distancing protocols. The problem is that many people are threatening to refuse the vaccine: According to a recent poll, more than 40 percent of the respondents said they definitely or probably would **not** be vaccinated.

I believe that everyone ought to be vaccinated, unless they are among the small group of people who should not because of medical reasons (e.g., they have an autoimmune disease, such as multiple sclerosis or are immunocompromised because of illness or medical treatment).

The vaccine is not simply for the protection of the individual. Vaccines protect a whole community by preventing the transmission of the disease. In the short run it protects individuals, both those who are vaccinated and, equally important, people who cannot be vaccinated. In the long run, a vaccine can completely eliminate a disease from a community. Examples include smallpox, which no longer exists, or polio, which now exists only in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

For Catholics, the duty to be vaccinated is part of our moral duty to uphold the common good. As Pope St. John XXIII explained, every human right is paired with a reciprocal duty:

“The natural rights of which We have so far been speaking are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person. ... [I]t follows that in human society one man’s natural right gives rise to a corresponding duty in other men; the duty, that is, of recognizing and respecting that right” (*Pacem in Terris*, 28, 30).

The fundamental right is the right to life, and so the duty to protect the lives of others is equally fundamental. Another right is the right to medical care, which includes the protection of the health of the community. Since being vaccinated is necessary to protect the life and health of



Army Capt. Isaiah Horton, a doctor at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Md., receives a Covid-19 vaccination at the medical center on Dec. 19. (Department of Defense photo by Lisa Fernando.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/secdef/50721688747/>

others, there is a strong moral obligation to be vaccinated.

As Secular Franciscans, we should embrace this obligation as it is in line with our Rule of life. Our duty to uphold the common good is embedded in our Rule, though the expression “common good” does not appear:

“Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. . . . Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith” (OFS Rule, Articles. 14-15).

People have expressed a number of reasons for not being vaccinated. A few subscribe to outlandish conspiracy theories regarding the vaccination: for instance, that it is part of a worldwide plot to inject microchips into the world’s population. Others, influenced by the anti-vaccination movement in the U.S., believe that the vaccine causes autism or other health problems. None of these concerns have any basis in fact. There is no connection between any vaccine and autism, and the Covid-19 vaccines have been extensively tested and shown to be safe for the vast majority of people. Side effects are rare and minor, especially in comparison to Covid-19.

Many Catholics do not want to get vaccinated because they have heard that the vaccines are unethical. A number of people on social media are claiming that the vaccines are made using aborted fetuses, which is not true.

Others argue that since they were developed or tested with cell lines derived 50 years ago from an aborted fetus, they should not be used. However, this argument misstates Catholic ethical teaching on remote material cooperation with evil, and both the Vatican and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have issued categorical statements on the morality of using existing vaccines. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) summarized its argument as follows:

“[A]ll vaccinations recognized as clinically safe and effective can be used in good conscience *with the certain knowledge that the use of such vaccines does not constitute formal cooperation with the abortion* from which the cells used in production of the vaccines derive....

“At the same time, practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary.... Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses, must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent. In particular, they must avoid any risk to the health of those who cannot be vaccinated for medical or other reasons, and who are the most vulnerable” (CDF, “Note on the morality of using some anti-Covid-19 vaccines”).

Thus, while being vaccinated is not an absolute obligation, the duty to protect the right to life and uphold the common good is. In particular, anyone who refuses to be vaccinated “*must do their utmost*” to not transmit the disease to others. This means adhering to strict masking and social-distancing protocols for months, perhaps even a year or more, until the rate of vaccination in their community exceeds the desired threshold, and there are no longer any known cases of community transmission. And they must be prepared to resume these practices if there is another

outbreak in their community. Getting vaccinated seems safer and easier. It is the moral thing to do.

I will leave the final word to Pope Francis, who has announced that he is being vaccinated, and is encouraging all Catholics to do likewise: “It’s an ethical choice, because you are playing with your health and life, but you are also playing with the lives of others. I am signed up. One must do it” (Pope Francis, quoted by TGCOM 24, 01/10/21; translated from the Italian original).

Area 1 Councilor David Cruz-Uribe, OFS, is also a councilor in St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity, Bessemer, Ala.

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: *Fratelli Tutti*: Dialogue and Communication

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

One of the greatest things that we living creatures have in common is communication, the ability to communicate with one another.

Every living being communicates with another being — to relay feelings, needs, opinions, decisions, and basic truths. Whether that communication method is through spoken words, sign language, facial expressions, body language or any number of paraverbals, we cannot get away from the need to communicate with others.

If we want to relay a message to another person, we need to communicate in one form or another to get that message across. Engaging in dialogue is the means of getting that message across to that other person.

What is a dialogue? Dialogue is a communication process that aims to build relationships between people as they share experiences, ideas, and information about a common concern. True dialogue aims to help the parties take in more information and perspectives than they previously had as they attempt to build a new and broader understanding of a situation.

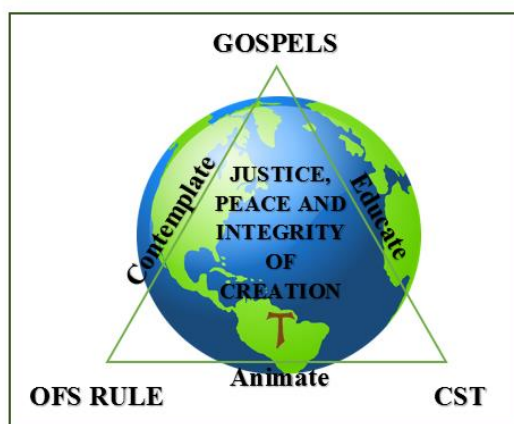
In his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes: “Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up as ‘dialogue.’ If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue” (198).

He says that dialogue is respectful, strives for consensus, and seeks the truth.

Dialogue is a unique communication process because it focuses participants’ attention on ***listening for understanding***. Dialogue works best when participants listen for what might be correct, true, and insightful about what others have stated. The listeners try to find ideas with which they can agree, and potentially combine those with their own ideas to build a larger truth than any side has on its own.

SPIRITUALITY

FORMATION



FRATERNITY

APOSTOLATE

Pope Francis goes on to say, “Unlike disagreement and conflict, persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagine. Authentic dialogue is necessary for building a better world” (198).

Having authentic, or what I call “mindful” dialogue, involves deep and active listening, listening for understanding. This works best when the people involved are open to learning, changing, and growing. Our dialogues often involve two parallel monologues, where no one is listening to the other; there is no understanding, and certainly no growth.

Most people either consciously or unconsciously believe that there is only one right way to believe or act. For this reason, some people discredit dialogue because it requires them to recognize that they may be able to learn from people who believe differently. When we believe that we alone hold the whole truth, we see no need to listen to others.

One reason for this is fear: If we listen to another, it may challenge our own world view and that can be scary to some people. Pope Francis says that fear deprives us of the desire and the ability to encounter the other (41).

Dialogue works best when participants bring curiosity and a sense of wonder about others, and a desire to learn more about people and their experiences. It requires humility to recognize that one person or group does not have the whole truth.

When we engage in true mindful dialogue, we listen to understand. This does not mean we listen to agree, because we may not agree, and that is OK. Everyone has their own story and it is their story. Our call is to listen with an open and caring heart, without judgment. We listen to learn and we listen to understand. Nothing more, nothing less. Pope Francis says, “Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable” (215).

We all are created in the image and likeness of a mighty God; we all have worth and value and we all have something to share. “All this calls for the ability to recognize other people’s right to be themselves and to be different. This recognition, as it becomes a culture, makes possible the creation of a social covenant. Without it, subtle ways can be found to make others insignificant, irrelevant, of no value to society” (218).

Right now, we are more isolated than ever in this time of global pandemic. There is less opportunity to communicate or dialogue in person or face-to-face, unless we are wearing masks and socially distanced. But thank God for technology which allows us to connect with one another and still have some semblance of fraternity or community. To this, the pope says: “In today’s globalized world, the media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which in turn can inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all... The media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances” (205).

St. Francis challenged his early community to go into the world to transform it by being and living as servants of God. Pope Francis challenges us today to do the same.

Think about a time when you have truly felt listened to and heard. How did it make you feel? Now, think about a time when you truly listened to and heard someone else’s story. How did that feel?

Being in fraternity or community means learning to authentically communicate with one another because that is showing love — which is the whole of the Gospel.

BSSF Region JPIC Animator Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, is a member of St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity in Aiken, S.C., the National JPIC Animator, and a member of the International Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Fraternity helps parish celebrate two anniversaries

By Larry Lynch, OFS

Photos by Misia Fedorko

Members of Five Georgia Fraternity joined Bishop Stephen D. Parkes, bishop of the Diocese of Savannah, Ga.;

Father Timothy McKeown, and Father Christopher Hassel, at Nativity of Our Lady Catholic Church in Darien, Ga., on Sept. 13.

They were there to honor the 75th anniversary of the church's founding and the week of Sept. 14, 423 years ago, when five Franciscan friars were martyred nearby.

Father McKeown and Father Hassel serve as pastor and parochial vicar, respectively, at St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in nearby Brunswick and at Nativity of Our Lady.

Many of Nativity's parishioners feel that the martyrs, known as the Five Georgia Martyrs, are the "heart and soul" of the parish. Their belief is centered on the fact that it was near their parish that one of the martyrs met his death. On Sept. 14, 1597, Father Pedro de Corpa was preparing to celebrate Mass on the holy Feast of the Exultation of the Cross, when he was brutally clubbed to death. He was just 37 years old and had been at his Tolomato Mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe for 10 years. Although Friar Pedro was warned about the impending danger, he felt that the mutual love between pastor and parishioners gave him no reason to fear harm.

Bishop Parkes celebrated Mass and gave a heartwarming homily that emphasized the love and forgiveness that surely was attributed to all five of the Franciscan martyrs. He spoke of the sacred ground that we stood upon and the fact that a monument dedicated to the martyrs will erected here.

The Vatican, he said, has the documents for the "Cause for Beatification of Friar Pedro de Corpa and Companions." The companions are Friar Francisco de Verascola, Friar Miguel de Anon, Friar Antonio de Badajoz, and Friar Blas de Rodriguez.

Bishop Raymond W. Lessard, bishop of Savannah (1973–1995), opened the cause in 1984. In 2007, Bishop John Kevin Boland, bishop of Savannah (1995–2011), officially closed the



Members of Five Georgia Martyrs Fraternity, St. Simons Island, Ga., and clergy attending the double celebration — Front Row: Damian Fedorko, inquirer (left); Pat Kota, orientee; Mary Jane Marsh, OFS; Larry Lynch, OFS; Lee Norvell, inquirer; Janice Capano, affiliate. Back row: Father Timothy McKeown, pastor (left); Bishop Stephen D. Parkes, bishop of Savannah.

diocesan process, and the authenticated records were sent to the Vatican. Presently, the martyrs are called "Servants of God."



Colette Jackson, OFS, another fraternity member. "The church in its smallness and simplicity, the display before the altar with the five crosses and accompanying five roses representing the martyrs on a brown background imitating earth/soil."

Larry Lynch, OFS, is a member of Five Georgia Martyrs Fraternity, St. Simons Island, Ga.

Nativity of Our Lady Church's small size and plain interior are powerful reminders of the humble Franciscan friars. Beneath the altar, Pat Kota, an orientee in our fraternity and a Nativity parishioner, created a sculptural scene honoring the martyrs.

"What inspired me most regarding the blessed ground where the likeness of the five Georgia martyrs will be erected was the surroundings," said

BSSF Regional Executive Council RECAP

By Nora Wessling, OFS

The Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region Executive Council (REC) met Nov. 7 via Zoom. Meeting highlights are as follows:

- The council was asked if there was anyone in the region's fraternities who may have a calling to be a spiritual assistant to encourage them to attend the spiritual assistant course since the Region is in need of Spiritual Assistants. The person needs to be professed for five years before taking the course. Interested, professed persons are to contact Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS, regional spiritual assistant.
- Regional Secretary Nora Wessling, OFS, and Minister DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, are working with and encouraging the fraternities to have their fraternity database information updated by December 2020 not only so the information is accurate but also to assist with the accuracy of the fair-share contribution to the National Fraternity (NAFRA).
- Because of Covid-19, many of the fraternities were unable to have their scheduled visitations or elections. The REC decided that the regional secretary would document in the NAFRA database if a fraternity did not have its visitation or election because of the pandemic. This was decided to be done especially for the future, when the specifics for the delay may not be remembered. The minister of the local fraternity will be notified when this documentation has been made.
- Vice Minister Carmen Madero, OFS, reported that she was the fraternal visitor, and Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS, regional spiritual assistant, was the pastoral visitor for the Sept. 11-12 visitation for the Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga. Her report explained how the process was successfully adapted due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was suggested that other fraternities in the region may want to consider

if this adaptation may work for them during this pandemic.

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

Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS

Vice Minister: Carmen Madero, OFS

Secretary: Nora Wessling, OFS

Treasurer: Ken Brooke, OFS

Formation Director: Dianne Ambrose, OFS

**Spiritual Assistant:
Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS**

Area Councilors

Area 1

David Cruz-Urbe, OFS; Sharon Loiselle, OFS

AL: Bessemer;

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

TN: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

Area 2

Betti Pettinati-Longinotti, OFS; Christine Lukesh, OFS

GA: Augusta, St. Simons Island;

NC: Asheville, Charlotte, Hendersonville, Newton;

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

Area 3

Ellen Ferrone, OFS; Martha Roman, 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
Joe Vodenichar, OFS**

Prayer Ministry (online prayer requests)

Area 1: John Martin, OFS

Area 2: Dorothy Huebner, OFS

Area 3: Bob Sabisch, OFS

Fraternity prayer coordinators submit prayer requests.

- Treasurer Ken Brooke, OFS, reported the third quarter financial status, and ended by saying there had not been much activity.
- Regional Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Animator Carolyn Townes, OFS, updated us regarding her involvement in many programs and projects. These were: conducting a 10-week Just Faith course, "Faith and Racial Equity for National Leadership," via Zoom; conducting and participating in the National JPIC Focus Groups: Care for Creation, Immigration, Spirituality and JPIC, and Mindful Dialogues; convening a Zoom book discussion to continue the dialogue around racial equity; presenting the 2020 National Award for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation during the virtual National Chapter to Monica Olivera, OFS, from Juan de Padilla Region. She is president of First Nations Outreach, where she ministers and helps supply needed necessities to Native Americans. Carolyn invited the council to let her know if there was anything local fraternities are needing.
- Formation Director Dianne Ambrose, OFS, reported that a rewrite of the *BSSF Regional Formators' Guidelines for Orientation and Initial Formation* is in progress. She is working with council members on this process. She renewed the yearly fee for the regional Zoom room and continues to offer use of the

Zoom room to everyone in the region. She is offering a once-a-week Evening Prayer on Zoom and has restarted a monthly Zoom local formation directors meeting. She reported attending, the Regional Formation Directors Workshop via Zoom in August, and also continuing education that the Franciscan School of Theology presented via Zoom.

- Youth and Young Adult Animator Joe Vodenichar, OFS, reported that he and Minister DorothyAnn attended a multi-week NAFRA training course, “Franciscan Youth and Adult Program” via Zoom, as well as a “Just Faith” training program concentrating on youth. He is planning to contact the ministers of each local fraternity in the near future to learn more of their needs.
- Area Councilors reported on their activities which included: submitting articles for the *Communio*, attending workshops, lectures, professions, a canonical establishment of a local fraternity, helping draft a summary for a workshop attended, drafting a script to combine a Mass with a Transitus and a Rite of Profession for a member, preparing for an upcoming election of a local fraternity.
- Minister DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, gave an overview of the National Chapter held in October. She also mentioned of the canonical establishment of Mother Cabrini Fraternity in Anderson, S.C., and our review of the proposed Visitations and Elections from November 2020 to July 2021.
- Minister DorothyAnn included other topics, such as the regional website having numerous topics of interest which included posted workshops and formation resources. She asked area councilors to refer members to the regional and national websites and informed the REC of the NAFRA theme for 2021: “Live a Life Worthy of Your Call.”

As noted, these are highlights of our REC Gathering. We hope it shows how we are actively involved in serving the needs of all our brothers and sisters in the region. We thank you for this opportunity to serve you and ask for your prayers as we continue to strive to serve as servant leaders. We in turn pray for all in our Region. With our wishes of blessings for all, filled with His peace and goodness.

BSSF Region Secretary Nora Wessling, OFS, is a member of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Augusta, Ga.

Congratulations, New Candidate

St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity, Spartanburg, S.C., welcomed into candidacy Nick DuFault, OFS, on Oct. 24. From left: Michaelleen Davis, OFS, Nick’s sponsor; Nick DuFault, OFS; Formation Director Paula Duncan, OFS; and Minister Sara Nell Boggs, OFS. (Photo by Esther Kelly, OFS)



Newly Professed: Congratulations!

The Five Georgia Martyrs Fraternity, St. Simons Island, Ga., celebrated the solemn profession of Mary Jane Marsh, OFS, Oct. 8, during morning Mass in St. William Church, St. Simons Island. Mary Jane is a convert to Catholicism from the Episcopal faith and took St. Elizabeth Ann Seton as her patron. At her profession, she received the Tau and a relic of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. The fraternity and Mary Jane's daughter, Denise, enjoyed an outdoor buffet reception at Gascoigne Pavilion after the Mass and profession. Seen here: Larry Lynch, OFS, minister (left); Lois Cutia, OFS; Mary Jane Marsh, OFS; Msgr. Christopher J. Schreck, pastor; Ann Mallon OFS.



BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS (V) AND ELECTIONS (E) January through July 2021

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

Date	Fraternity/Group & Location	V Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors
		E Presider/Ecclesial Witness

Nov. 7: Regional Executive Council Meeting via Zoom

Jan. 14	Five Georgia Martyrs, St. Simons Island, GA	E Christine Lukesh
Canceled/to reschedule		(DorothyAnn Rowland)/ Dcn. Tom Shaver
Jan. 17	Seven Dolors of the BVM, Franklin, TN	E Carmen Madero/?
Canceled/to reschedule		
Jan. 31	Padre Pio, Raleigh, NC	E Martha Roman/Dcn. Tom Shaver
Feb. 5–6	Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Bluffton, SC	V Betti Longinotti/?
Canceled/to reschedule		

See CALENDAR, p. 20

CALENDAR, from p. 19

Feb. 13	Immaculate Conception, Jonesboro, GA	E	Sharon Loiselle/?
	Canceled/to reschedule		
Feb. 21	Sts. Francis and Clare, Knoxville, TN	E	Carmen Madero/Dcn. Tom Shaver
March 13–14	Channel of Peace, Chattanooga, TN	V	Sharon Loiselle/Jean Schneider (Dcn. Tom Shaver)
March 19–20	Spirit of Francis and Clare, Conyers, GA	V	Sharon Loiselle/?
	Canceled/to reschedule		
March 19–20	Bl. John Duns Scotus, Garden City, SC	V	Ellen Ferrone/Dcn. Tom Shaver
April 10 –11	Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC	V	Martha Roman/?
April 11	St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Elizabeth City, NC	E	Ellen Ferrone/?
April 17	Our Lady of Good Counsel, Greenville, SC	E	Betti Longinotti/Joanita Nellenbach
April 25	Blessed Solanus Casey, Morehead City, NC	E	Martha Roman/Dcn. Tom Shaver
May 10–11	Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, NC	V	Martha Roman/?
June 3	St. Maximilian Kolbe, Charlotte, NC	E	Betti Longinotti/?
June 27	St. Joseph Cupertino, Bessemer, AL	E	?/?
July 7–8	Fraternity of St. Clare, Asheville, NC	V	Betti Longinotti/?
July 10	Crucified Christ, North Charleston, SC	E	?/?

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.SecularFranciscansUSA.org

Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (CIOFS)

International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order

www.ciofs.org