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THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN  
ORDER

Winter 2018-19 Issue 96

The background of the main title is a photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is filled with orange and yellow clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, reflecting on the water. The waves are visible in the foreground.

# Going from Gospel to Life and Life to the Gospel

See Christ!  
Be Christ!

## Mission to Share the Vision

The TAU-USA, a publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States, is a vital communication link between the OFS-USA leadership and all candidates and all professed Secular Franciscans throughout the United States. The articles within the publication, while sharing the Secular Franciscan charism and vision, are intended to inform, inspire, and challenge.



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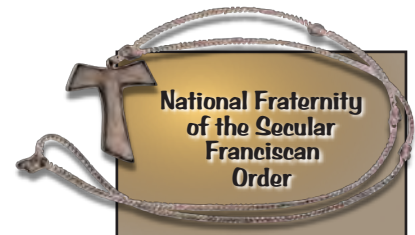
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#### Note:

A Spanish version of the TAU-USA is now available and being mailed to Spanish speaking members upon request. If you wish to receive the TAU USA in Spanish and not English, please send your name, address, fraternity name and region name to: Cindy Wesley OFS, [cw93444@gmail.com](mailto:cw93444@gmail.com) or 846 Calimex Place, Nipomo, CA 93444.





## **OFS-USA** **NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE** **SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA**



by Bartolomé Esteban Perez Murillo (1617-1682')

### **NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE**

by Jan Parker, OFS

### **SEE CHRIST! BE CHRIST! GOING FROM GOSPEL TO LIFE AND LIFE TO THE GOSPEL**

What happens when we open the Gospels? For one thing, it can transform us. That is the power of God's Word. I'd like to share a story about what happened when I opened the Gospel one day — but perhaps it's more a story about conversion, and how we are re-made as the Spirit moves in our lives.

Early this year, I became fascinated by the fact that June 24, the date on which our OFS Rule was approved, is the same date on which we celebrate the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. I began to think of many interesting connections between St. John the Baptist and our Secular Franciscan Rule, and even with St. Francis himself. We know that Francis was given the name John at his baptism, and that he always celebrated the feast of St. John the Baptist in a special way.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Francis had a devotion to John the Baptist? I could imagine St. Francis reading the Gospel accounts of John the Baptist and being inspired. After all, when you think of John the Baptist you think of repentance, austerity, and one who heralded Christ. Sounds like Francis to me! I was intrigued and decided that this connection between John the Baptist and St. Francis would be an interesting subject for an article in the *TAU-USA*.

The day came to write my article. After my morning prayer, I picked up my Bible and began to read everything I could find about John the Baptist. Hours passed as I studied Bible commentaries, learning more about the Gospel stories of John's birth, his preaching in the wilderness, his baptism of the Lord and Jesus's own testimony about him. I pondered John's life, his call, and his heart for Christ. There was so much here that connected with our Franciscan way of life! I sat back in wonder. How would I ever capture all of this in a brief newsletter article?

I set my writing aside, and searched for an image of John the Baptist to put with my article. This painting, pictured here, caught my eye, for it echoed all I had contemplated that day. Here we see John who, from his birth, was devoted to God's will — a bold messenger, radically committed to the preaching of repentance, a herald of the coming Kingdom — one to whom Christ was everything. Here, too, is Christ, the Incarnate, the Light shining in the darkness, reaching out to John to share with him the water of Life, inviting him to glory. John humbly bows and drinks, his gaze upon the Lamb. Christ's gaze upon John is one of tender love and compassion. There is so much symbolism in this beautiful painting, but what captivated me was what I cherished from my reflections that day: It's all

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<sup>1</sup> See *St. Francis of Assisi, A Biography* by Omer Englebert, pg. 12

about a relationship with Christ! John the Baptist had this relationship — certainly Francis did, too. I quickly imagined Francis of Assisi taking John's place in this painting. That was easy to do. As I saw Francis there, I thought of his words, "We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> I could feel the intimacy between them. I then dared to go a step further, and I placed myself there. I bowed humbly as Jesus reached out to me, offering life-giving water. I drank, and my heart was filled with a renewed desire to conform my life to that of Christ's. I offered a prayer of thanks for this contemplative moment. I realized at that moment that my day was no longer about writing an article, it was about an encounter with Christ in the Gospel. The Holy Spirit had led me to what I needed that day — not to write an article, but to spend time in prayerful reflection on the Scriptures.

What happens when we open the Gospels? We are transformed.

Some time ago, our sister Mary Bittner shared a memorable quote that speaks to the heart of this:

Whenever we come together to listen to the Word of God, what we are seeking at bottom is not mental information or moral instruction or even a sentimental influence that will make us "feel" the presence and goodness of God. What we seek with all our soul, rather, is the possibility of opening ourselves up in prayer to God's transforming action. Whether we are fully conscious of it or not, in other words, we desire a change of life, a conversion from what we presently are to a more precise embodiment of the likeness of Christ at the center of our being, radiating out from us through all our thoughts, words, and actions.

This is why the life of contemplation is the boldest and most adventuresome of undertakings, for what could be more radical, more truly earth-shattering, than the willingness to be dismantled and created anew, not once or twice in a lifetime, but day after day? "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." (2 Cor 5:17) But being created in this sense is not a passive work. Our "clay" is the spiritual stuff of our will and freedom and thoughts and feelings and desires, and all of these have to be surrendered every day anew to God's power. We cannot become new creations without actively participating in our remaking by the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

As this quote points out, this is not a passive work. We are blessed to have a Rule that calls us to this bold undertaking of contemplation — a Rule that call us to devote ourselves to the Gospel and to seek to encounter with Christ."<sup>4</sup> We also have a theme for this year which can help us as we go from Gospel to life, and life to the Gospel — "**See Christ! Be Christ!**" These four words truly sum it all up! Let us open our eyes to **see Christ** — to contemplate Christ — in the Gospel, in the Eucharist, in our brothers and sisters, and in all the ways he is present in our world. Let us then surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit within us, committing ourselves to ongoing daily conversion so we might **be Christ** in our world.

*"But when the kindness and generous love of God our Savior appeared,  
not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy,  
he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,  
whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life."  
(Titus 3:1-7)*

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<sup>2</sup> *Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters in Penance*, Prologue of the OFS Rule

<sup>3</sup> Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *The Way of the Disciple* p. 18

<sup>4</sup> Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Articles 4, 5, 8



## News from the National Executive Council NATIONAL PRIORITY FOR 2019-2021

At the 2018 Chapter, the National Fraternity Council (NAFRA) discussed the question of national priorities for 2019–2021. Many suggestions were presented, and several were mentioned multiple times, but no one priority stood out clearly. It was the consensus of the body that the incoming National Executive Council (NEC) should decide our national priorities for the upcoming three years. The NEC is happy to announce that this was accomplished at our December 13–16, 2018, meeting in St. Louis, Mo. During this meeting, we prayerfully considered the needs of the national family, as well as the feedback from the NAFRA Geo Groups at Chapter, and the decision became clear to us. While in past years NAFRA has set as many as six priorities, this year we chose to narrow our focus to one—*Fraternity Life*. Note that concentrating on fostering vibrant fraternity life does not imply that previous priorities will be ignored or neglected. Formation, JPIC, Communications, and Spiritual Assistance will all play an important role in strengthening our local fraternities.



The decision to choose *Fraternity Life* was confirmed for us in a wonderful way! A few weeks after we chose this priority, we received a Christmas letter from our General Minister. In this letter Tibor Kauser encouraged us to repeat our “yes” unconditionally—saying *yes to God, yes to our vocation, and yes to our neighbor*. He then repeated three times “...this will give new life to our fraternities, too!” (See our General Minister’s Christmas Letter on page 5)

To help all of us achieve this priority we decided to highlight three aspects of fraternity life:

### National Priority 2019-2021 Fraternity Life

1. Deepening our Franciscan Vocation
2. Growing in Fraternal Communion
3. Cultivating Universal Kinship

Our relationships with God, with our OFS brothers and sisters, and with all people made in the image and likeness of God will be the subject of future reflections, as will some of the means (commitment, conversion, communication) we must use to enable our fraternities to grow in holiness.

Meanwhile, let us begin by reflecting on the spiritual reality and purpose of our fraternities. We're so used to participating in various groups, both within and outside the Church, that it's easy to treat our fraternity as just another group, rather than as an integral part of our vocation. Let's look at our foundational documents. How do they portray fraternity?

Our General Constitutions state:

**Art. 28.1. The fraternity of the OFS finds its origin in the inspiration of Saint Francis of Assisi to whom the Most High revealed the essential gospel quality of life in fraternal communion** (See *Constitutions* 3.3 (below); *Testament* 14).

**Art. 3.3. The vocation to the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion.** For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities.

**Art. 100.3.** Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and **the witness of building fraternity sincerely and openly are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love.** They should be recognized in it by their "being," from which their mission springs.

#### **Points to ponder:**

- The fraternity is not an afterthought. It originated with St. Francis, and its essential gospel quality was revealed to Francis by God Himself.
- We don't just "live the Gospel." We live it "in fraternal communion." Fraternal communion is thus defined as a *constitutive element* of our vocation. We have a specific way of being in the world, and a specific way of being together... in fraternal communion.
- The Constitutions tie building fraternity to our Franciscan mission of "rebuilding" the Church. In fact, they term it one of the

principal services we as an Order do for the Church. Recall that during our profession we promised to spend our efforts doing this very thing.

The local fraternity is a visible sign of the Church, a community of faith and love. Together with all the members, you now pledge yourselves to spend your efforts **to make the fraternity a genuine ecclesial assembly and a living Franciscan community.** (Rite of Profession, Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order).

If we fail to take this seriously, if we work half-heartedly, if we rarely show up at fraternity gatherings, we are failing our brothers and sisters, we are failing to live our profession, and we are failing the Church.

- Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis and his brothers rejoiced when others were added to their company.

"Immediately four other good and sound men were added to them as followers of the holy man of God. ...At that time Saint Francis and his brothers felt great gladness and unique joy whenever one of the faithful, led by the Spirit of God, came and accepted the habit of holy religion whoever the person might be: rich or poor, noble or insignificant, wise or simple, cleric or illiterate, a layman of the Christian people. This was a great wonder to those of the world and an example of humility, challenging them to the way of a more reformed life and to penance for sins." (1 Celano 31)

Ask yourself: do people today feel that "great wonder" when they visit our fraternities?

What sort of example do they see?

- "Come to [Jesus], a living stone, rejected by men yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...."(1 Peter 2:4-5a)

*And finally, look to the next issue of the TAU-USA and to our national website [secularfranciscansusa.com](http://secularfranciscansusa.com) for additional reflections on this year's focus.*





## MINISTER GENERAL'S CHRISTMAS LETTER

Rome, December 24th, 2018

My dear Sisters and Brothers in St. Francis!  
May the good Lord give you his peace!

*"The day of gladness drew nigh, the time of exultation arrived!"<sup>1</sup>*

Yes, the day of gladness drew nigh, and it is time to rejoice and to give thanks. God has come among us; God said 'yes' to the man. This 'yes' has arrived almost unknown, in an unbelievable manner, *hidden these things from the wise and the learned ...and ... revealed them to the childlike.*<sup>2</sup> And yes, we see this in St. Francis, and we can also see it today, that the mystery of Christmas is hidden from the wise and revealed to the childlike.

Great things are born in silence. When we are living the season of Advent waiting for the coming of the Lord and celebrating the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world at Christmas, we often experience the noise and buzz of the world, which is far away from the silence of the stall in Bethlehem. Only a few people knew about what has happened during those days, and thus have the joy of the great act of God: *the fullness of times had come!*<sup>3</sup>

We have to live Christmas with this experience today, too: we are living in the fullness of times. Christ has come and has remained among us. It is not easy to live this great gift, and today again, it seems that only a few people know about what this gift really is, what we celebrate. Sometimes even we ourselves forget about it in the midst of the rush of our life, doing our best to prepare everything for the feast, to prepare things we wish to be signs of our love to one another. We forget about the silence of Bethlehem that is essential to be able to celebrate the incarnation of the Word of God.

The silence of Bethlehem is a great opposition to the noisy world—rebels, riots, claims, wars, fights in all areas of our societies and even in the Church! We have great concerns about what is happening around us, and it takes our attention, takes our time, takes our power.

But this is the time of exultation! Therefore, I give thanks to the Lord our God for all the good he has given us during this year, and I invite you all to live this time of exultation with a full awareness of the presence of God among us. I invite you all to renew our decision to live the fullness of our vocation, and to strive more strongly and more intensely to live the kind of holiness to which God has invited us.

*We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves.... Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife, as Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain.*<sup>4</sup>

At Christmas, this call for holiness is stronger. Stronger, not because God is calling us more loudly, but because we are going to have a time with more silent moments. We are more ready to discover the miracle of God, and to contemplate it in silence. I encourage you with the words of Thomas Merton, who died 50 years ago, but whose teaching is still a strong invitation for us:

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<sup>1</sup> 1Cel 85

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 11.25

<sup>3</sup> Gal. 4.4

<sup>4</sup> Gaudete et exultate 14.

*“There must be a time of day when the man who makes plans forgets his plans and acts as if he had no plans at all. There must be a time of day when the man who has to speak falls very silent. And his mind forms no more propositions, and he asks himself: Did they have a meaning? There must be a time when the man of prayer goes to pray as if it were the first time in his life he had ever prayed; when the man of resolutions puts his resolutions aside as if they had all been broken, and he learns a different wisdom: distinguishing the sun from the moon, the stars from the darkness, the sea from the dry land, and the night sky from the shoulder of a hill.”<sup>5</sup>*

This is the kind of silence that lets us celebrate Christmas at the depth of its significance and meaning. God said a 'yes' to all men and women, and this 'yes' is unconditional. Mary said 'yes' to God, and her 'yes' is unconditional. It is a good approach to step on the road to holiness to repeat this 'yes' unconditionally.

Saying 'yes' to God, not only with our prayers, but also with our actions. Saying 'yes' to God also means to seek his will, to do his will. ***And yes, this will give new life to our fraternities, too.***

Saying a 'yes' to myself: accepting myself as a gift of God to the world, to my family, to my beloved ones, and yes, even to myself. Life is the gift of God, and we have to say 'yes' to our lives. We have to accept it with joy together with all our weakness, fragility, difficulties, because it belongs to God. It is right that Christmas shows us the immeasurable value of life, regardless the external circumstances. ***And yes, this will give new life to our fraternities, too.***

Saying 'yes' to the neighbor: looking at him as a gift of God. My neighbor is someone whom God has sent to help me on my road to holiness. All I should do for him, saying 'yes' to him unconditionally, will help me to holiness. I invite you to love and act for the poor, the marginalized, the abandoned ones, the orphans, the widows of our times, who are on the edge of the society, or even beyond it. We need all those whom nobody else needs. ***And yes, this will give new life to our fraternities, too.***

For us secular Franciscan sisters and brothers, this silent celebration of Christmas means the fullness of times, the time of exultation. We always have to seek what is first, and silence has always been first. The world was created in silence. Christ has arrived in silence. Also, Saint Francis has met God first in silence, in the prison, in the St. Damian Church, in the nature, in the solitude.

Let us spend this feast season of Christmas with this exultation, born in silence and in prayer. Let us be aware that the fullness of times has come. Let us get closer to God, closer to our neighbor, and thus also closer to ourselves. Let us be more determined to become holy and let us be more determined to put the incarnated Word of God in the center of our fraternities, local, regional, national and even international. Let us share in the experience of Saint Angela of Foligno:

*The Incarnation has made two things known to us. The first one is that it has filled us with love. The second is that it makes us certain of our salvation.<sup>6</sup> I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right that I should think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart.<sup>7</sup>*

I wish you all a blessed, holy Christmas, so that you can experience the silence of God, in which the greatest thing has happened: the Word of God has become flesh and dwells among.



Your brother and your minister,

Tibor Kauser,  
CIOFS Minister General



<sup>5</sup> From Thomas Merton: No man is an island

<sup>6</sup> 12th letter of St. Angela of Foligno

<sup>7</sup> Phil. 1.3-7



# NAFRA chapter

By BILL SCHMITT, OFS

The week-long chapter, held in mid-October in St. Louis, MO, convened the ministers and delegates of the 30 regional fraternities and other individuals in the Secular Franciscan Order (including observers from an emerging fraternity in Guam).

Several days of discussion about the present and future of the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order preceded the election of national leaders for the next three years.

Lively conversations among the more than 90 attendees — who included official representatives from the International Council (CIOFS) and members of

the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) — reflected the Secular Franciscans' mission and character.

A passion to find joy and foster peace, following in St. Francis' footsteps to live the Gospel, energized discussions ranging from youth vocations and members' ongoing formation to peace and justice and the church's sexual abuse crisis.

Celebration of the order's Rule of life as renewed 40 years ago, plus the plan to celebrate in 2021 the 800th anniversary of the order's founding, went hand-in-hand with daily liturgies and prayer to focus the chapter's participants on their mission.

Participants from other orders and groups in the Franciscan family, Catholic

and ecumenical, joined in the activities.

During a break from their meetings, participants attended Mass in the Old Basilica Cathedral of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, which is located in the shadow of the city's famous Gateway Arch. They also toured the newer Basilica Cathedral, which is named for St. Louis IX of France, the compassionate king considered a co-patron of the Secular Franciscan Order along with St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

The National Fraternity continued its tradition of issuing a statement to local and regional fraternities. This one focused on sexual abuse in the Church (see page 10).



*Participants show their Franciscan spirit during a break at the National Chapter, held at Renaissance Hotel in St. Louis.*



# National Fraternity elects leadership team

## JAN PARKER SERVES 2ND TERM AS NATIONAL MINISTER

By **BILL SCHMITT, OFS**

Members of the National Fraternity, meeting in their chapter of elections, voted on Oct. 13, 2018, to return **Jan Parker, OFS**, for a second term as national minister of the 12,000-member Secular Franciscan Order in the U.S.

Also elected to three-year terms were:

- National Vice-Minister: **Mary Bittner, OFS**.
- National Secretary and Alternate International Councilor: **Jane DeRose Bamman, OFS**.
- National Treasurer: **Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS**.

• International Councilor: **Awilda Guadalupe, OFS**.

- National Councilor: **Josh Molidor, OFS**.
- National Councilor: **Dennis Ross, OFS**.
- National Councilor: **Donna Hollis, OFS**.

In addition, Fr. **Christopher Panagoplos, TOR**, steps up as president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA).

The National Executive Council will seek to apply the order's charisms to various challenges and opportunities. Their task is to emulate St. Francis of Assisi in service to peacemaking, justice and compassion — for the marginal-

ized and all of God's creation — through endeavors at all levels of the order.

New Zealand International Councilor Chantal Healy, OFS, delegated by Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, of Hungary, presided over the elections. The ecclesial witness was Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap. Father Francis, a Cameroon native who serves as Rome-based general spiritual assistant to CIOFS, provided faith formation to the chapter participants.

Parker, of O'Fallon, MO, thanked the council with whom she had worked for the past three years.



*Jan Parker, OFS*



*Mary Bittner, OFS*



*Jane DeRose Bamman, OFS*



*Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS*



*Awilda Guadalupe, OFS*



*Josh Molidor, OFS*



*Dennis Ross, OFS*



*Donna Hollis, OFS*



*Christopher Panagoplos, TOR*

# MINISTER REPORTS ON STATE OF THE ORDER

## Made much progress, but still face challenges

By PAT CARR

In her State of the Order message at the National Chapter in October, National Minister Jan Parker, OFS, noted that one could marvel at the progress made rebuilding the Secular Franciscan Order since the revision of the Rule in 1978; however, there is a need to seriously consider some deficiencies that may be causing “heart disease” in the Order.

Parker cited accomplishments in the areas of: Communications, Vocations, Formation, Spiritual Assistance, Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Youth, Multicultural and Administration.

“Evaluating how we are addressing our priorities is one way to look

at the State of the Order but it doesn’t tell us everything,” she said. “Are we living true to our identity and does our structure support it?” According to an assessment by our International Council (CIOFS): “Structurally, unification has occurred, but we still experience problems on how the sense of unity and belonging are perceived. We have not fully embraced the implications of our Rule and Constitutions; have not fully understood our vocation, identity and mission; and have not lived up to what the Church expects of us.”

Parker urged participants to reflect on their own and other members’ actions and attitudes as a way of improving the Order. What is your attitude toward

conversion? Do you and others focus on changing the Order instead of changing yourselves?

“Viewed from this perspective there are some of us who are gravely ill and in need of healing. We desperately need the help of the Divine Physician,” Parker said.

Parker also provided some statistical information on the U.S. Order from 2016 to 2017. The number of local fraternities remained the same at 593. So too the 30 regional councils. There was a decline in membership from 12,053 to 11,802. The number of people in formation decreased from 1,854 to 1,762. There are now 30 diocesan priests in the order. And, the number of spiritual assistants increased from 407 to 421.

### JPIC AWARD GOES TO KATHLEEN CARSTEN

#### She lives her life with ‘2 feet of love in action’

JPIC Animator Carolyn Townes, OFS, introduced the 2018 JPIC Award winner, Kathleen Carsten, OFS, as someone who lives her life with “two feet of love in action.” With one foot, she meets the immediate need; with the second foot, she addresses the issue.

Carsten has worked as a faith community nurse for St. Aloysius Church in downtown Detroit since 1999. She serves the health needs of the poor and homeless. That includes the elderly at Griswold Apartment Building, who in 2013 were facing eviction under new ownership. Many of the elderly had lived there for over 30 years.

She contacted a psychologist who volunteered to help the residents with their anguish. Then Kathleen discovered health issues due to renovations getting underway before the eviction deadline. There was dust everywhere. She called residents and discovered that many had chronic illnesses which were

being exacerbated by the conditions in the building – filth, lead paint, elevators that were undependable.

She made numerous complaints to the City of Detroit Building Department. She reached out to an attorney who volunteered his time. On the same day that they filed a complaint in court, the City of Detroit placed a “Cease and Desist” order. In the seniors’ remaining three months at the facility, their physical health would not be further jeopardized. But their spiritual and mental health struggled from the lingering losses of friends and community, and the anxiety of starting over again. “Our work needed to continue,” said Kathleen.

The Senior Housing Protection of Detroit organization, known as SHP-D, was formed when the Griswold incident happened. They were successful in making government officials aware of the plight of the poor seniors and the need for continued low-income housing.



Carolyn Townes, OFS (left) with JPIC Award honoree Kathleen Carsten, OFS.



# Who were those people in St. Louis? One observer's thoughts

'THIS IS NOT WHO WE ARE' ... LEADS TO ... 'THIS IS WHO WE ARE'

By BILL SCHMITT, OFS

**"This is not who we are!"**

This powerful statement, put forth by a member of our National Council, was posited as something members might occasionally have to say when a fellow Secular Franciscan has been caught up in society's current tendencies toward polarization, coarseness, and hatred.

I was inspired by this blunt message. Our regional and national leaders, seeking the Holy Spirit's wisdom in guiding the Order, agreed that the O.F.S. must be recognized as resisting any betrayals of Christ's immense love.

As someone who had attended Quinquennials but never this kind of national decision-making event, I was heartened by the spiritual framework modeled by the Order at a time when so many in society are searching for identity and meaning. By the time the chapter concluded, I grew in gratitude that we brothers and sisters of penance have a charism for helping our culture hold onto truth by saying, "This is who we are."

This observer sensed the Lord clarifying our order's identity – and a path for moving forward (to "rebuild my



Church" and "build a more fraternal and evangelical world").

- Through commitments to youth and vocations, as well as the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) award for service to senior citizens, I felt appreciation for the order's multi-generational character, its ability to share Franciscan traditions and values with members old and new.

- The election process itself was complicated for many, testing patience and persistence. Adherence to constitutional requirements was upheld; and fairness and solidarity took deeper root inside people's hearts. One participant quipped, "A great formation exercise, huh, folks?"

- Hotel staff who had served the group for days received our words and gestures of genuine gratitude.

- A lively discussion of the official statement to be issued at the chapter's close prompted numerous comments from the floor, respecting the power of words to be constructive or destructive.

Participants focused on goals of sustaining relationships of mercy and justice, plus authentic accompaniment, witnessing to Christ's love and the OFS Rule. One defender of the rigorous editing commented: "We want that statement to become flesh" in every local fraternity.

- Mindfulness of the OFS presence globally and locally helped to affirm relationships of trust, nurturing the order as it approaches its 800th anniversary. We shared the Holy Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours, and many interactions, both profound and recreational. The result was joyful recognition of the gifts of Gospel love to be walked out in the footsteps of St. Francis for the good of the Church and world.

The Chapter approved an annual theme for U.S. fraternities — a "maxim" to summarize the week's lessons. The slogan is: **"See Christ, Be Christ, Share the Vision."** That seemed to be one way of saying, "This is who we are."

## STATEMENT ON CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

**'We stand firm and make no excuses'; like Francis, let's rebuild the church**

The National Fraternity, during its Chapter in St. Louis last October, issued a statement on clergy sexual abuse of minors, noting that the recent grand jury report in Pennsylvania was "a cause of sorrow, pain and agonizing self-scrutiny for the Catholic Church in the United States."

"We recognize the tragic reality of sinful abuse perpetrated on the most vulnerable," the statement said. "It deeply saddens all of us. We stand firm and make no excuses. The brothers and

sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order extend mercy and compassion to the victims of abuse and to their abusers. Trusting in God who allows the good seed and the weeds to grow together (Mt. 13: 24-30), we pray for healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace."

The statement continued: "More than 800 years ago, our Lord asked St. Francis of Assisi to 'rebuild my Church which is falling into ruin.' Francis accomplished this by living a life of penance and sacrifice according to the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. As followers of St. Francis, we commit ourselves to do the same. We call the members of our Order and invite all people of faith to be vigilant for the sake of the vulnerable and to foster strong relationships throughout the Body of Christ. We support the clergy and religious who serve Christ Jesus and His Church. Let us go forth in the Light of Christ to rebuild our Church, that it may be renewed as a beacon of hope and safe refuge, grace and truth."

## HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

### Living the rule

The 40th Anniversary of the Rule was celebrated throughout the chapter, including the viewing of the video produced by CIOFS on the Rule. General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap, who served as ecclesial witness, challenged the national fraternity: “Do I live the rule? We must become experts in living the rule. It is meant for sanctification... I shouldn’t become an expert to change someone, somewhere; but first, it should change me.”



**Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap.**

### Liturgy challenges, unites

At the celebration of daily Mass the brothers and sisters were challenged and brought closer together. Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, during the opening mass, asked “Where is Jesus? We must be Christocentric. We have to bring Him back.” OFM Fr. Jerome Wolbert’s message centered on accountability. “To know accountability is to enter into a deeper sense of penance,” he said. Regional Spiritual Assistant Fr. Ed McKenzie, OFM, reminded attendees: “We might come together as followers of Francis in Chapter, but we participate in the Mass as members of the entire body of Christ. We are all united in one voice of prayer and worship – at one Eucharist.” At the closing Mass Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap, expressed “profound gratitude” to those who accepted nominations and were elected, and to those who were not elected. “No one can say ‘I was not elected and I will not serve.’ I remind all of us of the greatness of service for all – elected and not elected.”



**Chantal Healy, OFS**

faith journey – from Jew to Catholic to Secular Franciscan. When she heard the words of St. John Paul II, “Be not afraid,” she knew that she should become a Catholic. As her faith journey continued, she realized that “we must go deeper to become true Franciscans.”

### Geographical Groups

Geo Groups discussed priorities and determined that once their suggestions were submitted, they would task the new executive council to finalize the list of priorities.

*Continued on next page.*

### Listen to your heart

Chantal Healy, OFS, from New Zealand, represented Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, for the elections. Her words of encouragement to say “yes” to serve the order were heeded by many who allowed their names to be considered for national office. “Listen to your heart,” she said. “The Holy Spirit will talk to you.” She shared her inspiring



*Geo Groups engaged in discussions throughout the chapter and experienced camaraderie.*



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CHAPTER

*continued from previous page*

### Youth/Young Adult goals

Kathleen Molaro, OFS, Youth and Young Adult Commission chair, discussed three goals of the commission: *Unite, Ignite, Invite*. **Unite** -- in purpose and in process to foster communion with youth. **Ignite** -- Each of us must take the first step and then spread the flames of the Holy Spirit to others. **Invite** -- We need to be sufficiently prepared before we invite. Are fraternities vibrant and inspiring for our young? Youth want to see authenticity, commitment, she said. She added that the Youth Commission is committed to help with resources and to provide networking opportunities. She reported that 17 regions have appointed animators. Among the activities she recommended is the 2x2x2 -- two OFS join with two youth to plan two activities.

### Locator map

National webmaster Lee Potts, OFS, updated attendees on new features of the website. He is anticipating an interactive map to show where fraternities are located. Each region will have its own colored markers and the location and contact information for each fraternity.

### \$12,000 for charities

Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, OFS reported that 23 non-profit agencies were nominated for charitable giving and 11 were recommended by the committee. A total



of \$12,000 was dispersed among the following: Villa la Paz Foundation (Peru), Holy Cross Retreat Center (New Mexico), Amazon Relief (Brazil), St. Francis Breadline (New York), Outreach to First Nation People (Kansas), Franciscan Family Apostolate (India), Dorothy Day Outreach Center (Pennsylvania), Angela Spirituality Center (California), Holy Family Vocational Orphanage Foundation (Uganda), St. Francis Inn (Pennsylvania), and Santa Chiara's Children Center (Haiti). Two other requests were honored: One from General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap, for financial support for a spiritual assistant training, and one for our Venezuelan brothers and sisters who are being supported through additional donations from U.S. members.

### Budget approved

Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, OFS, proposed a 2019 budget of \$342,741, which was unanimously approved.

### Ecumenical outreach

Mike Carsten, OFS, interfaith/ecumenical chair, discussed relations with non-Catholic Franciscans, saying that we attend each other's chapters. He discussed having regional ministers as delegates to some of these events. "We gather together as Franciscans and explore what unites us," he said.

### New National SAs

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants introduced Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, as a new national spiritual assistant. He was an OFS before he became an OFM. He serves as pastor and guardian in the only Byzantine house in the USA. The National Fraternity also thanked Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap, for serving as president-in-turn. The new president-in-turn is Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR. Also attending was Fr. Giles M. Gilbert, OFM Conv., who was subsequently appointed to serve as the Conventual Friars' representative on the CNSA.



**THE CHAPTER FEATURED A JPIC PANEL** consisting of Sister Marie Lucey, OSF, of Franciscan Action Network; Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, former national spiritual assistant, and Joe Makley, OFS, a member of the national JPIC team. The panel addressed how and when we speak in a Franciscan prophetic voice and the



effectiveness of civil disobedience. We must "speak in terms of the gospel," said Sr. Marie. "All of us being in touch with the roots: the Gospel, Francis and making them come alive in ourselves," added Fr. Kevin. Joe quoted Article 15 of the Rule, to be "in the forefront, collectively and individually."



# A visioning for formation

## AS IN ST. FRANCIS' TIME, SPIRIT OF AGE ULTIMATELY DOESN'T SATISFY

By MARY STRONACH, OFS

Setting the stage for a weekend of formation visioning, Fr. David Pivonka, TOR, provided a dose of reality.

"The world has profoundly changed in the last 25 years," said the host of EWTN's *Wild Goose* series. "Young people have no safe place. There is a sense of danger infiltrating every part of us." He said that there are things that want to corrupt, to manipulate the spirit of faith.

He took workshop attendees through an historical view of God.

In the pre-modern world, pre-1600s, God is the starting point. The world is imbued with God. The truth is rooted in God, he explained.

From the 1600s through to the 1960s, the modern world view has man at the center of all things. "God is pushed off to the side. God might exist but there is no intimate contact. Humanity has the ability to make things better... fix the world's problems. Right and wrong is based on the human vision."

In the post-modern world – the last 50 years – there is no center. There is chaos. "The truth is whatever an individual believes to be true." There are no boundaries. God is not a part of the equation. During this era, he said, many people have no identification with religion.



Fr. David Pivonka, TOR

Youth talk about being "spiritual" but not "religious," he said. They react to culture mainly by feeling. It is an era when you "can't offend anybody." He continued, "This is a non-reflective age. We are so busy, so consumed... We don't reflect on consequences." In the 24-hour news cycle, we are "bombarded with noise. Our interior life is suffering. **We need to invite people to an interior life.**"

"Words like 'should or should not' are foreign to this culture," he added. "Truth and preference are largely the same. If I determine what's true and

someone disagrees, then it reflects on me... The world is so divided, so hostile, we can't dialogue." He referred to a quote in a school that said, "We will tolerate all things except what we believe to be intolerant."

He offered three approaches on how to engage this culture. The first is "accommodation," accepting that everything is OK. But, he said, using this approach "ultimately doesn't respect the individual."

The second is not to critique the culture. "This is an escape behind walls, and leads to isolation," he said. "The church is counter-cultural. We must confront it."

He provided a more hopeful alternative with the third approach – "Infiltration and transformation." Engage the culture, he said. "Desire to create a fraternal world. When Francis embraced the leper, he recognized Christ... Recognize and see that, and help other people to see it. There are two conversions into Christ. The first is to leave the world and go to Christ. The second is to go back to the world with Christ to bring to the world what we discover... The power of the Gospel is an encounter of the love of God that changes us... Especially now, in the midst of chaos, they see in us something that can satisfy."

## FORMATION COMMISSION: Moving forward with the vision

By DIANE MENDITTO, OFS  
Chair, National Formation Commission

The weekend of August 30 to September 2, 2018, was particularly significant for formation in the United States. During that time, the National Executive Council, the National Formation Commission, regional formation directors and 11 invited Secular Franciscans with a passion for formation met at the

Savior Pastoral Center in Kansas City for a formation visioning workshop. We were joined by regional spiritual assistants who were just finishing their own workshop at the same venue.

In response to the challenge set by CIOFS that came out of the 2017 General Chapter, our purpose was to strengthen the focus on formation in the USA. During our workshop, we sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

After a Spirit-filled keynote by Fr. Dave Pivonka, TOR, we also heard a talk on "Transformative Visioning" by Anne Mulqueen, OFS, spiritual assistant to the Formation Commission, and on the "Realities of the Order" by Mary Stronach, OFS, then-international councilor. Inspired by these talks we broke into groups to discuss the following pivotal questions:

*Continued on next page.*

## MOVING FORWARD WITH THE VISION

*continued from previous page*

- What would the ideal Order look like?
- What is God's direction for the Order?
- Who does God want us to be?

(By the way, these questions might be used as discussion topics for ongoing formation.)

The feedback from the small discussion groups was powerful. We felt a sense of awe at how the Spirit had moved among us and led us in very similar directions.

The next portion of the workshop centered on specific areas which partici-

pants chose according to interests and expertise. These were:

- Fraternal life and relationships.
- Spiritual life, prayer and contemplation.
- Apostolates and outreach expressing the Franciscan Charism.
- Communications and social media.
- Essential documents.
- Scripture and Franciscan sources.
- Secular identity and the Franciscan charism.
- Commitment to the Order: Time,

Talent and Treasure.

- Servant leadership.
- Youth.
- Spiritual assistants and their relationship to the OFS.
- Discerning a vocation.
- Multiculturalism

These special interest groups discussed two questions:

- Relative to your topic, what needs to change in order to achieve the vision?
- What will formation in this area look like in light of God's vision for our Order?



## FOLLOW UP TO THE WORKSHOP: Exciting time for formation in the USA

By **DIANE MENDITTO**, OFS  
Chair, National Formation Commission

In the weeks following the workshop, the Formation Commission reviewed the responses. Many were similar and important enough that, as we begin to set our priorities and develop a plan, we will address them specifically.

When the workshop ended, the National Executive Council remained for a business meeting to which the members of the National Formation Commission were invited. I was honored to be asked to serve as commission chair. In turn, I invited two former members and four new members to join the commission. I would like you to get to know them:

- **Justin Carisio**, St. Katharine Drexel Region; professed in 1987; local formation director and member of team preparing spiritual assistants for the region.
- **Francine Gikow**, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region; professed in 1984;

local and regional formation teams and certified spiritual director.

- **Layna Maher**, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region; professed in 1999; regional and local formation director and certified local spiritual assistant.

- **Patrick Martin**, St. Margaret of Cortona Region; professed in 2007; past local and regional minister; on board of Franciscan Mission Service.

- **Mary Stronach**, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region; professed in 2003; former international councilor, member of international formation commission; national public relations co-chair.

- **Anne Mulqueen**, NFC spiritual assistant, St. Margaret of Cortona Region; professed in 1984; has been local, provincial, regional and national formation director (co-chair nationally); regional spiritual assistant.

The NFC and the NEC will again collaborate for *Visioning Part II*, to be held April 4-7, 2019, during which we will

use the data gathered at the first Visioning Workshop to put flesh on the vision for formation in the United States.

Our hopes for the future are many. We are updating the formation webpage. We are stressing communication among regional formation directors and formation team members on the NAFRA-FORM List-Serv. An updated version of the *Handbook for Formation Directors* is now available, and we will be getting to work on making the FUN Manual more user-friendly.

Soon we will reach out around the country to invite professed members to be part of 10 to 12 task forces, in their areas of expertise, which will address the priorities and directives of the Visioning initiative. We will be working with the directives presented by CIOFS as well.

As you can see, it is an exciting and vital time for formation in the Secular Franciscan Order.



# Workshop for spiritual assistants

## A CALL WITHIN A CALL, OFFERING COMPASSION/TENDERNESS RATHER THAN RIGIDITY

by MARY STRONACH, OFS

The Spiritual Assistant Workshop, held on August 29-30 at Savior Pastoral Center in Kansas City, started with an impromptu prayer by Sister Agnes Marie Regan, OSF. She asked the nearly 50 participants to hold out their open palms in prayer, saying, “The future of our Franciscan Order is in your hands.”

As main speaker for the event, Fr. Christopher Panogoplos, TOR, national spiritual assistant, embraced the prayer, reminding the spiritual assistants of their responsibilities to the members, to the Order and to the Church. “Our Franciscan vocation is a life, not a ministry. Our identity is not in what we do; rather, it is in how we do whatever it is we do,” he said. We bring “quality of presence, an attitude of service.” This gift should be: “self-giving, offering our availability, closeness, humility, and mindfulness” to the present moment.

“The approach is how to reach out pastorally: by listening, by dialogue, finding the road to mercy within the Rule, to meet situations with compassion and tenderness rather than with

juridical rigidity,” he noted. “Don’t judge. Listen. That’s where communication begins. Take the whole person. Do not judge the illness. Flesh out where they are coming from – emotionally, physically, spiritually. That’s pastoral... Establish a relationship.”

Fr. Christopher recommended that, as spiritual assistants, we follow Pope St. John XXIII’s advice to “see everything, overlook a great deal, correct a little.”

He cited the qualities for effective relationships: trust, meditation, respect, patience, attentiveness, suffering, creative fidelity.

We should offer a “balanced authority (between) tenderness and strength... To be truly and fully human is to accept and respect the difference, to communicate with, admire, marvel at, and make an alliance with the masculinity and femininity within oneself and with others... Francis accepted the feminine part of himself, tenderness. Clare accepted the masculine part of herself, her strength.”

Quoting Pope Francis, he said we should be involved in a “Revolution of Tenderness... not to change the truth

but to change our ethos: the character of the culture. The Church is to radiate more of God’s mercy and tenderness.”

Father Christopher broached the subject of the polarization we have in the Order, in the Church and government today. “We need to see the world, not as our enemy, but as our child; the child may be belligerent, may make mistakes... but the child is not your enemy... Pro-choice people are not an enemy; they are our sisters and brothers, our families. It’s not them/us, only us. When we see the world as enemy, then we become protective, defensive; you don’t protect yourself against your child.”

He suggested that Catholic social teaching can overcome polarization: “Catholic social teaching on the dignity of all human life, solidarity with the poor, the immigrants and refugees, and care for the environment can unite Catholics in working for the common good.” He added a quote from Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez: “See, judge, act -- as a method of discernment. Seeing what current social realities are, judging them in light of the

*Continued on next page.*



Fr. Christopher



# WORKSHOP FOR SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

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Church's social teaching, then acting to make those realities more just."

In addressing the issue of multiculturalism, he said: "The task is to understand diversity without destroying essential unity. The rich history of the Church in its multiple settings shows how local cultures have enriched rather than diminished the Church. Through courage and humility, by widening his own space in heart, St. Francis moved the Sultan's heart. ... The task, for formation to succeed, includes an in-depth understanding of the essence of Catho-

lic tradition and of the cultural variation found within the tradition."

So, how do we live our lives as Franciscans? He quotes Brother William Short, OFM, who offers three Franciscan responses:

1. To refocus our energies on the essential rather than the peripheral; that is, on the suffering of our world rather than Church politics. Recognize, acknowledge and respond to suffering in our world, Church, nation, communities and families.
2. To become reconciling presences in

every circumstance of our lives.

3. To seek conversion of heart through pondering, praying and preparing to act in Christ's name.

We can bring into harmony those around us who are estranged. We might "start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly we will be doing the impossible." As impossible as it may seem that any one of us can make a difference in our fractured world, imagine if 13,000 Secular Franciscans performed one reconciling act every day; what a different world we will know!

## SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS AND 'ALTUS MODERAMEN'

In the afternoon session of the workshop, National Spiritual Assistant Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap discussed the Rules and Guidelines for selecting and appointing a Spiritual Assistant.

He emphasized that it is important to provide on-going formation for local Spiritual Assistants...to perhaps gather them together at a regional event for formation.

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, national spiritual assistant, addressed the Altus Moderamen -- the fraternal responsibility that the First and Third Order friars have to ensure the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan Family. He asked, "How do we Franciscans talk about and live out



*Brother Alexander and Father Jerome*

this relationship, this bond?" He said that the friars need to cooperate. All obediences share this responsibility. Citing Article 89.1 of the General Constitutions, he said spiritual assistants should

be ensured at all levels of fraternity. It is the responsibility of the provincials. "The Franciscan Major Superior is responsible for the quality of pastoral service," he said.



# Sharing The Vision

## News from the National Executive Council

by Jan Parker and Mary Bittner

### Newly Elected Council Called to Servant Leadership

The newly elected National Executive Council members had their first meeting on October 21. Knowing that prayer is the best “first agenda item” for any council and we joined together to pray and share our reflections on the following readings. We offer ourselves that God may work through our weaknesses. Please pray for us, that we might serve you, our national family, with love and dedication.



*“Blessed is that servant who does not place himself in a high position of his own will and always desires to be under the feet of others.”*

Admonitions XIX

*“There is probably no culture in which people are so unabashedly encouraged to seek power as ours. From the moment we set out on our climb to the top we make ourselves believe that striving for power and wanting to be of service are, for all practical purposes, the same thing. This fallacy is so deeply ingrained in our whole way of living that we do not hesitate to strive for influential positions in the conviction that we do so for the good of the Reign of God....But the mystery of our ministry is that we are called to serve not with our*

*power but with our powerlessness. It is through powerlessness that we can enter into solidarity with our fellow human beings, form a community with the weak, and thus reveal the healing, guiding, and sustaining mercy of God.”*

Henri Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, pp. 61, 64.

*“Some people, who cannot see what nourishment they could be bringing, do not realize that they can become bread for others. They have no confidence that their word, their smile, their being or their prayer could nourish others and help them rediscover trust. Jesus calls us to give our lives for those we love. If we eat the bread transformed into the Body of Christ, it is so that we become bread for others.*

Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, rev. ed., p. 194.

### New Email Addresses for NEC

Please note the following new email addresses.

National Minister, Jan Parker, OFS

[ofsusaminister@gmail.com](mailto:ofsusaminister@gmail.com)

National Secretary, Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS

[ofsusasecretary@gmail.com](mailto:ofsusasecretary@gmail.com)

### 40th Anniversary of the Rule Our Jubilee Year Continues!

How well do you know the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order? Have you celebrated the Rule during this Jubilee Year? Our national goal is that every local fraternity dedicate at least one formation session to the Rule between now and June 24. Ready-made presentations on the Rule can be found on our OFS-USA website ([secularfranciscansusa.org](http://secularfranciscansusa.org)) under “Resources.” Most importantly during this Jubilee Year, all OFS are urged to read the June 24, 2018 letter from Tibor Kauser, our Minister General, which can be found in the last issue of TAU-USA, and also on the website.



## **New CNSA Appointment Fr. Giles Gilbert, OFM Conventual**



We are delighted to announce the appointment of Fr. Giles Gilbert, OFM Conventual to the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA.) Welcome, Fr. Giles! Fr. Giles is humbled and grateful for the privilege and responsibility of ministry as a National Spiritual Assistant. He is

happy to be at the service of the Order and is very grateful for the many ways in which Secular Franciscans have shaped his vocation and ministry as a friar and priest. A brief biography of his journey to the Franciscan life follows:

Friar Giles Michael Gilbert, OFM Conv. was born in Chicago, IL. As a young adult, he became a member of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), founded by St. Maximilian Kolbe. After college, he worked as a Dispatcher for Mundelein Police Department, where he also served as a Spanish/English interpreter and translator. He then entered the Little Brothers of St. Francis, a small contemplative community of Franciscan brothers following the Rule of the Third Order Regular and living among the poor in Boston, MA. The Secular Franciscans of St. Paschal Baylon Fraternity met regularly at his friary and introduced him to the Secular Franciscan way of life.

Following his Profession, Friar Giles discerned a call to enter the First Order. In 2009, he entered the St. Bonaventure Province of Conventual Franciscans. He finished his studies in Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago and graduated with an M.Div. from Mundelein Seminary. After his ordination in 2016, Friar Giles became Parochial Vicar at Holy Family Parish in Peoria, IL and the Local Spiritual Assistant to Sacred Heart Fraternity of Secular Franciscans. In 2018, he was appointed as a Regional Spiritual Assistant to serve the Franciscans of the Prairie Regional Fraternity. His interests include: Byzantine Iconography and Theology; Early Franciscan History; Chess; Literature and the Humanities; Camping; Kayaking; Snowmobiling; Traveling; and Animals.

## **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)**

What is a Franciscan response to the lack of civility in public discourse? What is a Franciscan prophetic voice when it comes to social justice? These questions were explored at our 2018 Chapter, as well as in the special JPIC Section found in the Fall 2018 TAU-USA, Issue 95. We encourage local fraternities to read the five articles in this special section and reflect on the questions provided. One of the organizations highlighted in that section is Franciscans International (FI.) At the 2018 Chapter the National Fraternity Council voted to support FI by way of a line item in the 2019 budget.

## **OFS-USA Website Project A Map of Every Local Fraternity**

Through the OFS-USA website we receive many inquiries of “where is the nearest local fraternity?” We are currently collecting information in order to create a map which will show the meeting location of every Local Fraternity in the USA. Local fraternity location and contact information will soon be just a click away on our website!

## **COMPUTER COMMITTEE \* HELP NEEDED \***

**The Computer committee needs help upgrading/fixing the National Database.**

**They are looking for people with experience in ASP (the current language) and PHP (the language we are moving to) and relational database. The system runs on MS SQL, but experience with any relational database will be useful.**

**The committee meets by telephone each month to discuss progress and exchange emails as often as needed. They have developed a plan to move forward, but need help getting there.**

**If you are interested in helping, please contact William Mussatto, OFS Computer Committee Chair, at [mussatto@acm.org](mailto:mussatto@acm.org). He can give you more information and introduce you to the existing team.**





# JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



## JPIC FORMATION: WALKING WITH TWO FEET OF LOVE IN ACTION

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National JPIC Animator

*“The conscience is called by this social teaching to recognize and fulfill the obligations of justice and charity in society. Social justice . . . concerns the social, political, and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions.” ~ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*



At the 2018 National Chapter held in St. Louis, Mo., the participants were treated to a lovely dose of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Formation. During the formation time, I spoke of walking with two feet of love: the **foot of charity** and the **foot of social justice**. Sometimes we tend towards one foot and neglect the other. But if we are to walk justly, let alone stand, it must be with both feet.

The formation time included my sharing that Sister Mother

Earth belongs to God

and all that it contains (cf. Psalm 24:1). If we are not properly and lovingly walking with those two feet, that we are doing a great disservice to our Sister Mother Earth. Along with the handouts, I also gave each participant an Earth stress ball, asking each one to hold the Earth in their hands. This is our power; to hold Sister Mother Earth in the palm of our hands and care for it. This is not only our power, it is our responsibility as stewards and children of our Most High God.

*Social justice is ensuring that those in society, our neighbors, can fulfill their basic needs. Church teaching tells us that all people, no matter who they are or where they come from, have a right to what is required for human decency, such as “food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, social services, and security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, or unemployment” (Pacem in Terris, 11; Gaudium et Spes, 26)*

*Charitable Works are the immediate actions that are in response to our love for God and neighbor, in accordance with direct generosity or compassion towards those who are most in need of help.*





Our formation time included a panel discussion about how we are to walk with those two feet. The panelists included Marie Lucey, a Franciscan Sister of Philadelphia; Kevin Queally, Third Order Regular Friar based in the Philadelphia area; and Joe Makley, a Secular Franciscan from St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region. These three panelists were carefully selected as Franciscans who not only walk with both feet, but also talk the talk.

One of the questions addressed civil disobedience, as there are many Franciscans who believe we should not engage in civil disobedience or that we should stay away from the political arena altogether. Yet our Holy Rule clearly states: ***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*** (Article 15).

The Merriam-Webster definition of **civil disobedience** is a **refusal to obey governmental demands or commands especially as a nonviolent and usually collective means of forcing concessions from the government.**

I was very pleased that our panelists echoed this definition especially as a nonviolent action beginning with prayer and discernment. It is not about marching in and taking over; but a civil and collective means to bring about change for the common good. It was also stressed that civil disobedience needs to contain mutual invitation. Both sides must talk with one another peacefully and civilly. This way, everyone is aware of one another's thoughts and motives. As we engage in the public arena, we must remember that we are Franciscans, and we are people of faith and people of peace.



***“Our commitment to the Catholic social mission must be rooted in and strengthened by our spiritual lives. In our relationship with God, we experience the conversion of heart that is necessary to truly love one another as God has loved us.”*** ~ From USCCB Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions

I was also pleased and honored to present the **2018 Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Award** to **Kathleen Carsten, OFS**. Kathleen is a member of the Divine Mercy Region and resides in Michigan with her husband, Michael Carsten, OFS, our Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Chair.



Kathleen gave a heartfelt talk about the work she does as a parish nurse in the Detroit area dealing with seniors and housing issues. You can watch our interview on the national website at: <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/2018-national-chapter>. Scroll to the bottom of the page to watch the video.

For more memories of the day with JPIC Formation, be sure to check out Bob Stronach's awesome photos on the national website. Bob's photo links are right below the video. The JPIC Formation is on Day 3.



CNSA

# NEWS & VIEWS

TAU-USA - Lester Bach OFM Cap - CNSA Emeritus

IF  
YOU  
WANT  
PEACE  
WORK  
FOR  
JUSTICE

—Paul VI

## Our Times

At the present time we face many social and religious issues that are difficult to deal with. We take time for personal and community reflection about information from media or personal experiences. Franciscans are faithful to the OFS Rule and Constitutions. We contribute to peace and love within our fraternities, homes, countries, the world and the Church.

The issue of sexual abuse or mismanagement among many people saddens us. Human failure has to be dealt with. Following the Gospel in these issues is no easy task. But for us it is vitally important.

Some people label migrants and refugees as a danger to our country. People who look different or speak a different language are treated as threats rather than as neighbors. We call some people lazy or foolish or violent. It is easy to label people.

Our Franciscan vocation calls us to be faithful to the Gospel. The following words reflect some elements we embrace at **profession**.

*Rule 13 They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.*

Article 18.2 (OFS Constitutions)

*Do we?*

## So what is expected of Franciscans?

Dialogue, for example, invites us to be *attentive listeners*, to understand one another and the issues that surround us. In the past we may have learned ideas or opinions that are no longer credible. We do not blame others who shared what they believed. At times we cling to "our way" of understanding the faith or social insights. Whether it is still totally accurate or not is another question to consider.

Franciscans are called to live in a way where change ("*conversion!*") is a clear option! For some people Vatican II is not a favorite nor is Pope Francis! But they both invite a fresh look at our faith with texts that are part of the teaching Church. Their words may offer us more than we want to accept since we already "know" our faith. Perhaps the problem is at least partially in us. We realize that personal *conversion* may be needed.

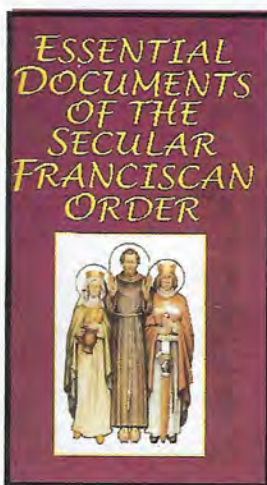
How do Franciscans deal with actions of *exploitation?* or *discrimination?* or *exclusion?* or *indifference?* OR: What practical steps do we take "*to create a spirit of welcome?*" or an "*atmosphere of fraternity everywhere?*" The call for such actions can stimulate feelings of anger, resentment or frustration, both in us or in others!

Sometimes *personal conversion* may not seem reasonable. It could mean that our **Profession** as Franciscans loses some of its' meaning. The **OFS Rule (#7)** expects *conversion* to happen daily! ... *let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls "conversion."* Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion **be carried out daily.** Really?

It may be difficult to deal with people who are always 'right,' who 'know it all!' OR, who resist change when the need for change is obvious! It takes honest, open-minded and prayerful people to be faithful to *personal conversion*. On some issues we may be blind without knowing it! Fraternity dialogue can help us discover fresh ways to understand the implications of the Gospel and the OFS Rule and Constitutions. We are called to offer examples of peace, seeking ways of unity and love to our friends, neighbors and enemies who may enter our lives at work, in church, in our neighborhood or even at home..







authentic foundations.

They **seek to deepen**, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life **according to the Rule of the OFS:**

- + Rule 7 in a **continually renewed** journey of conversion and of formation.
- + Rule 4 open to the challenges **that come from society and from the Church's life situation**, "... going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel."
- + in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

Article 8.2 (OFS Constitutions)

Mindful that **the Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation and the animator of fraternal life and mission**, Secular Franciscans should seek to imitate the faithfulness of Francis to his inspiration. They should listen to the exhortation of the Saint to **desire above all things "the Spirit of God at work within them."**

Article 11 (OFS Constitutions)

**We are Gospel people.** We are faithful in following the OFS Rule and Constitutions. We recognize a need for conversion to develop in our Franciscan lives. Ignorance of this need is no excuse! We face many challenges every day. The guidance of the Gospel and the Rule and Constitutions, moves our inner spirit and shows itself in our external example. It is our way to contribute to a peaceful and unified world. St. Paul's words encourage us to give witness to St. Francis' way of living.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace to which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And **whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

Colossians 3: 12-17

**Rule 19 Peace is the work of justice and the fruit of reconciliation and of fraternal love.** Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in society:

- + they should see to the proposal and **spreading of peaceful ideas and attitudes;**
- + they should develop their own initiatives and should **collaborate individually and as a fraternity** with initiatives of the Pope, the local churches, and the Franciscan Family;
- + **they should collaborate** with those movements & its institutions **which promote peace while respecting its**

Article 23.1 (OFS Constitutions)

Scripture and the OFS Rule and Constitutions are clear in their call!:

... In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for **perfect charity** in their own secular state. By their profession **they pledge themselves to live the Gospel** in the manner of St. Francis **by means of this Rule** approved by the Church.

OFS Rule - #2

+++

Pope John XXIII, a member of the OFS, wrote these words to help us persist in a loving approach to life and ministry.

*Consult not your fears,  
but your hopes  
and your dreams.*

*Think not about your frustrations,  
but about  
your unfulfilled potential.  
Concern yourself not  
with what you tried  
and failed in,  
but what it is  
still possible to do!*

Pope John XXIII

+++

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him. ...

And this is his commandment, **that we should believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another**, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them! By this we know that he abides in us by the Spirit he has given us.

1 John 3:18-19 / 23-24

+++

**Rule 14** Secular Franciscans should always **act as a leaven** in the environment in which they live through the witness of their fraternal love and clear Christian motivations.

Article 19.1 (OFS Constitutions)

**SHALOM**





## YOUNG PEOPLE: OUR FUTURE AND OUR NOW

Kathleen Molaro, OFS, National FY/YA Commission Chair

*“Youth are like fire. We flame, we bring light, give warmth but are also under the threat of getting extinguished. Today we are flickering, we may either blow off into the darkness or blow up into wildfire to burn down everything. The church needs to kindle these sparks into the right flames.”*

Percival Holt, Indian Catholic Youth Movement, National President

We often refer to young people as “our future.” Although there's truth to that statement, we can't just look at our younger Catholics as the future of our church. They are also our “now.” In order to ensure an authentic, vibrant, and empowering Church; a Church where all are invited to answer the call to holiness and a deeper relationship with Christ, we cannot discount what our younger folks are telling us. We need to listen, be willing to learn, and courageously and humbly walk side by side with our younger brothers and sisters. As the body of Christ, no matter what age category we fall under, our baptism unites us in purpose, as does our Profession as Secular Franciscans. We must not allow age, ideologies, life circumstances, or even personality traits divide us. Rather, our love of God and desire to bring the Gospel into a hurting world should bring us together.

What are our youth saying? What do they need or want in order to draw them into a relationship with God and others who share their faith? How can we help them, and how can they help us?

Many beautiful and inspiring quotes have come from two recent gatherings. More than 14,000 young people participated in the pre-synod survey and meeting, and 36 young people attended the “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment” synod last month. Here are a few quotes that give a little insight into their minds and hearts:

“I would like to be part of a church in which everyone has a place and in which the voice of each member is considered, without 'demanding' a certain prototype of faithful, in a profound encounter with the diversity in which Christ manifests himself.” (Silvia Retamales—Chilean bishops' youth office)

After sharing about how young and old islanders lived and worked in the past, sailing from island to island, the younger rowing the boats, elders using stars and currents to guide, one young person said “until we start paddling together by way of listening and equipping our young people with the tools to navigate the inevitable storms, our canoe will only float into irrelevance. If you, our elders, set the right course and steer this canoe in the right direction, we the young faithful are ready to help you power it through the challenges.” (Moenono-Kolio—Pacific Islands, Caritas International Youth Forum)

“Yes, we exist!” One young sister says. “We are a generation that strongly values clarity and authenticity, perhaps to a fault. Slick, expensive presentations go ignored, while raw, sincere testimony is held with reverence.” (Sister Benedicta Turner of the Daughters of St. Paul)

“We want to be part of the solution to conflicts. We believe that young people must be the first authors and promoters of their personal fulfillment.” (Yithzak Gonzalez—Secretary of youth office, Panama)

“Let us be Jesus to others, letting them see the source of true light in our own lives and relationships.” (Nicole Perez, catechist, Philippines)

“Young people need to see examples of holiness so that they know that Christianity is true, it's beautiful and it's attainable.” (Carmelite Brother Neil Conlisk, 30 yrs. Old)

These quotes help us realize our younger generation is asking to be a vital, necessary part of the church. As Franciscans, our Rule calls us to “go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people.” (Art. 6) Many have ignored or actually run from the fact that the younger generation is part of that mission. If they are brave enough to approach us with their questions, doubts, good ideas, and challenges — if they are courageous and humble enough to admit they might need help discerning their vocation and growing in their faith — our imperative is to find ways to listen and respond.



# Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity

## Our Shared Journey With All People

*from Vatican II in Plain English*

by Michael Carsten, OFS

Pope Francis continues to call the Church, the People of God, to address issues of violence, oppression and death of human beings, and the planet itself. He is empowered to shout this out to millions of Catholics through the statements of compassionate concern and brilliant guidance given to all of us in the Second Vatican Council documents.

The Council has much to say to us about how we navigate our relationships with each other and our planet. I was recently introduced to a paraphrased version of the documents of the Council, and I have found them to be quite helpful. *Vatican II in Plain English* is written by Bill Huebsch and Paul Thurmes. For authentication of the paraphrased version, on the Publisher Page the following is written: “The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are official declarations that the material reviewed is free of doctrinal or moral error.”

I believe we have an obligation to read these important documents and to incorporate them into our daily lives, most especially into our prayer lives. This set of books is a great resource for doing just that.

From Book 2 (from a set of three books) entitled “The Constitutions,” I have excerpted certain quotes. This book helps us recall our shared journey, our need for a renewed understanding of our sense of community, our sense of unity, which places us on an equal basis with all people, and all their faith traditions, most especially the

lowly for whom we strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.



### Book 2 - The Constitutions *Chapter 2, The People of God*

*(Although the “verses” below are written in psalm-scripture style in the book, I present them in paragraph form to save space. The bold and italic material in verse 9 are mine as brief comments.)*

#### **Verse 9**

God has always welcomed anyone whose heart is ready to experience the divine presence. These are the ones whose lives reflect goodness and who cultivate a sense of awe. But God has always chosen to welcome



women and men, not merely as individuals but bound together, united as a people who recognize the divine. So, coming together as a people is an essential element of salvation. ... the house of Israel came as one people, united in a covenant with God, slowly growing more and more ready to receive God fully, ready to live within a full and new covenant. In Christ, this new covenant was instituted, and all were called together as a people: Both Jew and Gentile, united in one common Spirit.... The church is constantly moving and searching, wandering... not unlike the Hebrew experience in the desert *(or the experience of the displaced now moving north through Mexico)*. And even though the Church's movement is sometimes filled with trial and tribulation, nonetheless, it *(we)* remain faithful overall. It *(we)* continues to be a visible sign of unity, a sacrament of salvation for all people. Aware of the absolute importance of its mission, the Church seeks constant renewal. It never ceases to beg the Holy Spirit for the grace it needs to be the light of the world. *Lumen Gentium!* ...

#### **Verse 12**

... This same spirit likewise sanctifies the whole world, which means that through the Spirit every aspect of the world will eventually be brought to goodness and holiness. This will happen because the Spirit gives gifts to each person and assists each in using them well. The power we need to do this comes only from God and leads us insistently to more and more become exactly who we are created to be. We call this shared, loving, sacred power by a name: we call it "grace." ... It is given to everyone at every rank of the Church. It forms us into a community which also has a name: The People of God!

#### **Verse 13**

All people everywhere and throughout all time are called to belong to this People of God. And doesn't this fit God's way of doing things? God did, after all, create us in the divine image to share human nature together.

Together we share an inescapable sameness. God even became one of us in Jesus Christ so that we might be united as human beings, that we might begin to realize that this sameness is a wonderful gift. But human unity may seem like a far-off dream. Our experience of national tensions and cultural warfare makes such ... unity appear impossible! God's reign, however, is not like an earthly one because it encompasses citizens of every race with all their various cultures and it forms these people into a Church. ...

#### **Verse 14**

Everyone on earth is welcomed into this unity, and each is called in a unique way. For those called to be Catholic, the church is necessary for salvation, according to both Scripture and tradition. ...

#### **Verse 15**

Those called to be Christians in other churches and with whom the pope is not yet fully united are nonetheless linked to the Church in many ways. United to Roman Catholics by Scripture, prayer, charity, and even sacraments, together we hope and work toward full unity. The Church urges all its members to lives that are holy and renewed to enable this.

#### **Verse 16**

And the many people who are not Christian are also connected to the People of God. The Jews remain dear to God for example, as do the people of Islam, as well as all those who seek God with a sincere heart. Likewise, those who seek no God whatsoever, if they are good and true, are also related to God's People. ...

The Word of the Church

Mike Carsten, OFS

November 7, 2018

[www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org](http://www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org)

# FRANCISCAN LIVING

## Suffering and Transformation

By Francine Gikow, OFS

What does suffering have to do with transformation? Do we really have to suffer to be transformed?

Yes! Suffering *can* lead to transformation and yes, we do have to suffer! As Pope Benedict XVI has said, “Love is always a process involving purification, renunciations and painful transformations of ourselves — and that is how it is a journey to maturity.”<sup>1</sup>

Suffering can lead to bitterness if we don’t make the right choices. However, if we look at suffering through a spiritual lens, it can awaken us (or “sensitize” us) to the areas in our lives that need change, conversion and transformation. If we avoid suffering or avoid looking at our suffering, we miss the chance for transformation and maturation in our spiritual life.

So how can we remove the blocks that prevent this transformation? First, we have to get comfortable with suffering. We have to accept it as part of life. Not only do we have to accept it, but we have to learn to embrace it! *Embrace* it you say? That sounds almost masochistic! But our lives as Christians demand that we suffer. There is no easy way.

God’s love though, is already present in our suffering, even though we may not be able to “feel” it. God is LOVE and we know He is ever present. We have to remind ourselves that we are already in the presence of LOVE when we suffer. We can unite ourselves with this LOVE and that makes all the difference!

Furthermore, with prayer and contemplation, we can become comfortable in suffering so we can be open to the tender embraces of our God and experience Him. The practice of contemplation makes us available to see God as the “Suffering Servant” — for we share in his passion, and He shares in ours, and that shared love opens outward to others.

Union with my loving God also changes the lens through which I see suffering. God’s love can supersede the anguish of suffering and can take me outside of my self-centered reality and refocus me toward others. Father Francis exhorted us in this effort when he said: “Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He who gives Himself totally for you may receive you totally!”<sup>2</sup>

Our suffering then becomes a reason to do things differently — now with the eyes of God. We become more sensitized to the needs of others and their own suffering because we too have suffered. We accompany others in their suffering and become a vessel of God to

them, even when they cannot perceive God themselves. As St. Francis says, “We are *spouses [of Him]*, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord, Jesus Christ....We are *mothers,... when... we give birth to Him* through a holy life which must give life to others by example.”<sup>3</sup>

The poem that follows can be used for further meditation. It is my gift to you.

### *The Mystery of Suffering*

By Francine Gikow, OFS

*Emotional pain-emotional rawness*

*At first you deny it — but it returns and you're left with the grief.*

*Then you bargain: “Maybe if I'm a better person, then this will cease.”*

*But the pain keeps coming no matter what you do.*

*You cry until you're exhausted, but the hurt is still there.  
You crawl into a hole but you have to come out sometime  
and the pain is there.*

*You let it fill you and purify you and teach you about God.  
You learn to use it — to convert you, to seek what is  
important... and become closer to God.*

*So you seek a way through it; accepting it,  
Embracing it and learning from it- from the pain that is  
there.*

*Then you become aware of the mystery of suffering: the  
experience of atonement — which leads to Love.  
For suffering that is shared becomes Love for all .*

*Our suffering has a reason. Our suffering has meaning;  
For God is ever-present and nearer to us than ever we  
could know.*

*For the One who is LOVE is already at hand — never  
ending, fully flowing out and into the world.*

*We bring what we have encountered and share His love as  
we accompany others.*

*We are transformed as we hold onto LOVE Incarnate and  
become the mystery of suffering with God for all.*

*To share in Christ's suffering and His sharing in ours,  
Is the meaning for the suffering: transformation is there.  
Perfect Joy!*

<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*. Ignatian Press: San Francisco, 2007, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> LtOrd, 29

<sup>3</sup> 2LtF 51,53





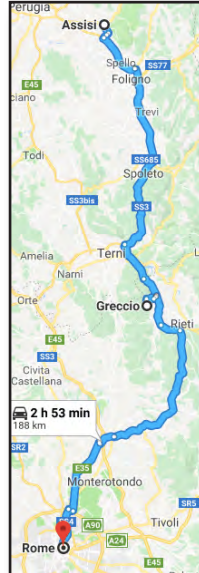
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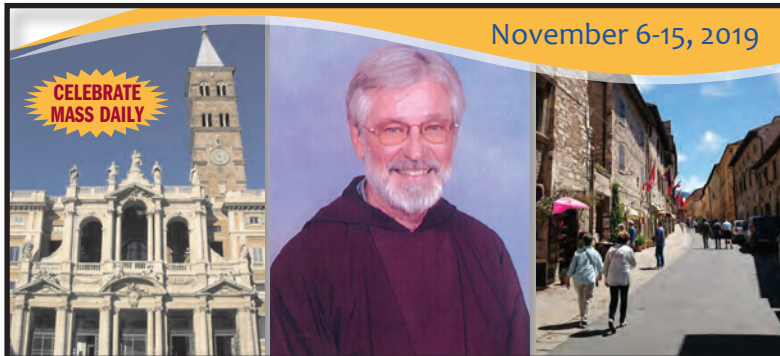
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