

# **National Minister's Annual Report**

## **NATIONAL MINISTER'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE ORDER - 2012**

**Beloved National Family,**

**On October 11, 2012, Holy Mother Church will begin a Year of Faith exactly on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In declaring this Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "The renewal of the Church is ... achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us....The Year of Faith, from this perspective, is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world. In the mystery of his death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins" (Porta Fidei 6). Also in October, the Holy Father will convoke a General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme will be "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."**

**Appropriately, our 2012 National Chapter will also convene in a little over a week in Denver, Colorado, with our theme being "Called to Build a More Fraternal and Evangelical World." Permit me in this year's Annual Report to show how we as a National Family have tried to stay consonant with Holy Mother Church in arriving at similar destinations.**

**When your newly elected National Executive Council came together for its first formal meeting in St. Louis, February 26-28, 2010, we crafted a brief vision statement and articulated our major priorities for our new term. That vision statement was "Keeping the gift of Gospel living alive," to be promoted through the following priorities or areas for development:**

- 1 - Fraternity**
- 2 – Formation**
- 3 – Communication**
- 4 – Youth**

**That initial vision statement became the theme of our 2010 NAFRA Gathering: "Bringing the Gift of Gospel Living to Life: Our Credible Witnessing," and informed the theme of our 2011 NAFRA Gathering or Annual Chapter: "Witnessing the Gospel Life Courageously in the World." With an eye toward The Year of Faith announced by the Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter "Porta Fidei" ("The Door of Faith"), dated October 11, 2011, that 2011 Chapter adopted our theme for our 2012 Chapter: "Called to Build a More Fraternal and Evangelical World."**

**From this current theme, staying with our four originally articulated priorities, Fraternity, Formation, Communication and Youth, I will organize this 2012 National Minister's Annual Report.**

**After all, Article 92.1 of the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order states: "The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of the unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church."**

**These are the Constitutionally mandated "life signs," the specific "signs of vitality" that International Visitors must check when they visit National, what National Visitors must check when they visit Regional, what Regional Visitors must check when they visit Local, what Local Visitors must check when they visit a new or emerging group. These are the measures of how we all should be caring for our fraternities.**

**These are the measures that I, as National Minister, have stressed this past year in my writings; in my presence at our National Executive Council meetings; at the first-ever JPIC Rally at Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois 04/12-15/12; in my visitations (Blessed Kateri Tekawitha Region, 04/26-29/12; Five Franciscan Martyrs Region, 05/25-27/12; and Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region 08/03-05/12); and perhaps most importantly at our 2012 Quinquennial (the Q) in Chicago 07/03-08/12.**

**Permit me to focus on our 2012 Quinquennial, my greatest joy and learning experience of 2012. Through the able leadership and hard work of the Q Planning Committee chaired by Patrick Mendes and Clare Reidy, of the National Executive Council and of the Host St. Mother Cabrini Region, the Q evidenced to me a true revival of the evangelical Franciscan spirit through our wonderful speakers and stimulating Q Congress Fraternities, our daily Masses and prayers.**

**Again, through these same means, perhaps especially through our four major speakers, Sister Ilia Delio OSF, Brother Bill Short OFM, Pat Brandwein-Ball OSF and our dearly departed Ed Shirley OSF, but also through the active and total participation of our beloved Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, we assured fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, offered help to fraternity life, reinforced the bond of the unity of the Order, and promoted its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church. It was my distinct honor, for example, to serve beside Bishop George J. Rassas, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, as he opened our 2012 Quinquennial with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.**

**I had hoped to have an ideal representation at the Q of one member from each local fraternity. As you can see above, we currently report 613 fraternities. Well, I hope you can sense my joy in sharing Christ in action, word and sacrament, meeting and praying and learning with 617, at last count, Franciscans from all over the United States, including, I believe, 25 of our 30 Regional Ministers, and all of our National Executive Council with the exception of Elaine who was recovering from pneumonia and under strict doctor's orders not to travel. We also enjoyed international representation from both our Minister and Vice Minister General of our entire Order, Encarnita del Pozo from Spain and Doug Clorey from Canada.**

**I think the entire National Family can take great joy in the success of the 2012 Quinquennial, perhaps especially in furthering that fraternal and evangelical call we all have to our own sisters and brothers in our Order and throughout the world. Of the many things I learned, saw and felt, permit me to share one insight from Sister Ilia Delio, OSF. She noted that the prayer of St. Francis before the**

**Crucifix at San Damiano begins, "Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart."**

**To Sister Ilia, the heart is the key to St. Francis, not the mind; and love is the highest good. Love is the deepest form of knowledge; love is the knowledge and power of God. To St. Francis, she said, God is outward-moving love, deeply in love with Creation. Love is relational, seen in the love of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Father, a Love Who is the Holy Spirit. The whole of Creation is a movement of love, a movement of the Trinity into all of Creation.**

**I hope and pray that our 2012 Quinquennial can enflame each of us evermore in that evangelical love of Christ and the Gospels at every level of fraternity, and may our fraternal and evangelical love attract others out in the world to our Faith, as Pope Benedict urges in the opening paragraph above.**

**Even with this great success of the 2012 Q, however, I must continue to stress that every Secular Franciscan fraternity deserves "capable and well-prepared persons" (General Constitutions Article 88.1) as Spiritual Assistants because the essential element of "vital Secular Franciscan fraternities" is the spiritual. Again, almost copying the words of Pope Benedict above in the first paragraph, I have said and will continue to say that we are wasting our time in fraternity if we are not concerned at every meeting with ongoing, even daily conversion, as we strive to turn away from sin and come closer in our thoughts, words and deeds to our Risen Savior Jesus Christ (Secular Franciscan Rule 7).**

**Again, according to the Collated Annual Report from the Regions, we reported 466 Spiritual Assistants (down from 495 the year before, and 506 in 2010) for 613 local fraternities and 30 Regional fraternities. We all know local fraternities that lack a formal, appointed, appropriate Spiritual Assistant, and I have been to Regions that have only one, often over-worked and venerable, Spiritual Assistant to serve the whole Region.**

**Supplying "capable and well-prepared" Spiritual Assistants to every fraternity at the local and regional level is a continuing problem, which needs our continued prayer and attention. Again, with prayer, I know of no "easy fix," but I encourage everyone**

**involved in leadership at any level of fraternity to avail herself or himself of the Franciscan Family Connection's (Spiritual Assistant's) Course and to be prepared, as with first aid, to give and to seek "capable and well-prepared" Franciscan Spiritual Assistance wherever and whenever needed.**

**At the National level, we continue to be blessed by the prayers, advice, example and service of our Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, all of whom shone so brightly at the Q: in alphabetical order, Friar Lester Bach OFM Cap and current President in turn; Friar Bob Brady OFM; Friar Steve Gross OFM Conv; and Friar Kevin Queally TOR. Would that every Regional and local fraternity could have such Spirit-filled assistance!**

**Further, concerning vital fraternity life, if we are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world, our Spirituality and evangelical love of the Lord and the Gospels must be witnessed out in the world, again, as our Holy Father emphasized above in the first paragraph.**

**Thus, perhaps the second greatest joy, after the Q, for me this past year was the first ever Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Commission Rally April 12 to 15, 2012 at Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, Illinois, under the able leadership of our JPIC Chair Kent Ferris. I loved the one on one sharing the Rally modeled, which could be used to build fraternity at every level, and I was impressed by the energy and ideas of the 37 people who attended from 21 Regions. Regional Ministers who had a JPIC person in attendance should be proud of each of your people. Although we will soon be losing Kent as our JPIC Chair as he focuses more energy on Diaconal Formation in his Diocese, the Rally strengthened the unity of, and gave renewed spirit to, the JPIC Commission.**

**From that invigorated JPIC Commission of 12 members, I feel the new National Executive Council will be able to find an excellent successor to Kent. Kent has also promised to continue to serve on that Commission, if asked. I would encourage the new National Executive Council to consider seriously a second JPIC Rally in the near future to continue to build energy for, and focus attention on,**

**Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, "the DNA of our Franciscan life, of our Franciscan spirituality," said the Rally's Keynote Speaker, Friar Pio Jackson, OFM, Spiritual Assistant to St. Clare Regional Fraternity.**

**1. The second priority is Formation.**

**Vital Secular Franciscan fraternities need effective formation. Our hard-working National Formation Commission with its Chair Bob "Fitz" Fitzsimmons certainly did its work by delivering in 2011 the 460 page "FUN" Formation Manual with an unbelievably rich accompanying CD of Reference Material. As I have noted before, I cannot imagine any other single document by any other single author or authors replacing these Formation materials in my lifetime.**

**The work this past year has been to communicate these new Formation materials into the hands, hearts and minds of every Secular Franciscan, professed, forming or inquiring, in the United States. Please pray and assist as you can in this effort. I attended and spoke at the Formation Workshop at the Bishop Claggett Retreat Center in Buckeystown, Maryland, on March 2, 2012 in my home St. Margaret of Cortona Region. I was most impressed that the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region reported that 400 of its 600 members had attended Formation Workshops on the new Formation materials. I know that many other Regions had Formation Workshops attended by representatives of every, or nearly every, Local Fraternity in their Region. For just three examples, the La Verna, the St. Katharine Drexel and Troubadours of Peace Regions reported Formation Workshops on the new Formation materials, which were attended by representatives of every Local Fraternity in the Region. These efforts capture the type of outreach both needed and deserved by the "FUN" Formation Manual and the accompanying materials.**

**If re-elected as National Minister, and with the approval of the newly elected National Executive Council, I plan to ask "Fitz" to finish his term as National Formation Commission Chair, if he and all his family enjoy good health, and choose a new National Formation Commission and Spiritual Assistant to lead us in continuing these**

**efforts to bring a uniform system of more thorough and truly Secular Franciscan Formation throughout the entire United States.**

**2. The third priority is Communication.**

**Communication is always a concern in building a more fraternal and evangelical world. We have already seen how vitally important it has been to communicate the new "FUN" Formation Manual and accompanying Formation materials to every current and potential Secular Franciscan in the United States. To me, this effort in 2012 must be a communication effort both electronic and personal. For me, the most effective communication this past year has been one on one sessions at the Q, at the JPIC Rally, at Regional Visitations, at NEC meetings, and at other meetings and gatherings of Secular Franciscans. Of course, communication across an entire country with over 13,000 members is impossible if it is only one on one.**

**Take for example the Q. We had the largest gathering of the Franciscan family in my direct experience, but getting the message out beyond the 617 attendees requires the electronic media. I feel the NAFRA Public Relations Committee with Bob and Mary Stronach, the NAFRA Computer Committee with its Chair Dan Mulholland, and National Webpage Master Vickie Klick have all worked hard to bring the Q electronically to all who visit our National Webpage. Further, every recent (from 2004 to 2012) issue of our TAU-USA publication is also available through our National Webpage.**

**In addition, email, both personal (tbellosfo@gmail.com ) and through the NAFRA-L, NAFRA-ALUM and NAFRA-RM list serves, keeps me in contact with our widespread National family. Again, thanks to Dan Mulholland for keeping these list serves up and running well. In 2012, I have continued to average perhaps 20 to 30 emails every day, with 50 being a not unusually high and 10 an "easy" day. We continue to be a "volunteer" organization. I thankfully receive no salary, have no paid staff, no office, and the computer is mine. If re-elected as National Minister, I am not asking for any change, any personal secretary or any salary, but I continue to beg, more importantly, for your prayers, patience and**

understanding. I am always open to any ideas you have on improving communication.

### **3. The fourth priority is Youth.**

One of the joys of many joys from both the Q and the JPIC Rally was to meet with the young people in attendance (from before college age with Kent Ferris's children to college age with students from Siena College in New York State to professed or in candidacy Secular Franciscans in their twenties and thirties). These young people are truly attracted to our Secular Franciscan charism and life. At the Q, for example, I gathered one evening with all those interested in Youth. There I listened to and shared with, in alphabetical order, Rob Breen, Barbara Countryman, Rhett Engelking, Lonnie Ellis, Kent and Lori and Clare Ferris, Linda Monitello, Pamela Townsend, Gladys Veloz and about 30 others.

Rob Breen, a Secular Franciscan who teaches at Siena College, has been the Spiritual Advisor to a Franciscan Youth Group at the College for several years. Pamela Townsend, a rising Junior at the College, I believe, is the head of that group. I met Rob and Pamela and four of Pamela's fellow students at a visitation to Blessed (soon to be Saint) Kateri Tekawitha Region in April 2012. At that time, Pamela agreed to come to the Q, which she did, bringing with her a fellow student Gladys Veloz, and to our National Chapter, which, it appears, she will. Barbara is a young Secular Franciscan mom, who attended Secular Franciscan gatherings as a child and young adult with her parents, and whose children went with Anne Mulqueen to World Youth Day in Madrid Spain last year. Rhett, Lonnie and Kent were all at the JPIC Rally as well as at the Q. They are thus attracted to us both by Youth and by JPIC. Lori is Kent's wife and herself a Secular Franciscan, and Clare is their oldest (thirteen years old, I believe) daughter. Linda is a Secular Franciscan who has worked with Organizers and Groups of Youth in her local diocese.

I would encourage the new National Executive Council to talk to these people as we continue to seek, but have not yet found, a "youthful" Chair for our Youth and Young Adults. Youth needs to be represented by Youth.



**As in previous years, this year's Collated Annual Report from the Regions reports a wide variety of activities with Youth around the United States. I remember at the Q Youth Meeting, Siena College student Gladys Veloz being asked what attracted her to the Franciscan Youth Group on campus. She said that she was attracted by their faith; she said that they were all good people; and she said they offered her the opportunity to help out.**

**From that meeting and from talking to other young people at the Q, at the JPIC Rally and at the Blessed Kateri Tekawitha Regional Visitation, I have learned that our youth are attracted by faith-based, welcoming Franciscan communities that are involved in prayer and in improving the world around them. As before, let us pray that all of us will do what we can to celebrate and encourage Youth. Let us pray for youthful hearts for all of our members that we might attract other youthful hearts, no matter the age.**

#### **4. Living in Mission with the Poor.**

**As I shared with you last year the joy I felt working down in Manaus, Brazil with Jim Flickinger, head of Amazon Relief (<http://www.amazonrelief.org/>), permit me to share the third of the three greatest joys for me in this past year of many joys, which was my teaching English, washing dishes and generally getting in the way of Dr. Tony Lazzara, the residents and staff of Hogar de San Francisco de Asis down in Chaclacayo, Peru, about 30 miles outside of Lima (<http://www.villalapazfoundation.org/>). Winner of the NAFRA Peace (now JPIC) Award in 2007, Dr Tony has lived in mission with the poor for over 25 years while I was only there for a few days, but still one is always left with the vitality of Spirit these sick and destitute children evidence day in and day out dealing with problems most of us can hardly imagine.**

**Permit to ask your prayers for all of these children, including two of my favorites, both, appropriately, Victors: one, Victor T., who lost both of his arms in a terrible fire, but who could write with a pencil between his big and second toes, and could also correctly hit the computer keys using his nose and chin; the other, Victor H., who was nicknamed "Maradona" for his absolutely fearless soccer playing even though he was very small and had a club foot. They**

are just two of the 50 amazing children living in this Franciscan house of love and care.

## **5. Sisters and Brothers at the Same Table of the Lord.**

As we noted at our 2011 National Chapter, we would prefer our time together to resemble more of a "Thanksgiving Celebration of Family" than a "Business Meeting." Thus, as always, please welcome, and introduce yourself to, any face at our 2012 National Chapter that you do not recognize. We are all sisters and brothers at the same table of the Lord.

At our 2012 National Chapter, for the first time ever, will be a delegation from Guam: Friar Patrick Castro, OFM Cap, Spiritual Assistant to St. Padre Pio Fraternity in Agana Heights, Guam; Violet Manibusan, Fraternity Minister; Deacon Louis Agulos, Jr., Co-Formation Director; and Cynthia Agbulos, Fund Raising Chair of the Fraternity and wife of Louis. They are coming a great distance and on their own time and money at the urging of Reverend Friar Joseph English, OFM Cap, the Vice-Provincial for Mary Star of the Sea: Pution Tasi, the Guam-Hawaii Capuchins. Friar English has petitioned "for the opportunity to participate and be part of the National Secular Franciscan Organization."

As you may know, Guam was ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish American War in 1898 and formally purchased from Spain for \$20 million in 1899. American participation in Guam involved a considerable loss of local and American life in World War II, and, according to historians, Guam was "the only populated U.S. soil to be occupied by another country in World War II." Today Guam remains a U.S. Territory. Please welcome these good people with joy.

Congratulations to our sister Secular Franciscan Jan Benton who will join us as the 2012 JPIC Award winner for her over thirty years of advocacy for peace and justice, especially for people with disabilities. Jan was at the Q and has been very helpful to me personally in the formation and continuation of the only Secular Franciscan Deaf Fraternity in the world, as far as we know. She and her attorney husband Martin once opened the doors of their own home for me and Anne Mulqueen and others in a peace-making

**effort during the controversial days of the 2007 Q. Please open your arms to Jan and Martin.**

### **A Final Personal Note of Thanks.**

**As you also may know, Article 13:3 of the National Statutes reads, "The outgoing National Minister cannot be elected to any other office on the National Executive Council." Thus, if I am not re-elected as National Minister, I am off the National Executive Council, and I wish to say now how much I congratulate the National Fraternity on the National Executive Council (NEC) that they elected to serve with me in 2009. All of them are true Servant Leaders; all of them have attended every NEC meeting when their health permitted; all of them have made Regional visitations or chaired Regional elections.**

**Specifically, Elaine Hedtke, our National Vice Minister, has given us our NAFRA Annual Report Collation for the past three years on which we base so much of our knowledge; she has handled the Election and Visitation Schedule; she and Jan Parker have worked with the Youth; every "special assignment" I have given her she has accepted. She's a trusted advisor. Third-term National Treasurer Dennis Ross has such a wealth of experience. It has been a blessing to have him serve us, and he will be impossible to replace. National Secretary Jan Parker has called herself an "SS," a Serving Secretary, and so she has been. She makes the calls, keeps the minutes, organizes the agendas, doing all with her accustomed grace and often with a song and a strum of her guitar. Our three National Councilors are Mary Bittner, Michelle Kim and Arturo Villareal. They reflect a welcome diversity to our National Council. For just about three days, I would like to borrow Mary's brain and spirit. Then I really think I could do something as National Minister! Michelle wears many hats. For example, she has a lot of experience at the United Nations and in working with Franciscans International. She is bilingual in Korean and English. She has professional experience with computers. For his part, if we all get too down at our 2012 NAFRA Gathering, I will turn the microphone over to Arturo Villareal, who always speaks with such power and motivation. My longest friend and acquaintance on the NEC is Anne Mulqueen, our two-term International Councilor. We are fellow members of St. Margaret of Cortona Region and did workshops together many years ago entitled "Catch the Fire" to return fraternities to their original Franciscan charism. From all reports, what a blessing Anne**

**was to represent all of us at Ed Shirley's Memorial in Austin, Texas.  
What a blessing this NEC has been! Thank you all.**

**A blessed Patronal Feast Day to all of you, your Fraternities and families.  
May Father Francis intercede for us and have God show us what is ours  
to do AND supply the grace to do it! Let us pray for one another.**

**With Peace and Love in Christ's and your Service,**

**Tom**