

## Order Experiences Change and Growth, National Minister Reports

NASHVILLE, TN -- For the first time in recent memory, the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States has experienced growth, National Minister Patrick Mendes, SFO, reported in his State-of-the-Order address at the national chapter, held Oct. 14-19 in Nashville.

The number of professed sisters and brothers at the end of 2007 was 15,811, he said, up from the previous year's total of 15,293. The number of candidates reported by regions stood at 1,208, and the number of inquirers at 850.

Canonically established fraternities now number 718, an increase of 16, he said. Plus, there are 37 emerging fraternities and 33 newly forming groups.

"These figures represent significant growth," Mendes said.

Spiritual assistance, on the other hand, continues to be a challenge. The number of friar spiritual assistants stands at 314.

"We need to take greater responsibility for our branch of the order," he said.

The good news is that the number of Secular Franciscan spiritual assistants has jumped from 64 to 80, and that another 66 Secular Franciscans are enrolled in the spiritual assistant training (now called Franciscan Family Connections), up from 27 enrollees the previous year.

Also, the number of religious sisters serving as spiritual assistants to fraternities is at 91, a jump of 21. There are 32 diocesan clergy, who are not SFO members, serving as spiritual assistants; and six members of other religious orders are spiritual assistants.

The number of fraternities without a spiritual assistant number at 185, a slight improvement over the previous year's 187. There are three regions with no spiritual assistant, versus only one the previous year.

"On the plus side," Mendes noted, "many of the friars in initial formation get an orientation to the Secular Franciscan Order."

In other matters:

- "This has been the year of formation," with "tremendously well-received" On-the-Road Workshops presented in Florida and Missouri. "Solid formation is the foundation for a fully Franciscan life," he said.
- Training of servant leaders, which regions are being encouraged to provide, got a boost with a summer seminar on servant leadership provided by St. Francis University of Loretto, PA. Seventeen regions were represented at the seminar. The good news is that St. Francis will offer annual summer seminars on Franciscan topics for Secular Franciscans (except during Quinquennial years).
- The Youth and Young Adults had a very successful Water Project fundraiser.

- Franciscan Action Network “is going great guns,” with a number of SFOs serving on the FAN board and with National Vice Minister Dc. Tom Bello, SFO, elected as vice president of FAN.
- Revisioning of the Holy Rule continues with the transition from the apostolic commissions to an integrated commission called JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation). He thanked ad hoc committee chair Patricia Brandwein-Ball, SFO, for leading a gradual, thoughtful, prayerful transition.

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