

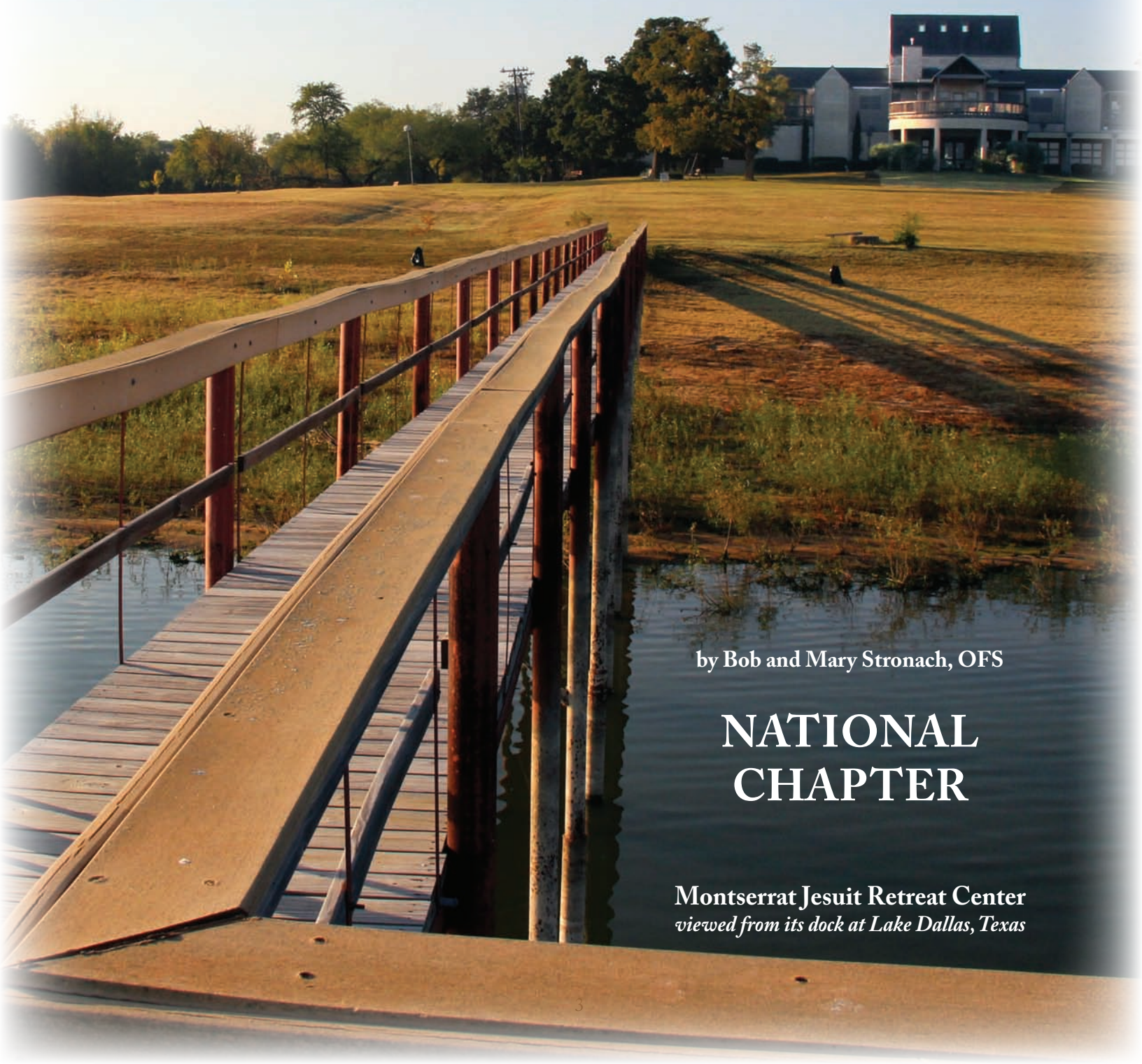
CALLED TO WALK ON WATER

In his opening remarks to the 2014 National Chapter, National Minister Dc. Tom Bello, OFS, encouraged everyone to stretch, to act on their faith, to live the Franciscan charism – to follow the Jesus who walked on water.

Referring to the Gospel passage where

Peter got out of the boat and tried walking to Jesus, he said: “Our Lord has called us to walk on the water. He didn’t say, sink. He said, come. If we keep our eyes on the Lord, we will never sink.”

He put it another way: “Jesus has not invited us to failure.”



by Bob and Mary Stronach, OFS

NATIONAL CHAPTER

Montserrat Jesuit Retreat Center
viewed from its dock at Lake Dallas, Texas

CALLED TO 'REBUILD MY HOUSE'

God is not only among us, but we are His merciful presence.

That 2014 national theme – be the merciful presence of God – resounded through the national chapter, held Oct. 21-26 at Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House near Dallas, TX.

The difference between saints and sinners is the ability to listen, National Minister Dc. Tom Bello, OFS, suggested in his welcoming remarks.

Give others the benefit of the doubt, he said. Think before speaking. Listen. And learn.

“In other words, just be the merciful presence of God.”

It also means being like servants,



**Deacon Tom Bello, OFS
NATIONAL MINISTER**

National Spiritual Assistant Kevin Queally, TOR, noted in the opening liturgy.

“Too many times we want to be leaders... but really it’s about ‘waiting’... learning the needs...ready to serve.”

God “is our peace,” who breaks

down “the walls between us.”

No enmity. No hate. Break down walls. “It’s what we’re meant to be,” Father Kevin said.

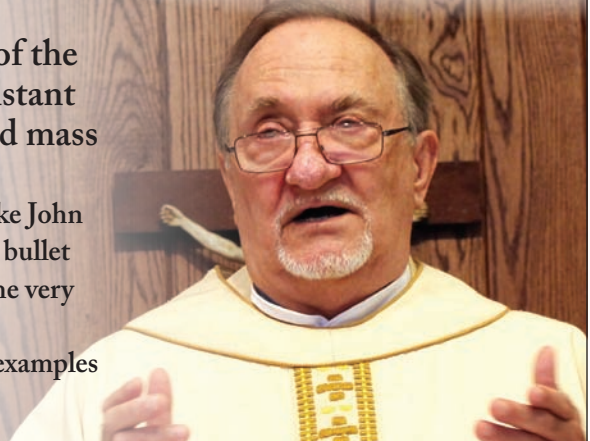
“He says to us, ‘rebuild my house’... You servant-leaders have been called to do this.”

WE ARE THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

“We are called more and more to be expressions of the merciful presence of God,” National Spiritual Assistant Stephen Gross, OFM Conv., asserted at the second mass of the chapter.

There are many models of God’s goodness, he said – models like John Paul II, who “forgave the man who shot him.” Even though that bullet began his physical deterioration, his spirit soared. “He tried to the very end to be an expression of God’s love and care.”

He declared: “We are the signs of the times. The signs are the examples we give.”



LIGHT A FIRE

Do you wish life wasn’t so full of strife? Do you yearn for peace?

“Forget about it!” That’s what Jesus is saying, asserted National Spiritual Assistant Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap., at the chapter’s third mass. “He came to light a fire... Jesus challenged the status quo.”

He continued: “We today are called to be Jesus’ disciples, to spread fire.”

Disciples spread fire by “being the merciful presence of God” and by living the greatest commandment – “love God and love neighbor.”

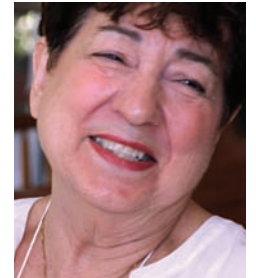
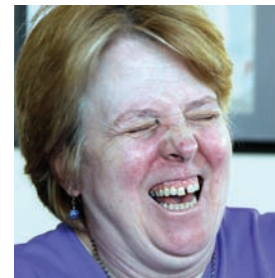
CHAPTER WAS A WEEK OF WONDER

The national chapter in Dallas was a week of wonder.

The wonder of coming together as brothers and sisters... of praying with joy and song... of prodding and visioning how to be more present Franciscans... and of savoring the morning-to-night sounds and scents and sights of a retreat center enveloped in nature (and isolated from the ebola scare at a downtown hospital).

Among the highlights:

- Adopting “*Be the Joyful Face of Christ to All*” as the 2015 theme (springboarding off 2014’s “Be the Merciful Presence of God”).
- Awarding the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Award to Tuscon Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas for “ground zero” work with desperate migrants.
- Declaring “solidarity with our immigrant brothers and sisters.”
- Putting a focus on vocations with a Vocations Committee developing marketing and resource materials.
- Invigorating the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult program with the appointment of a mother-daughter team to lead the charge.
- Adopting a \$356,000 operating budget.
- Immersing in prayer and reflection through on-going formation, including the words and challenges hurled by friars during daily mass.



BY THE NUMBERS

In his national minister's report to delegates, Tom Bello noted that the U.S. has:

- 12,739 active professed members (down 264).
- 1,014 candidates (a drop of 42).
- 637 canonically established fraternities (an increase of 31 fraternities).

SOME BEST PRACTICES

The topics of vocations, fraternity growth, and council health were on the minds of participants in both small group and general sessions. The discussion offered suggestions of best practices:

- Communication, in various forms, is essential, whether to keep people informed, invite to meetings, show appreciation for a job well done. Use cards, letters, certificates, email, social media (e.g., Facebook).
- Learn to delegate tasks.
- Offer retreats for local and regional leaders.
- Develop a cadre of mentors.



Carolyn Townes, OFS

- "In the best local fraternities, everybody has something to do. Members are engaged."



The chapter broke into small group sessions to tackle agenda topics, such as best practices in regional and local fraternities, leadership development and effective communication.

JPIC IN ACTION

One might say the chapter experienced an immersion in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

National JPIC Chair Carolyn Townes, OFS, spoke of DOING peace. Franciscan Br. David Buer, OFM, who himself previously received the award for his work with the homeless and migrants, accepted the JPIC Award on behalf of Bishop Kicanas, who sent video greetings (*see opposite page*). Chapter delegates were so moved that they later unanimously adopted a statement of solidarity (*see opposite page*).

There are two ways of being – “a heart of war or a heart of peace,” Townes told the assembly.

“Which are you?”

“We see the world as we are.”

She asked: Do we think of ourselves and others, for example, as being fat or stupid or something else?

“This is the violence we do to ourselves and to one another.”

Or “do we truly believe we are beloved sons and daughters of the God of peace?”

As Thomas Merton suggested, she said, to be a saint is to be myself; but my true self is found in God.

“Once you got the ‘who’ straight, then you do the ‘do’.”

“Do PEACE,” she said, explaining the word as an acronym.

Do... Prayer

Empathy

Active Listening

Compassion (recognize suffering and act to relieve it)

Evangelical Love

“That’s the Gospel!”

JPIC AWARD HONORS BISHOP'S WORK WITH MIGRANTS

DALLAS – Citing his “ground zero” work on behalf of desperate migrants in southern Arizona, the Secular Franciscan Order is honoring Tucson Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas, D.D., with the Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award.

The award was announced at the national annual gathering, held Oct. 21-26 at Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House, Lake Dallas, Texas.

Br. David Buer, OFM, a friar who himself received the JPIC Award in 2010 for his work with the homeless and migrants in Arizona, accepted the award on behalf of Bishop Kicanas, who was unable to be present.

JPIC Commission Chair Carolyn Townes, OFS, introduced Brother David and National Minister Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, presented the award, saying the bishop “exemplifies the Franciscan values of peace-making, charity and justice for the poor.” The award included a glass statue of “God’s hands embracing the world,” and a \$2,000 prize.

In a video message, Bishop Kicanas expressed “deep gratitude,” praised the advocacy of Secular



JPIC Chair Carolyn Townes, OFS, with Franciscan Br. David Buer, who accepted the award on behalf of Tucson Bishop Gerald Kicanas.

Franciscans on behalf of the poor and homeless, and said the award encourages him and others to continue the fight to fix a broken immigration system.

Secular Franciscans nominating the bishop wrote: “Over the last

decade, southern Arizona has been ‘ground zero’ for the humanitarian crisis of desperate migrants risking their lives, by crossing the desert on foot. Each year, 150-200 human remains are found in the desert around Tucson. Many more hundreds are found each year along the Mexican border in Texas, New Mexico and California.

“Bishop Kicanas has been tirelessly working to create bridges of love and concern in an era of wall building and militarization. He helped form the ‘Dioceses Without Borders’ project, which unites the Catholic Dioceses of Phoenix, Tucson and Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, to work together on migration issues. He reaches out to all the human beings in the borderlands: the humanitarian groups; the Border Patrol and other enforcement agencies; the migrants; the faith community; the ranchers and elected officials. He welcomed the Jesuit’s Kino Border Initiative project in Nogales. Bishop Kicanas’ commitment has also played an important role nationally, testifying before Congress, for the need for comprehensive immigration reform.”

CHAPTER DECLARES SOLIDARITY WITH IMMIGRANTS

DALLAS – The national body of the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order declared its “solidarity with our immigrant brothers and sisters” in a statement unanimously adopted at its annual gathering, held Oct. 21-26 in Dallas, TX.

Citing Philadelphia Archbishop Charles J. Chaput’s insight that “the more we encourage and support the integrity of families, the healthier society becomes,” the national body

said: “We lament that immigrants live in fear of a dysfunctional system which often leads to the forced break-up of loving families.”

The body, consisting of some 50 leaders representing nearly 13,000 Secular Franciscans across the U.S., said that Secular Franciscans “are called by our Rule of Life to cultivate the well-being of the family through our Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life.”

The leaders said they were inspired by the words and actions of Tucson Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas, this year’s recipient of their Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Award.

“We accept the challenge from Bishop Kicanas that we seek ways to stand in solidarity with our immigrant brothers and sisters, through prayer, personal action, and support for comprehensive immigration reform.”

YOUTH TOOLBOX

Active in youth ministry, Christy Nelson, OFS, and former Regional Minister Sue Nelson, OFS, were introduced as the new Youth/Young Adult co-chairs.

They presented a three-year vision to attract youth to a Franciscan spiritual experience and ultimately nurture a multi-generational membership in fraternities. They're developing a "fraternity toolbox" -- a how-to guide with resources and materials such as a "welcome video" -- that fraternities can use to attract and work with youth. They said they would like to see every fraternity plan two activities this year that involve youth, whether it's planning a public event or something as simple as a couple of Secular Franciscans talking Franciscan spirituality with one or two youth at a coffee shop.



FORMATION SHARING

Another new national appointee, Formation Chair Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS, shared a vision to move from information to transformation. She anticipates a workshop that follows up on the FUN (For Up to Now) Manual, and that fosters sharing -- "share the journey, share with one another, share our stories."



Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS



Jim Flickinger, OFS

DISASTER RESPONSE

Jim Flickinger, OFS, founder of Amazon Relief, reported on his efforts to launch a Secular Franciscan disaster response team -- initially in Florida, with plans to expand to other states. Some 50 people had already indicated an interest in volunteering.

to Fair Share, the chapter voted to have *Tau-USA* mailed to candidates as well as professed members.

FOR CANDIDATES

With the international order requesting that candidates contribute

ANNUAL REPORT DATA

Vice National Minister Elaine Hedtke, OFS, emphasized the importance of regions submitting annual report data, with National Spiritual Assistant Stephen Gross, OFM Conv, noting that the church needs to know the status of its people and orders. "We're responsible for handing in accurate statistics."



Elaine Hedtke, OFS



Donna Hollis, OFS, and Josh Molidor, OFS, are the regional ministers who co-hosted the 2014 chapter in Texas.



VOCATIONS PLAN

Vocations Chair Jeff Ramirez, OFS, announced that the Vocations Committee was in the process of developing a plan of action, best practices and promotional material. The committee can be contacted at ofsvocationscommittee@gmail.com.

“Vocations are not only found within the church,” he noted. “Get out of your comfort box” and be open to the idea that “you can find vocations” in the “most unlikely places.”

He added: “We embrace our imperfections. We need to love ourselves because how then can we love anyone else?”



Jeff Ramirez, OFS

“We’re Franciscans – not for ourselves but for others. We come together to get energized and then we have to go out... The world is our

cloister.”

And: “We are the servants of God whose purpose is to move people’s hearts... We’re the seeds.”

COMMUNICATIONS

The chapter heard that communication continues to be a priority – with the Communications Committee looking at how to improve the NAFRA website and Tau-USA publication, and to make better use of social media ([facebook.com/secularfranciscans-nafrausa](https://www.facebook.com/secularfranciscans-nafrausa) and [#secfrannafra](https://twitter.com/secfrannafra)).

SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

“I have come to set the earth on fire.”

That’s how Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, opened his remarks as outgoing president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA).

He pointed out that, as Franciscans, “we are called to heal wounds...to bring home those who have lost their way,” and that “we must listen to each other and grow together.”

The discussion moved to an important



Fr. Kevin Queally

topic for many fraternities – the need for spiritual assistants. With fewer friars available, the order needs to foster the formation of secular spiritual assistants. Regions that have active SA training shared how they go about it.

“We need to do everything we can to give spiritual assistant training,” said National Minister Tom Bello, OFS.



Anne Mulqueen, OFS

INTERFAITH

Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Chair Anne Mulqueen, OFS, spoke of church unity as “a spiritual relationship” and pointed to areas where different faiths can work together, such as in peace-making, advocacy, and recognizing “the Earth belongs to God and is intrinsically good.”

Ecumenical and Anglican Franciscans journeyed with the chapter -- Katie Cook, OEF, representing the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, and Fr. Tom Johnson, TSSF, minister provincial, Province of the Americas, (Anglican) Third Order Society of St. Francis.



Katie Cook, OEF

BUDGET APPROVED

National Treasurer Cyl Maljan-Herbelin presented a proposed 2015 budget of \$356,195, which drew praise as well as discussion of several line-item allocations. It was approved by a nearly unanimous vote.



Fr. Tom Johnson, TSSF