

NATIONAL CHAPTER OF ELECTIONS

by
Bob & Mary Stronach, OFS



Meet the New National Executive Council

BRING GOD'S LOVE TO ALL

THE SUN THAT NEVER SETS

“Love and fraternal friendship.” That’s the essence of coming together in chapter, outgoing National Vice Minister Elaine Hedtke, OFS, declared at the opening of the national gathering in Clinton, NJ, on Tuesday, Oct. 13.

In fact, “it’s built into our DNA” as Franciscans, she said.

That theme permeated the chapter as regional ministers, officers, delegates, friars, guests and observers renewed acquaintances or made new friends.

Our Lady of Angels Region hosted the gathering under the leadership of Regional Minister Diane Menditto, OFS, and Planning Chair Ron Pihokker, OFS.

It also was a chapter of elections, with Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, of Hungary installing a new executive council on Saturday and General Spiritual Assistant Amando Trujillo-Cano, TOR, of Rome, Italy, witnessing for the church.

Outgoing National Secretary Jan Parker, OFS, appeared visibly shaken at her election as national minister, but quickly quipped: “Christ is the sun that never sets.”



Elaine Hedtke, OFS
OUTGOING NATIONAL VICE MINISTER



Jan Parker, OFS
NATIONAL MINISTER

DAY 1 GREAT JOY

During the opening mass, Msgr. William Benwell, vicar general of the Diocese of Metuchen, expressed “great joy” at welcoming Secular Franciscans to the diocese, especially since he is a spiritual assistant to one of the New Jersey fraternities.

Monsignor Benwell mentioned he had the opportunity to visit the tombs of several saints whose churches were practically empty. But when he visited Assisi to pray at Francis’ tomb, he was one among thousands. So many “wanted to capture something of the spirit of Francis,” who lived by his own words, “To me life is Christ.”

Following mass, Youth and Young



Msgr. William Benwell
DIOCESAN VICAR GENERAL

Adult Commission Co-chair Christy Nelson, OFS, gave an update on the “SHINE” approach to reaching out to “younger” folk. She and her co-chair mom, Sue Nelson, created SHINE toolkits to guide interested fraternities. “The game plan,” Christy said, “is to bring the next generation of Catholics closer to Christ through Franciscan spiritual experiences.”

ECUMENICAL FRANCISCAN: A FOCUS ON FRANCIS AND CLARE

No stranger to a Secular Franciscan national gathering, Soshana Kay was warmly welcomed as a sister, albeit ecumenical, Franciscan. As co-minis-



Soshana Kay, OEF

ter of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, she shared her poem about differences and similarities of the orders. Difference in size (“thousands upon thousands” vs. “tens upon tens”) and age (“800 years old” vs “30 something”) and membership (“Catholic and Protestant” vs Catholic). “But at our deepest cores, the differ-

ence fades fast...”

“We want to follow Jesus like Francis and Clare.

We want to kiss the leper, feed the hungry, save the planet, stop the violence, end the war, tear down the walls, build the bridges, light the darkness, rebuild the Church.”

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Attendees at the National Chapter got to visit the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark, N.J. INSET: National leaders, front l-r, Vice Minister Mary Bittner, Minister Jan Parker, Secretary Mattie Ward; rear, l-r: Councilor Joan Geiger, Councilor Willie Guadalupe, Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, International Councilor Mary Stronach, Councilor Mary Frances Charsky, and CNSA President-in-Turn Friar Bob Brady.

They recommended a simple approach to connect with youth and young adults – reach out to them in their situations, and ask how to be of assistance. Change from “come to our meeting” to “how can we serve you?” In other words, Christy said, it’s about “SHINING your spiritual light.”

DAY 2 REJOICE ALWAYS

“Rejoice!”

That was the title and theme for Deacon Tom Bello’s address to the chapter Wednesday, Oct. 14. Despite battling cancer, the outgoing national minister rejoiced in Pope Francis’ visit to the U.S. and his speech before the U.S. Congress.

“Rejoice in the Lord always...” he quoted. “The Lord is near... Have no anxiety at all.”

He called on fraternities to take action in a number of ways:

- Have a mentor for every candidate in formation.
- Have candidates choose and complete a service apostolate before profession.
- Be mindful of how fraternity gatherings are conducted. It’s not all business; or, rather, the real business of the order is each other – “our relationships.” “We need time together, social sharing... That’s how we keep and welcome new members.”

COMMITTEES REPORT

The afternoon featured group breakouts by geographic region and brief appearances by commission and



Deacon Tom Bello, OFS
OUTGOING NATIONAL MINISTER



Barb Morgan, Kate Kleinert, Judy Haupt and Susan Simeone
THE QUINQUENNIAL COMMITTEE

committee chairs.

“Regional formation directors were enthused about getting together, sharing, networking,” National Formation Chair Mary Ann Lenzi, OFS, said about the national formation workshop held earlier in the year.

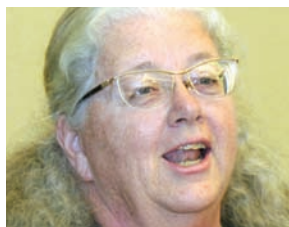
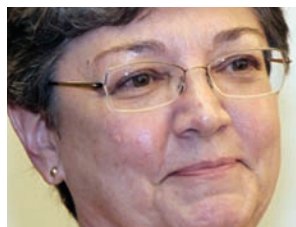
Noted Ecumenical/Interfaith Chair Anne Mulqueen, OFS: “I’ve been a witness to the essential unity of the church” through dialogue and collaboration among the orders; namely, the Secular Franciscan Order, the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, and the Anglican Third Order Society of St. Francis. (The latter two were represented at the chapter.)

“See you in St. Louis!” enthused Quinquennial Committee members as they encouraged people to start registering for the July 2016 event.

Quipped Computer Committee Chair Dan Mulholland, OFS: “We fulfill a function that St. Francis never envisioned.”

“Translations of the Tau and formation materials are slowly expanding,” especially in Spanish and Korean, noted Communications Committee Chair Cindy Wesley, OFS.

“Develop an elevator speech about the Secular Franciscan Order,” urged Vocations Chair Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, in a video message. (She arrived a day later.)



Mary Ann Lenzi, OFS; Anne Mulqueen, OFS; Cindy Wesley, OFS, and Dan Mulholland, OFS.



Friar Christopher Panagoplos, TOR

SEE WITH EYES OF FAITH

A fraternity gathering like the national chapter is a “fraternal expression” where we see reality “with the eyes of faith,” National Spiritual Assistant Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, noted at the Wednesday evening mass.

Prayer and community are essential, he said, for the Holy Spirit to be involved in chapter decisions.

REVIVE OUR SPIRIT

The Q Committee helped to cap off the day by noting: the Quinquennial Congress in July 2016 will be about “**Reviving Our Spirit.**”

Committee member Kate Kleintert, OFS, said they would be asking attendees to bring or send hygiene products for “blessing bags” to give to the homeless through St. Anthony’s Food Pantry in St. Louis.

DAY 3

NON-CATHOLICS HAIL ‘LAUDATO SI’

Non-Catholics may be as intrigued as Catholics by Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Anglican Fr. Mosud Ibn Syedulla, TSSF, told the gathering Thursday morning, especially since it speaks to the whole world. In fact, he said, the interfaith committee of Ecumenical, Anglican and Catholic Franciscans is planning a conference on *Laudato Si*. “It’s a centerpiece for our work... to help heal the world.”



Fr. Mosud Ibn Syedulla, TSSF, and Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS

ORDER EYES CHALLENGES

“Concrete problems” afflict too many fraternities around the world, noted Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS – which is why the 2014 General Chapter put a focus on “how to manage an order like the OFS.”

While management is a term more often seen in business, with the Secular Franciscan Order it’s about “building the kingdom of God,” about “fraternal animation and guidance.”

He listed problems the International Council (CIOFS) has identified:

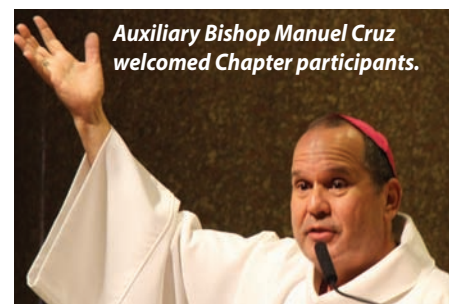
- misunderstanding the roles of minister and vice minister.
- councilors not open to collaboration, support, advice (see it as interfering rather than helpful).

- insufficient involvement by the non-elected.
- lack of permanent structure/positions.
- self-isolation (such as in a parish or local community).
- insufficient visitations (fraternal and pastoral).
- insufficient collaboration with the Franciscan Family.
- insufficient involvement in church structure.
- lack of horizontal and vertical communication.
- lack of understanding of OFS/YouFra relationship.

(A NAFRA committee, chaired by International Councilor Mary Stronach, OFS, is addressing the “management of the order” issue, with plans to submit recommendations to CIOFS.)

‘DAY AWAY’

The great majority of chapter attendees spent the afternoon in the “day away” program, visiting Liberty Park (with many riding the ferry to Ellis Island and around the Statue of Liberty) and then traveling to the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark (see cover), where Auxiliary Bishop Manuel Cruz celebrated mass and welcomed the Franciscan visitors.



Auxiliary Bishop Manuel Cruz welcomed Chapter participants.

JPIC AWARD HONORS AFRICAN NUN FOR ORPHAN WORK

Sister Caritas Barajingitwa, LSOSF, dreamed of providing a loving home and practical education for orphans in Africa. With the help of American donations, that dream came true when she opened Holy Family Vocational Orphanage in Southern Uganda.

For her work, the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order, meeting in national chapter in Clinton, NJ, Oct. 13-18, honored Sister Caritas with the Franciscan Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award.

JPIC Commission Chair Carolyn Townes, OFS, introduced Sister Caritas, citing her for creating a future for children of AIDS victims.

The award includes a \$2,500 prize. The money is earmarked for a new school, said Sister Caritas, a member of the African-based Little Sisters of St. Francis.

The orphanage houses 18 children, and includes 13 acres for farming plus 13 acres for future dormitories and a new school, eventually to accommodate 100 children.

Sister Caritas got the idea for the orphanage while pursuing a master's degree in education in the late 1990s at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec. In fact, the idea became her master's thesis, she said.

"Going back to Uganda, I thought it would be just a matter of putting the project into place,"



Sr. Caritas Barajingitwa, LSOSF, embraces JPIC Chair Carolyn Townes, OFS, during the awards ceremony.

she recalled. "I went door to door begging, to no avail."

But God opened another door, as she would put it.

The pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Binghamton, NY wrote a letter to the mother superior of the Little Sisters, asking her to send one of her sisters to work in his parish. The mother superior summoned Sister Caritas and told her she was going to the United States. She arrived in June 2001. Two years later, thanks to donations

by American Catholics, she was able to open Holy Family Vocational Orphanage and welcome the children into its protection.

Secular Franciscans and other friends in Binghamton established the Holy Family Vocational Orphanage Foundation to continue raising funds for the orphanage and further Sister Caritas' dream.

A proponent of teaching practical life skills as well as academics, Sister Caritas said the orphanage teaches home economics, carpentry, basket weaving, sewing and tailoring, and farming and animal husbandry.

However, sister noted, for the orphans, "knowing that they are loved is most important" because "then they will be able to love others."

ON GLOBAL JPIC TEAM

National JPIC Commission Chair Carolyn Townsend, OFS, has been appointed to the Order's international JPIC team.

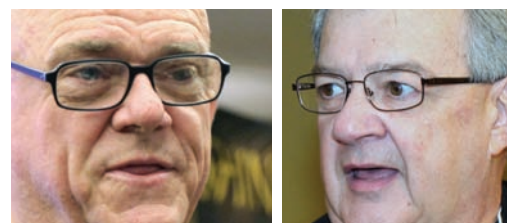
DAY 4

CNSA TALKS TRAINING

"Your Rule helps me understand my own," Fr. Chris Panagoplos, TOR, noted in a session conducted by the Conference of National Spiritual

Assistants (CNSA). He made that statement after being officially welcomed by Br. Bob Brady, OFM, CNSA president-in-turn.

Brother Bob also thanked Fr. Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap., who was completing his term on



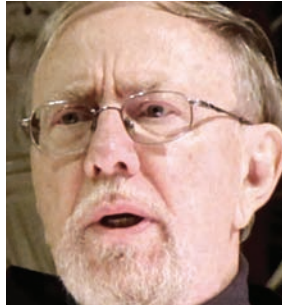
Friars Bob Brady, OFM, & Chris Panagoplos, TOR.

CNSA, sparking a standing ovation for the friar.

Brother Bob announced that the new Conventual member of CNSA will be Fr. Linus DiSantis, OFM Conv., currently stationed in Syracuse, NY.

They introduced guidelines for spiritual assistant training, with CNSA Executive Secretary Cyl Maljan-Herbelin, OFS, giving an overview:

- Franciscan Family Connections is the basic text.
- Additional resources include the FUN Manual, Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order, and Handbook for Spiritual Assistants.



Friar Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap., and Cyl Maljan-Herbelin, OFS.

• While over half of SA training programs are correspondence-based, more and more are combining correspondence and in-person classes. Whatever the type of training, “you have to have internships and mentoring.”

Friar Bob encouraged regional ministers to be in touch with provincial spiritual assistants as much as possible, especially since provincial SAs are the ones who appoint spiritual assistants.

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS: FRANCIS' CALL

“From the fast and furious to the Passion of Christ.”

That’s how General Spiritual Assistant Amando Trujillo-Cano, TOR, described St. Francis’ vocational call.

He and Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, capped Friday morning with formation presentations.

Francis wasn’t always saintly, the friar said. Before his conversion, he hit “rock bottom.”

After his conversion, when he embraced the leper, Francis also was embracing the suffering Christ. His mercy toward lepers was the same mercy he experienced from God. “That which seemed bitter became sweet.”

Father Amando echoed what Francis wrote, “the Lord gave me brothers” to live the Gospel life, just as Jesus said, “You are brothers.”

The Lord also called Clare. In fact, he said, Francis cannot be fully understood without Clare. Plus, the Holy Spirit attracted “other penitents” to the experience of fraternity.

Francis didn’t have a GPS device



Friar Amando Trujillo-Cano, TOR

to find his way. Instead he looked for God’s clue, and found it in the Portiuncula, where it became clear that “the essence of St. Francis’ vocation was following Christ in evangelical poverty.” He embraced Christ’s humility and poverty with joy. Even the “perfect joy” of being scorned and rejected by his own, as he imagined in a lesson told to Brother Leo.

Hearing Christ’s call to repair his

church, Francis rebuilt three small churches until he realized the wider mission of calling people to conversion.

Sacramental life – Christ in the Eucharist – was central to Francis, and the Franciscan calling. In fact, Fr. Amando said, Francis was “dancing to God’s music.” In other words, he was open to the Holy Spirit. “If he was a great saint, it was because he let the Holy Spirit guide him.”

OFS IS REAL VOCATION

Tibor opened his talk with a comment on the church-endorsed reality of the Secular Franciscan Order: “Our vocation is a real vocation... It is a call of God.”

He went on to describe some characteristics of the Secular Franciscan vocation. Thanks to the love of God, he said, Secular Franciscans are free to do good; they’re inventive and talented; they’re sensitive for justice; they’re respectful of creation; they’re seeking peace; they’re seeking simple solutions; they seek minimum instruments but maximum compassion and solidarity; and they have courageous meekness and tender determination.

LEADERS URGE FRATERNITIES TO EMBRACE THE VULNERABLE

Secular Franciscan leaders are calling on their 600-plus Franciscan fraternities across the U.S. “to take action and help adopt and embrace migrants and our most vulnerable people.”

Meeting in national chapter in Clinton, NJ, Oct. 13-18, the 40 leaders and delegates issued a statement, declaring “our solidarity with the poor, the marginalized and refugees.”

Referring to Pope Francis’ call in *Laudato Si* “to recognize that other human beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes,” they asked: “How is God calling us to care for His creation with a human face?... How do we respond to their basic human rights and needs with Franciscan care and love?”

The statement continued: “Thousands of migrants are seeking a homeland to escape terror-

ism, persecution and even death. This is the largest migration since the early 20th century.”

It concluded: “We pray with Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*: ‘Oh God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes’.”

The leaders and delegates represent some 13,000 Secular Franciscans.



Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS

FORMATION: ENCOUNTERING BEAUTY

Reflecting the Franciscan notion of universal kinship with all of creation, Formation Chair Mary Anne Lenzi offered a “breath of fresh air” in a pictorial slideshow presentation titled, “The Beauty of It All.”

“Open your heart to praise beauty,” she suggested, then quoted Francis: “You are holy, Lord God, who does wonderful things... You are all our sweetness.”

She would comment on an image, then pause and encourage reflection:

- the order and harmony of the created world results from the diversity of being.
- “Laudato Si” points to nature as

a magnificent book in which God speaks to us.

- The world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and prayer.
- Beauty is another name for God.
- Escape to a place of beauty. (How easy is it to notice beauty around you? What gets in your way?)
- While Thomas of Celano referred to Francis, in art, praising the Artist (with capital A), John Duns Scotus saw God as a loving and liberal creator, saw the absolute irreplaceable value of each thing, and saw the enormous dignity of the created order.

It’s about being open to the heart of the Spirit, Mary Ann concluded – about seeing harmony, balance, rhythm around us. A kind of union called Beauty.

SMELLING THE FLOWERS

Father Matthias picked up on the formation theme of appreciating beauty in his homily at the Friday evening mass.

Imagine taking a walk with Jesus, and then with Francis, stopping to notice the birds, the grass, the trees, the flowers.

In the message of divine providence in the day’s readings, “God cares even for these small birds.”

The Franciscan way is a way of simplicity, he said.

“We pray without anxiety, without worry (because if God cares for even the sparrows, imagine how much more He cares for us).”

DAY 5

CHAPTER ADOPTS BUDGET, THEME

Among the final items of business before the chapter headed into Saturday’s elections, the body:

- approved a \$273,150 budget for 2016.
- issued a statement of solidarity with refugees (see top of page).
- adopted a new theme for the year:

‘Bring God’s love to all!’

CHAPTER ELECTS LEADERS FOR NEXT 3 YEARS

Jan Parker, OFS, of O'Fallon, MO, was elected national minister Saturday afternoon. She and the other newly elected leaders serve a three-year term.

Jan was national secretary for the past six years and before that, was regional minister of St. Clare Region. Jan, who has three adult children, works in the family business, and formerly was a full-time pastoral associate and coordinator of music and liturgy for her parish.

The other members of the national executive council are:

- Vice Minister **Mary Bittner**, OFS, of Ypsilanti, MI, a national councilor for the past six years. Before that she was regional minister of Divine Mercy Region for six years. Mary is an associate research scientist at University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, MI.

- Secretary **Mattie Ward**, OFS, of New Hope, PA, regional minister of Saint Katharine Drexel Region for nearly nine years. Mattie is employed

as deputy clerk to a federal district judge.

- Treasurer **Jerry Rousseau**, OFS, of Blairsville, GA, regional minister of Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region for the past five years. A retired director for Delta Airlines, Jerry and his wife, Madeline, have four children.

- International Councilor **Mary Stronach**, OFS, of Marcy, NY. This is her second term. Previously she was formation director for St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region. She teaches Spanish at Utica College, is outreach coordinator for MAMI Interpreters, and operates Stronach Associates public relations consulting. Mary and her husband, Robert, have two daughters and three sons.

- National Councilor **Mary Frances Charsky**, OFS, of Binghamton, NY. This is her second term. She also was elected alternate international councilor. Previously she was regional minister of St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region. She is a

retired elementary school principal.

- National Councilor **Awilda (Willie) Guadalupe**, OFS, of Newnan, GA. She has served as a regional councilor for Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, and on the national communications committee. A retired civilian employee of the Department of Defense, Willie and her husband, Israel, have two daughters.

- National Councilor **Joan Geiger**, SFO, of Bellerose, NY, regional minister of Tau Cross Region for more than five years. She is retired from the New York City Department of Education.

- President-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants Friar **Bob Brady**, OFM, of Oakland, CA. A national spiritual assistant since 2006, the Franciscan brother has been involved in ministry to the elderly and in social work at shelters, drop-in centers and with Catholic Charities. He also spent six years at his order's headquarters in Rome, Italy.

ALWAYS TIME FOR FRANCISCAN JOY

