

SPIRIT OF 2016 CHAPTER

'Rejoice and Be Glad'

By **BOB & MARY STRONACH, OFS**

If there were a moment that reflected the spirit of the 2016 National Chapter, perhaps it was when attendees were lifting their arms and swaying as an African friar called:

"Be happy in the Lord, rejoice and be glad."

General Spiritual Assistant **Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap.**, liked to sing and sway, almost dance, when celebrating the liturgy in the

chapel and addressing the chapter in the conference hall at San Pedro Retreat Center in Winter Park, Florida, just outside Orlando. He hails from Cameroon, where, he once said, "we like to sing and dance to everything."

He encouraged participants to consider how they allow themselves to be used by the Lord because "this is where we find true joy."

A key, he said, is to remember that "with God, I can break through any barrier; with God, I can climb any wall."

National Spiritual Assistant **Christopher Panagoplos, TOR**, put it another way: "Just keep doing what we've learned and received" because Jesus likely wants us to "go where we're going to be challenged"



– which is why "that little itty-bitsy Tau is so important."

Said Fr. Francis: "We just need to allow Him to use us."

At another point, National Formation Chair **Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS**, put it this way: "We need to notice the transforming presence of God within us."

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General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap.; Vice Minister General Chelito Núñez, OFS; National Minister Jan Parker, OFS, and Orlando Bishop John Noonan.

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In the chapter's opening mass, Orlando Bishop **John Noonan** reflected on the Franciscan charism: Francis lived the Gospel, the beatitudes, and by doing so, "he captures people's hearts" and "brings them closer to God."

Father Francis commented on the bishop's decision to accept the invitation to help kick off the chapter: "It's a great sign of unity of our brothers and sisters here with the local church... a sign of 'go, rebuild my church.'"

He told the bishop: "Thank you for your presence... for reminding us of our dignity and our presence in the

church today."

Perhaps reminiscent of a long-ago meeting between a Francis from Assisi and the Bishop of Rome, Bishop Noonan and Friar Francis embraced.

Like a Family Reunion

Not to be outdone by the friar's sense of rhythm, National Minister **Jan Parker**, OFS, and Our Lady of Guadalupe - Empress of the Americas Regional Minister **Donna Hollis**, OFS, came dancing into the conference hall, singing "Alleluia."

"We celebrate a family reunion today," Jan said. "...What a gift to be

together."

And it's a family whose members belong to all four levels of the order, she noted, with representatives of each present at the chapter, from local fraternity volunteers, to regional ministers and delegates, to the international visitors, **Friar Francis** and Vice Minister General **Maria Consuelo (Chelito) Núñez**, OFS.

"We've talked about you... how well you do things," such as the recent Quinquennial Congress, Chelito said.

"We're here to serve you; we're here to listen to you, to accompany you," she added, noting: "We're all responsible" for the life of the order.

Father Francis said: "It's wonderful to know we are part of a great body," with Secular Franciscans present in 116 countries (including 79 with national fraternities). "We're not limited to our little corner of the world."

He went on to note that the OFS rule "embodies a very important element from the Second Vatican Council – a call to holiness."

"The Rule is a pathway to holiness" and "holiness is to let the light of Christ through you... wherever Divine Providence places you here



Jan Parker, OFS, and Donna Hollis, OFS, kick off the opening session, dancing and singing 'Alleluia'.

and now.”

He added: “God does not call the qualified. He qualifies the called.” In fact, “when you are attentive to the call, you can realize how much God has been forming you.”

See Energy, Hope All Over

In her message to the chapter, Jan Parker said she was excited that “so much is going on” within the U.S. order.

“I see humble service everywhere. I see energy everywhere. I see hope everywhere.”

Among NAFRA’s accomplishments, two stand out – the Quinquennial Congress that attracted more than 600 people, and “Management of the Order” Survey that saw over 2,000 Secular Franciscans providing input for the International Order to use to map a future.

The year had a rough spot, though, with the passing of past National Minister Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, she said. “But he’s very much with us (in spirit).”

There are some challenges, as pointed out to the international visitors in the pre-visitation questionnaire. They include such things as an aging demographic, with 80 percent over 55, and the geographical distances across regions and between fraternities.



Formation Chair Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS

“To rebuild the church, we must rebuild ourselves,” Jan said, looking at mentoring and leadership development, training of spiritual assistants, and attracting “younger” folk.

‘We Are Called’

There were several on-going formation moments, with Formation Chair Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS, pointing to the notion that “we are called.”

“It’s about heart, not head... It’s about fraternity.”

Fraternity is a place of belonging and of joy; a place to learn to love and be loved; a place of challenge and growth that fosters a sense of mission.

“It’s a process.”

And “fraternity is a perfect workshop,” added Formation Commission member Diane Menditto, OFS, especially since being called means “we are full-time Franciscans,” not part-timers.

A Need to Contribute to Fraternity Life

Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, OFS, offered a mini-formation talk of his own, pointing to the need to contribute to the life of the fraternity. In fact, he said, the first financial responsibility is to the life of the fraternity; the second is for the needs of worship; the



The National Chapter in session.

third is to the fraternity's apostolates, and the fourth responsibility is to charity. "Charity is number four."

Regarding NAFRA's own spending, Jerry said he was pleased to be able to provide dollars for disaster relief and other urgent needs. NAFRA and member donations provided over \$20,000 for Secular Franciscans hit hard by the Baton Rouge and Louisiana flooding.

The Youth/Young Adult H2O Project collected \$5,500 from fraternities across the U.S., and the money was awarded to a Secular Franciscan project that provides clean water for villages in Uganda. Spearheading the project is Stephen Smith, OFS, a member of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity of Blairsville, Georgia.

"Work began in August on running clean water for the very first time to the remote village of Kigato at a cost of \$4,200. The remaining \$1,300 went towards completing a \$3,000 water project in Kiwaala."

Later in the chapter, Jerry proposed a 2017 budget of \$287,850, which was approved overwhelmingly.

So Much Depth to Franciscan Vision

There's so much depth to the Franciscan vision. It's not merely love for nature. "We got to look beyond the bird bath," Father Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, urged at mass. "What did he (Francis) see, animate and inanimate? What did he see? Francis saw beauty and good."



Jerry Rousseau, OFS
National Treasurer

'Twinning' with Africa OFS

"Twinning," that is, journeying with Secular Franciscan fraternities in Africa, was a topic at a roundtable session.

Jerry Rousseau said members of fraternity linked up with Secular Franciscans in Uganda involved with Franciscan youth.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region has been supporting the vocational
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Vocations Chair Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, spoke of plans to market the OFS vocation, including creating a vocations "landing page" on the web for referring interested persons.



Other friars providing spiritual insight at the chapter included Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap. (above), the incoming president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, and Br. Bob Brady, OFM, outgoing president-in-turn.



orphanage in Uganda founded by Sr. Caritas Barajingitwa (Little Sisters of St. Francis), winner of NAFRA's 2015 JPIC Award, noted Regional Minister **Al Picogna**, OFS. And Sister Caritas has helped shuttle formation materials to Ugandan Secular Franciscans, added National Councilor **Mary Frances Charsky**, OFS.

Deacon **David Ream**, OFS, minister of Franciscans of the Prairie Region, said his regional treasurer had to make a business trip to Uganda and took the opportunity to connect with a local fraternity. Now there's a "fraternal bond" and "they're keeping in contact."

Holy Trinity Regional Minister **Steve White**, OFS, spoke of helping a missionary working in Africa where electricity was unreliable. They acquired mechanical honey processing equipment from the Amish so "he wouldn't have to worry about having electricity to operate it."

The international visitors were curious to see participants from the U.S. territories of Guam and the Virgin Islands, especially the latter.

"I'm fantastically excited," Chelito said. "Fraternities are found in the Virgin islands. Praise God. We weren't aware of them."

Violeta Q. Manibusan, OFS, minister from Guam, perhaps summed it up best for those from far-flung islands:

"We're Secular Franciscans, and for a long time we didn't know all of you existed."

She added: "We're so excited. We just want to keep sharing everything we learn."

Formation in Africa

Speaking of far-away places, **Father Francis** pointed to the international order's Africa Project.

"Formation is a priority for the order," he said, noting that the order is bringing formation workshops to African secular Franciscans. He appealed to the U.S. Fraternity to help fund the project.

"Your gesture will be welcomed with great joy and dancing by your brothers and sisters in Africa."

Later during budget discussions, the



Violeta Manibusan, OFS, of Guam

National Fraternity voted to allocate \$2,000 to the project.

The body also allocated \$2,000 for a pre-school project in Caracas, Venezuela, where Chelito's fraternity was planning to offer breakfast and snacks for some 130 children from poor families. Additional donations from chapter attendees and others also went to the project.

With medicine and first aid supplies in short supply in Venezuela, NAFRA put out a pre-chapter appeal and collected supplies for a pharmacy that Chelito's fraternity operates at a



church with the assistance of a secular Franciscan physician. Chelito stuffed one suitcase with medicines and first aid items, plus NAFRA had another two boxes shipped to Venezuela.

In all, regional ministers and delegates voted to distribute NAFRA charitable grants as follows:

- Franciscan Mission Service, \$1,500.
- “Don Bosco” Pre-School (Venezuela), \$2,000.
- CIOFS-African Workshops, \$2,000.
- Franciscan Ministries Inc. (Detroit), \$2,000.
- Amazon Relief, \$1,500.
- Franciscan Family Apostolate, \$1,500.
- Franciscans International, \$1,500.
- Villa La Paz (ministry of previous JPIC Award winner Dr. Tony Lazzaro in Peru), in memory of Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, \$1,500.

Transformative Work

The donation to Detroit’s Franciscan Ministries took its co-founder, **Mike Carsten**, OFS, by surprise. He was attending the chapter as the newly appointed Ecumenical/Interfaith chair.

Mike is not new to NAFRA as he is a former regional minister and former national councilor. Mike and his Secular Franciscan wife, **Kathleen**, work with the poor at St. Aloysius Church in Detroit (where he is director of neighborhood services). As an outgrowth of that experience, the Carstens, along with another Secular Franciscan, **Gary Goers**, founded Franciscan Ministries. They operate Canticle Cafe every Wednesday, providing food and clothing, and on other days they bring food, clothing, blankets and sleeping bags to the homeless under bridges and other places they congregate, and then they visit squatter families who live in abandoned houses without utilities, bringing groceries and clothes.

Their goal, he says, is “not only to serve and minister to the poorest of



Violeta Q. Manibusan (left), and Mary Frances Charsky (right) helped pack a suitcase of medical supplies for Chelito Núñez (center) to take to Venezuela where her fraternity operates a pharmacy because of a shortage of medicines and first aid products.



Kathleen and Mike Carsten

Founded Franciscan Ministries, serving the poor and homeless in inner-city Detroit.

the poor, but also reach out to our Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters to provide opportunities and show them how to do something similar in their own communities.”

The experience, Mike adds, is transformative. “It is a humbling experience to work with the poor and people who are waking up in the morning (on the street and under bridges) and say ‘good morning’ to you; and you ask how they’re doing, and they say they’re



Alison Fisher

Models a trash bag “evening gown” during a “fashion show” by Florida OFS members.

blessed because they’ve woken up.”

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Non-business moments of the chapter included a visit to the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe (founded to serve the huge tourist population of Orlando area attractions) and a mock fashion show featuring original attire such as a pin-striped suit, with stripes of safety pins, a black trash bag evening gown, a newspaper dress, and shower curtain rainwear.

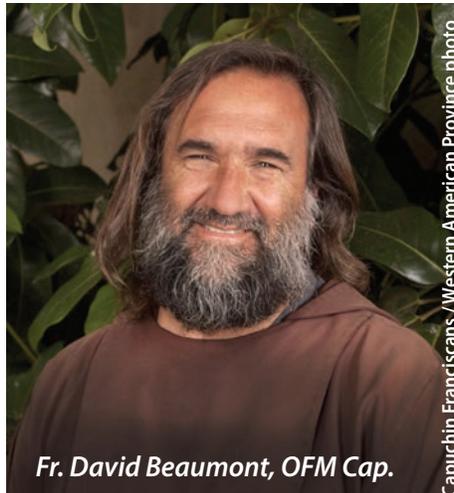
JPIC Award Recognizes Friar's Work with Indigenous People in Mexico

The Secular Franciscan Order in the United States has awarded its Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award to a Franciscan friar serving indigenous people in Northern Mexico.

Fr. David Beaumont, OFM Cap., "is a model for all of us" in his "joyful service to people," National Minister Jan Parker, OFS, said in announcing the award at the Order's annual chapter, held Nov. 2-6 at San Pedro Conference Center in Winter Park, Florida.

Participating in the chapter were over 40 Secular Franciscan leaders, along with several Franciscan friars, from across the U.S., plus Guam and U.S. Virgin Islands.

Father David, a Capuchin friar with the Franciscan Friars of Western American Province, "has been working



as a missionary in Northern Mexico since 1992, serving the needs of 120,000 indigenous people, the four tribes of Pimas, Yanquis, Mayos and Guarijios, in four cities, and in 86 remote villages and 100 mission stations," noted National

Councilor and JPIC Committee member Awilda Guadalupe, OFS. He provides for the "basic needs of the people," she said, and "has helped translate key parts of the Bible into the languages of the area's four tribes."

Father David "often travels on foot and donkey between destinations" where "roads are difficult and unsafe," she added. "His life has been threatened when traveling in areas where drugs, robbers and those unfriendly to the friars cross paths."

Accepting the award on Father David's behalf was fellow Capuchin friar Br. Alexander Escalera, who is a national spiritual assistant to the Secular Franciscan Order.

The award includes a cash prize of \$3,000 to support Friar David's work.

NAFRA Declares Stand for Peace in Face of Violence and Hatred

On behalf of 12,000 Secular Franciscans throughout the U.S., the National Fraternity issued a statement declaring "our commitment" to stand firmly against acts of violence and hatred.

"Although we have a moral responsibility to respond to violence," the statement said, "our first response should be to promote peaceful dialogue and diplomacy, pardon, reconciliation, and development of initiatives that especially advocate for those who suffer from the result of violence."

The statement continued:

"The world is in dire need of people willing to 'individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives,' as Article 15 of The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order mandates. Secular Franciscans are called to promote peace by their words, actions, and attitudes, in order to maintain the dignity of life all around the world for all people. 'Let us, then pursue what leads to peace and

to building up one another.' (Romans 14:19)

"The peace we proclaim with words must dwell even more abundantly in our hearts. We must not provoke others to anger or give scandal. Rather, let our gentleness draw them to peace, goodness and concord. This is our vocation: to heal wounds and to bind what is broken.

"United in our mission, Secular Franciscans are called to do all we can 'to live in peace with everyone.' (Rom. 12:21)"

Breath of God

Before wrapping up, the chapter approved the theme for 2017.

Ending with Hebrew words for "Come, Spirit of God", the theme is:

*Oh, Breath of God,
Unite Us in Action!
Bo ruach Elohim!*



Ecumenical Franciscans were welcomed at the NAFRA Chapter. At left are Br. David Canter from the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF), and Deacon Joan Verritt from the Anglican Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF).

CHAPTER CANDIDS

