

Special section by BOB & MARY STRONACH, OFS

NAFRA chapter

By BILL SCHMITT, OFS

The week-long chapter, held in mid-October in St. Louis, MO, convened the ministers and delegates of the 30 regional fraternities and other individuals in the Secular Franciscan Order (including observers from an emerging fraternity in Guam).

Several days of discussion about the present and future of the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order preceded the election of national leaders for the next three years.

Lively conversations among the more than 90 attendees — who included official representatives from the International Council (CIOFS) and members of

the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) — reflected the Secular Franciscans' mission and character.

A passion to find joy and foster peace, following in St. Francis' footsteps to live the Gospel, energized discussions ranging from youth vocations and members' ongoing formation to peace and justice and the church's sexual abuse crisis.

Celebration of the order's Rule of life as renewed 40 years ago, plus the plan to celebrate in 2021 the 800th anniversary of the order's founding, went hand-in-hand with daily liturgies and prayer to focus the chapter's participants on their mission.

Participants from other orders and groups in the Franciscan family, Catholic

and ecumenical, joined in the activities.

During a break from their meetings, participants attended Mass in the Old Basilica Cathedral of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, which is located in the shadow of the city's famous Gateway Arch. They also toured the newer Basilica Cathedral, which is named for St. Louis IX of France, the compassionate king considered a co-patron of the Secular Franciscan Order along with St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

The National Fraternity continued its tradition of issuing a statement to local and regional fraternities. This one focused on sexual abuse in the Church (see page 10).



Participants show their Franciscan spirit during a break at the National Chapter, held at Renaissance Hotel in St. Louis.

National Fraternity elects leadership team

JAN PARKER SERVES 2ND TERM AS NATIONAL MINISTER

By **BILL SCHMITT, OFS**

Members of the National Fraternity, meeting in their chapter of elections, voted on Oct. 13, 2018, to return **Jan Parker, OFS**, for a second term as national minister of the 12,000-member Secular Franciscan Order in the U.S.

Also elected to three-year terms were:

- National Vice-Minister: **Mary Bittner, OFS**.
- National Secretary and Alternate International Councilor: **Jane DeRose Bamman, OFS**.
- National Treasurer: **Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS**.

• International Councilor: **Awilda Guadalupe, OFS**.

- National Councilor: **Josh Molidor, OFS**.
- National Councilor: **Dennis Ross, OFS**.
- National Councilor: **Donna Hollis, OFS**.

In addition, Fr. **Christopher Panagoplos, TOR**, steps up as president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA).

The National Executive Council will seek to apply the order's charisms to various challenges and opportunities. Their task is to emulate St. Francis of Assisi in service to peacemaking, justice and compassion — for the marginal-

ized and all of God's creation — through endeavors at all levels of the order.

New Zealand International Councilor Chantal Healy, OFS, delegated by Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, of Hungary, presided over the elections. The ecclesial witness was Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap. Father Francis, a Cameroon native who serves as Rome-based general spiritual assistant to CIOFS, provided faith formation to the chapter participants.

Parker, of O'Fallon, MO, thanked the council with whom she had worked for the past three years.



Jan Parker, OFS



Mary Bittner, OFS



Jane DeRose Bamman, OFS



Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS



Awilda Guadalupe, OFS



Josh Molidor, OFS



Dennis Ross, OFS



Donna Hollis, OFS



Christopher Panagoplos, TOR

MINISTER REPORTS ON STATE OF THE ORDER

Made much progress, but still face challenges

By PAT CARR

In her State of the Order message at the National Chapter in October, National Minister Jan Parker, OFS, noted that one could marvel at the progress made rebuilding the Secular Franciscan Order since the revision of the Rule in 1978; however, there is a need to seriously consider some deficiencies that may be causing “heart disease” in the Order.

Parker cited accomplishments in the areas of: Communications, Vocations, Formation, Spiritual Assistance, Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Youth, Multicultural and Administration.

“Evaluating how we are addressing our priorities is one way to look

at the State of the Order but it doesn’t tell us everything,” she said. “Are we living true to our identity and does our structure support it?” According to an assessment by our International Council (CIOFS): “Structurally, unification has occurred, but we still experience problems on how the sense of unity and belonging are perceived. We have not fully embraced the implications of our Rule and Constitutions; have not fully understood our vocation, identity and mission; and have not lived up to what the Church expects of us.”

Parker urged participants to reflect on their own and other members’ actions and attitudes as a way of improving the Order. What is your attitude toward

conversion? Do you and others focus on changing the Order instead of changing yourselves?

“Viewed from this perspective there are some of us who are gravely ill and in need of healing. We desperately need the help of the Divine Physician,” Parker said.

Parker also provided some statistical information on the U.S. Order from 2016 to 2017. The number of local fraternities remained the same at 593. So too the 30 regional councils. There was a decline in membership from 12,053 to 11,802. The number of people in formation decreased from 1,854 to 1,762.

There are now 30 diocesan priests in the order. And, the number of spiritual assistants increased from 407 to 421.

JPIC AWARD GOES TO KATHLEEN CARSTEN

She lives her life with ‘2 feet of love in action’

JPIC Animator Carolyn Townes, OFS, introduced the 2018 JPIC Award winner, Kathleen Carsten, OFS, as someone who lives her life with “two feet of love in action.” With one foot, she meets the immediate need; with the second foot, she addresses the issue.

Carsten has worked as a faith community nurse for St. Aloysius Church in downtown Detroit since 1999. She serves the health needs of the poor and homeless. That includes the elderly at Griswold Apartment Building, who in 2013 were facing eviction under new ownership. Many of the elderly had lived there for over 30 years.

She contacted a psychologist who volunteered to help the residents with their anguish. Then Kathleen discovered health issues due to renovations getting underway before the eviction deadline. There was dust everywhere. She called residents and discovered that many had chronic illnesses which were

being exacerbated by the conditions in the building – filth, lead paint, elevators that were undependable.

She made numerous complaints to the City of Detroit Building Department. She reached out to an attorney who volunteered his time. On the same day that they filed a complaint in court, the City of Detroit placed a “Cease and Desist” order. In the seniors’ remaining three months at the facility, their physical health would not be further jeopardized. But their spiritual and mental health struggled from the lingering losses of friends and community, and the anxiety of starting over again. “Our work needed to continue,” said Kathleen.

The Senior Housing Protection of Detroit organization, known as SHP-D, was formed when the Griswold incident happened. They were successful in making government officials aware of the plight of the poor seniors and the need for continued low-income housing.



Carolyn Townes, OFS (left) with JPIC Award honoree Kathleen Carsten, OFS.

Who were those people in St. Louis? One observer's thoughts

'THIS IS NOT WHO WE ARE' ... LEADS TO ... 'THIS IS WHO WE ARE'

By **BILL SCHMITT, OFS**

"This is not who we are!"

This powerful statement, put forth by a member of our National Council, was posited as something members might occasionally have to say when a fellow Secular Franciscan has been caught up in society's current tendencies toward polarization, coarseness, and hatred.

I was inspired by this blunt message. Our regional and national leaders, seeking the Holy Spirit's wisdom in guiding the Order, agreed that the O.F.S. must be recognized as resisting any betrayals of Christ's immense love.

As someone who had attended Quinquennials but never this kind of national decision-making event, I was heartened by the spiritual framework modeled by the Order at a time when so many in society are searching for identity and meaning. By the time the chapter concluded, I grew in gratitude that we brothers and sisters of penance have a charism for helping our culture hold onto truth by saying, "This is who we are."

This observer sensed the Lord clarifying our order's identity – and a path for moving forward (to "rebuild my



Church" and "build a more fraternal and evangelical world").

- Through commitments to youth and vocations, as well as the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) award for service to senior citizens, I felt appreciation for the order's multi-generational character, its ability to share Franciscan traditions and values with members old and new.

- The election process itself was complicated for many, testing patience and persistence. Adherence to constitutional requirements was upheld; and fairness and solidarity took deeper root inside people's hearts. One participant quipped, "A great formation exercise, huh, folks?"

- Hotel staff who had served the group for days received our words and gestures of genuine gratitude.

- A lively discussion of the official statement to be issued at the chapter's close prompted numerous comments from the floor, respecting the power of words to be constructive or destructive.

Participants focused on goals of sustaining relationships of mercy and justice, plus authentic accompaniment, witnessing to Christ's love and the OFS Rule. One defender of the rigorous editing commented: "We want that statement to become flesh" in every local fraternity.

- Mindfulness of the OFS presence globally and locally helped to affirm relationships of trust, nurturing the order as it approaches its 800th anniversary. We shared the Holy Eucharist, Liturgy of the Hours, and many interactions, both profound and recreational. The result was joyful recognition of the gifts of Gospel love to be walked out in the footsteps of St. Francis for the good of the Church and world.

The Chapter approved an annual theme for U.S. fraternities — a "maxim" to summarize the week's lessons. The slogan is: "*See Christ, Be Christ, Share the Vision.*" That seemed to be one way of saying, "This is who we are."

STATEMENT ON CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

'We stand firm and make no excuses'; like Francis, let's rebuild the church

The National Fraternity, during its Chapter in St. Louis last October, issued a statement on clergy sexual abuse of minors, noting that the recent grand jury report in Pennsylvania was "a cause of sorrow, pain and agonizing self-scrutiny for the Catholic Church in the United States."

"We recognize the tragic reality of sinful abuse perpetrated on the most vulnerable," the statement said. "It deeply saddens all of us. We stand firm and make no excuses. The brothers and

sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order extend mercy and compassion to the victims of abuse and to their abusers. Trusting in God who allows the good seed and the weeds to grow together (Mt. 13: 24-30), we pray for healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace."

The statement continued: "More than 800 years ago, our Lord asked St. Francis of Assisi to 'rebuild my Church which is falling into ruin.' Francis accomplished this by living a life of penance and sacrifice according to the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. As followers of St. Francis, we commit ourselves to do the same. We call the members of our Order and invite all people of faith to be vigilant for the sake of the vulnerable and to foster strong relationships throughout the Body of Christ. We support the clergy and religious who serve Christ Jesus and His Church. Let us go forth in the Light of Christ to rebuild our Church, that it may be renewed as a beacon of hope and safe refuge, grace and truth."

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

Living the rule

The 40th Anniversary of the Rule was celebrated throughout the chapter, including the viewing of the video produced by CIOFS on the Rule. General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap, who served as ecclesial witness, challenged the national fraternity: “Do I live the rule? We must become experts in living the rule. It is meant for sanctification... I shouldn’t become an expert to change someone, somewhere; but first, it should change me.”



Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap.

Liturgy challenges, unites

At the celebration of daily Mass the brothers and sisters were challenged and brought closer together. Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, during the opening mass, asked “Where is Jesus? We must be Christocentric. We have to bring Him back.” OFM Fr. Jerome Wolbert’s message centered on accountability. “To know accountability is to enter into a deeper sense of penance,” he said. Regional Spiritual Assistant Fr. Ed McKenzie, OFM, reminded attendees: “We might come together as followers of Francis in Chapter, but we participate in the Mass as members of the entire body of Christ. We are all united in one voice of prayer and worship – at one Eucharist.” At the closing Mass Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap, expressed “profound gratitude” to those who accepted nominations and were elected, and to those who were not elected. “No one can say ‘I was not elected and I will not serve.’ I remind all of us of the greatness of service for all – elected and not elected.”



Chantal Healy, OFS

faith journey – from Jew to Catholic to Secular Franciscan. When she heard the words of St. John Paul II, “Be not afraid,” she knew that she should become a Catholic. As her faith journey continued, she realized that “we must go deeper to become true Franciscans.”

Geographical Groups

Geo Groups discussed priorities and determined that once their suggestions were submitted, they would task the new executive council to finalize the list of priorities.

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Listen to your heart

Chantal Healy, OFS, from New Zealand, represented Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, for the elections. Her words of encouragement to say “yes” to serve the order were heeded by many who allowed their names to be considered for national office. “Listen to your heart,” she said. “The Holy Spirit will talk to you.” She shared her inspiring



Geo Groups engaged in discussions throughout the chapter and experienced camaraderie.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CHAPTER

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Youth/Young Adult goals

Kathleen Molaro, OFS, Youth and Young Adult Commission chair, discussed three goals of the commission: *Unite, Ignite, Invite*. **Unite** -- in purpose and in process to foster communion with youth. **Ignite** -- Each of us must take the first step and then spread the flames of the Holy Spirit to others. **Invite** -- We need to be sufficiently prepared before we invite. Are fraternities vibrant and inspiring for our young? Youth want to see authenticity, commitment, she said. She added that the Youth Commission is committed to help with resources and to provide networking opportunities. She reported that 17 regions have appointed animators. Among the activities she recommended is the 2x2x2 -- two OFS join with two youth to plan two activities.

Locator map

National webmaster Lee Potts, OFS, updated attendees on new features of the website. He is anticipating an interactive map to show where fraternities are located. Each region will have its own colored markers and the location and contact information for each fraternity.

\$12,000 for charities

Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, OFS reported that 23 non-profit agencies were nominated for charitable giving and 11 were recommended by the committee. A total



of \$12,000 was dispersed among the following: Villa la Paz Foundation (Peru), Holy Cross Retreat Center (New Mexico), Amazon Relief (Brazil), St. Francis Breadline (New York), Outreach to First Nation People (Kansas), Franciscan Family Apostolate (India), Dorothy Day Outreach Center (Pennsylvania), Angela Spirituality Center (California), Holy Family Vocational Orphanage Foundation (Uganda), St. Francis Inn (Pennsylvania), and Santa Chiara's Children Center (Haiti). Two other requests were honored: One from General Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap, for financial support for a spiritual assistant training, and one for our Venezuelan brothers and sisters who are being supported through additional donations from U.S. members.

Budget approved

Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, OFS, proposed a 2019 budget of \$342,741, which was unanimously approved.

Ecumenical outreach

Mike Carsten, OFS, interfaith/ecumenical chair, discussed relations with non-Catholic Franciscans, saying that we attend each other's chapters. He discussed having regional ministers as delegates to some of these events. "We gather together as Franciscans and explore what unites us," he said.

New National SAs

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants introduced Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, as a new national spiritual assistant. He was an OFS before he became an OFM. He serves as pastor and guardian in the only Byzantine house in the USA. The National Fraternity also thanked Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap, for serving as president-in-turn. The new president-in-turn is Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR. Also attending was Fr. Giles M. Gilbert, OFM Conv., who was subsequently appointed to serve as the Conventual Friars' representative on the CNSA.



THE CHAPTER FEATURED A JPIC PANEL consisting of Sister Marie Lucey, OSF, of Franciscan Action Network; Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, former national spiritual assistant, and Joe Makley, OFS, a member of the national JPIC team. The panel addressed how and when we speak in a Franciscan prophetic voice and the



effectiveness of civil disobedience. We must "speak in terms of the gospel," said Sr. Marie. "All of us being in touch with the roots: the Gospel, Francis and making them come alive in ourselves," added Fr. Kevin. Joe quoted Article 15 of the Rule, to be "in the forefront, collectively and individually."

A visioning for formation

AS IN ST. FRANCIS' TIME, SPIRIT OF AGE ULTIMATELY DOESN'T SATISFY

By MARY STRONACH, OFS

Setting the stage for a weekend of formation visioning, Fr. David Pivonka, TOR, provided a dose of reality.

"The world has profoundly changed in the last 25 years," said the host of EWTN's *Wild Goose* series. "Young people have no safe place. There is a sense of danger infiltrating every part of us." He said that there are things that want to corrupt, to manipulate the spirit of faith.

He took workshop attendees through an historical view of God.

In the pre-modern world, pre-1600s, God is the starting point. The world is imbued with God. The truth is rooted in God, he explained.

From the 1600s through to the 1960s, the modern world view has man at the center of all things. "God is pushed off to the side. God might exist but there is no intimate contact. Humanity has the ability to make things better... fix the world's problems. Right and wrong is based on the human vision."

In the post-modern world – the last 50 years – there is no center. There is chaos. "The truth is whatever an individual believes to be true." There are no boundaries. God is not a part of the equation. During this era, he said, many people have no identification with religion.



Fr. David Pivonka, TOR

Youth talk about being "spiritual" but not "religious," he said. They react to culture mainly by feeling. It is an era when you "can't offend anybody." He continued, "This is a non-reflective age. We are so busy, so consumed... We don't reflect on consequences." In the 24-hour news cycle, we are "bombarded with noise. Our interior life is suffering. **We need to invite people to an interior life.**"

"Words like 'should or should not' are foreign to this culture," he added. "Truth and preference are largely the same. If I determine what's true and

someone disagrees, then it reflects on me... The world is so divided, so hostile, we can't dialogue." He referred to a quote in a school that said, "We will tolerate all things except what we believe to be intolerant."

He offered three approaches on how to engage this culture. The first is "accommodation," accepting that everything is OK. But, he said, using this approach "ultimately doesn't respect the individual."

The second is not to critique the culture. "This is an escape behind walls, and leads to isolation," he said. "The church is counter-cultural. We must confront it."

He provided a more hopeful alternative with the third approach – "Infiltration and transformation." Engage the culture, he said. "Desire to create a fraternal world. When Francis embraced the leper, he recognized Christ... Recognize and see that, and help other people to see it. There are two conversions into Christ. The first is to leave the world and go to Christ. The second is to go back to the world with Christ to bring to the world what we discover... The power of the Gospel is an encounter of the love of God that changes us... Especially now, in the midst of chaos, they see in us something that can satisfy."

FORMATION COMMISSION: Moving forward with the vision

By DIANE MENDITTO, OFS
Chair, National Formation Commission

The weekend of August 30 to September 2, 2018, was particularly significant for formation in the United States. During that time, the National Executive Council, the National Formation Commission, regional formation directors and 11 invited Secular Franciscans with a passion for formation met at the

Savior Pastoral Center in Kansas City for a formation visioning workshop. We were joined by regional spiritual assistants who were just finishing their own workshop at the same venue.

In response to the challenge set by CIOFS that came out of the 2017 General Chapter, our purpose was to strengthen the focus on formation in the USA. During our workshop, we sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

After a Spirit-filled keynote by Fr. Dave Pivonka, TOR, we also heard a talk on "Transformative Visioning" by Anne Mulqueen, OFS, spiritual assistant to the Formation Commission, and on the "Realities of the Order" by Mary Stronach, OFS, then-international councilor. Inspired by these talks we broke into groups to discuss the following pivotal questions:

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MOVING FORWARD WITH THE VISION

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- What would the ideal Order look like?
- What is God's direction for the Order?
- Who does God want us to be?

(By the way, these questions might be used as discussion topics for ongoing formation.)

The feedback from the small discussion groups was powerful. We felt a sense of awe at how the Spirit had moved among us and led us in very similar directions.

The next portion of the workshop centered on specific areas which partici-

pants chose according to interests and expertise. These were:

- Fraternal life and relationships.
- Spiritual life, prayer and contemplation.
- Apostolates and outreach expressing the Franciscan Charism.
- Communications and social media.
- Essential documents.
- Scripture and Franciscan sources.
- Secular identity and the Franciscan charism.
- Commitment to the Order: Time,

Talent and Treasure.

- Servant leadership.
- Youth.
- Spiritual assistants and their relationship to the OFS.
- Discerning a vocation.
- Multiculturalism

These special interest groups discussed two questions:

- Relative to your topic, what needs to change in order to achieve the vision?
- What will formation in this area look like in light of God's vision for our Order?



FOLLOW UP TO THE WORKSHOP: Exciting time for formation in the USA

By **DIANE MENDITTO**, OFS
Chair, National Formation Commission

In the weeks following the workshop, the Formation Commission reviewed the responses. Many were similar and important enough that, as we begin to set our priorities and develop a plan, we will address them specifically.

When the workshop ended, the National Executive Council remained for a business meeting to which the members of the National Formation Commission were invited. I was honored to be asked to serve as commission chair. In turn, I invited two former members and four new members to join the commission. I would like you to get to know them:

- **Justin Carisio**, St. Katharine Drexel Region; professed in 1987; local formation director and member of team preparing spiritual assistants for the region.
- **Francine Gikow**, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region; professed in 1984;

local and regional formation teams and certified spiritual director.

- **Layna Maher**, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region; professed in 1999; regional and local formation director and certified local spiritual assistant.

- **Patrick Martin**, St. Margaret of Cortona Region; professed in 2007; past local and regional minister; on board of Franciscan Mission Service.

- **Mary Stronach**, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region; professed in 2003; former international councilor, member of international formation commission; national public relations co-chair.

- **Anne Mulqueen**, NFC spiritual assistant, St. Margaret of Cortona Region; professed in 1984; has been local, provincial, regional and national formation director (co-chair nationally); regional spiritual assistant.

The NFC and the NEC will again collaborate for *Visioning Part II*, to be held April 4-7, 2019, during which we will

use the data gathered at the first Visioning Workshop to put flesh on the vision for formation in the United States.

Our hopes for the future are many. We are updating the formation webpage. We are stressing communication among regional formation directors and formation team members on the NAFRA-FORM List-Serv. An updated version of the *Handbook for Formation Directors* is now available, and we will be getting to work on making the FUN Manual more user-friendly.

Soon we will reach out around the country to invite professed members to be part of 10 to 12 task forces, in their areas of expertise, which will address the priorities and directives of the Visioning initiative. We will be working with the directives presented by CIOFS as well.

As you can see, it is an exciting and vital time for formation in the Secular Franciscan Order.

Workshop for spiritual assistants

A CALL WITHIN A CALL, OFFERING COMPASSION/TENDERNESS RATHER THAN RIGIDITY

by MARY STRONACH, OFS

The Spiritual Assistant Workshop, held on August 29-30 at Savior Pastoral Center in Kansas City, started with an impromptu prayer by Sister Agnes Marie Regan, OSF. She asked the nearly 50 participants to hold out their open palms in prayer, saying, “The future of our Franciscan Order is in your hands.”

As main speaker for the event, Fr. Christopher Panogoplos, TOR, national spiritual assistant, embraced the prayer, reminding the spiritual assistants of their responsibilities to the members, to the Order and to the Church. “Our Franciscan vocation is a life, not a ministry. Our identity is not in what we do; rather, it is in how we do whatever it is we do,” he said. We bring “quality of presence, an attitude of service.” This gift should be: “self-giving, offering our availability, closeness, humility, and mindfulness” to the present moment.

“The approach is how to reach out pastorally: by listening, by dialogue, finding the road to mercy within the Rule, to meet situations with compassion and tenderness rather than with

juridical rigidity,” he noted. “Don’t judge. Listen. That’s where communication begins. Take the whole person. Do not judge the illness. Flesh out where they are coming from – emotionally, physically, spiritually. That’s pastoral... Establish a relationship.”

Fr. Christopher recommended that, as spiritual assistants, we follow Pope St. John XXIII’s advice to “see everything, overlook a great deal, correct a little.”

He cited the qualities for effective relationships: trust, meditation, respect, patience, attentiveness, suffering, creative fidelity.

We should offer a “balanced authority (between) tenderness and strength... To be truly and fully human is to accept and respect the difference, to communicate with, admire, marvel at, and make an alliance with the masculinity and femininity within oneself and with others... Francis accepted the feminine part of himself, tenderness. Clare accepted the masculine part of herself, her strength.”

Quoting Pope Francis, he said we should be involved in a “Revolution of Tenderness... not to change the truth

but to change our ethos: the character of the culture. The Church is to radiate more of God’s mercy and tenderness.”

Father Christopher broached the subject of the polarization we have in the Order, in the Church and government today. “We need to see the world, not as our enemy, but as our child; the child may be belligerent, may make mistakes... but the child is not your enemy... Pro-choice people are not an enemy; they are our sisters and brothers, our families. It’s not them/us, only us. When we see the world as enemy, then we become protective, defensive; you don’t protect yourself against your child.”

He suggested that Catholic social teaching can overcome polarization: “Catholic social teaching on the dignity of all human life, solidarity with the poor, the immigrants and refugees, and care for the environment can unite Catholics in working for the common good.” He added a quote from Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez: “See, judge, act -- as a method of discernment. Seeing what current social realities are, judging them in light of the

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Fr. Christopher

WORKSHOP FOR SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

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Church's social teaching, then acting to make those realities more just."

In addressing the issue of multiculturalism, he said: "The task is to understand diversity without destroying essential unity. The rich history of the Church in its multiple settings shows how local cultures have enriched rather than diminished the Church. Through courage and humility, by widening his own space in heart, St. Francis moved the Sultan's heart. ... The task, for formation to succeed, includes an in-depth understanding of the essence of Catho-

lic tradition and of the cultural variation found within the tradition."

So, how do we live our lives as Franciscans? He quotes Brother William Short, OFM, who offers three Franciscan responses:

1. To refocus our energies on the essential rather than the peripheral; that is, on the suffering of our world rather than Church politics. Recognize, acknowledge and respond to suffering in our world, Church, nation, communities and families.
2. To become reconciling presences in

every circumstance of our lives.

3. To seek conversion of heart through pondering, praying and preparing to act in Christ's name.

We can bring into harmony those around us who are estranged. We might "start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly we will be doing the impossible." As impossible as it may seem that any one of us can make a difference in our fractured world, imagine if 13,000 Secular Franciscans performed one reconciling act every day; what a different world we will know!

SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS AND 'ALTIVS MODERAMEN'

In the afternoon session of the workshop, National Spiritual Assistant Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap discussed the Rules and Guidelines for selecting and appointing a Spiritual Assistant.

He emphasized that it is important to provide on-going formation for local Spiritual Assistants...to perhaps gather them together at a regional event for formation.

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, national spiritual assistant, addressed the Altius Moderamen -- the fraternal responsibility that the First and Third Order friars have to ensure the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan Family. He asked, "How do we Franciscans talk about and live out



Brother Alexander and Father Jerome

this relationship, this bond?" He said that the friars need to cooperate. All obediences share this responsibility. Citing Article 89.1 of the General Constitutions, he said spiritual assistants should

be ensured at all levels of fraternity. It is the responsibility of the provincials. "The Franciscan Major Superior is responsible for the quality of pastoral service," he said.

