

'Hearts Alive'

Special section by
BOB & MARY STRONACH, OFS

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE NATIONAL CHAPTER

by PAT CHALMERS, OFS

The National Chapter of Secular Franciscan Order, held September 26 to October 1, saw 'hearts alive' and in action.

The Chapter pulled our hearts together (the engines of our beings). We were fueled by the Holy Spirit. He united us in the bonds of Fraternity.

Over 80 regional ministers and guests travelled from as near as Holy Trinity Region, the chapter host, and as far away as Guam, nearly halfway around the world. This gathering brought to mind a chapter called by Francis of Assisi in our fraternal early days. The site of the gathering (Mount Saint Francis, Indiana; just northwest of Louisville, KY), while uniquely Franciscan, was considerably

more hospitable and modern than the 13th century hills of Italy. Yet that spirit of Franciscanism was evident in all we did. As Francis himself noted in the Siena Testament: *"Write that I bless all my brothers, (those) who are in the Order, and who will come until the end of the world... Let them always love and be faithful to our Lady Holy Poverty, and let them always be faithful and subject to the prelates and clerics of Holy Mother Church."*

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'Peace' Award Reveals a Journey of 'Yes'

by MARY STRONACH, OFS

Lisa Kremer, OFS is "one who keeps saying 'yes'."

That "yes" journey, which began in 2002 with her Secular Franciscan profession and a trip to Guatemala, led to her receiving the 2017 Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Award at the National Chapter.

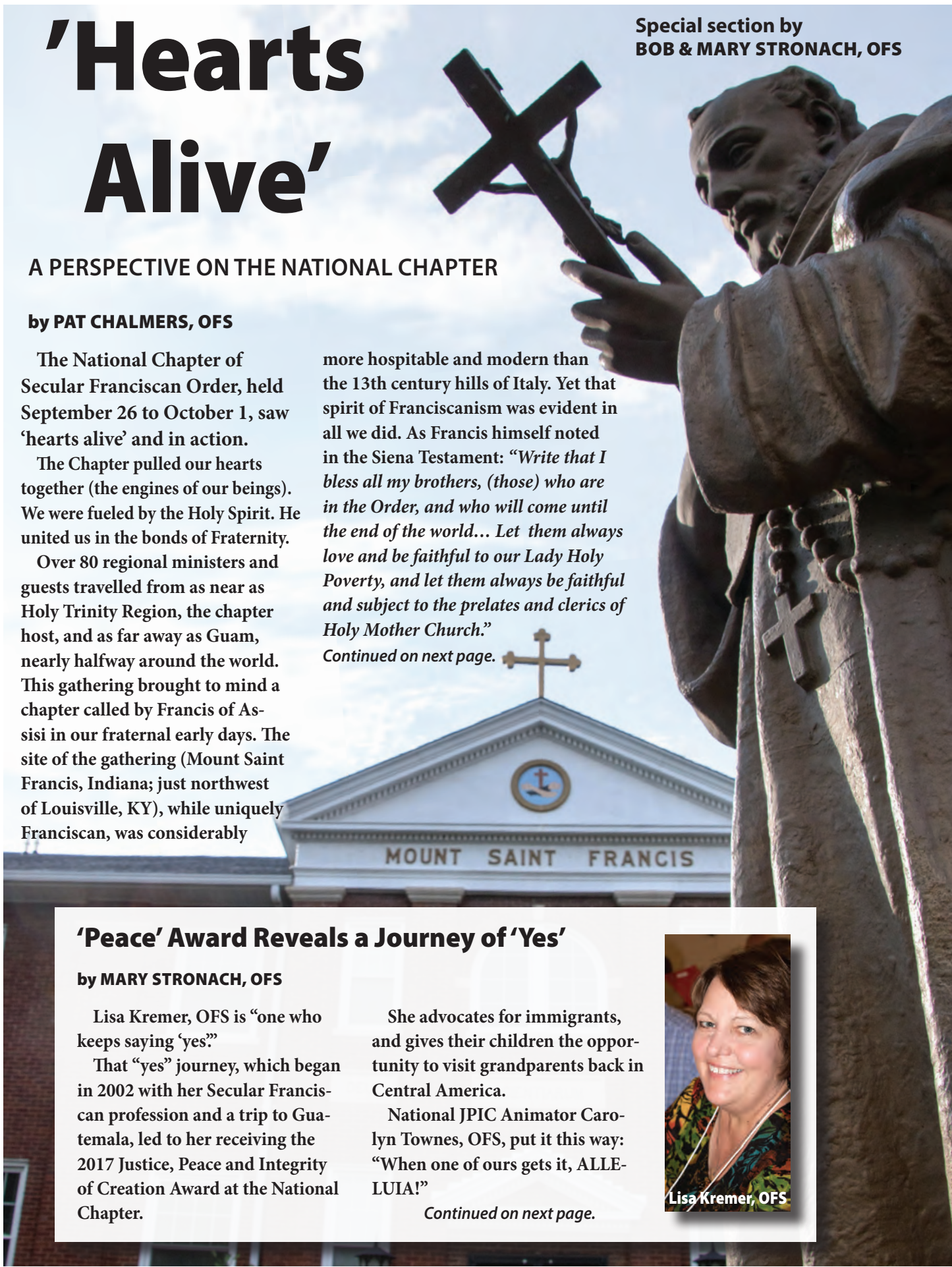
She advocates for immigrants, and gives their children the opportunity to visit grandparents back in Central America.

National JPIC Animator Carolyn Townes, OFS, put it this way: "When one of ours gets it, ALLELUIA!"

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Lisa Kremer, OFS





Chapter participants were often smiling when not adding spirited voices to the discussion.

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National spiritual assistants, friars (priests and brothers), deacons – all joined with their secular brothers and sisters to animate this Chapter.

A typical work day went for 11 hours with breaks interspersed for meals, prayer, and free time. The actual work time was about 8 hours, plus or minus. Time devoted to group prayer amounted to about an hour and a half. The meetings chained together smoothly,

linking ideas, discussions, imperatives, and decisions into a smooth flowing “instrumentum laboris.” This instrument of work seemed nearly musical in both form and function.

Which brings us to rushing (literally) through meetings -- meetings that examined our animation with regards to: Formation (direction, directors, way & means); Duns Scotus Fund; Franciscan Action Network (FAN); our National Fraternity; Instrumentum Laboris; our

2018 theme; spiritual assistance; ongoing formation. And other priorities such as vocations, communications, ecumenical/interfaith, finances, and, where we are going.

The accompanying dialogue seemed truly inspired. It’s no wonder that National Minister Jan Parker so often prayed:

“Let us be fully open to the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

JPIC AWARD *continued from previous page*

2002 was a pivotal year – a conversion experience, her profession, and a campus ministry trip to Guatemala.

Going to an underdeveloped country and getting to know Guatemalans made such an impact that she returned five years later. But this time, she decided to change the name from a “mission” trip to an “awareness” trip. In 2009, she said “yes” again for another trip.

By this time, Lisa had moved to Worthington, Minnesota, where there is a large group of Guatemalans. She became friends with these people. Here, a Guatemalan housekeeper in the local rectory asked Lisa to visit her mom whom she had not seen for 15 years. The mother lived in a rural, indigenous, dangerous region. Based on the advice of the parish priest who said that God wanted her to go, she journeyed to San Marcos with a driver and bodyguard. Lisa met with the families but felt guilty because the Guatemalan children back



Lisa Kremer, OFS, with National JPIC Animator Carolyn Townes, OFS

home could not visit their extended families, especially grandparents, in the home of their ancestors.

A revelation got Lisa to take action... While the parents are undocumented and cannot risk journeying back to their homeland, the children are US citizens. They can travel freely and openly and meet and enjoy the families their

parents had left behind in Guatemala. “Familias Juntas” (Connected Families) was born! “God opened all doors,” said Lisa. Around the same time Lisa met a Guatemalan filmmaker, Luis Argueta, who wanted to document the journey.

While concerned about the risks of such an open activity, the parents

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Challenges Help Set Priorities, National Minister Reports

'WE ARE BLESSED WITH THE GIFT OF GOD'S POWER!'

National Minister Jan Parker began the State of the Order report leading all in song and giving thanks to God for the bonds of fraternity. In particular she noted the growing bond with our OFS brothers and sisters around the world. Citing both "joys and struggles" during the year, she said that "challenges help us set priorities."

Jan outlined each area of priority stating the importance of:

- solid formation,
- the active presence of Spiritual Assistants,
- a coordinated communications structure,
- wider public relations,
- a new website,



- improvements to the database,
- our responsibilities in the area of social justice.

"We do so well in the our charitable outreach," she said, "but bringing our voice to public policy is part of the Bishop's call for love in action, and part of our call."

She announced:

- an upcoming survey to coordinate outreach to other countries,
- a new Vocations Toolkit to assist local fraternities in their efforts,
- a Guidelines Task Force to review and publish national policies.

Noting the importance of a "brand," Jan unveiled the new OFS-USA logo –

an original artistic version of the TAU that is "more alive."

Stating that "servant leadership is not easy," she reminded council members to turn to each other for support especially when facing decisions for the good of the Order. Pointing to a San Damiano cross, she said, "Here is where we find our strength."

In closing Jan led all in a blessing based on the Beatitudes, stating that *we have been blessed with the gift of power.*

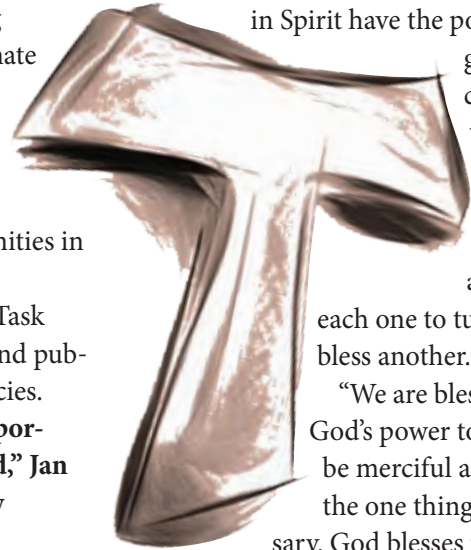
Beginning with, "the gentle poor in Spirit have the power to

give," she continued this litany of God's empowerment, and asked

each one to turn and bless another.

"We are blessed with God's power to unite, to be merciful and to find the one thing necessary. God blesses us, and

we in turn bless each other in so many ways!"



JPIC AWARD *continued from previous page*

agreed, feeling that the story needed to be told. The film, called "Abrazos", which means "hugs" in Spanish, was recently shown to Pope Francis.

Since that first amazing family reunion, Lisa made a number of trips to introduce children to their grandparents.

Lisa's ministry now encompasses a network of volunteers, advocating for families, providing transportation and support for immigration court, connecting with immigration lawyers, visiting people in jail, and supporting families of those who have been deported. She also has a "Dreamcatcher's Program" that helps these "bright" kids envision a better future.

Lisa tells the story of a young women she met in Guatemala who provided this perspective:

"You (U.S. volunteers) come to Guatemala on an airplane. We invite you into our homes and maybe feed you food we can't afford to give our children... We come to your country on a long trip across the desert. We leave our families behind, go into debt. When we get to your country, we're sick, injured and called illegal. We work the worst jobs, hiding all the time for fear that someone will send us back..."

Lisa took a long pause, and added: "And that's why the poor will inherit the kingdom of heaven."



2018

NATIONAL THEME

Renewed and Confirmed:
Live the Treasure!

(Celebrating 40 years
of our OFS Rule)

THE BUSINESS OF THE ORDER

NATIONAL CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

Finances

Treasurer Jerry Rousseau, OFS, provided an overview of the Treasurer's report. He mentioned the use of restricted accounts with donations to CIOFS (international council of the Secular Franciscan Order) for help with costs for the General Chapter, including the funding for travel to the General Chapter for English-speaking African nations and the H2O Collections project. The report was approved.



The budget for 2018 is up approximately \$20,000 to a total of \$306,782, but, Jerry emphasized, there would be no need to increase Fair Share. The budget won unanimous approval.

New Website

Lee Potts, OFS, the new website designer, unveiled the shell of the new NAFRA website. A goal is to have a modern site which will attract young people. It should be useful to members and people who don't know about the Order. There was a positive response to the detail revealed which included an events calendar, a translation feature and a secured back-up system.



Lee Potts, OFS, discusses development of a new NAFRA website.

Charitable Giving

The Charitable Giving Task Force recommended the distribution of \$13,000 to 13 charities. The amounts for each were determined by the number of votes received by each charity. The charities were: Villa la Paz Foundation, Holy Cross Retreat Center, Amazon Relief, To The Nations Inc., Outreach to First Nation People, Franciscan Family Apostolate, Remedio entre Todos, Franciscan Ministries, Holy Family Vocational Orphanage Foundation in Uganda, St. Francis Inn, Franciscan Mission Service, Blessed Mary Angela Spirituality Center Among the Poor, and Franciscan Federation for the Holy Land. The recommendations of the Task Force were approved by the body.

Duns Scotus

The Duns Scotus Fund may be used for OFS Formation projects. Grants are based on merit and financial need.

Fostering Stronger Ties with Bishops

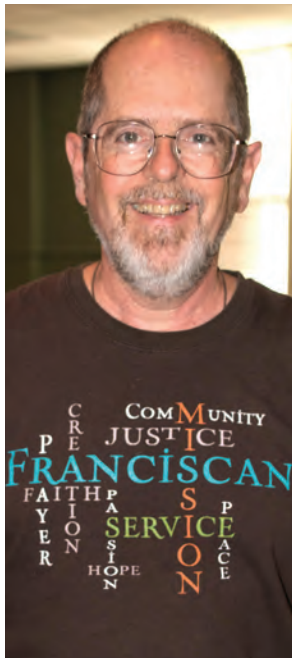
In a discussion directed by David Seitz, OFS, on fostering Regional Fraternity relationships with local bishops, several suggestions were shared:

- Write letters to bishop stating who we are, which fraternities are in their diocese and contact.
- When the bishop visits the parish (for confirmation, etc), it is an opportunity to introduce yourself and thank him for guidance.
- Share newsletter with bishops, provincials, provincial SAs.
- Send anniversary cards to Bishop on date of appointment.
- RMs should introduce themselves to Bishop.
- Invite the bishop or his representative to anniversary celebrations and Franciscan Feast days.
- The more we are involved in parish and diocesan life, the more people know about the OFS.
- Suggest interviews in diocesan newsletters.
- Get into the diocesan directory.

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Franciscan Mission Service Partnership

Patrick Martin, OFS, president of the board of Franciscan Mission Services (FMS), proposed a partnership with the OFS. Founded in 1985, FMS sends lay people to serve in



other countries and then brings them back on “reverse mission” – to share the experience with communities in the U.S.

Patrick requested:

- Prayer.
- Participants for an OFS Short Term Mission Trip (1-2 weeks to Bolivia or Guatemala, approximately \$2K per person).
- Information and talent sharing. He is willing to help share with young adults.
- Keeping returned missionaries involved in the Franciscan family.
- Money. OFS has been very generous in the past.

Patrick said this partnership is directed to Regional and Local fraternities. Any interested OFS can contact Patrick for information. There are no budgetary implications for NAFRA. Patrick added: “This could be an opportunity to bring young adults into our Order.”

Franciscan Youth

New Youth Commission Chair Kathleen Molaro, OFS, is facing some challenges, she says, especially with distance and with a lack of animators for Franciscan youth in fraternities.



There’s opportunity in a “large diversity of youth.”

This past summer’s Youth Visioning Workshop helped Kathleen begin to assess and embrace the challenge of reaching Franciscan Youth. She explained that during the process, drafts of an updated vision and mission statement were written, a list of tasks were identified, a timeline was determined and the makeup of a commission were highlighted.

World Youth Day, she added, is scheduled for January 2019. “We are compelled to go,” she said. “We must... And let us become the bridge (as Mary is the bridge to Christ, as represented in the logo for World Youth Day).”



Willie Guadalupe, OFS, new chair for Multiculturalism and Diversity.

Multicultural Brothers and Sisters

“Discover a friend!” urged Willie Guadalupe, new chair for Multiculturalism and Diversity. “Diversity acknowledges differences. Multiculturalism accepts differences,” she explained, adding several actions that we, as OFS members should be doing to embrace our brothers and sisters and to discover a new friend: “Recognize diversity. Respect differences. Acknowledge. Value. Encourage. Empower. Celebrate rather than tolerate. Be proactive in listening. Accept all people as a gift of God.”

“This is a justice issue,” she said. “We cannot tolerate actions that deny basic human justice.”

After charting projected growth of various population groups, she addressed the issues of language, of having bilingual fraternities and formation materials, and resources in other languages.

She recommended that the attendees assess the pulse of their communities, develop strategies to attract multicultural candidates and consider bilingual fraternities where that sense of fraternity is experienced by all members.

No Vacation from Vocation

“There is never a vacation from your vocation,” reminded Vocations Chair Jane DeRose-Bamman. “Spreading the word is everyone’s responsibility.”

To that end, “we need a variety of tools to build the kingdom,” she said, explaining that a vocations toolkit would be available in early 2018. Among the tools to promote the Order are promotional items like: pens, stickers, magnets, t-shirts, license plate holders. The new on-line toolkit will include: A Come & See Outline, prayers, business cards, brochures, social media access, the new logo, on-line testimonials, and Spanish and Korean tools.

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Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee

Donna Hollis, OFS, a member of the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee, shared her emotional journey of faith to Ca-



tholicism and to Francis triggered by her viewing of the movie, *Brother Sun Sister Moon*. Her anti-Catholic parents and her initial concerns about Mary's role didn't sway her. She reported that, after some years, her mother, who was initially angry with the church because her best friend became a cloistered nun, also became Catholic.

"We go through life with misconceptions, but we still have to be open to new people...we must draw together at one table."

At the end of her session, she invited those interested to view the new video that the committee produced on building awareness to what ecumenism is and what they are doing. The title of the video is: "The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity: An Instrument of Peace."

CNSA Report

With the departure of Brother Bob Brady, OFM, from the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA), the CNSA consists of only two national spiritual assistants.



Brother Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap., announced that he was actively reaching out to the four obediences to address the need. He also spoke to the issue of initiating an abuse prevention program. "We need a policy," he said. "Certification must be in effect before placement for a spiritual assistant. It is required for all – present and

future."

Loving Farewell to Brother Bob

Was it a roast or a toast? Memories abounded. Love overflowed. Applause of appreciation filled the room when the attendees said their goodbyes to National Spiritual Assistant Br. Bob Brady, OFM. After comparing him to a piano, a finely-tuned instrument, *with a shiny top*, Fr. Christopher Panogoplos, TOR, gave him a touching send-off by saying, "We will continue to honor you by our Franciscan living."

As part of his closing remarks, Brother Bob said: "My hopes are that you commit yourselves to find ways to reach out to those who have less than yourselves – to help fill the void."



Fr. Christopher Panogoplos, TOR

A Brief History of the Order

During one session, Fr. Christopher Panogoplos, TOR, provided a brief historical overview of the Franciscan family, reminding attendees of their origins as the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. "The name of the order includes the word 'penance.'"

Our first rule was approved in 1289 by Pope Nicholas IV. After that time, many left their homes to live in community, following the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Thus, he said, in 1447 the Third Order Regulars (TOR) grew from our roots. The TORs, he said, are our "children." "The Third Order Regular has come from you."

In 1927 with the rule approved by Pius XI, we were all banded together into one, including religious sisters and priests. This rule emphasized daily conversion, he said.

Next year, we are celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the OFS Rule of 1978 and the TOR will be celebrating the 35th Anniversary of their updated rule.



Brother Bob and Father Christopher.

Formation Team Serves Franciscan 'Tea' for the Soul

If the National Formation Team has its way, Franciscans can savor a cup of tea in a variety of charismatic flavors.

Or, as the theme for their presentation put it: *"Tea for your Franciscan soul: A moment of retreat."*

Headed by Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS, the team served National Chapter attendees a cup of "tea" by handing out cards, each with a different selection of Franciscan "tea" bags. They included words that end with a "tea" sound (or the letters "ty"); namely, authenticity, unity, activity, hilarity, diversity, formability, priority, sensitivity, hospitality, spirituality, poverty, humility, simplicity, charity, fraternity.

What is the essence of our "tea?" they asked. They urged attendees to smell the "aroma" of their "tea." How does it blend with one's identity as a Francis-



Formation Commission Chair Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS, and Formation Spiritual Assistant Anne Mulqueen, OFS.

can? How does this "ty" manifest itself in one's life? What might God be inviting one to do?

Soft music in the background allowed the attendees time to consider and process how their "-ty" word fit into their Franciscan reality and to allow God to

speak to them.

A few shared observations:

- *Formability* – It's like "clay. I must learn when to stop to determine who is forming me." -- Patsy Phillips, OFS, *Los Tres Compañeros*.

- *Humility* "goes well with humble pie-ty." -- Linda Trythall, OFS, *Our Lady of the Rockies*.

- *Activity* – "If you're not going to do anything, then why wear the TAU? Re-define your activity based upon your shell (wearing of Tau)." -- Jeane Swaynos, OFS, *Five Franciscan Martyrs*.

- *Authenticity* – "There was no duplicity in Francis. He was all in." -- David Seitz, OFS, *Divine Mercy*.

In closing, the team urged: "Take your 'tea' with you and sip it with other people."

U.S. Order Declares Solidarity with Refugees, Poor, Those Facing Hatred

On behalf of 12,000 Secular Franciscans across the U.S., the National Fraternity issued a statement at the Chapter declaring "our solidarity with those who are immersed in situations that cause division, fear, and hopelessness."

The statement pointed to "refugees fleeing unbearable conditions," families in poverty, and people trapped "where racism, hatred, and violence prevail."

The statement expressed concern over the "failure of Congress to act on issues of immigration." Noting their Rule challenges Secular Franciscans to be "at the forefront of promoting justice" and to "strive to bring joy and hope to others," the statement challenged "all people of faith" to: "take actions that promote peace and justice; work to change policies that disrespect the dignity of the

least among us; offer a helping hand to those in need; and pray always."

The statement concludes: "Pope Francis has told us that it is time, in doing this important work, for us to witness 'patient expectation and apostolic endurance.' (Evangelii Gaudium) It is time for us to become 'this hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast.'" (Heb. 6: 19)

GEO Groups Discuss Franciscan Action Network

During the National Chapter, Geographical (GEO) Groups were formed of about ten regional ministers each to address several topics, including Franciscan Action Network (FAN). The groups offered a variety of perspectives on whether the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order should continue funding FAN.

Some teams supported the National

Executive Council's recommendation to fund FAN for one more year. "We need a seat at the table (referring to the fact that Carlos Calderón, OFS, was invited to serve on the board). We must continue the dialogue to clarify expectations."

"Be more transparent on the Hill and don't just have controversial rhetoric," said another team. "Rhetoric is the

problem. Francis didn't do it this way."

Another team suggested that we "be our own Secular Franciscan voice... We should have more control, more involvement and not give it away."

Once all teams presented their perspectives, the body had an open discussion, and voted overwhelmingly to fund FAN for another year.

Chapter's Masses Offer Advice on Living the Gospel

Daily Masses at the National Chapter were not only food for the soul, but offered insights on priority living.

Setting priorities is a “familiar struggle,” noted Lexington, KY Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.

“Sometimes it’s easier to practice faith with struggles. It’s harder to give proper priority when things are easier.”

Presiding at Mass on the third day of the chapter, the bishop asked: “Did you ever notice that all the money-making in the world is not satisfying?”

The challenge is “living the Gospel message in secularity.” That’s what it means to be Franciscan. “We need to bring things into perspective and priorities.”

If we were to set the right priorities, he challenged attendees to imagine, “What if we make the powers nervous because we’re promoting life, had policies that promote family life, the dignity of the worker? What if we made the powers nervous, making a splash, making them perplexed, creating a stir?”

He added: “Recognize the words of Jesus as a transformative event and put the Gospel forward. Challenge those who make it difficult to put the Gospel into practice.” That should be the priority.

At another Mass, Fr. Ed McKenzie, OFM, provincial spiritual assistant for Sacred Heart Province, pointed to “leadership” as a priority. “Others flow



Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.

from this.”

“We’re here as leaders of the Order and the Messiah is among us. We were led here by someone and chosen to lead others.”

In the case of Jesus, he needed 12 leaders to kick-start the process and then pass it on to others. Success is hinged on choosing the right people.

The goal to becoming a better leader is a never-ending process, he said.

Jesus says, what you see is what you get with a leader. “Don’t put on airs. Practice what you preach. Call a spade a spade. This can rub people the wrong

way, but then, love is tough. Tell it like it is.”

Another leadership quality is to be able to change your mind. You “need to be open to the facts, even those that don’t support our position. Be open to possibility. Often we become immovable. My road or the highway.”

A leader should be “a thoughtful and reflective person, careful in considering things,” so “think before you act.”

As leaders, we “embrace the values important to Francis – honesty, humility, faith, generosity.”

“A good leader is honest about his faith and his doubts. That’s sincerity.”

At the opening Mass, National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Christopher Panopoulos, TOR, pointed to the priority of Gospel-inspired action.

The “Gospel will never be politically correct,” he said. “The Secular Franciscan Order will never be politically correct. We must leave our comfort zones...where we will be challenged...to travel with those left for dead.”

He added: “We’re confronted with so many challenges threatening Gospel living... We come to this holy place to discuss what we are about, not just by words but by action. We take to heart what the church is asking us to do joyfully.”

He added: “You know who the lepers are. Reach out so they can feel the love of God.”

GEO Groups Tackle Priorities for ‘Instrumentum Laboris’

GEO Groups tackled the issues and recommendations set forth by the document entitled “Instrumentum Laboris,” which was submitted by CIOFS to national fraternities for review and recommendations on priorities.

Instrumentum Laboris addressed eight priority areas: Formation, Fraternal Life, Building a Fraternal and

Evangelical World, Leadership, Communications, Finance, Spiritual Assistance, Franciscan Youth. Each area offered proposals based on the recommendation of the national fraternities around the world.

Following the GEO groups’ presentations, the body decided that top priorities for the U.S. Order were: Forma-

tion, Communication, Leadership and Fraternal Life.

The National Fraternity decided to support the priorities financially in principal, especially formation, but wanted to wait until the General Chapter decided what to support and approve, and the types of funding the International Fraternity would need.

Youth Visioning & JPIC Animation CONCURRENT SUMMER WORKSHOPS



Br. Richard Contino, OSF

“We’re preparing the next greatest generation.”

That’s how Br. Richard Contino, OSF, views Franciscan youth ministry.

It was a statement that resonated with a dozen Secular Franciscans who were envisioning how to bring to life an OFS youth/young adult (YYA) program in the U.S.

Meeting in St. Louis, MO, July 27-30, in conjunction with a gathering of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) animators, the group tackled a vision and potential action items for reviving the YYA commission.

“If Franciscans can’t be a presence for youth, who can?” said Friar Richard, an educator with the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn. He was a featured presenter for the group, comprised of three national officers and Secular Franciscans involved in youth ministries.

“Be authentic,” the friar urged. Authenticity “is what kids are seeking today.” That’s “where we start, and I do

think we have a phenomenal story (in the Franciscan charism).”

Describing interaction with youth as a kind of “cross-pollination,” the friar pointed to Franciscans as being “living instruments.” In other words, “we help lead them where God wants them to be.”

“Engagement” is a key word, he noted. “It’s being a teacher and a mentor.”

As far as being authentic and engaging, Friar Richard pointed to the words said during a deacon’s ordination as painting a state of action to emulate:

“Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you preach.” That sums up what St. Francis was: Authentic.

A couple of 30-somethings in the group pointed to some common interests that youth have.

“They’re concerned about dating,” Heather Cherniak, OFS, said, noting that they wonder about being professed

and often ask, “What’s it like dating as a Secular Franciscan?”

Kelly Moltzen, an OFS candidate active with Franciscan Action Network, pointed to the way youth tune into social justice issues. “That’s the way to get youth engaged.” Others quickly agreed that JPIC appeals to younger folk because it’s a way to take action and be involved in something meaningful.

Meanwhile, in a nearby room, the JPIC animators were sharing their challenges and successes, nourishing one another.

“Are you a truly Spirit-filled animator?” challenged National JPIC Animator Carolyn Townes.

“It’s not a job. It’s a ministry,” she reminded them. “It’s the Holy Spirit’s job. It’s yours to animate.” In other words, “we have to allow the Spirit to guide us.”

She said they could “make a better impact through divine intervention.” “Not my will. Thy will be done.”



Heather Cherniak, OFS; Kelly Moltzen, OFS candidate, and JPIC’s Carolyn Townes, OFS.