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TAU-USA

A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN
ORDER

Fall 2020 Issue 101



PRAISE BE TO YOU: ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

5th Anniversary of Laudato Si'

Mission to Share the Vision

The TAU-USA, a publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States, is a vital communication link between the OFS-USA leadership and all candidates and all professed Secular Franciscans throughout the United States. The articles within the publication, while sharing the Secular Franciscan charism and vision, are intended to inform, inspire, and challenge.



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OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA



NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker OFS

"What are the servants of God if not His minstrels, who must lift people's hearts and move them up to spiritual joy?"

The Assisi Compilation from Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 2, pg. 186

It seems every article I have read lately begins with the phrase, "In these unprecedented times..." So true. We have seen too much sickness and death. Too much injustice. Too much division. We hear voices of righteous anger, and cries for help. Many on the front lines are stretched beyond their abilities as the stress of this pandemic takes its toll, not to mention the social unrest and the political strife that surrounds us. Many are weary, many are frightened, and many are in need of hope.

I am among the weary, but far from losing hope. One reason for that is you, my Franciscan brothers and sisters. Throughout the long and challenging months of this past summer, my spirits have been uplifted by your words and witness.

A few weeks ago, our General Minister, Tibor Kauser, sent us a video message of encouragement. I hope you all had a chance to view it.¹ Tibor shared a quote from our Constitutions which is so applicable at this time: ***"Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future."*** (GC 26.1)

I have seen this lived out by you in a great variety of ways these past months, and I have never felt more confident in the vitality of the Order. The pandemic is not squelching our desire for

fraternity—it is strengthening it. We are moving forward in new ways, responding in faith to the signs of the times. As Donna Hollis recently said, *"Just as Clare lived in an historic time and made a way for women to follow their calling; we are making a way to live through this pandemic, which is also a very historic time."*

In this issue of the *TAU-USA* are contributions from OFS members across the country. These words and stories give witness to the many ways Franciscans are living the Gospel, making visible the living and active presence of Christ, witnessing to the good yet to come, and calling all to believe in the transforming power of love and pardon.² We journey together in love and compassion. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

I will share a little story with you. It was the end of a long day. I was tired and stressed. All I could think of were all the things I had hoped to do that day but had not yet accomplished. I turned on my computer to answer some emails and clicked on one from LaVerna Region. It was the latest edition of *La Verna Vision*. I took some time and scrolled through the pages of this newsletter, noticing all the news and happenings. I suddenly stopped when, right in the middle of my screen appeared a photo of Regional Minister Jeff Gumz holding out a slice of homemade cherry pie. Right there, in the mix of all the news, announcements and formation articles was an invitation to enjoy some cherry pie!

¹ See "Message from OFS Presidency: Hope and Joy" on the CIOFS website <https://ciofs.info/>

² OFS Rule, Articles 5, 12 and 19, along with the rest of the OFS Rule

It's hard to describe what happened at that moment. It was as if St. Francis himself had come into my room carrying a steaming bowl of porridge and, with a grin on his face and a twinkle in his eyes, he was holding it out for me to take and enjoy. All I know is that a big smile came to my face, and my worries just disappeared.

The words to a song come to mind as I think of it: *"In the love come from God, I now entreat you, put away all your cares, and be free from every possession, coming freely to love, and to serve and to honor the Lord."* I had been visited by Sister Simplicity. Perfect joy filled my heart. It just goes to show how simple

pleasures and the joy of good food are such a part of our charism—and how in the midst of all we are called to do we must sometimes just stop, put aside our to-do lists, pick up our fiddle sticks, dance a bit, and then enjoy some cherry pie!

Yes, in many ways our world has been turned upside-down, and the struggles are real, but so is the grace we have been given to live our Franciscan vocation. May the stories in these pages be a source of inspiration and fraternal encouragement, and may spiritual joy fill your hearts! Peace and all good.

Your sister, Jan



Jeff Gumz, OFS with his homemade cherry pie with vanilla ice cream topping

From the La Verna Vision:

"Jeff is always busy with something: family, high school teacher, working with Secular Franciscans, Lambeau Field Stadium tour guide. Now, his busy schedule also includes baking a cherry pie! Jeff says that one of his joys of living in Northeastern Wisconsin during late July is cherry picking, and Door County, Wisconsin, is famous for their cherries. So now is your opportunity to join in and enjoy a piece of cherry pie. But first you have to prepare it."



Door County, fresh picked cherries

2018-2021 National Priority: Fraternity Life

BUILDING FRATERNITY: ADVICE FROM SCRIPTURE AND ST. FRANCIS

by Mary Bittner, OFS

"Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and *the witness of building fraternity sincerely and openly* are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love" (OFS General Constitutions Art. 100).

Given that building fraternity is intrinsic to Secular Franciscan life and forms one of our principal services to the Church, how do we go about it? St. Francis in his *Earlier Rule* and the words of Scripture give us much practical advice about fostering fraternity spirit and growth. Take some time to ponder each quotation. As followers of Christ in the footsteps of Francis, how might we put his words into practice?

Love is the basis of fraternity. "And they should love one another, as the Lord says: *This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved*

you (Jn 15:12). And let them express the love which they have for one another by their deeds (cf. Jas 2:18), as the Apostle says *Let us not love in word or in speech, but in deed and in truth* (1Jn 3:18)" *ER XI 5-6*. "In brotherly love let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression" (Rm 12:10). This may seem so obvious as to be not worth mentioning, yet Francis stresses that a genuine love of the brothers and sisters is of primary importance in fraternity life. He reminds us that it is easy to assume that we love someone until we're called upon to do it.

Make building fraternity a priority. "And wherever the brothers are and in whatever place they meet other brothers, they must greet one another wholeheartedly and lovingly, and *honor one another without complaining* (1 Pt 4:9)" *ER VII 15*.

“And each one should confidently make known his need to the other, so that he might find what he needs and minister it to him. And each one should love and care for his brother in all those things in which God will give him grace, as a mother loves and cares for her son (cf. 1 Th 2:7)” *ER IX 10-11*. “So then, let us be always seeking the ways which lead to peace and the ways in which we can support one another” (Rm 14:19). Fraternity doesn’t happen automatically, without significant effort on our part. It takes time to develop. We need to give it high priority and be willing to work to make it a reality.

Don’t be judgmental. “Let them not judge or condemn. And as the Lord says, they should not take notice of the little defects of others (cf. Mt 7:3; Lk 6:41)” *ER XI 10-11*. “And let all the brothers, both the ministers and servants as well as the others, take care not to be disturbed or angered at the sin or evil of another, because the devil wishes to destroy many through the fault of one; but they should spiritually help [the brother] who has sinned as best they can, because *it is not the healthy who are in need of the physician, but those who are sick* (cf. Mt 9:12; Mk 2: 17). “Let us each stop passing judgment, therefore, on one another and decide instead that none of us will place obstacles in any brother’s way or anything that can bring him down” (Rm 14:13). Being judgmental is one of the easiest ways to poison the spirit of the fraternity.

Don’t gossip. “Let them not murmur nor detract from others, for it is written: *Gossips and detractors are detestable to God* (Rm 1:29-30)” *ER XI 8*. We don’t usually think that indulging in gossip is a serious matter, but it too poisons the spirit of the fraternity.

Willingly show forgiveness. Francis, in his *Letter to a Minister*, gives the topic of forgiveness a telling introduction: “And by this I wish to know if you love the Lord God and me, his servant and yours—if you have acted in this manner: that is, there should not be any brother in the world who has sinned, however much he may possibly have sinned, who, after he has looked into your eyes, would go away without having received your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not to seek mercy, you should ask him if he wants mercy. And if he should sin thereafter a thousand times before your very eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him back to the Lord” *Letter to a Minister 9-11*. Even in our fraternities, we will have many opportunities to apply this advice.

“Well,” someone might say, “this emphasis on building fraternity is all well and good, but isn’t it a bit inward-looking? Are you saying we should just focus on ourselves and our own little group?” No, not at all. As Secular Franciscans, as we build fraternity we serve the Church, and we assist our members to bring the Gospel life to the world.

Discussion Questions

1. Francis’s emphasis on love always comes with the admonition to show love in *deed*, as indeed does Scripture. Which articles of the OFS Rule relate to this most basic element of building fraternity? What do they ask us to do?
2. Is building fraternity a high priority for you and your fraternity? Would others agree with your self-assessment? How has your fraternity grown in this over the last several years? How might you try to improve?
3. Francis particularly asks that we not take notice of the little defects of others. Why? Why do you think Francis was so concerned that his brothers not judge each other, and not be angered by the sin of another? What happens when we do get angry at another’s sin? How do we then respond to the one who sinned?
4. Why are gossip and being judgmental so detrimental to a fraternity? How can they be countered?
5. Why does Francis consider the way in which we forgive and show mercy to our brothers and sisters to be evidence of whether we “love the Lord God and me, his servant and yours?” What experiences have helped you learn to forgive?



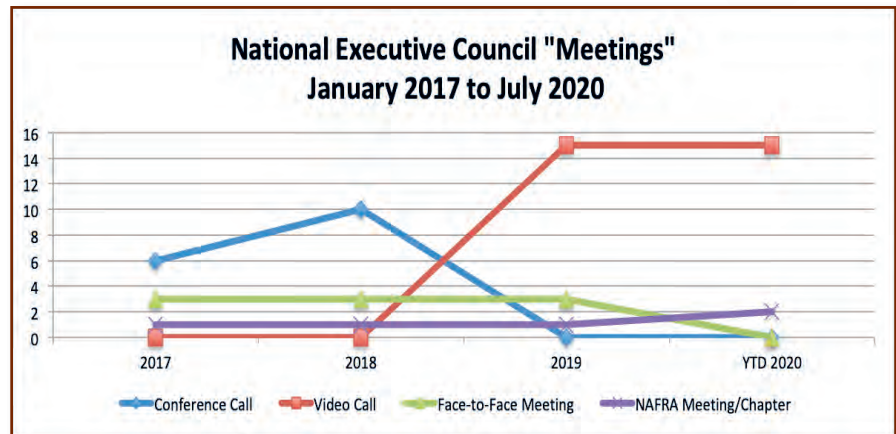
SHARING THE VISION

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

COVID-19 changes the National Executive Council's Plans too.



The National Executive Council (NEC) typically meets 2-4 times per year to conduct the business of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States with a few phone calls in between meetings. Due to the pandemic the NEC began to meet only virtually. Most of those meetings were two hours or less once or twice a



month. In March, the scheduled four-day meeting at the Chiara Center in Springfield, Illinois was replaced by virtual meeting sessions over the same period of time. As of July 2020, the NEC virtually met 15 times in 2020. See chart of meetings for the NEC:

The NEC takes time for a little fun during the numerous meetings. This snapshot is from our Virtual Meeting, July 25-26, 2020.

Some specific actions taken during the spring and summer include:

1. Guidelines for Fraternal Gatherings in Times of Social Distancing were issued in May 2020. <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/2020/05/13/guidelines-for-fraternal-life-during-social-distancing/> The guidelines address what types of events can happen virtually (fraternity gatherings, council meetings, and initial formation sessions). Other events will need to be postponed until it is safe to gather together (visitations, elections, and Rites of Admission and Profession).
2. The International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) sent out a draft of new International Statutes this past spring. The NEC reviewed the statutes and drafted comments with recommendations and questions. The draft will be shared with the Regional Ministers for review and comment prior to returning it to the CIOFS this September.
3. The CIOFS elective chapter has been postponed until 2021. Please continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide all as CIOFS prepares for the chapter.
4. A new CIOFS website, www.ciofs.info, was launched in early July.
5. Our three National Commissions – Formation, Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and Franciscan Youth and Young Adults (FY/YA) – were undaunted by the Covid-19 limitations and over this past summer enthusiastically hosted virtual workshops. Hundreds of OFS from across the country benefitted from these gatherings, enjoying both formation and

fellowship in large and small groups. At the JPIC Visioning II Workshop, held virtually May 8-9, 2020, 36 national leaders came together to continue the conversation that was begun in August 2019. During this workshop, the idea of JPIC Focus Groups came up as a way to educate and communicate about certain social justice issues: Immigration, Care for Creation, and the Spirituality of JPIC. Less than three weeks later, the world was shocked at the brutal killing of another unarmed black man by police. People were able to see the killing unfold on TV and on social media. Seculars all over the country were crying out, "What is ours to do?" As a result, an additional JPIC Focus Group was formed to address the issue of racism and practice mindful dialogue. This past August, the Formation Commission two-day workshop drew nearly 100 attendees. (See related article in this issue.) The FY/YA Commission hosted weekly gatherings over an 11-week period. All these virtual gatherings have received rave reviews.

6. Guidelines for Regional Archives were approved in May 2020 and have been posted on our website. For a copy of the guideline, please contact Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS (ofsusasecretary@gmail.com)
7. Regional Visitations and Elections have been postponed due to the pandemic. NEC members are working closely with the Regional Ministers to see when the events can be rescheduled.
8. The Spanish translation of the OFS Ritual is nearly complete. Many people were involved with this effort. It will be sent for final formatting and printing in the near future. The NEC is looking forward to having this resource become available.

A Reminder about the National Database

Beginning in December 2020, the number of fraternity members listed in the database will be the number used to establish the Fair Share amount for your region. This is an important reminder for each local fraternity to make certain that their data in the National Database is accurate.



20th Quinquennial Congress Postponed Due to Covid-19

There's a late 60s tune made famous by Glen Campbell that starts out, "By the time I get to Phoenix..." That song comes to mind as we announce that the 20th Quinquennial Congress, scheduled to be held in Phoenix in August 2021, is now postponed due to pandemic related concerns.

This past August, the 40+ members of the National Fraternity Council gathered via Zoom to deliberate on this difficult decision. There were important factors to consider, including the safety of our members, the financial impact, and the desire for a successful Q. There were no easy answers. In the end, a strong majority voted to cancel the current contract and rebook for a later date.

The new date for the 20th Quinquennial Congress has not yet been established, but we are negotiating for the Summer of 2023. Let's pray that "by the time we get to Phoenix..." this pandemic will be history. More information will be in upcoming issues of TAU-USA.



CONVERSION AND ACTION ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF *LAUDATO SÍ*

by Joe Makley OFS

Vice-Chair, National JPIC Commission and Vice-Minister, St.
Elizabeth of Hungary Regional Fraternity

It was Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, who said of Saint Francis: “[He showed us the] inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace.”¹ He was talking about Francis’ whole life and ministry, and he wanted us to understand that these things are connected. To put it in the terms of the moment, it is difficult to stop a pandemic when large segments of the society do not have proper health insurance or clean drinking water. The spirit of *Laudato Si* is a spirit of justice and peace, integral to life in a clean and healthy Earth.

I was to attend the Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington at the end of April. The theme was environmental justice (on the anniversary of *Laudato Si*). After it was cancelled, I caught one of the guest speakers online, Joan Brown, Sister of Francis, who directs *New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light*, a group that works on environmental issues with native American and vulnerable populations. Her presentation called for that change of heart described in our Rule, from the temptation to exploit nature, to one of universal kinship. Sister spoke directly to how the pandemic provides an opportunity for a conversion to realize essential elements of the *Laudato Si* vision, through direct changes to our own lifestyles, and working to correct societal injustices brought to light by its stresses on our institutions. “What is our call now,” she asked, “in this mysterious moment of death and birth?”

I’ve been thinking and praying about that, as I’m sure you have. During these weeks we’ve had a close visit from Sister Death, a unique physical separation from our human families, and a pause in the bustle, under skies clearer and bluer than I

can remember seeing in decades. Whole fleets of commercial jets are parked. Even trains and buses have stopped rolling. The human costs of perpetual war, weak institutions and social inequities are placed under a bright light. Surely now we can hear the cries of those who are not in the protective bubble of the “developed” world, or its dominant groups. Surely now we can see how our own habits of consumption are connected to the problem. Surely now, we will hear God speaking to us, and our hearts will be made ready for a truer, deeper, and more complete conversion to Christ, and with our Seraphic Father St. Francis, to see all creatures, animate and inanimate, praising the Most High, to renew our gratitude for them, and to raise our voices in the same chorus.

All our popes since Pope St. John XXIII have called us to this, most recently Pope Francis, but also Pope St John Paul II in his articulate description of “human ecology” in *Centesimus Annus*.² Our Rule (p. 18) calls us to ecological conversion, universal kinship. Over the past few weeks, we have also been shown (in a new way) that we can’t do it all. So what action will we choose? How will a renewed love, a new, less stony, more natural heart for everyone and all creation, be made manifest in each one of us?

I know we are all helping to reduce suffering, through volunteer work, donations, etc., so we are already taking visible action out of love. We have been asked to work more on “root causes and structures,” so I’ll mention a few practical steps, trying to stick to things I have actually done, or someone I know has:

¹ *Laudato Si*, P. 10

² *Centesimus Annus*, pp. 37-40

- ❖ Monitor legislation at the state, local, or national level. See what is being proposed in each session and follow the OFS Rule to support just laws and oppose unjust laws, to seek the common good, to demonstrate solidarity with the marginalized. This includes contacting the diocesan public policy office and writing to or calling legislators, offering comments to legislative committees. As Kent Ferris, of the Davenport, Iowa, diocese, said at the 2019 JPIC: “If a person prefers to work directly with the poor and doesn’t like politics, that person’s voice may be the most important one the legislators hear on that day.” Like many of us, I am reluctant to trust an email alert; I need to know myself what is going on, so it takes time. In Maine, we do have a diocesan office of Public Policy, and its director, Suzanne Lafrenier, lets us know about things coming up at the state legislature if we get on her email list. Some dioceses have an office of Pro-Life or other title.
- ❖ Send thank you messages to legislators and others who work on behalf of the marginalized, the poor, and the vulnerable.
- ❖ Look for authentic dialogue opportunities. Specifically, have a respectful online discussion with, for instance, a vocal Catholic who disagrees with the Church’s activity of refugee placement. Practice that loving dialogue. Ask questions. Seek to understand. “How did you come to be at such odds with Church teaching on this?” Develop a relationship, rather than trying to “win.”
- ❖ Continue to work to get St Francis’ *Canticle of the Creatures* out there among Catholics, in print, but

especially in recital to music. The Canticle is a picture and an inspiration of *ecological conversion*. The Transitus service is a great way to feature it at a Parish. Holy Family Fraternity has a service that does this, and we’d be glad to share.

- ❖ Reduce consumption: It’s a key Franciscan lesson from the pandemic: *buying stuff can cause harm*. Buying less can be transformational. Look at what we just achieved by not buying air travel! Buying intentionally (avoiding sweatshops and child labor, choosing Fair Trade, avoiding petrochemicals, supporting worker-owned companies and coops, etc.) can make a real difference, too.
- ❖ Use less food: More rice and beans. More soup. Make things rather than buy. Fewer one-time purchases “for supper,” better planning. Food takes a lot of energy to produce and transport. David Seitz, a board member of the Franciscan Action Network, said recently of the pandemic: “I am eating healthy and spending way less money. I’m going to keep doing this!”
- ❖ Drive less. I am amazed at the lack of movement our car’s odometer. I’m partial to a road trip, but I can get used to the savings, and the substantial contribution to Mother Earth.
- ❖ Hold onto that deepened sense of gratitude for what I already have.

I think all of us have felt we would come out of this transformed. I pray that our conversion will also be a collective one, where the voice of the OFS is more unified and gains volume and is heard by those who in Pope Francis’ words “are still waiting.”





JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



FRANCISCAN MINDFUL DIALOGUES

by Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National Animator

“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.”

(OFS Rule, Art. 19a)

During these difficult times of political turmoil and racial upheaval, one question keeps coming up over and over again: “What can I do?” I have only one answer: Dialogue with one another. Listen to the stories. Validate the stories. Then you will be able to share your stories.

It doesn't mean you have to agree with those stories, because after all, they are someone else's truth—not yours. As Franciscans, we are called to listen, to understand, then to speak from that understanding. Especially when you are engaged in difficult dialogues—about racial tensions or political differences—you want to remain grounded in the Gospel. Jesus had difficult dialogues, but he knew to speak the truth in love, with empathy, compassion, and peace.

When we attempt to have dialogues, or two parallel monologues, there is a winner and a loser. We go on the attack, we spot a weakness in someone's argument. We tend to take every comment or opinion that is expressed as a personal affront to our own values and beliefs.

What if we change the way we think about these dialogues? What if, in those heated moments, we choose dialogue over debate? What if we choose to have mindful dialogues? When we engage in mindful dialogues, we flip the script. We replace our ego and desire to win with a sense of curiosity, empathy, and a desire to learn. Instead of coming from a place of judgment, we are genuinely interested in the other person: their experiences, values and concerns. They become other, and not object, to gain the upper hand.

Nazi Concentration Camp survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl once wrote: **“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”** We have that space. In our dialogues, how are we filling that space?

We must engage in mindful and meaningful dialogues that move us forward—not backward, or worse, not at all. Something happens when both speaking and listening are revered—it creates a sacred and transformational moment. It is the beginning of being in right relationship with one another. We are called to build connections through mindful dialogue—in relationships, communities, and fraternities. It is taking that space and filling it with curiosity and empathy and reverencing the outcome.

Getting to that place of dialogue can be difficult. We tend to get fired up about what we are passionate about—especially when discussing politics or social justice issues. We can let our ego get in the way of truly hearing the other person's perspective. In the current climate, those heated debates morph into conflicts where people are even willing to walk away from their relationships, friendships, and fraternities.

After having mindful dialogues, you will discover that your assumptions and biases can be wrong or totally off base. If those conversations don't happen, the parties remain annoyed and frustrated, causing an undercurrent of disrespect in the relationship.

First, be curious about the other person; their ideas, concerns, perspectives. Then, be willing to listen to them, even when you disagree. By putting aside your own ego and preconceived ideas, you become open to limitless learning. Also be curious and ask questions. Questions allow mindful dialogue to get to a place of true understanding. They allow you to disagree agreeably.

In our conversations and dialogues, the goal is not to win or convert the other to your way of thinking and believing. The goal is to be open to learn, to be curious about the other person, allowing them a safe space to be heard and to voice their opinion. The goal is a true speaking and listening experience, offering empathy rooted in friendship.



RACISM—WHAT’S A SECULAR FRANCISCAN TO DO?

Mother Cabrini OFS Region Newsletter Submission, August 2020
Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

The national OFS fraternity has asked us:

- to identify and eradicate the structures that perpetuate racism...
- to pray for an end to racism...
- to identify and confront our own unconscious racial biases.

I hope this article provides some resources for each of these actions that you can use individually or as a fraternity for on-going formation. It is not comprehensive, but rather offers a menu of ideas.

Warning: Expect to be uneasy when you ponder and grapple with issues of race. Racism in the U.S. is an uncomfortable truth, experienced differently by us all. For some, it is a passing thought, brought to mind by occasional news events. For others, it is real each time they walk out the door. Some are blind to how they silently participate or reap its benefits, while others see their role with crystal clarity. When we discuss racism, our very image of ourselves and our participation comes into question, which is not easy. Have hope! As penitents, Secular Franciscans are used to on-going conversion and the discomfort it brings as the Spirit leads us to new places!

First, a Prayer to Overcome Racism

On August 2, 2020, we celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels of the Portiuncula, so it is fitting that we ask the Blessed Mother’s assistance in our journey of confronting racism.¹

“Mary, friend and mother to all, through your Son, God has found a way to unite himself to every human being, called to be one people, sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son, seeking forgiveness for the times when we have failed to love and respect one another.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism and to build a just society.

We ask for your help in following your Son, so that prejudice and animosity will no longer infect our minds or hearts but will be replaced with a love that respects the dignity of each person.

Mother of the Church, the Spirit of your Son Jesus warms our hearts: pray for us.”

Second – The Rule: A Starting Point for Secular Franciscans

There are many instances of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching that confront racism, but a shortcut is to look at The Rule. Taking a stand is not only the realm of politics – it is in the realm of faith, too.

Rule Article 13b. As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

Rule Article 15. Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

Third – Identifying Systemic Racism Through Definitions and Videos

Each of us can work on our own attitudes and actions to not be racist, but to make real change “in the field of public life” we need to work on the structures of racism and how we unconsciously contribute to or benefit from them.

Definitions: The OFS-USA JPIC Animator Notes – Special Edition – Carolyn Townes, OFS from June 2020 offers some useful definitions. *Suggestion:* walk with the Spirit a bit if any of these terms make you feel uncomfortable.

“**Racism** is defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

Institutional racism (also known as **systemic racism**) is a form of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions. It is reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among other factors.

White privilege or white-skinned privilege are the inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice. It also refers to societal privilege that benefits white people over non-white people in some societies, particularly if they are otherwise under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.

The phrase "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) can refer to the **social movement, the organization, or the message**. When someone refers to BLM, make sure you know which one they are referring to. **Note:** Many people agree with the message without belonging to the organization or supporting the movement.

The **social movement** was founded in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin in February 2012. The movement became nationally recognized for street demonstrations following the 2014 deaths of two African Americans: Eric Garner in New York City and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. is a global **organization** in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

The **message**, represented by the hashtag (#blacklivesmatter), is used at demonstrations, rallies and on social media to reaffirm that Black lives are just as sacred, valued and loved by God.

And yes, all lives matter. However, all lives do not matter when Black lives do not matter.

Video: “Let’s Get to the Root of Racial Injustice,” Prof. Megan Ming Francis, TEDx Rainier, (19.5 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aCn72iXO9s> (Note: if you can’t access the video links directly, you can search YouTube for the titles.)

Description: This personable explanation from an African American professor uses the Ted Talk format and her own stories to reframe how we think of racism. It moves from thinking of racism as a few “bad apples” to the knowledge of how the “whole tree” is infected and calls for a new approach that goes beyond focusing only on education or policing. Note: I think her language and style will appeal to Franciscans!

Video: Systemic Racism Explained (4.5 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrHIQIO_bdQ

Description: This short education cartoon explains what is meant by systemic racism, using the example of a white and a black student. It touches on schools, universities, housing, banking, incarceration, jobs, and implicit bias.

Video: “The Unequal Opportunity Race” (4 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX_Vzl-r8NY

Description: This brief cartoon uses the analogy of a footrace, with some contestants held back by systemic racism while other run more easily and accumulate wealth and prosperity.



Finally – Confronting Our Own Unconscious Racial Bias

I have not met a Franciscan who thinks they are a racist. The very thought of it is threatening. Yet we all carry unconscious biases based on our upbringing, where we get our news, personal experiences, gut-feelings, etc. The graphic below of concentric circles fits nicely with our approach of on-going conversion. What behaviors match our Franciscan approach to life? What circles do you sit in right now? Is your vocation calling you to move to another circle or act on one or more items?

Note: The original of this graphic can be found at: <https://www.surgeryredesign.com/> It is by Andrew M. Ibrahim, MD, MSc based on the work of Dr. Ibram Kendi. Permission has been given to use, copy and share.

¹ Source: © 2020 OFS-USA JPIC Animator Notes – Special Edition – Carolyn Townes, OFS

RACE RELATIONS AND THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

A Historical View

By William Wicks, OFS, NAFRA Historian 2005 - 2012

I believe strongly that as Secular Franciscans, we are called to accept all people as equal under God; our Rule testifies to this by stating “in the divine seed in everyone.” (Rule 2:19) And who can prejudge the divine seed? As Franciscans, we are called to be sensitive to the diversity of culture. In 2007, the Quinquennial Congress in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania was dedicated to Multiculturalism.

The following is a brief chronology of events related to the Secular Franciscan Order during the early period of race relations in the United State of America. This information can be found in *A History of the Secular Franciscan Order, Volumes I and IIB*.

1938 National Executive Board Meeting

“The Color Question” was a topic addressed at the National Executive Board Meeting held in Cleveland, Ohio, in August 1938. The dialogue related to how to respond to the situation in which white members complained about the presence of “Negroes” at their fraternity meetings, and how the question of “Negroes” at a convention should be addressed; some hotels did not allow them room accommodations. Here are excerpts of the meeting dialogue. Board Chairman Fr. Thomas Grassman, OF. Conv., stated, “We must more aggressively come out for the equality of all in the sight of God and because of the immortal soul.” When the topic of a separate convention was proposed, Secretary Maximus Poppy, OFM, argued, “That amounts to Jim Crow....” Fr. Max ended the discussion with “...any members who feel that they cannot subscribe to this policy [of equal accommodations] are free to remain from the convention. Thus liberty is safeguarded, and the principle, even though we lose their good will.”¹

1947 Quinquennial Congress

This “Color” dilemma resurfaced in the planning of the 1947 Quinquennial Congress held at the Netherland Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati, Ohio. “The question relative to our Colored delegates was then raised, since the Netherland Plaza Hotel refused to house them. A Friar [not named] said

that he had made arrangements with the Manse Hotel, a colored businessmen’s hotel.... Arrangements were also to be made to reserve a special dining room in the Netherland Plaza Hotel and to designate it as the Convention dining room. The Colored delegates could eat freely here with our white delegates. This was necessitated by the fact that the hotel management declared that the Colored could not eat in the public dining room of the hotel, nor perhaps in any of the adjacent White restaurants.” That is “the way it was.”²

1961 Action for Interracial Understanding Apostolate

The Action for Interracial Understanding (AIU) began as an apostolate for the Third Order in 1963, a year before the passing of the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*. It was a program designed to educate members on race relations and to encourage them to participate in non-violent demonstrations in support of Civil Rights. “Our apostolate, ‘Action for Interracial Understanding,’ certainly needs paramount attention in all fraternities. Good race relations must be a concern of every tertiary. No tertiary can close his eyes and ears to the tremendous problem. Love of God and love of neighbor demands that you involve yourself in helping Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and other minority groups in obtaining a true recognition of their dignity as sons of God and

¹ Wicks, William H., *A History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, Volume I (1917-1942)*, Barbo Carlson Printing, Lindsborg, KS, 2007, 247- 249

² Minutes of Special Executive Board Meeting, January 1947

your brothers in Christ. This is no time to wring your hands. It is a time of action.”³ It should be noted that many Tertiaries participated in the famous 1963 Washington march.



**1968 –1971
Waldeman
(Wally)
Roebuck,**

National
Federation Prefect
(Nation Minister of
the Order on left)

Although the apostolate was motivated by the “African American” Civil Rights movement, all minority groups were included. Robert Fenton was the first Executive Director. Waldemar Roebuck, who later became president of the North American Federation (the national OSF organization at the time), was very much involved in the AIU apostolate.

Five years after Wally presented the St. Francis Peace Award to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. King, 39, was assassinated. When race riots broke out in Harlem, Wally, now a Secular Franciscan for 40 years, hit the streets with a copy of the “peace prayer of St. Francis.” He was a longtime civil rights activist and recipient of the Pierre Toussaint Award from the Archdiocese of New York. He passed away in 1999 on All Saints Day.

2007 Quinquennial Congress

More 400 members of the Order participated in the 17th Quinquennial Congress in Pittsburgh, Penn. The theme of the congress was *Many Cultures—Through Francis—In Christ*. This multicultural theme was intended to raise the level of awareness of cultural diversity within the Order.



Peace Offering:
Cited by the New York Organization of Franciscans for his “Franciscan-like approach to the solution of racial problems,” the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. receives the 1963 St. Francis’ Peace Medal from the Rev. Philip Marquard.

A Letter to the Secular Franciscan Order from 1963

In 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was awarded the *St. Francis Peace Medal*. The following is a letter of gratitude addressed to the Executive Secretary of the Third Order. These words were written 57 years ago and still resonate today. Our world has changed greatly over the years, yet the insights and aspiration of Dr. King are as important today as they were when this letter was written.

This is a rather belated note again to thank you and the Third Order of St. Francis for honoring me in such a significant way with your St. Francis Peace Medal. It is an honor that I will cherish as long as the cords of memory shall lengthen. In a real sense, your desire to bestow upon me this distinguished award was expressive of two important points. On the one hand, it expressed the new and vital willingness of the Christian church to take a concrete step in the direction of identifying with the struggle for racial justice in our nation. Since I happen to be a Protestant, the awarding of the St. Francis Peace Medal expresses the new ecumenical concern that is now greatly alive in both Protestant and Catholic circles. So I am convinced that your generous gesture toward me will go a long, long way toward bringing about new levels of fellowship for all Christians, a move so nobly initiated by Pope John, and it will give those of us engaged in this difficult yet challenging struggle for freedom and justice the consoling awareness of the support of the church.

³ Franciscan Herald and Forum, August 1963, 226

WE ARE ONE

What the Pandemic Can Teach Us About JPIC and Our Franciscan Lives

by Patricia Grace, OFS
JPIC Animator for the Saint Francis Region

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I committed myself to social isolation on March 13, 2020. This date was late for some and early for others. On March 12, we had a family meeting, however, and decided that it was time for Grandmama, as my grandchildren call me, to go to her apartment, close the door, and stay there. I usually spend a few days a week with my grandchildren, so this was going to be hard. But I agreed. Catholic Charities, where I spend the other two and half days a week, closed its offices soon thereafter and asked us to continue to work remotely. Then my parish, then my Franciscan gatherings, then just about everything. I am sure you all walked this same path as one by one all that was familiar was closed.

I committed to social isolation until April 1, then May 1, then June 1. I will most likely still be isolating when this edition of our Joy of Francis is published. However, we are isolating in the age of the internet, and Go to Meeting, and Zoom, and a myriad of other programs that allow us to connect, to study, to work, and to pray. We had a National JPIC meeting scheduled for the first week in May in Chicago. We met, instead, by Zoom. Nearly 30 representatives from around the country discussed, prayed, and envisioned. During our times together, we found ourselves raising the topic of the pandemic and the effect it was having on our lives and the lives of people around the world. During the final session, one of our Franciscan sisters, Juliet Spohn Twomey, OFS, from Junipero Serra Fraternity, Monterey County, so eloquently called us to consider that we are at a critical

time in our history. There is so much to learn from this pandemic. This article was inspired by her comment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that we are one world and one global family. What happened to people in Asia was soon felt in nearly every country in the world. We found ourselves tracking numbers of cases in countries some of us had never heard of and looking to medical researchers throughout the world for their suggested solutions. It also raised for me a sense of profound vulnerability. As San Diego shut its doors, my only view of this magnificent city by the sea was from a video created by a drone, documenting the silence on the beaches, in the hills surrounding us, through Balboa Park, and the harbor. Even the airport looked closed.

I realize now that when I first heard of the virus, I felt fairly secure that we in the U.S. had it covered. How surprised I was over the next weeks to see that we didn't. The pandemic was unanticipated, and we were not prepared. Never have I questioned the ability to get health care in this fine and advanced country of ours. It is always there, available, and excellent, or at least for those of us with health insurance. Now even an insurance card did not ensure that one could get the medical care needed to combat the virus, despite the untiring efforts of all our doctors, nurses, and health care providers on the front lines. I grieve to think of those without insurance or easy access to medical facilities, or who live in fear of going to a

hospital because of all the identity questions that can be asked.

Food was no problem for me. My daughter and other young friends shopped for me. But, once again, I could afford to “stock up.” What about the mother with four children who lives paycheck to paycheck and now did not even have work? Or the father caring for his children or elderly parents not knowing when he was going to get laid off? The nursing home where I serve as a Eucharistic Minister closed its doors to all visitors. I took Easter cards with well wishes and information about accessing Mass on radio and television, handing it to the nice man at the door, both of us looking as if we were prepared for a space mission. Now we hear of outbreaks in nursing care facilities around the country.

The pandemic has taught us how any environmental or public health crisis falls most heavily on the poor. We can see why *Laudato Si'*, whose fifth anniversary we recently celebrated, teaches that Care for Our Common Home includes attention to social inequity as well as environmental degradation and calls upon us to consider all these factors as we strive to create global economic, political, and social systems that honor the dignity of every one of God's created beings.

The pandemic can teach us that those who are the least protected are the most vulnerable. Outbreaks in prisons and detention facilities, as well as in nursing homes are recorded daily. Those of us near our southern border cannot imagine how the men, women, and children who came to the U.S. border seeking asylum and are currently housed in makeshift camps in Mexico are surviving. Many have been there for months. The courts have been closed for weeks and will open soon with an even larger backlog of cases.

Then we look up and see plant life that had been killed by pollution coming back to life.

The air is cleaner and clearer. We can hear birds, not airplanes, see across canyons that had only harbored smog. The earth is breathing more easily again.

Can we accept what the pandemic is teaching? Can we see more that we are one human family? Can we embrace the universal kinship of all of creation that our Beloved Saint called us to embrace, respecting all creatures, animate and inanimate, which bear the imprint of the Most High? (Chapter Two, Article 18) Can we begin to see how we can strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ for all who live? (Chapter Two, Article 13) What can the pandemic teach us about how to exercise our responsibilities as Secular Franciscans to build a more fraternal and evangelical world with a spirit of service motivating our actions? (Chapter Two, Article 14).

The pandemic can be the event that helps us see the interconnectedness of all that lives more clearly. Through it we see more profoundly the wounding effects of our modern lifestyle upon the natural world. The pandemic shines its light on the vulnerability of all of us and the double vulnerability of the poor, the elderly, and the marginalized.

I am certain we will get to the other side of this. My certainty rests in God. My prayer is that we get to the other side with a new vision, a deeper understanding, more compassion, and a fervent commitment to do all that we can individually, fraternally, and through our Order to care for the world and all within it. As our Franciscan sister said, this is a critical moment in history. God is calling us to open our eyes and ears and heart and do His Holy Will. Our Beloved Saint Francis is praying for us. Let us honor the trust given to us.

Peace and All Good,
Patricia



MOVING FORWARD: IT'S UP TO US

Kathleen Molaro, OFS

Many feel unable to move forward, stifled by current world problems that seem insurmountable. Feelings of depression, division, greed, fear, or apathy thwart our efforts to live our vocation authentically. Secular Franciscans have a choice: either to hide from troubles or, with the help of our Rule and Gospel, to seek ways of moving forward in spite of difficulties.

Young people face the same dilemma. Will they turn to God or have a crisis in faith? Will they joyfully serve or become stagnant with despair? Will they work for justice or wallow in selfishness? Secular Franciscans are called to inspire young people with the message that God cherishes them and desires to draw them into His embrace. Our witness and support will help them grow in an awareness that God is present and active in their torn world and has infused them with divine purpose.

In *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, our bishops remind us that the mission of the Church is to form people who, “led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world.” None of us need be alone in this challenge. By walking with young people in their journey towards holy maturity, we are gifted by their energy and enthusiasm. The bishops go on to say, “Our presence within the web of society can be a source of solace and strength in the face of enormous human need.” We can bring hope, especially to young people who want so badly for things to change. It is up to us to invite them into a Christ-centered life, which gives them the ability to influence the world with Gospel values.

Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FY/YA) Animators or delegates from almost every OFS Region have been participating all summer in weekly Zoom gatherings for the purpose of discovering how we can fulfill this challenge. Presentations and conversations are lively, Spirit filled, supportive and enlightening. Those attending know we must reach out to our young people in solidarity as we all traverse the trials facing us, and we are discussing how best to do so. The FY/YA commission hopes our virtual gatherings have provided inspiration and tools to equip Regions with a common purpose and the skills necessary for undertaking this task.

We are encouraged that FY/YA Animators are confidently stepping into the world of youth and young adults, searching for ways to build relationships, open hearts, and share their gifts. If you are interested in (or are already) working with youth or young adults, the Commission and your Regional Animator would love to hear from you!

As this year's NAFRA theme states, we must “Journey together in love and compassion.” It's time to move forward, and it's up to all of us. Thank you for praying for our young people and for those who are walking with them.

The bishops have determined that successful outreach to young people will connect them with:

- 1) Jesus Christ;
- 2) The Church, by inviting and welcoming their presence in the Christian community;
- 3) The mission of the Church in the world; and
- 4) A peer community in which their faith is nurtured and strengthened.

(Sons and Daughters of Light: A Pastoral Plan for Ministry with Young Adults, USCCB)



St. Anthony & the Blessed Virgin Mary

Fr. Christopher Shorrock, OFM Conv., CNSA



This year marks the Eighth Centenary of the “Franciscan vocation of St. Anthony of Padua” as Pope Francis remarked in his letter to Carlos Trovarelli, Minister General of the Friars Minor Conventual commemorating this event, dated February 15, 2020.

On January 16, 1220, the young Augustinian Canon Regular, Fernando Martins de Bulhões, on hearing of the martyrdom of five Franciscans in Morocco, decided to enter the Franciscan Order and became known to the world as Anthony of Padua.

Anthony died on June 13, 1231, at the Poor Clare monastery at Arcella (now part of Padua), aged 35, and was canonized by Pope Gregory IX on May 30, 1232, at Spoleto, Italy, less than one year after his death.

Pope Pius XII proclaimed Anthony a Doctor of the Church on January 16, 1946, and gave him the title *Doctor Evangelicus* ["Evangelical Doctor"] since the freshness and beauty of the Gospel emerge from his writings.

St. Anthony is a popular saint, a wonderful preacher, and a great miracle worker; only a few have looked upon him as a deep theologian or a learned teacher.

Perhaps one lesser known fact about St. Anthony is his great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and, on account of the many references to Mary in his sermons and expressive passion with which he speaks of her, he might well be called, like St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whom he so frequently quotes, a second “Marian Doctor.”

With regards to the sources for his doctrine on Mary, we possess eight sermons¹ of St. Anthony on the Blessed Virgin Mary: one on the Birth of Mary,

three on the Annunciation, three on the Purification, and one on the Assumption.

These are numbered among his *Sermones Mariales*. Besides these, however, we find references to the Blessed Virgin Mary in many of his Sunday and Feast Day sermons, especially in his sermon for the Third Sunday of Lent, which says: “Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee” (Luke 11:27).

These are known as his *Sermones Dominicales* [Sunday sermons]. Among his *Sermones Solemnitatum* or *Sanctorales* [Sermons for Solemnities or Feasts] there are four other sermons or outlines for the Purification, and six additional outlines for the feast of the Annunciation.

Furthermore, all the sermons on the mysteries of our Lord’s life highlight Mary; for example, his sermons for the Feasts of the Nativity of our Lord, of the Epiphany, and of the Resurrection.

One writer stresses the fact that the St. Anthony’s whole life seems to revolve around the Blessed Virgin Mary, which he styles a *Vita Mariana* [Marian life].

He is said to have been born on the feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1195, in Portugal, a country known since the end of the 12th Century as the “Land of Mary,” to whom it was dedicated by Alphonse I after the victory over the Moors.

The cathedral of his native city, Lisbon, was sacred to the memory of the Assumption; his mother, Donna Maria, offered her infant son to Mary before a statue of Mary’s Immaculate Heart while chanting the *Magnificat*; Anthony was baptised on August 22, the octave of the Feast of the Assumption, which today is dedicated to the Queenship of Mary.

An ancient tradition tells us that Anthony’s first words were an invocation to Mary—*Maria*; his last

words were a final salutation to his Lady Queen in his *O gloriosa Domina* [O glorious Lady] to whom as a child he dedicated his virginity.

St. Anthony's later sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary are substantially and theologically so exhaustive and so complete, that one Belgian Franciscan felt he could stake his reputation as a scholar by asserting that "St. Anthony's sermons give us a *complete* Mariological theology"; whereas an Italian biographer of St. Anthony writes:

There is not a trait in the life of Mary to which he [St. Anthony] did not dedicate a page or two; not a mystery in her life that he did not study profoundly and correspondingly expound to his listeners. He allowed no occasion to escape on which he might dedicate his ardent zeal to inculcate devotion to her or propagate her cult. And if there is no Catholic doctrine he did not illustrate, it must be admitted that he preferred to treat those which referred to Mary.

Although the sources of St. Anthony's Mariology were both the Sacred Scriptures and Tradition, he quotes the former so frequently that one might call his Mariology Biblical. Pope Gregory IX aptly called him an "Ark of the Covenant," for within were kept the Sacred Books.

One author, writing of the Mariology of the Evangelical Doctor states that this:

[Reveals his ability as an interpreter of Sacred Scripture. In it we may observe excellent use of the literal sense of the Bible, and some of the richest types that are to be found in his sermons. When he speaks of Mary, St. Anthony does not spare himself in his efforts to sing her praises. To him the Blessed Virgin is the Queen of all creatures, and her prerogatives were constantly in his mind when he spoke to others. The Scriptures furnish him with the phrases that he sought to describe Mary's pre-eminence just as they had been his inspiration in other matters.

In arguments taken from tradition, St. Anthony borrows especially from the great Marian doctors: St. Augustine, St. John Damascene, St. Bede the Venerable, and St. Anselm, but above all, from St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

His Mariology not only embraces all the accepted beliefs of medieval scholastics, but reaching far beyond his own times, sufficiently indicates other doctrines that only centuries later were either defined as dogmas (the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and are definitely accepted today as Catholic doctrine and common theological teaching; or form a part of the present liturgical system of the Church as embodied in the devotion to Mary under various new titles which, like so many

recently detected stars in the firmament, have been added in the form of new jewels to Mary's crown, such as the doctrine of Mary's being the Co-Redemptrix of the world, the Mediatrix of all graces, etc.

The fundamental principle of St. Anthony's Mariology, around which everything else revolves, is Mary's Divine Maternity and the Virginal Birth of the Saviour. This once established as the final cause, St. Anthony proceeds to develop all the other privileges of Mary either introductory to it or subsequent upon it.

Let us conclude with the word of our holy father, Pope

Francis, "may his [St Anthony] example of sharing in the difficulties of families, the poor and disadvantaged, as well as his passion for truth and justice, still arouse in us today a generous commitment to give of ourselves as a sign of fraternity."

This article is part of the introductory remarks for a much larger work on the Mariology of St. Anthony that Fr. Chris is working on. Fr. Chris holds a Doctorate in Theology and is currently an adjunct lecturer at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, Hales Corners, WI.

¹See the 4-volume series on Saint Anthony of Padua, *Sermons for Sundays, and Festivals*, translated by Paul Spilsbury (Padova: Messaggero Di Sant'Antonio, 2007).





FORMATION COMMISSION

by Francine Gikow, OFS
National Commissioner

“IF TODAY YOU WOULD HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS¹”

As a Secular Franciscan during this time of coronavirus, I have been forced to confront my own racial biases and the inequality that exists in our society based on race. From the earliest days in initial formation, we are told “go from gospel to life and life to the gospel” with a careful reading of the gospel.² But what **do** the gospels say to us at this time? How do we act/react as Secular Franciscans? How can I make sure that I do not “harden my heart”?

Since Vatican II, the Church has directed us in this essential element of our vocation:

”At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel...”³

“...[the Church] can draw from the Gospel the most profound reasons and ever new incentives to promote the generous dedication to the service of all [people], the poor especially, the weak and the oppressed- and to eliminate the social consequences of sin which are translated into unjust social and political structures... the Church...leads toward freedom under all its forms—liberation from sin, from indwelling or collective selfishness—and to full communion with God and with [people] who are like brothers [and sisters].”⁴

The message is clear. The Church invites me—no, actually demands of me—as a secular, professed Franciscan, to work toward the equality of all people in our society. Of course, depending on our particular gifts and personalities, what I do may be different than your response to the call of the Holy Spirit. But we *are all* the body of Christ, here on earth. What DO scripture and the gospels say? In search of the answer, I have compiled some of my favorite passages for your prayer, meditation, and consideration. They are not a complete listing; for that you would need to read/meditate on the ENTIRE Bible! However, they are a start. You may want to take a different specific passage each day to prayer and meditation. You may want to

share at your fraternity meeting which passages “spoke” to you and why. You may want to cut up all the Bible citations, put them into a bowl and pray a different one each day.

Make an effort to be open to the Word of God and not “harden your heart,” let go of any pre-conceived ideas and see where God leads you, then act on it. Make a decision to change a behavior. Decide what you can do differently. Do penance. Ask forgiveness. Open a respectful dialog. The list is endless. As Francis said to his brothers:

“I have done what is mine; May Christ teach you yours.” (Lmj14:3)

Scripture Citations:

Essence of the Law (Deut 10:17-20)
The Beatitudes (Mt.5 1-10 or Lk 6 20-26)
Sheep Amidst the Wolves (Mt 10”16-23)
Parable of the Sower (Mt 13: 1-17)
Forgiveness (Mt 18:21-22)
The Rich Young Man (Mt 19:23-27)
The Greatest Commandment (Mt 22:34-40)
Persecutions Foretold (Mt 24:9-14)
Welcoming a Stranger (Mt 25:31-40)
Judgment of the Nations (Mt 26:31-36)
Woman at the Well (Jn 4: 4-42)
Love for Enemies (Lk 6:27-36)
Do Not Judge... (Lk 6:37-38)
The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)
The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)
Woman Caught in Adultery (Jn 8:1-11)
Transformation (Romans 12:2)
Mutual Love (Heb 13:1-3)
Mercy and Judgment (James 2: 12-13)
Justification By Works (James 2:22-24)
Judging Others (James 4:11)

¹ Psalm 95:7b-11. (NAB)

² OFS Rule: Art.4

³ Guadium et Spes, 4.

⁴ Synod of Bishops, “Evangelization of the Modern World,” Third General Assembly, October 26, 1974, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976. p.597)

NATIONAL FORMATION WORKSHOP GOES VIRTUAL

by Mary Stronach

On Friday evening, August 21, Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, kicked off the Regional Formation Director's Workshop with a "hug." "I've got my arms wrapped around everyone in a virtual hug around my screen!" He reached out to nearly 100 Secular Franciscan Formation team members and spiritual assistants from across the United States and the Pacific Ocean, all the way to Guam. His hugs reached them through their computers, iPads, and Smart Phones.

During his presentation on the importance of initial formation, Father reminded the formators that "we are formed in fraternity. We bring the outside in... It is the 'privileged place.'"

"A listening attitude is quite fundamental," he continued. "Good initial formation should provide opportunities for listening," he told the group, whose faces sometimes filled the screen, intent on his every word.

The inspirational kick-off took the virtual attendees from the spiritual to the practical. On Saturday morning, after Diane Menditto, OFS, Chair of the National Formation Team, gave an update on the new formation program, the

National Formation Team provided a sneak preview of a draft of the components of the new formation program: the first draft of the *First Steps* brochure, an outline of what the chapters would include, a sample chapter in full color, and its companion guide.

During the afternoon session, the formators learned "How to Talk Like a Franciscan." The basic message guided the formators through listening, mediation, and conflict resolution techniques a la Francis.

The day ended with the Formation Team participating in a Panel Discussion addressing numerous issues, including ideas and resources for ongoing formation, virtual formation, formation team building, handling difficult situations, discernment, and the role and need for well-formed of Spiritual Assistants.

The National Formation Team, chaired by Diane Menditto, OFS, includes Justin Carisio, OFS, Francine Gikow, OFS, Layna Maher, OFS, Mary Stronach, OFS, and their Spiritual Assistant, Anne Mulqueen, OFS.



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FRANCISCAN LIVING

GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT

By Francine Gikow, OFS

"Blessed be God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement; who encourages us in every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement." 2Cor. 1:3-7 (NAB)

You may recognize this scripture verse using the traditional word, "consolation" rather than "encouragement." However, I chose the New American Bible version for a reason. First, sometimes reading the same passage in a different version of the Bible may open up new ways of thinking about it. It breaks open the complacency of "oh, I know that one" to hearing what we weren't expecting, so we pay closer attention.

Have you thought of God being an encourager? Have you experienced our merciful God urging you into areas of your life where you did not want to go? He encourages us in those small "whispers" or nudges to do something out of our comfort zone. Sometimes God has to drag us reluctantly to take that leap of faith. I'm sure God's encouragement impelled many of us to explore the Secular Franciscan Order for the first time. For many, myself included, God had to do *a lot* of encouragement over and over again before we stepped into our first fraternity meeting. I know it was this way for me—it took about four or five years of dragging my feet before I relented!

In this age of pandemic and social unrest, we definitely need encouragement. Social distancing can be very lonely. Sometimes, encouragement comes by a specific thought returning time and time again. It may be a whispered idea that keeps nudging us. It may even be a sudden unsettling conversion which pushes us until we follow the

urging of the Holy Spirit. God, the Master Encourager, cheers us along the path to what He created us to become.

The "status quo" for God is not acceptable. He wants us—rather he *yearns* for us—to be His disciples and grow in holiness. So God allows hardships to bring us to Him and then He encourages and supports us through those difficulties as we learn to rely on Him alone. It's another form of penance and conversion; being stripped of our own will and offering it to God. God as my encourager not only consoles but supports me in my journey through life's tribulations. In fact, God's encouragement is "overflowing," never ending, lavish and abundant—for our God is the God of abundance. His mercy is never ending!

Like Francis, we look at the cross of our Savior and see His sufferings. But the cross is *not* just about suffering. For Franciscans, it is the way to redemption. It is the way to resurrection. It is a way of hope and joy.

The passage goes on to say, *"Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the sufferings, you also share in the encouragement."* In other words, God gives us His encouragement so we can "pay it forward" and build up the Body of Christ here on earth.

Many we meet may not yet be able to "see" God or hear His word for themselves. Our experience of God as the kind and gentle "encourager" can introduce others to Him through our experience: the yearning, urging, encouraging God wants a relationship with Him. For after all, God's main plan for us is salvation—to live in His Love forever.

"Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others." (OFS Rule, Art. 19)

BRING PEACE

L. Dorothea McNeil OFS
Minister, Father Solanus Casey Regional Fraternity

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Article 19

I had originally intended to write on a completely different subject, but as I began I was led here. There have always been political, religious, or moral disagreements among people. In the past 15-20 years, we have seen people expressing their opinions in ways that are more and more extreme. Instead of reason, we have emotion; in place of discussion, we have insults. Social media adds to this by giving the shield of anonymity to the most hurtful remarks. It isn't so much what people believe, as the way they say it, that is driving us apart. Anger and insult cause divisions. Those divisions make common ground impossible and prevent us from working on the real problems in our communities, our country, and our world.

What can we, as Secular Franciscans, do about this? Probably not that much, on a grand scale. But, as you must know, this culture of argument and insult has invaded our communities, schools, workplaces, churches, and families. In those places, where we live out our vocations, we can make a difference.

In writing this, I thought of my family. Our political opinions range from libertarian to the most progressive liberalism. We differ in our politics, religion, and philosophy. Yet my children and children-in-law are in constant contact with each other. Our gatherings

are happy and filled with love. I will not say they are free from "discussion," or even "intense discussion," but we always end up eating together around the dinner table. We support each other in times of sorrow and rejoice together in times of joy. We are a family, and the love that binds us together is far stronger than any differences we may have.

Even in the midst of our "discussions," my children would never say anything really insulting or hurtful. Our shared love as a family prevents it. In the past 20 years, the ties that have united members of families, churches, communities and our country have been eroded. The loss of those connections has enabled people to be as nasty as they wish. So, back to the question: what can we Secular Franciscans do? We can establish, and re-establish, the connections that help us to have respect and love for each other. We can do this by listening.

First, we can listen to what people are saying: all that is said, not just the first two words. You don't have to agree, just listen. Try to understand the facts of the story, or the reasons for the argument. Second, listen to the person speaking. Listen with an understanding heart. Why are they saying this? How do they understand the words? Are there emotions behind what is being said? Is agreement, or a connection, possible? Third, listen to yourself. Are you

shutting yourself off from discussion? Are your own beliefs interfering with your ability to understand? Do you interrupt the other person to score a point? Is your own anger or impatience a barrier? Fourth, listen to God. (This should also be first.) Are you treating this person as a child of God or as an enemy? Is your purpose argument or discussion? Do you want to learn or to win? Do you understand that you are already in relationship with this person?

Listening seems like such a little thing, but it isn't. When we don't listen to people, they feel devalued, and then they devalue the lives of others. The turmoil in our

society comes from millions of people who are talking and shouting, but not listening. This brings us further and further apart from each other. Listening begins relationships and keeps them together. Listening is not agreement; it means that we respect each other. It confirms the dignity of each person. It opens the path to real discussion, and from there leads to understanding and peace.

We cannot solve the world's problems by ourselves. But, through listening and forming connections with those we meet, we can change the world we live in. May we bring our Franciscan peace and goodness to all our brothers and sisters.



ENCOURAGEMENT, FELLOWSHIP AND PRAYER IN THE AGE OF PANDEMIC

By Roberta Oliveira, OFS
St. Francis Fraternity, Milton, Mass.

“... For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.” (Romans 1:11,12)

It is believed that Paul wrote these words to the Romans while on mission to Jerusalem. He was separated from the church by distance, but not in spirit, and writes to encourage them on their faith journey. In fact, the New Testament is filled with examples of early church members encouraging one another during times of separation, persecution, and fear from the very beginning. So why would it be unusual for us to want to encourage each other now?

Most of us can play the news reports in our head. Something bad is happening in China! Italy is going through the same thing! People are sick and they are dying! They are overwhelmed! All of Europe is bending to a horrible virus! A nursing

home in Washington State! New York is on lockdown! Dear God, please protect us. Please do not allow our churches to be closed. Fear, sadness, and loss were mounting. As this unfolded, our fraternities were scrambling to determine what we were going to do about meetings, retreats, etc.

For our fraternity, there were a few emergency conference calls by the Council. We had planned our first Lenten Day of Recollection for March 14 and were scheduled to meet the following Tuesday as a fraternity. Can we or should we meet? We were working with a minimal and ever-changing amount of information of what was being called a Pandemic. Can we still offer our first annual Lenten day of retreat? It includes

other fraternities and, of course, food. Is that safe? What about our monthly gatherings? Before too long, in a matter of days, the decision was made for us, and we had to cancel our meetings, retreats, travels and organized prayer meetings. We had already cancelled our events when the Massachusetts Governor and the Archbishop made the decision for us. Overnight, it seemed, the unthinkable had happened. We could not meet. We could not ask to have a mass celebrated with our fraternity! We could not attend mass. Everyone paused, waited, cried ... and then, before too long, as the anxiety settled, the Council met via teleconference once again to discuss what we could do to keep our fraternity alive and active; to encourage one another and to attempt to soothe the pain of isolation. Like all, we were stunned and broken but a remarkable thing happened... a way was opened with a strongly committed leadership... to begin again. *Nunc Coepi!*

We had heard about Zoom. Schools were using it. Government agencies were using it. Why couldn't we? So we scheduled our first Council meeting via Zoom! It worked. We decided to begin offering evening prayer to the fraternity members one or two nights per week. Another member of the Council wanted to pray the Stations of the Cross on Fridays during Lent. Another fraternity member thought perhaps praying the rosary together might be a good idea and so we began on Sunday. Suddenly we had a busier "meeting" schedule than ever; but it was working! We COULD be together to encourage one another and so we did!

As I write this, we have been meeting via the Zoom platform for several weeks. Yes, it does have limitations. We decided that inclusion is particularly important. If we are going to be meeting in a virtual way, we need to include all members of the fraternity, not just those with internet capabilities. Additionally, the free version of the software limits all meetings to 40 minutes after a trial period. With these limitations in mind, we decided to sign up for the paid version of the software so we would be able to include those who do not have a computer or smartphone, and meetings could be held without

a time limit. Security is also superior to the free version.

I would like to note here that we did become aware that some management of all of the online meeting providers have beliefs not in accord with our beliefs on life issues. We decided our best option here was to add a prayer intention at every one of our meetings that their hearts may be changed. Our Savior is above earthly issues and can work in the hearts of the developers. We are persistent in this plea.

All do not feel comfortable using the platform for a variety of reasons, and the times of additional prayer are not always perfect; but many of our fraternity members are attending. We are getting to know each other more deeply as we are meeting more often. What a blessing! Some of us who live in senior housing are unable to be with family and friends, and we can support and encourage each other... to share our tears and to know we are not alone. We are building community through a technology that prior to this time was anathema to most of us.

On Easter Sunday, many of us gathered for prayer, rejoicing through song, scripture readings and prayers of thanksgiving! We shared the fun and hardships of a modified Easter feast, how we were communicating with loved ones, our tears and fears. This was organized by one of our fraternity members who was so inspired, and it was a wonderful time. I believe each one of us who attended was greatly blessed by this celebration, and we will be sharing the experience with our children and grandchildren when we are past the time of pandemic and have settled into our lives once again.

In addition to Zoom, we have been committed to making sure that each member of our fraternity is contacted by phone or letter to encourage and uplift them. We understand some are not comfortable with the technology, and we continue to try to find ways to reach them. It is remarkable that our fraternity has been able to continue to support our ministries financially and to remain an alive and active body during this time of separation. What began as an act of inspired desperation has become a great blessing!

Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity



CADEIO 2020 INTERRELIGIOUS SUMMER INSTITUTE

By Kelly Moltzen, OFS

As a representative of the OFS-USA Ecumenical Interfaith Committee, I had the opportunity to participate in the 2020 Interreligious Summer Institute with CADEIO, the Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers. As Catholics, we are called to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in the foundational Vatican II documents of the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*). We focused this summer on the call to interreligious dialogue in *Nostra Aetate*. While the institute was held virtually instead of in-person due to the pandemic, it was a rich experience with much wisdom shared about the traditions of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It is with my understandings and additional thoughts from John Borelli, Ph.D., Special Assistant to the President for Catholic Identity and Dialogue at Georgetown University and coordinator of the CADEIO summer institute, that I offer to you the teachings given at the 2020 CADEIO.



These traditions have been practiced for millennia, developed by their founders mainly to provide guidance for living in the world. Although they each contain multiple theological traditions, which differ significantly from Christian theology, they provide spiritual sustenance for half the world's inhabitants. *Nostra Aetate* focused on sharing the spiritual, moral and cultural values we hold in common with the followers of these traditions through dialogue and collaboration, although mutual enrichment through theological dialogue is also encouraged. Citizenship is viewed as a contract, and contracts are sacred throughout the world where religion and society interpenetrate. Like Christianity, Judaism and Islam spell out practical realities of law

and history and are guides and inspiration for putting belief in action, as they emphasize living according to the divine law. Jews and Muslims also believe their guidelines should be subject to changes based on circumstances that arise over time. Doctrines and practices change, as we observe with them, and as Vatican II taught in so many ways.

Muslims believe Muhammad was the last prophet, in line with the Abrahamic prophets who came before him. Muhammad, once he was established with his wife

as a successful merchant, withdrew from society for meditation on the One God and heard a profound spiritual call that motivated him to warn people about their actions. Muslims honor Mary and are strongly monotheistic: the first Muslims preached monotheism to the polytheistic Meccans and other Arab tribal peoples of the Arabian Peninsula. They even worry that Christians can be polytheistic, because their *Qur'an* presents the Christian trinity as three different gods, divine father, mother and son.

Muslim scholars point out that the trinity in the *Qur'an* is not the trinity in which Christians believe; however, their warning is helpful to Christians to understand that Father, Son and Spirit are all substantiations of the one God. But even so, in line with the unifying call in John 17:21 "That they all may be one," Muslims call on Jews and Christians to come together to serve God: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah (God in Arabic)" (*Qur'an* 3:64). Further, the goal of Islam is to establish peace and stop oppression: ["Whoever saves one—it is as if he had saved mankind entire" (*Qur'an* 5:32)]. The *Qur'an* includes rules that promote democracy, human rights, healthy interactions with neighbors, women, rights of

minorities, finance, and equality. *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges that over the centuries there have been not a few conflicts and clashes between Christians and Muslims, despite the call of both traditions for greater unity in love and service, due largely to the integration of religion with the civilizations of the past.

Hinduism is also monotheistic, despite the many forms of gods and sectarian groups devoted to different gods. The characterization that Hinduism is polytheistic came about when India was colonized by the British, who tended to view Hindus from their British perspective as Christians and to focus on the scriptural traditions rather than to understand the rich devotional life of Hindus. There is a movement among Hindu scholars to find “decolonized epistemologies,” that is, to come to an internalized understanding of the tradition apart from the theories of outsiders and return Hinduism to its original meaning. Their *murti* (images, statues) are symbolic icons—the embodiment, manifestation, incarnation, or personification of a deity. Their belief is one of panentheism, that there is an essence of the divine that abides in all, and that there is an “*Ishvara*” (God, the Lord, the Supreme Being). Hindus believe in simple living and high thinking, have “*Sanskaras*” (rites of passage), which parallel the Christian sacraments; and believe the environment is sacred and deserves protection, though many Hindus, like Christians, are not environmentalists.

In Buddhism, there are the Four Noble Truths, the basic teaching of the Buddha: there is suffering in the world; suffering has an origin, which is craving/thirst; the way to get rid of suffering is to extinguish the thirst; and there is a path that leads to the end of suffering (the Eightfold Path). To crave another re-birth is to not have achieved nirvana (enlightenment). Our lives are never satisfactory as long as we crave more and more and fail to understand that ceaseless craving leads ultimately to sorrow. Similar to the teaching from St. Augustine, who said in the opening passage of his *Confessions*, “You have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You,” to achieve nirvana and the end of suffering is to escape the cycle of rebirth. The concept of the impermanence of worldly things is strong in Buddhism, as everything is constantly changing. One can achieve enlightenment with or without a body, because the body of the Buddha was once on earth, though the truth body of the Buddha has never ceased. Similarly, the body of Jesus is not here on Earth anymore, but the body of Christ is. Thus, as Buddhists believe that nirvana is the one and only reality, for them true resurrection is not the soul’s escape from the body, but allowing oneself to settle into nirvana, while for Christians the resurrection is an embodied experience

of oneness with the resurrected Christ. For Buddhists and for Christians, we are more than a soul, we are physically embodied beings; however, the ultimate condition of resurrection and salvation are understood quite differently.

While we can examine the similarities between these traditions and Christianity, the richness of dialogue may come in examining the differences. There are four forms of interreligious dialogue: dialogue of everyday life; dialogue of action; dialogue of theological exchange; and dialogue of religious experience. The main goal of interreligious dialogue should not be about doctrine, but about building social solidarity, and we can build solidarity by acknowledging differences. This has been the emphasis of Pope Francis—dialogue is about accompaniment, journeying together, each in our own religious ways, but building solidarity for the greater moral and religious values we share. John Borelli of Georgetown University says, “dialogue is not a strategy but a way of salvation and friendship.” Borelli, who once worked at the U. S. Bishops’ Conference and served as a consultant to the Vatican, draws this quote from the teachings of John Paul II and Pope Francis. Both took the message of *Nostra Aetate* into their ministry as popes to provide example and leadership for Catholics. Interreligious dialogue should be a lifestyle, and something we approach with humility. By participating in grassroots interfaith dialogue, we can connect with others on a human level. There are important lessons for us to learn from practitioners of other traditions, which can even help us deepen our own understanding of Christianity and Catholicism. This can allow us to create new, interreligious rituals and prayer services. Further, by learning the practices of other traditions, such as bowing one’s head in a Buddhist temple or taking one’s shoes off in a mosque, we can demonstrate our respect for those whose model of worship is different from our own. Interreligious dialogue can be a powerful way of promoting peace as well, as St. Francis demonstrated when he approached Sultan al-Kamil during the Crusades.

There is a great need to offer opportunities for religion education to young Catholics, in high schools, seminaries and formation houses. One way of doing this could be through bringing in different faith perspectives on ecology during a study of *Laudato Si*. We can also get involved in interreligious dialogue through local interfaith councils, by sharing meals together, and through Interfaith Power and Light chapters, which are affiliated with CADEIO.



Spirituality, fraternity, science, and some good old elbow grease work together in an apostolate sponsored by the St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity on Long Beach Island, New Jersey.

Taking a page from St. Francis's love of the environment and *Laudato Si*, the fraternity works to improve the fragile ecosystem of Barnegat Bay-Little Egg Harbor by raising tens of thousands of clams each year.

Fraternity members participate in the nonprofit [Reclaim the Bay](#) project sponsored by Rutgers Cooperative Extension. To date, the project has deposited upwards of 10 million clams in the bay since its inception in 2005.

The fraternity joined the effort three years ago after a presentation by Rick Bushnell, president of Reclaim the Bay, and we became one of 11 groups in the bay area to host the project.

“We saw it as good volunteer effort, and we liked being able to see a beginning and an end to the project,” said Jim Collery, OFS, one of the team of fraternity members who volunteers on the project.

Work begins in June when 50,000-60,000 clams the size of a pencil head are delivered to the upwellers located on the campus of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church on Long Beach Island. Some oysters are also included.

Upwellers are a sort of nursery for clams, which are housed in silo-shaped tanks that have a steady

supply of bay water. A sump pump siphons water from the bay, and the clams extract food from it, returning cleaner water back into the bay, said Jim Heimlich, OFS, who organizes the project for the fraternity.

The weekly job of the volunteers is to clean the clam excretions and other debris from the upweller. Some members work cleaning the tubs and cylinders where the clams reside. Others help record statistics such as the temperature and salinity of the water, as well as measuring the size of the clams.

Besides the weekly cleaning and data collection, fraternity members also check regularly to make sure that the water pump is operating. As long as the clams have fresh water, they will continue to breathe and filter the water. If the pump stopped because of a power outage or other factor, the water would lose its oxygenation and the clams would suffocate.

The cleaning occurs after 9:30 a.m. Mass on Tuesdays.

Project members welcome children and relish the opportunity to describe how the ecosystem works. They explain how upwellers replenish the clam population, which has been on the decline since the 1980s, when nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from sewers and farms flooded the bay and stimulated algae growth. Other factors such as overharvesting also contributed to the decline.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis states that, “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself” and that is working amidst this project.

“Interfacing with the environment certainly helps build fraternity,” said Heimlich.

Fr. John Frambes, OFM, agreed, “These are good times for fellowship and lots of laughter.”

Fr. Frambes is the fraternity’s spiritual assistant and has a daily view of the upweller from his office window. He regularly volunteers to help clean the upweller.

Fr. Frambes is also called on to bless the clams at the traditional blessing of the animals each Oct. 4, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

Heimlich says the reclaiming project is a way to help the ecosystem.

“The health of the bay clams and oysters are important to the health of the bay. They clean up the chemicals and debris that make it unhealthy for the fish,” he said.

“One oyster filters 40 gallons of water per day. A clam will filter 10 gallons of water per day. Their presence contributes to the health of the environment and helps others in the bay environment thrive,” said Heimlich.

By November, the clams have grown large enough to remove from the upweller and turn over to other volunteers from the Reclam the Bay project, who plant them in protected plots in the bay. The clams are covered by mesh nets to keep crabs, mollusks, and birds from eating them.

A year later, when the clams are 1.5 inches wide, they are distributed in secret locations throughout the bay, where they will continue to grow and reproduce. Any clammers and fishermen lucky enough to find them can harvest them.

Unfortunately, the reclaiming project was put on hold this season because of Covid-19 and a storm that damaged a structure next to the upweller that limited access to the area. The fraternity is looking forward to continuing the project next summer.



X*X*X CLOSING THOUGHTS X*X*X

“We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.”

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

“Sometime during the day, with your beverage of choice, make an effort to re-connect with the Rule and Constitutions, studying and reflecting, actively contemplating on what you professed to be and do. You gotta stay bright to be the light of the world.”

Fr. Christopher Panagoplos TOR, President in turn, CNSA

Many of us will look back on this time of pandemic isolation as a time of spiritual metamorphosis. The ways in which we have changed during this time will be the measure of our trust in a God who calls forth the butterfly in each of us.

Miriam Kennedy OFS St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region

I was thinking the other day that the Coronavirus is a sort of Grinch, who as the story goes, tried to “steal” Christmas. The Grinch took away all the externals of Christmas from the little town of Whoville, but, amazingly, Christmas still came. Similarly, the COVID-19 Grinch is trying to steal Easter from us. But Easter will still come, even though it is highly unlikely that we will be able to physically attend Mass and receive the Eucharist. We won’t have the externals, but Easter will still come – in our hearts and in our souls! Let us remember that WE are the Church, the Body of Christ.

Pat Serotkin OFS, Our Lady of Poverty Regional Fraternity.

The pandemic has given us a lot of lemons. God has given us the recipe for lemonade.

Kate Kleinert, OFS St. Katherine Drexel Region

Regional Diversity Team

Shortly after the tragic death of George Floyd this past May, St. Joan of Arc Regional Minister Cherryle Fruge shared that her region had started a diversity team. The following is a report from Cherryle about this effort:

The idea of developing a Diversity Team began so we could do a process of elimination to dissect the roots of racism that falls under the umbrella of All Violence. The agenda for the first Zoom gathering was to find out “Who We Are” by each telling our story. *“Have you ever been discriminated against or shunned on your Franciscan Journey. Have you experienced discrimination within the Order?”*

We needed to first work “within” before we could work outward – ruling out if there were any issues within the Order concerning racism or discrimination of any kind to all people of diverse cultures. If there is a problem within the Family, we have to work on addressing the dysfunction, educate and reconcile our differences so we can begin healing the wounds from the inside out. Once the wholeness of our self returns, only then can we more fully understand how to educate with love and compassion in the world in which we live.

I am happy to say that everyone on the team said that the Order “felt like home” and being in fraternity sustained them. Since there are no issues within the Order in our region, our focus moved to educate ourselves on the Beatitudes of Good Communication amongst all people. I heard a quote that went something like this: *“You are the other part of me, I don’t yet understand.”* We need to learn from each other. This is why learning and practicing mindful dialogue is so important with all people, because we don’t understand each other and what life is like from the perspective of other cultures. We are now working “outward” to help make this happen. Cherryle Fruge, OFS, St Joan of Arc Regional Fraternity

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