

TAU-USA

A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

Spring 2022 Issue 105



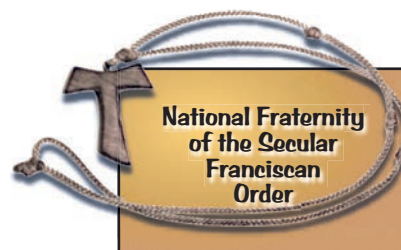
Pysanky

ПИСАНКА (*Ukrainian*)

Pysanky, Ukrainian Easter eggs, are decorated using a wax-resist (batik) technique. The word comes from the verb *pysaty*, "to write", meaning that the designs are not painted on the eggs, but written with beeswax. The intricate motif of each egg, as well as the colors, each have special symbolic meaning. During the Easter Season the decorated eggs are lovingly given to family members and friends as a symbolic gift of life, and for Christians, a symbol of Easter and the Resurrection. These beautiful eggs are just one example of Ukraine's rich cultural heritage, and are a reminder that our Ukrainian brothers and sisters are in need of our prayers and support during their life struggle to maintain their national sovereignty.

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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Request to receive the TAU-USA as only a digital version, or general database questions, contact the Database Administrator, Cyl Maljan-Herbelin, OFS
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A Spanish version of the TAU-USA is now available and being mailed to Spanish speaking members upon request. If you wish to receive the TAU USA in Spanish and not English, please send your name, address, fraternity name and region name to: Cindy Wesley OFS, cw93444@gmail.com or 846 Calimex Place, Nipomo, CA 93444.



OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA



NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker OFS

GREAT THINGS CAN HAPPEN

For a long time, I didn't know what a Quinquennial was. I don't think anyone in my fraternity knew what it was either. None of us had ever attended a "Q." We had heard about one, but it seemed so distant from us. Who was it for? What was it about? We didn't know, and sadly, didn't ask.

That has changed. Now with three Quinquennials behind me, I want to do my best to tell you about the Q, and invite you to be part of it.

The Quinquennial Congress (its official name, or "Q" for short) is a once-every-five-year gathering of the entire National Fraternity, mandated in our OFS-USA statutes. It's not a retreat, and it's different from any other conference or workshop. In fact, it's an experience of fraternity unlike any other.

When I think of a Q, what comes to mind is the pure joy of being part of something so much larger than I had ever imagined. I can still feel the joy, love, and excitement that fills the room – a very large room holding hundreds of Franciscans! We come together at a Q to share something very important, and when you experience fraternity on this scale, it transforms you.

Despite the numbers, there is an immediate connection with each person there, a real sense of heart-to-heart understanding. This connection is

deepened through conversations that take place at meals and at Little Fraternity gatherings (8-10 persons, randomly grouped, who meet each day.) Being a part of a Little Fraternity has been a highlight of every Quinquennial I've attended. I'd like to share with you two "Little Fraternity stories" that I'll never forget.

In 2007, a young woman in my Little Fraternity shared the story of how her mother had died when she was born. Later in her life she heard details of her birth—the joy of new life, tainted by terrible sadness. She learned, too, of the extraordinary care shown by the hospital staff. As she told her story, another member of the little fraternity started asking some very particular questions, such as, when was this, and at what hospital? It's almost unbelievable, but it turned out that this second woman was one of the nurses



who cared for the young woman's mother. She had actually held this young woman as an infant. The rest of us watched as this amazing reunion took place. Talk about a special bond!

The second story is how friendships formed at a Quinquennial can have a lasting impact. Donna Hollis and Cathy Roszhart were both members of my Little Fraternity at the 2012 Q. Donna was the facilitator of our group, and I was struck by her compassion and gentle guidance. Cathy's joy and

enthusiasm made an equal impression on me. The three of us really connected. Over the next few years, we would see each other only rarely at various Franciscan events. Now, ten years after we first met, God has brought us together in a surprising way! The three of us are members of the Quinquennial Core Committee helping to organize the 2022 Jubilee Q. We never dreamed that those seeds of friendship, planted in our Little Fraternity, would bear fruit in a wonderful collaborative service to our national OFS family.

or homilist said that challenged them. It could be that a conversation with an OFS from halfway around the world widened their vision. Very often it is simply the joy of fraternal communion on a previously unimaginable scale, and a deeper realization of Christ's presence.

I know that not everyone reading this will be able to attend this year's Q, but for many this may well be an opportunity of a lifetime. Whether you are new to the Order, an inquirer, a Spiritual Assistant or a friend of the Order, the Q is for you. Everyone is welcome, and you do not have to be a



Jan Parker, Cathy Roszhart and Donna Hollis pictured with their Little Fraternity at the 2012 Q

You never know how a Quinquennial experience may enrich your Franciscan journey. Speak to anyone who has attended a Q, and they will tell you—they returned renewed and changed. What touched their hearts? Perhaps it was hearing how a fellow Franciscan's trust in God helped them through a difficult time, or something a presenter

Franciscan to attend. Please, prayerfully ask yourself if God is calling you to the Q. I know, with all we've been through with this pandemic, there may be concerns about such a large gathering, but let's keep looking forward with faith and hope. Great things happen when God calls Franciscans together. I hope to see you there!

IMPORTANT NOTE from the Q COMMITTEE



If you plan to register for the Q, it is very important that you open your confirmation email and CLAIM YOUR ACCOUNT. (See page 29 for details on how to do this.) Claiming your account is the only way you will be able to add travel information, choose your breakout session, or change any other information. Without your travel information, we cannot provide you with the free ground transportation to and from the hotel. If you are arriving by car, please let us know the approximate time so we can plan for peak times for registrations at the hotel front desk.

Whether you can attend the Q, or not, please consider supporting your Franciscan family with a message in our Q Program Booklet. (See page 3 for details.) Thank you for your generous response!



SHARING THE VISION NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL



Covid and the Quinquennial

Many are raising concerns about how Covid may affect the Quinquennial, and at this point it's too early to say for sure. We will, of course, abide by whatever guidelines are set by the CDC, the city of Phoenix, and the Sheraton Hotel. It is highly unlikely that we will cancel, but certainly the health and safety of all is our main concern. Closer to August, we will update all those registered for the Q.

Do you need help registering for the Quinquennial?

Back by popular demand, we have scheduled another Zoom presentation to walk you through the Quinquennial registration process. If you have questions about the 2022 Quinquennial, join us on Saturday, May 21, at 2:00 PM Eastern (1:00 PM Central, 12:00 Noon Mountain, 11:00 AM Pacific). RSVP by sending an email to ofsusa.qcongress@gmail.com

National Executive Council Elections

The National Elections have been rescheduled for October 15, 2022. A new call for nominations will go out on April 15, 2022. Kate Kleinert, OFS, and Emma Lozowski, OFS, co-chairs of the Nominations Committee, will contact each person nominated, including those nominated last year, to confirm their willingness to serve on the National Executive Council. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide the nomination process.



Claim your spot in the Quinquennial Program booklet!

Share a word of encouragement
Send a greeting from your fraternity or Region
Advertise your business or promote a cause



The Q Program booklet will be distributed at the Q and shared on our website

Page size: 8.5" x 11"

Full Page-\$200

Half Page-\$120

Quarter Page \$65

Business Card size-\$35

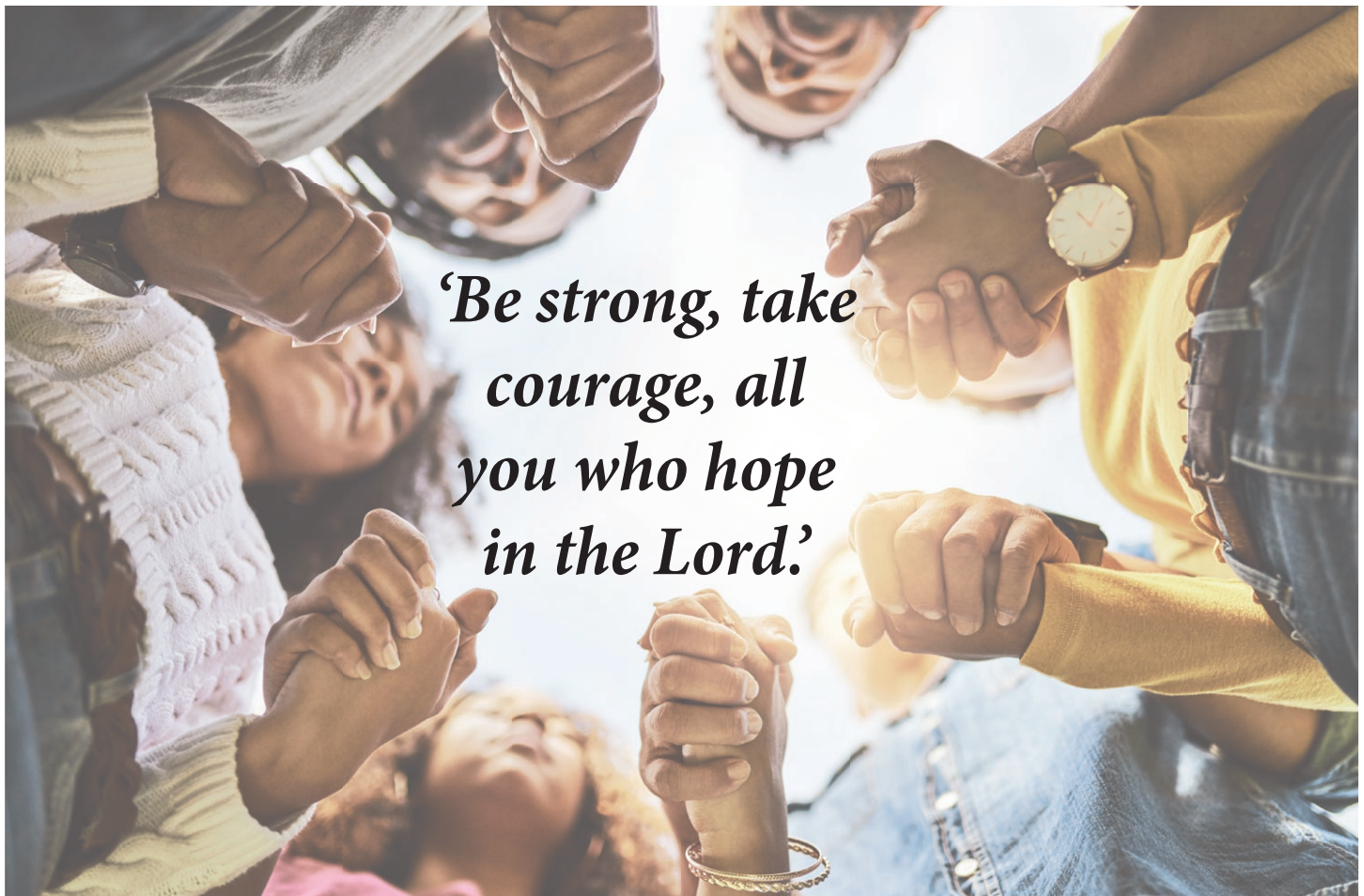
Patron-\$25 (*one line in list of patrons*)

For an order form, or more information contact Sharon Dale, OFS

Call 715-423-4136 or Email shadale@wctc.net

Don't wait! Deadline is April 30, 2022

Please support the Q and your Franciscan Family



*'Be strong, take
courage, all
you who hope
in the Lord.'*

National Chapter Virtually Engaging and Inspiring

By MARY T. STRONACH, OFS

For the second year, virtual hugs and warm smiles filled the computer screens of between 80 and 100 regional ministers, national leaders, spiritual assistants and observers. From across the country, they converged on screen for the 2021 National Chapter, prepared to engage in discussions and make decisions for the good of the Order.

Prayer helped the participants to focus. New regional ministers met for the first time in their own session and were reminded to “allow the Holy Spirit to hold the reins” as He will “give you courage to do what you have to do.” National Minister Jan Parker offered the powerful insight that the “state of the order depends on the state of each one of us,” and then, provided an overview

of the U.S. Order and a vision for the future. In a brief appearance from Hungary, Minister General Tibor Kauser reminded everyone to have “a clear vision of our identity” because “without knowing who we are, we will never know what we should do.”

A full agenda assured attendees that this event, although from the comfort of their couches or kitchen tables, would require their attention, hard work and wisdom.

The national budget was presented and approved. The Peace Award for work done with refugees and undocumented immigrants at the southern border brought tears to the eyes of participants. The Formation Team brought the OFS Ritual to life. Spiritual Assistants

provided insights on Franciscan spirituality through the Liturgy of the Hours, mass and formation, emphasizing that “prayer and contemplation are the bedrock of our engagement with the divine.” As is customary, attendees also had their “day away,” a virtual trip along the trails, peak and ravines of Yosemite National Park and Ash Mountain. And, for those who needed a little more excitement, participants from Florida had to hide in a closet because of a tornado warning. They returned shortly, safe and sound in the arms of the Secular Franciscans awaiting them on the Zoom call.

The theme for 2021-2022 brought the National Chapter to focus with its mandate from Psalm 31:25: “*Be strong, take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.*”

The Call to 'Rebuild My Church'

SR. AGNES ADDRESSES 'PROPHETIC CREATIVITY'



Sister Agnes Marie Regan, OSF

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

An echo of St. Francis's vision of God's call to "rebuild my church" resounds in the 21st century inspiration of 'prophetic creativity,' a concept that appears in recent Franciscan and church documents.

In a presentation the opening night of Chapter, **Sister Agnes Marie Regan, OSF**, encouraged Secular Franciscans to respond to God's call to study and act on prophetic creativity, especially as it is presented in Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the International OFS Council (CIOFS) document *Instrumentum Laboris* and the Ministers General Christmas letter.

Prophetic creativity is seeing as God

sees with spiritual eyes and then acting while allowing God's grace to strengthen us to do his will.

"It is innovative action taken in response to the Holy Spirit working with and within us," Sister Regan explained.

The creativity is important and mentioned no less than 44 times by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti*, she said.

"Pope Francis spoke about the need for prophecy in the church today, saying 'prophecy is born whenever we allow ourselves to be challenged by God, not when we are concerned to keep everything quiet and under control. When the Gospel overturns certainties, prophecy arises. Only someone who is

open to God's surprises can become a prophet.'"

Prophets create action, Sister Regan said, and quoted Pope Francis again, "You want a prophetic church? Then begin to serve and stop talking. Not theory, but testimony." Prophetic creativity enables us to "not save up ourselves but to spend ourselves for others," according to Pope Francis.

Sister Regan noted that by the nature of our baptism, we are called to be prophets.

She admitted that the call can feel uncomfortable. She cited Biblical characters like Sarah, who laughed when God told her she would bear a son because she was too old; Moses, who said, send my brother, I can't talk; Jacob, who had a wrestling match with God; and Jonah, who wound up in the whale's belly.

A better model for how to respond would be Mary. We recite her answer every evening when we pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

"So, if we say we feel uncomfortable, let's think about how Mary accepted it," Sr. Regan said, referring to lines from the Magnificat:

*My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*

Because He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His name.

God is calling us to focus our prayer and our energy in His direction by falling in love again with our profession. She cites a quote from Encarnacion del Pozo, OFS, former minister general, to continue the call for action within the order that began with restructuring in 1978.

Continued on next page.



Pope Francis signs encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* at the Tomb of St. Francis in Assisi.



CIOFS Presidency at work in Rome. Photo by R. Stronach, OFS.



CURRENT MINISTERS GENERAL: (from left) **Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR; Tibor Kauser, OFS; Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM; Fr. Roberto Genuin, OFMCap; Fr. Carlos Trovarelli, OFMConv, and Sr. M. Magdalena Schmitz, representing CFI-TOR.**

Continued from previous page.

“I firmly believe that, based on the experience of the first 40 years, the future of formation in the Order must be oriented toward being. Only by doing, without being, the Order will not mature and regress to a simple and tired routine,” del Pozo said.

Since we are all thirsty for a deeper relationship with God, we should be open to the direction in which prophetic creativity can lead us. Some of this is outlined in *Instrumentum Labororis*. Those directions include creating new fraternities and infusing life into old ones.

“Seek new ways to help the development of the spiritual life of the sisters and brothers. They’re hungry for a deeper relationship with God and a broader understanding of their Franciscan call,” Sister Regan said.

Prophetic creativity calls for personal presence, witness, prayer, active collaboration, and service that goes beyond the

day-to-day administration.

“[Service]...is not limited to ‘bureaucratic issues’ nor to the execution of the guidelines of the Council of the higher level but requires ‘prophetic creativity’ for the realization of the Secular Franciscan life, both as individuals and as Fraternity, consistent with the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church,” she quoted from *Instrumentum Labororis*.

She emphasized that all Franciscans are called to take part in creative prophecy. It all works with the daily conversion to which we are called.

“All of us have to look at it and ask ‘What is my part in this?’” she said.

“Conversion is impossible without motivation and change. It directs us to look at Jesus and Francis for our examples,” Sister Regan said.

Never fear that you lack the ability to pursue the renewal, she added.

“God does not choose those who are qualified. He qualifies those he chooses,” Sister Regan said.

es,” Sister Regan said.

What would happen if everyone responded to God as Francis and Clare did?

Sister Regan cited an answer from Jan Parker, OFS, national minister.

“We would grow closer to God and each other. We would engage more deeply in what we promised and there would be a rebirth of our Franciscan order. Our fraternities would become more alive with enthusiasm, hope and joy.”

The challenge is to heed the call by St. Francis as it is cited in Rule 6.

Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.

“Let’s commit our lives to the message of Jesus and let it take over our hearts and minds with full excitement,” Sister Regan said.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

'Recognize the Power of Loving, Serving'

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

When your earthly journey is over and you meet our heavenly Father, which of the two greetings do you expect?

- “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”
- “Where were you?”

This proposition was presented by Carolyn Townes, OFS, national JPIC animator, at the national chapter.

“I invite you to ponder that thought. Meditate on it. Let it upset you. Let it make you uncomfortable. Because I guarantee, those who have nowhere to lay their heads at night are not comfortable,” Townes said.

Townes said she calls on the Holy Spirit each day for guidance on her mission in the world.

“How may I to show up for my brothers and sisters, especially those who lack hope? How am I to show up for the lost, the broken, the outcast, the marginalized, those who grieve and are in pain? How am I to show up for those who are scarred by the sin of racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism? And how am



Carolyn Townes, OFS

I to show up for those who are further scarred by those who deny the isms even exist,” she asked.

Her presentation encouraged Franciscans to recognize the power of loving and serving daily in our world.

“When we encounter the stranger, the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the migrant—regardless of how they got that way—we are called to minister to their needs,” Townes said.

“We are not called to judge, to condemn, to criticize or to blame—we are simply called to love and care for them,” she said.

The intention behind that love and service extends beyond our opinions.

“Yes, we love and care for the unborn because we deem them “innocent.” But then we turn our backs once they leave the womb and become the migrant, the refugee, the homeless, the broken, the sinner. God loves them all just the same—whether they are innocent or guilty of living in a fallen world.

“God loves them all. Are we not called to do likewise? If we say we are followers of Jesus and Francis, that means we live, move and have our being like Jesus and Francis,” Townes said.

As followers, we are continually called to the life of service and love.

“Today...we tend to pick and choose which parts to follow and which parts we want no part of. Our Lord was a migrant and a refugee, but we don’t want to look at that part of his story because it doesn’t jive what I think my...savior should look like.”

'She Is on the Margins'

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

Donna Hollis, OFS, is the 2021 recipient of the National *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award* presented at the National Chapter. She is a member of the Our Lady of Guadalupe Fraternity in Las Cruces, NM, and serves as a councilor on the National Executive Council.

Carolyn Townes, OFS, JPIC animator, introduced Hollis as a Franciscan living out her call.

“She is on the margins, at the border, taking care of those who have nowhere

to lay their heads at night,” Townes said. “She does not judge or question why – only, what can I do to help? How can I love you and care for you – one human being to another? One child of God to another child of God.”

Hollis explained that her work is inspired by Leviticus 19:34, which reminds us to welcome everyone. “You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself.”

She works with Project Oak Tree created in 2014 by the Catholic Diocese of Las Cruces to provide hospitality to refugees, who were released from custody to El Paso and the surrounding area to transition to life in the United States. The organization is staffed by volunteers helping unite the immigrants with their families living in the U.S.

The name of the organization is inspired by a passage from Chapter 18 of Genesis, where the Lord appeared

Continued on next page.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER



Donna Hollis, OFS, with Central American refugee family.

Continued from previous page.

to Abraham by the Oak of Mamre; and when Abraham spotted travelers approaching, he offered them food and rest. Later he realized he had been visited by messengers or angels of God.

Within a year, the work at Project Oak Tree surged when refugees began fleeing violence and extreme poverty in Central America and other Latin American countries.

“We, At Holy Cross Retreat Center are just one of the ‘In between places,’ giving them food, clothing, medical care, covid tests, vaccines from the medical team, planning transportation to their families in the US,” Hollis said.

The need has only grown.

“The U.S. government has reported encountering an unprecedented number of migrants at the southwest border. In New Mexico alone there have been 98,409 Border Patrol encounters with people entering the U.S. illegally since October 2020. This count includes unaccompanied children, some of whom are dropped over the wall, pushed through an opening or abandoned somewhere along the international line. Although it is hard to believe, their par-

ents are just trying to save their lives,” Hollis said.

The reasons behind the migration are complex, but the fear that the people have is real.

“People from countries neighboring the U.S. are facing violence, poverty and corruption in the governments that cannot help them. In short, they and their families are not safe,” Hollis said.

Neither is their journey secure.

“From the very moment that a migrant decides to leave home and take off north, all the way until they reach their destination, the threat of death is present on the journey,” she said.

One example was a teenage boy who was found murdered and his body mutilated because he was unable to pay a Mexican gang the ‘crossing fee’ they charged to get into the U.S.

Another was a Mexican woman captured by a border patrol agent.

“She was handcuffed with three others, struggling as she was being forced through a barbed wire fence. The woman slipped her hand from the handcuff and ran. After about 50 feet, she fell from a 20-foot cliff in the dark-

ness, smashing her head and dying near the river’s edge,” Hollis said.

She cited statistics from the International Organization for Migration that said 2,191 persons have died along the U.S.-Mexico border since 2014. She added that the U.S. Border Patrol reports that 8,050 migrant deaths occurred along the Southwest border since 1998.

The journey remains incomplete once they reach the U.S. border where they may be sent back to Mexico to await their immigration hearing instead of being released to their sponsors. This is a result of the Migrant Protection Protocol. The MPP requires people who have asked for asylum to return to Mexico to prevent them from spreading Covid in the U.S. It means that the refugees are at risk of further violence and lack access to proper food, shelter and medical treatment, Hollis said.

“Others are detained and live in ‘congregate settings’ that migrants are typically held in. These settings are not set up for social distancing, nor designed to care for people in normal times, let

Continued on next page.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

AWARD REPRESENTS ALL WORKING FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

In true Franciscan fashion, Donna Hollis, OFS, began her JPIC award talk by recognizing others who were nominated for the award.

“This award represents and includes all of us who work tirelessly for Justice and Peace. It is not just me, but many members working together as Franciscans, and people with compassionate hearts showing the love of God through our actions for others in most need,” Hollis said.

The other nominees:

Thomas Michael Fame, MD, St. Margaret of Cortona Region, began a fundraising project for the poor in Haiti.

Stacey Antine, OFS, MS, RDN is the founder of HealthBarn USA. As a registered dietitian she feeds ill children and their families and seniors in need through the Healing Meals programs.

Kelly Lynch, OFS, St. Margaret of Cortona Region – her ministry is called

“Mychal’s Message,” which continues the work of Fr. Mychal Judge, OFM, chaplain for NYC Fire Dept. who died while serving victims of 9-11. Mychal’s Message meets the needs of the homeless and shares Fr. Judge’s message of unconditional love.

Alan Ouimet, OFS, Blessed Solanus Casey Region – Alan’s work is with the Franciscan Family Apostolate and the work they do in India. Through the Franciscan Family Apostolate, individuals, families, and fraternities in the U.S. are privileged with a unique level of connection to their sponsor families in India.

Fr. Emmet Murphy, OFM, Holy Name of Jesus Province – Fr. Murphy conducts outreaches to immigrants in US parishes and travels to developing countries on mission trips.

Valerie Baronkin, OFS, Brothers and

Sisters of St. Francis Region. She is the Greenville Deanery Respect Life Coordinator. She attends the March for Life in Washington DC. Valerie’s work in the Pro-Life arena exemplifies her peace efforts.

Fr. Seraphim Wirth, OFM, Franciscan Brothers of Peace in St. Paul, MN. He has provided spiritually, emotionally and materially for the “Karen Refugees” in St. Paul, and in the Region of Myanmar. Fr. Is the chaplain for the Karen community of about 200 families who are the ethnic minority from Burma.

Fr. Murray Bodo, OFM, St. John the Baptist Province – we know and acknowledge Fr. Bodo’s ministry of living the Franciscan life through his writings which have formed our own Franciscan way of life. Through his courageous initiatives, he works to animate compassion and nonviolence in the world.

JPIC AWARD

continued from previous page

along emergencies. Even those who have demonstrated through a credible fear interview that they merit a U.S. immigration hearing may have to wait for their hearing in Mexico,” she said.

The crisis is compounded by the Afghanistan refugees who were airlifted out of their country to the U.S. after the Taliban took over. Nearly 10,000 Afghan refugees were housed at Ft. Bliss Dona Ana County Range Complex, not far from Las Crucis.

“The relocation of Afghan families into communities across the U.S. creates an opportunity for each of us to stand up and assist people in need. The transition away from the emergency response to the more quality of life response is ongoing. The refugee site may close in the spring once resettlement operations are complete,” Hollis said.

Another 4,000 Afghans resided at Holloman Air Force Base. These were vulnerable contractors and their families who worked with the U.S. during the war in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. They, too, have moved on to resettlement.

“We see the face of Christ in the faces of the refugees. The Divine seed is in everyone. We just have to recognize it. Hopefully, they see God’s love through us,” Hollis said.

Hollis closed her presentation with a reminder of the Gospel’s call to do God’s work among the vulnerable and marginalized.

“So, what do I do with Justice and Peace? I live it out with many, many others who help and support those most vulnerable. We have many Secular Franciscans living out this call to help

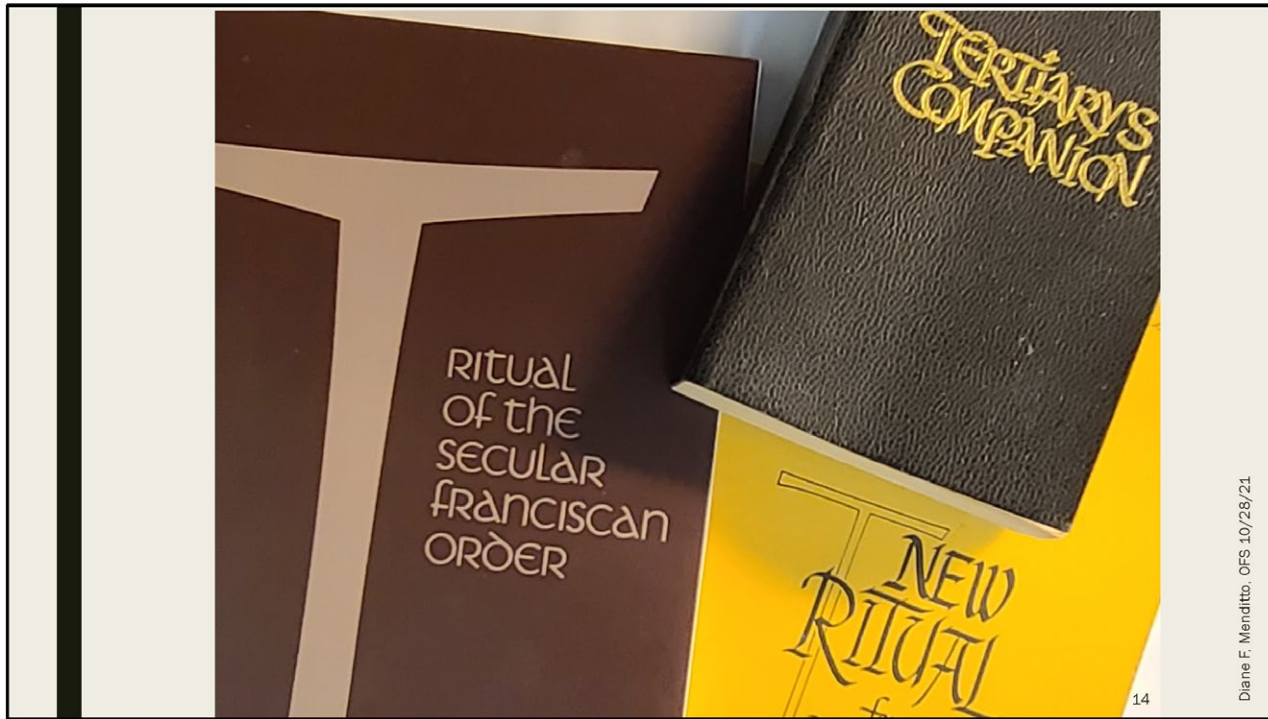
migrants and refugees in their area of the state. Fraternities seek ways to help and explore ways to be involved with the needs of their areas, including soup kitchens, homeless, the elderly, writing letters to our congressmen and more. We are just being present and much more. We are all living it out.”

“Jesus is telling us where to find Him and where to find God: in the stranger,” Hollis concluded.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me. I assure you, as often as you did it for the least among you, you did it for me.”

— Matthew 25:35-40

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER



Diane F. Menditto, OFS 10/28/21

FORMATION TEAM REVEALS RITUAL AS A TREASURE

The National Formation Team unpacked the Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order and revealed a treasure for the life of Franciscans. Written by the International Franciscan Liturgical Commission led by Benet A. Fonck, OFM, it was officially approved in English in 1985.

Formation Chair Diane Menditto, OFS, began the program with an historical overview of the Ritual. The Tertiary's Companion, for example, was used prior to 1955. "(I)n 1966, in light of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II, the Commissaries General of the Franciscan Order urged the entire Franciscan world to engage in an overhaul of the rule, constitutions, and ritual of the Third Order."

Following that recommendation, the New Ritual for Public Functions was compiled in 1973 by Benet A. Fonck, OFM and his associates. Father Benet, also spearheaded, the most recent version of the ritual in 1985. This version provides background information, liturgical guidelines, and prayers used at important events.

In the forward to the Ritual (p. vi), Diane noted, "we are urged to enrich our local celebrations with signs, symbols, gestures, music, and whatever practices are appropriate to enhance the spirit of prayer of the worshipping community."

The Ritual: Pure Gold

Anne Mulqueen, OFS, spiritual assistant for the Formation Team, described the Ritual as "pure gold."

"Two very important 'golden threads' found in the Ritual are our Secular Franciscan identity and heritage and an understanding that fraternity is a place where we belong."

Through a quick overview of the Rite of Admission, she brought into focus the fact that the candidates are called "to live more intensely and faithfully their Baptismal promises; to follow Christ; to follow the example of St. Francis; to serve others; to live as a secular person; and all for the glory of God."

Add to that the sense of belonging: "The fraternity promises to support the

candidates on their journey. The fraternity also expects the candidates to enrich the fraternity... That's what it means to belong! Mutual love and support."

The Rite of Profession, she noted, "contains the most significant life-changing statement. They are making a permanent commitment to the gospel life... It is life altering and there will be no turning back."

Anne added that symbolic gifts are very important, conveying meaning that has an effect deeper than words can express. "Music, gesture, images, gifts all enhance prayer because they engage the senses as well as the intellect."

The Ritual suggests the following gifts: at the ceremony of welcoming, a biography of St. Francis and St. Clare; at the rite of admission, the Tau and a copy of the Rule; at profession, a copy of the Holy Gospels. She adds, "The Gospel is much more than a symbol. It is to be internalized because to profess the Gospel, one must know the Gospel."

Continued on next page.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER



FORMATION ON THE RITUAL

continued from previous page

She offered some points to remember:

- Rituals should be celebrated publicly in fraternity.
- Advance preparation and focused intention are vital.
- Everyone is expected to be a participant.
- When we gather, we are in the presence of GOD.
- Include your spiritual assistant in the planning.

The Ritual as a Formation Source

Layna Maher, OFS, and Justin Carisio, OFS, formation team members, explored how the Ritual can be used as a formation source. Layna began by emphasizing that “initial formation should anticipate and illuminate the Ritual.” She added that “rites strengthen our union with God.” Each rite has specific elements, she said; they include questioning the candidate, witnesses, the wording, the acceptance by the candidate and the symbols.

“Each rite is instructive and affirming of the vocation and life of the Secular Franciscan.”

For formation directors, she reminded that “the Rite of Profession incorporates into the ritual key themes to be explored and learned during initial formation.” These include: living the gospel following St. Francis, fidelity to the Church, maintaining the spirit of service, the importance of the Rule, the renewal of Baptism and Confirmation promises,

that our mission is to rebuild the church, the centrality of life in fraternity, and the permanence of the commitment.

Justin then took the attendees through the rite of profession, acknowledging the beauty of the words and the intensity of their meaning. He emphasized that the candidates should be made aware of these words, the reality of their meaning and the commitment they are making long before they profess them as they stand publicly before the fraternity and the witnesses of the church.

Fraternal/Pastoral Visitations

Francine Gikow, OFS, and Mary Stornach, OFS, both members of the Formation Team, discussed the prayers for the Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation.

Francine addressed the fact that Article 92 of the Constitutions states the purpose of the visitation, which is to be a booster shot for those professed; to assure fidelity to the charism and rule; to help fraternity life in assisting in “issues” within the fraternal dynamics; to reinforce the unity of the Order, reminding everyone that each one of us lives in four fraternities – local, regional, national and international; to ensure that we are part of the Franciscan family and the Church, and to ensure that we reach out to the Friars, Poor Clares, and other branches of the Franciscan family.

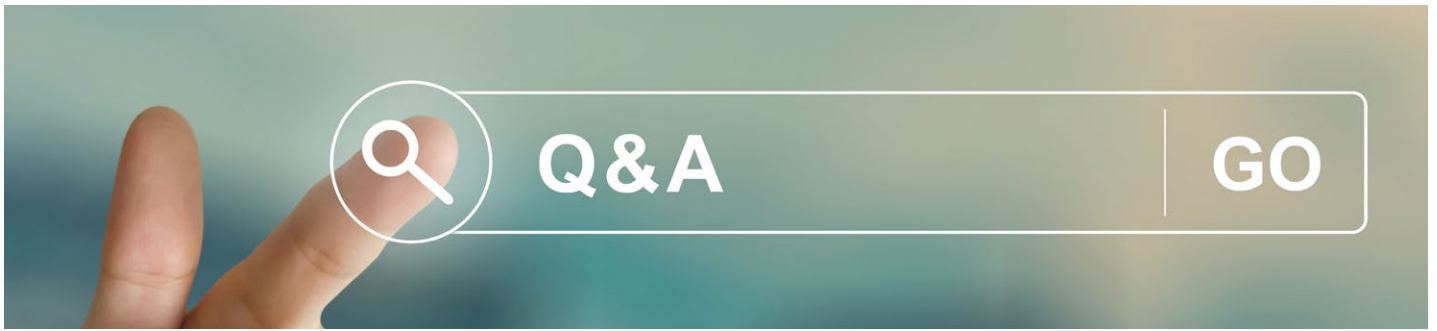
She explained that within the prayers of the visitations, there is a ‘flow.’ “Sometimes they are reminders of our purpose, other times they are

petitions or goals.” She added that we should “SAVOR the actual words of the prayers.” She highlighted the prayers and allowed the participants to embrace the message and tone of the words.

Mary then completed the program by reviewing the closing part of the Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation during which time the visitors have a fraternal dialogue with the fraternity members, offering observations, comments and recommendations for the fraternity, or, as the General Constitutions Article 93 say, “fraternal correction.”

She asked the participants to listen to the words of the closing prayer, during which time, “in fraternal love,” the fraternity visitor lifts the fraternity in prayer and reminds the fraternity to remain faithful to the Rule. The fraternal visitor instructs the fraternity to “be at peace, warn the idlers, give courage, care for the weak, be patient, do not take revenge, wishing the best for the brothers and sisters and for the community, be happy at all times, pray constantly, give thanks, and then, as a final reminder that we are Brother and Sisters of Penance, to prepare for the last days.”

She concluded with Francis’ blessing to Brother Leo: “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May he look upon you with kindness and give you his peace. May the Lord bless you, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”



CNSA and NEC Respond to Questions and Provide Updates

The Saturday afternoon session with the Spiritual Assistants and the National Executive Council (NEC) tackled questions that attendees submitted.

About spiritual assistants:

Discernment is recommended for those OFS interested in becoming spiritual assistants. The CNSA website offers some direction. More than one interview is necessary. We need to get more familiar with the person and learn about his/her background.

About formation and enrichment for spiritual assistants:

The quality of formation of the spiritual assistant is critical. Mentors should be provided for beginning spiritual assistants. The NAFRA website offers guidelines on how to establish a Spiritual Assistant program. There will be some enrichment at the Q. But also, when the national assistants meet, they often invite local spiritual assistants to join them.

Responsibilities of secular spiritual assistants:

Secular spiritual assistants should not be assigned to serve in their own fraternities. When a Friar Province considers this, we should discourage them. If secular spiritual assistants are assigned to their own fraternity, they must know in advance that they give up their vote when they become a spiritual assistant. The role of the spiritual assistant is to “bridge the divide between the friars and OFS.”

Communication with friars:

Sometimes, the friars do not answer e-mails. If they don't respond one way, try another way. Don't presume that e-mails are read and remembered. Be persistent and creative. If you know someone in the province, ask for help or ask the national spiritual assistant of the same obedience.

Canonical establishment document:

Information is available in the revised *Spiritual Assistant Handbook* which is available digitally on the website.

Establishment of other Third Order Groups:

Encourage members to inform the regional ministers of when other groups are reaching out in their region. Some groups appear to selectively defend Catholic teaching, refuse to dialogue, and may be cult-like in how they engage with the world. However, any friar province may establish other Third Order groups. It is important that we stand firm in what we believe. Recent breakaway groups profess the Leonine Rule. We abrogated that rule. Our profession was made under the Pauline Rule. Let us remember what we professed to and allow ourselves to be challenged by it. Be aware. Educate. Communicate. Be prepared.

Same-sex legal unions::

We follow church teaching even when it is difficult or inconvenient. Therefore, unions outside of those blessed by the church are not compat-

ible with membership in the OFS (for example, same-sex unions). Harmony with the Church is important. The CNSA and NEC can help guide the process of dialogue for the fraternity's leadership to shepherd the member in such a situation to discern which commitment they will choose to follow; a printed guide is being developed.

Revision of Ritual:

The Council has finally been able to negotiate the purchase of the copyright of the Ritual. This will allow the National Fraternity to begin both the updating of the English version and then the translation into Spanish and other languages. Work has just begun, spearheaded by the CNSA, and we are asking members for anything they may want considered for inclusion.

Duns Scotus:

Modifications were made to the wording of some of the amendments in the Duns Scotus Formation Fund Principles and Procedures document. Nominations should be submitted to the NEC for new members of the board. Any fraternity or fraternity member seeking funding for special formation programs can go on-line to secularfranciscansusa.org under the tab, “Resources: Guidelines, Forms, and Other Resources.”

National Statutes:

A revision of the National Statutes is being considered. The ministers were asked to send suggestions and give direction to the Executive Council.

Friars Challenge, Help Bring Prayer Alive at Chapter



The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants enlivened the National Chapter by focusing on being part of an order, on prayer and contemplation, and on the Liturgy of the Hours.

As an Order, Respect Different Opinions

“It’s important that we recognize that we are committed to an order, and we should try to be in harmony with the church... and with each other,” **Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM**, said. But, sometimes, he said, it’s difficult. Sometimes, even across the church, there may be disagreement.

He suggested that sometimes we take something that is true and blow it out of proportion, out of context and reinterpret it, moving people away from the truth. Sometimes, we may not hear the scholarly reply. It’s “important to be grounded to know where the church is – in scripture and to understand it in the light of Christ, to pay attention to church and its magisterium.” Respect it.

As an order, we should “be respectful of other people with a different point of view.” For him, he said he likes to “keep things open and on the table – It’s a dimension of being part of an order.” He recommended having a “broad collection of people and hear a lot of opinions. It’s helpful to sort things out that way.”

“There are a lot of things that we have to keep in our hearts and we can’t say



anything,” but, “we can take them to our spiritual directors. I hope that anyone who is in a position of authority, has a spiritual director.”

Being a part of an order can be difficult, especially if you are in the role of leadership, he said. We must not abandon but rather be “vigilant and persistent about coming ever closer to being coordinated with the rest of the church and among ourselves as an order.”

He added, “To be willing to be directed and to give up something you love out of the sense of harmony of the church is a dimension of leadership...” It’s challenging to keep some things in our hearts, but “we must face this challenge because we are part of an order.”

Prayer & Contemplation: the Bedrock

“Prayer and contemplation are the bedrock of our engagement with the divine,” began **Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR**. Prayer is about giving thanks, asking for intercessions, making petitions and adoring God. These are the four types of prayer, he said.

“The Liturgy is the summit with all forms of prayer included,” he noted. Quoting Sister Delio, he said “prayer is where we speak what we know and what we don’t know.” He added Bonaventure’s thoughts: “If we want to ascend to God, we must descend into our own humanity... In prayer, God bends down to embrace us.”



“God speaks to us,” he added, and we should be “listening and engaging with him... Where God is, he gives us the strength and speaks to us in the goodness of creation... We’re the ones who put the veil in front of our faces.”

Through prayer and contemplation we can understand who we are. “It brings all into perspective,” he said, adding that St. Clare’s method of “contemplation begins with the mirror of the Crucified Christ; seeing oneself in daily prayer before the Cross; to accept God in the Crucified is to accept God in our own lives, to accept who we are; the more we contemplate Christ, the more we come to resemble Christ.”

He advised: “Find God in the midst of all that is humanity. Listen to him in creation and in fraternity. Keep your mouths shut and ears open to see how God wants the world to be.”

He closed by saying that Contemplation makes us “aware of God who is always here.”

Liturgy of the Hours: Church’s Gift

Fr. Chris Shorrock, OFM Conv. asked the questions: Can Liturgy of the Hours become a prayer for every person? Can it bring new energy? Can we learn from it?

Using the Timothy M. Gallagher,
Continued on next page.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

National Budget Unanimously Approved

After an explanation of the financial state of the order, the National Chapter unanimously approved a \$221,400 budget for 2022.

National Treasurer Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS, explained that, while expenses for 2022 are anticipated to be \$371,880, the deficit of \$150,480 will be covered by funds in savings.

National Fraternity Sends Support to Various Ministries

Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.

– Article 11, OFS Rule

Consistent with the guidelines from the OFS Rule, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order approved supporting a number of programs which will “benefit God’s children.”

Nominations were solicited for charitable giving by the 2021 task force which consisted of one person from each of the four GEO groups plus the treasurer: Pat Serotkin, Northeast; Jeane Swaynos, South/Central; Terry Barber, West; Joe Edwards, Great Lakes; and Claudia Kauzlarich, national treasurer.

The following Franciscan organizations were selected to receive a \$500 contribution each.

- Dorothy Day Outreach, Loretto, PA.
- Holy Cross Retreat Center, Mesilla, NM.
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Free Clinic, Worthington, MN.
- St. Francis Breadline, New York, NY.
- Tek4Kids, New Albany, IN.

Those receiving a \$250 contribution each were:

- Dream Catcher Youth Servant-Leadership Program, Fulda, MN.
- Francis Center, Portland, OR.
- Tau Ministries, David Seitz, OFS, Waterford, MI.
- Franciscan Brothers of Peace, St. Paul, MN.

Rite of Remembrance Spurs Our Faith

Secular Franciscans who have died in the previous year were honored in the Rite of Remembrance at the National Chapter on Oct. 3, led by Donna Hollis, OFS, national councilor. The ceremony included a reading from the Gospel of John in which Jesus assures his disciples: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Father Jerome Wolbert, OFM, noted that in this Gospel Jesus was preparing his apostles for the future just as he prepares us. He was getting his followers ready for the crucifixion, an event they had not envisioned.

“All of their expectations are going to be shattered... They

didn’t understand until the Holy Spirit came and gave them confidence,” he said.

“Jesus Christ planted the seed. As we come together in this Rite of Remembrance, we fertilize the seed that is planted in our hearts. We learn not to be troubled but that our faith grows in remembrance of our brothers and sisters as we place our trust in Jesus Christ that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

Ministers and delegates from each of the National Fraternity’s 30 regions lit candles and read the names of the deceased. National Councilor Josh Molitor, OFS, sang and played the guitar in accompaniment to the ceremony.

Friars...

Continued from previous page.

OMV, book, *Praying the Liturgy of the Hours - A Personal Journey*, as his reference, he said that “spiritual life consists of ordinary experience with its daily joys and struggles, daily efforts to pray, and daily striving to love God and others.”

“When ordinary spiritual experience is expressed in words, new paths open in our lives of faith.”

Liturgy of the Hours, he said, is a “rich source of (that) spiritual growth.” The Psalms in the Hours “cry to God in times of affliction,” and “express hope and a deep longing for God.”

Quoting St. Ambrose, he said:

“A psalm is ‘a cry of happiness.’ A psalm soothes the temper, distracts from care, lightens the burden of sorrow. It is a source of security at night, a lesson of wisdom by day. It is a shield when we are afraid, a celebration of holiness, a vision of serenity, a promise of peace and harmony.”

The Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, is, he concluded, “the Church’s greatest gift for all members of the church.”

General Chapter Elections

NEW VICE MINISTER GENERAL IS FROM USA



Mary Stronach, OFS

Tibor Kauser, OFS, of Hungary has been re-elected minister general of the Secular Franciscan Order. This is his second six-year term.

Mary T. Stronach, OFS, of the United States of America is the new vice minister general.

Tibor and Mary lead the “little fraternity” of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS). They were elected during the Order’s General Chapter in Rome, Italy, held Nov. 13-20, 2021.

Mary is the first American to hold an elected position on the Presidency. She is a former USA international councilor who has been serving with the Order’s Presidency as an interpreter and as a



member of the International Formation Commission. A member of St. Joseph Fraternity, Utica, NY (St. Kateri Tekawitha Region), Mary also has been serving on the National Formation Commission.

Also elected were seven Presidency councilors serving different areas of the world, plus a Presidency councilor representing Franciscan youth (YouFra). They are:

- **Francis Park, OFS** (South Korea): Asia-Oceania
- **Adolph Assagba, OFS** (Togo): Francophone Africa and islands.
- **Eremenciana Chinyama, OFS** (Zimbabwe): English and Portuguese Speaking Africa.



Tibor Kauser, OFS

• **Dina Shabalina, OFS** (Ukraine): North Europe.

• **Noemi Riccardi, OFS** (Italy): Southern Europe and the Mediterranean.

• **Ana María Raffo, OFS** (Peru): Central and North America (reelected).

• **Silvia Noemí Diana, OFS** (Argentina): South America (reelected).

• **Luis Félix Chocojay, OFS** (Guatemala), YouFra.

The new CIOFS Presidency was confirmed by the president of the elective session, **Fr. Massimo Fussarelli**, OFM minister general, during a mass of thanksgiving at the Basilica of Saint Sebastian in Rome.

Chapter Approves International Statutes ‘Ad Experimentum’

The plenary assembly of the OFS General Chapter on Nov. 18 approved the modification of the International Fraternity Statutes ‘ad experimentum’. This means that during the next three

years, its practical application will be evaluated before making a final decision at the next General Chapter.

The purpose of the decision is to incorporate the International Statutes in

situations that occur commonly in the national, regional and local fraternities and to get feedback from the fraternities to determine if the statutes would need any modification.



A Message From Pope Francis

On November 11, 2021, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order, to whom he addressed the following words:

Dear brothers and sisters of the Franciscan Secular Order, good morning!

I greet you with the words Saint Francis addressed to those he met along the way: “The Lord give thee peace!”. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of your General Chapter. In this context I would like to recall some elements proper to your vocation and mission.

Your vocation is born of the universal call to holiness. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that “lay people share in Christ’s priesthood: ever more united with Him, they exhibit the grace of Baptism and Confirmation in all dimensions of their personal family, social and ecclesial lives, and fulfill the call to holiness addressed to all the baptized”.

This holiness, to which you are called as Secular Franciscans, as the General Constitutions and the Rule approved by Saint Paul VI ask of you, involves the conversion of the heart, attracted, conquered and transformed by the One who is the only Holy One, who is “the good, every good, the supreme good” (Saint Francis, Praises of God Most High). This is what makes you true “penitents”. Saint Francis, in his Letter to all the faithful, presents “doing penance” as a path of conversion, a path of Christian life, a commitment to do the will and works of the heavenly Father. In his Testament, he describes his own process of conversion in these words, which you know well: “The Lord gave to me, Brother Francis, thus to begin to do penance; for when I was in sin it seemed to me very bitter to see lepers. ... And when I left them, that which had seemed to me bitter was changed for me into sweetness of body and soul. And afterwards I remained a little and I left the world (1-3).

The process of conversion is thus: God takes the initiative: “The Lord gave to me to begin to do penance”. God leads the penitent to places where he would never have wanted to go: “God led me among them, the lepers”. The penitent responds by accepting to place himself at the service of others and by using mercy with them. And the result is happiness: “That which had seemed to me bitter was changed into sweetness of mind and body.” Exactly the path of

conversion taken by Francis.

This, dear brothers and sisters, is what I urge you to achieve in your lives and in your mission. And, please, let us not confuse “doing penance” with “works of penance”. These - fasting, almsgiving, mortification - are consequences of the decision to open one’s heart to God. Open your heart to God! To open one’s heart to Christ, living in the midst of ordinary people, in the style of Saint Francis. Just as Francis was a “mirror of Christ”, so may you too become “mirrors of Christ”.

You are men and women committed to living in the world according to the Franciscan charism. A charism that consists essentially in observing the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The vocation of the Secular Franciscan is to live the Gospel in the world in the style of the *Poverello, sine glossa*; to take the Gospel as the “form and rule” of life. I urge you to embrace the Gospel as you embrace Jesus. Let the Gospel, that is, Jesus Himself, shape your life. In this way you will take on poverty, minority and simplicity as your distinguishing marks before all.

With this Franciscan and secular identity of yours, you are part of the outbound Church. Your favorite place to be is in the midst of the people, and there, as lay people - celibate or married -, priests and bishops, each according to his or her specific vocation, to bear witness to Jesus with a simple life, without pretension, always content to follow the poor and crucified Christ, as did Saint Francis and so many men and women of your Order. I encourage you too to go out to the peripheries, the existential peripheries of today, and there to make the word of the Gospel resound. Do not forget the poor, who are the flesh of Christ: you are called to proclaim the Good News to them (cf. *Lk* 4:18), as did, among others, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, your Patroness. And just as the “fraternities of penitents” of yesteryear distinguished themselves by founding hospitals, dispensaries, soup kitchens and other works of genuine social charity, so today the Spirit sends you to exercise the same charity with the creativity required by the new forms of poverty.

May your secularity be full of closeness, compassion and tenderness. And may you be men and women of

hope, committed to living it and also to “organizing” it, translating it into real everyday situations, in human relations, in social and political engagement; nurturing hope in tomorrow by alleviating the pain of today.

And, dear brothers and sisters, you are called to live this in fraternity, aware that you are part of the great Franciscan family. In this regard, I remind you of Francis’ desire that the entire family remain united, certainly with respect for the diversity and autonomy of its various components and also of each member. But always in a lively mutual communion, to dream together a world in which we are all, and all feel, that we are brothers, and working together to build it (cf.

Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, 8): men and women who fight for justice, and who work for an integral ecology, collaborating in missionary projects and making yourselves artisans of peace and witnesses to the Beatitudes.

In this way we started out with the path of conversion, and then all these proposals of fruitfulness, that come from the heart joined to the Lord, and that loves poverty. May Saint Francis and all the Saints of the Franciscan family accompany you on your journey. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady, “Virgin made Church”, protect you. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

Questions for Reflection

1. Many people think holy people are people who perform many acts of piety, people who are frequently around church and doing “churchy” things. Pope Francis instead connects holiness with our life of penance, allowing our hearts to be converted, “attracted, conquered and transformed by the One who is the only Holy One, who is ‘the good, every good, the supreme good.’” This “doing penance” is not merely “acts of penance” but becoming a mirror of Christ. Who are some of the people you have known who are “mirrors of Christ”? What makes them such clear mirrors?

2. What do you do that helps your heart to become more “attracted, conquered, and transformed” by the Holy One? How have both pious acts and moments of ordinary life (like St Francis meeting the leper on the road) been opportunities for you to become more in love with God?

3. What is a time you have gone “to the peripheries”? Describe the effect that experience had on you, on your heart.

4. For some, politics is about elections and laws. But Pope Francis lays out a vision where all of our human relationships are bound together in a community that allows for our political participation, not compartmentalized, but every aspect of our community life connected to our involvement in each other's lives and also connected to our call to holiness, to being mirrors of Christ. What is one way that this vision challenges you to consider something different about how you are living your life? Is there at least a small way that you might respond to this challenge?

5. “Your favorite place to be is in the midst of the people ... to bear witness to Jesus with a simple life, without pretension, always content to follow the poor and crucified Christ.” How do you think Pope Francis is trying to encourage us by declaring that our secularity, our being “in the midst of the people” is our “favorite place”?

6. *Just as the “fraternities of penitents” of yesteryear distinguished themselves by founding hospitals, dispensaries, soup kitchens and other works of genuine social charity, so today the Spirit sends you to exercise the same charity with the creativity required by the new forms of poverty.*

What are some of the “new forms of poverty” that you see? What are some of the opportunities you and the members of your fraternity have to respond to these new forms of poverty?

7. Not all of us are great “organizers” of others. Yet we are each called to nurture hope. How does our fraternity help to nurture hope and exercise compassion and closeness, for each other and for those outside our fraternity as well?

From Roswell to Rome for a Fraternity Gathering

Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS
National Secretary and Alternate International Councilor

In November 2021, I had the opportunity to travel from Roswell, N.M., to Rome, Italy, for a fraternity gathering. Well, it wasn't just *any* fraternity meeting, it was the gathering of the International Fraternity Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS). All Secular Franciscans (OFS) are members of the International Fraternity. But this was the first time I was able to attend it. Of course, I more regularly attend gatherings for the other three fraternities for which I am a member – the OFS-USA (national), Our Lady of Guadalupe-Empress of the Americas Region (regional) and St. Francis– Roswell, N.M. (local).

The International Fraternity Council meets every three years. Due to COVID, the XVI General Chapter was postponed to November 13-21, 2021. This time, the gathering also involved the VII Elective Chapter of the International Fraternity Council. Awilda Guadalupe OFS, CIOFS Councilor for OFS-USA, was not able to attend. Since I was elected as Alternate to the CIOFS Councilor (as well as National Secretary), I made my way to Rome to represent the OFS-USA at the Chapter. What an honor!

After 24 hours of traveling, I arrived at the meeting location. The first person to greet me was our Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS. We had met two times before (2015 and 2016), but I was truly amazed that he remembered me, seeing that there are 173,000+ OFS. Surrounded by many strangers wearing masks and speaking various languages, Tibor's greeting indicated I was family and welcome. Presidency Councilors staffed the registration table. The servants were serving their brothers and sisters. Soon after, I was reunited with Mary and Bob Stronach, OFS,¹ who were working at the Chapter in various capacities.

There was a buzz in the lobby. No matter the language, the enthusiasm was evident. Participants from five continents were so excited to be together after a year-long delay, and it wasn't just because of the access to Italian gelato!



The *Instrumentum Laboris*² inspired the Chapter theme: “Animating and Guiding with Servant Leadership.” The talks, homilies, and keynotes³ were focused on this challenging but appropriate theme. It is difficult to be brief about the events of the nine-day gathering, so I direct you to the summaries, the presentations and photo galleries for each day at: <https://ciofs.info/news/gen-chapter/2020-general-chapter/>.⁴ Thanks to Bob and Mary Stronach, OFS, for the wonderful summary of the days’

events along with the collection of snapshots. This article contains the impressions from my participation in the gathering.

The number of participants was impressive. A total of 57 of 70 National Fraternities were represented, along with the wider Franciscan Family. I met brothers and sisters from Mexico, Central America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The four Ministers General participated in the Chapter (Amando Trujillo-Cano, TOR; Fr. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM; Fr. Roberto Genuin, OFM Cap; and Fr. Carlos Trovarelli, OFM Conv). Our former General Minister (2002-2014), Encarnacion del Pozo, OFS, also attended the Chapter.

It was a relief to learn that this Chapter followed the same format as the Chapters for the OFS-USA National fraternity and regional fraternities: prayer (daily Mass and Evening Prayer), business meeting, formation, and hospitality. It wasn't a surprise that the meeting schedule was packed running from 7:30 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. most days. I had to get used to the European meal schedule (lunch at 1:00 p.m. and dinner at 8:00 p.m.).

Because this was an international gathering, materials were provided in the four major languages of the Order (Italian, English, French, and Spanish). Real-time translation was provided for presentations and discussions in the large group meeting hall. Individuals had handsets with earphones to dial into the appropriate translation channel. Presenters and those in the audience with questions had to speak slowly so the translators had time to translate. As you can imagine, the team of translators worked very hard the entire week.

¹ Mary Stronach serves as a translator and Bob Stronach serves as a photographer and editor of several publications for CIOFS.

² A copy of the *Instrumentum Laboris* from 2020 can be downloaded in English or Spanish at: <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/ongoing-formation-resources/>.

³ Make sure to review the talk by Br. Michael Perry, OFM: <https://ciofs.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/EN-The-Gift-and-Responsibility-of-Minister-as-Servant-fr-Michael-Perry-OFM.pdf>

⁴ Note: the link is correct with “2020” instead of “2021.”

The business topics for this chapter included: changes to the geographic groupings for the Presidency Councilors, triennial budget, and proposed revisions to the International Statutes. Voting was done by raising green, red, or white cards. To generate discussion on those topic and suggested priorities prior to voting, participants met in small groups by language. My working groups included the representatives from the Netherlands, Bosnia Herzegovina, Republic of Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Slovenia, Germany, and Korea. I learned that we all struggle with similar issues: aging membership, few wanting to serve on councils, limited numbers of vocations, shortage of spiritual assistants, and limited formation materials. Several mentioned they experienced challenges with translating – especially lengthy, complex documents. We are blessed in the United States to have access to very good formation materials and strong teams for translation.

I did my best to take notes and pay attention – not just because I needed to report back to our fraternity council, but also because I was appointed to the committee to develop the final “Message to the Order” or Conclusive Document from the Chapter.⁵ General Vice-Minister, Chelito Nunez (Venezuela), Michel Versteegh (International Councilor from the Netherlands), and I were appointed to this committee. This was a labor of love during my first International Chapter.

Highlights of the trip include a private audience with Pope Francis on November 15, 2021, and the Chapter of Elections on November 17, 2021 (the Feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary). The Holy Father challenged us to do penance and to “Let the Gospel, that is, Jesus Himself, shape your lives.” We were so delighted that each participant was able to personally greet the Pontiff. I will never forget the experience.

Elections, no matter the fraternity level, are always exciting to me. This one was exciting because we didn’t get the slate until the afternoon before the elections, several candidates were added before the elections on Wednesday, and during the elections several positions went to the third ballot for the decision. (Does this ever happen in the elections in which you’ve participated?) All candidates were wonderfully qualified and dedicated, so the Holy Spirit truly was needed. Also, this was an historic election, as a

member from the United States (Mary [Maria Teresa] Stronach) was elected as Vice-Minister General. We pray that the Holy Spirit leads the newly elected Presidency members as they form as a Council and digest the outcome from the Chapter. Our new Presidency representative is Ana Maria Raffo from Peru. She is representing Northern and Central America.



Thanks to outgoing Presidency members: Chelito Núñez (Venezuela), Ana Fruk (Croatia), Attilio Galimberti (Italy), Michel Janian (Lebanon), Jenny Harrington (South Africa), Augustine Young Hak Yoon (Korea), and Andrea Karlovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Their efforts in serving the Order over the last seven years (some longer) have been monumental.

Another fascinating point was related to YouFra. There was a general discussion on how to incorporate YouFra members into the OFS. Many (20+) participants revealed they had been part of YouFra in their countries (European, Central and South American). I had never lived in an area where YouFra groups were strong – so I was quite surprised to learn how extensive they are in other parts of the world. Many of those people responding were in their 40s. It was very impressive to see that those people who started as YouFra members were very active as adults.

Bonzica Loncar, OFS, International Councilor from Bosnia Herzegovina, expressed that at first we were all strangers, but by the end of Chapter, we were one fraternity although from different backgrounds. We knew each other’s names and our countries of origin. We learned a little bit about how each applied their vocations and the challenges of doing it in their specific cultures. These individuals were so excited about doing what Pope Francis exhorted us to do – let Jesus shape our lives. I returned to Roswell⁶ to be reunited with my husband a few pounds heavier because of all the pasta, but energized to continue with ongoing conversion so that I can allow Jesus to shape my life and be open to His holy will.

If you haven’t participated in a regional or national chapter gathering, I encourage you to attend if there is room. These events are an energy boost for our vocation. The Quinquennial is scheduled for August; you’ll be able to meet members of your National and International fraternities there. I am planning to attend. I hope to meet you there.

⁵ The Conclusive Document can be found at: <https://ciofs.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/EN-XVI-General-Chapter-Conclusive-document.pdf>

⁶ I was quite astounded by how many people from all over the world knew about little Roswell, New Mexico. The people would joke with me about the 1947 crash landing.

State of the Order

National Minister, Jan Parker OFS

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

A little over a year ago, my daughter and I stopped at the “Little Church”, one of my favorite places of prayer. We prayed together before heading to the hospital for my surgery that day. It’s been quite a year since then, with many months of chemo.



I am so thankful for the love, support, and prayers of my Franciscan family during this past year, and ultimately, I thank God for what many see as a miracle, because today I’m cancer free.



Of course, there was great relief when I heard this news, but along with the joy, I also find myself nervous and anxious. I can’t help but wonder, “*Is the cancer gone for good? Could I go through all that again?*”

Other cancer survivors have told me how they too, experience a kind of post-traumatic stress.

I reflect on all this because I am far from alone in having had to face trials this past year. As I prepared for this talk, it occurred to me that ***the State of our Order depends to a great deal on the state of each of us.***



We have all been through a lot. Health issues, isolation, job losses, and drastic changes in our lives, not to mention natural disasters, political divides, and social unrest.

This pandemic has affected each of us, and it has affected our Order as well. As fraternities have struggled to meet these challenges, servant leaders are on overload. Many councils were asked to serve longer terms. There’s a lot on our plates. Sometimes I wonder - I got through cancer, but can I make it another year as National Minister? I’m sure many of you have had those days, too, when you’ve asked yourself, “Can I keep going?”

So, what do we do when fears and worries surround us? We continue to pray. And we listen for God’s voice.



One morning last week, when those fears and worries were haunting me, I tuned in to our local Christian radio station. As I did, they announced it was time for “A Minute in the Word.”

My ears perked up when I heard this message from Sandi, one of the radio hosts who often gives this little reflection on Scripture. Here’s what she said:

“*Do you know who you are?*” (That’s when my ears really perked up.) She continued: “*Several years ago, in counseling, I was asked to consider my identity. Who am I, really?*”

It was thought-provoking and good for my soul... Do you know who you are?"

She then shared this Scripture:



“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart...” (Jeremiah 1:5)

She continued: *It is both sobering and life-giving to realize that we are known by God. Fully known. Fully loved. When you know who you are, as God’s beloved child, it changes everything. You not only understand yourself better, but you can more fully embrace the love of your Father.”*

This message resounded in my heart. I truly am a beloved child of God, and my Father is there for me. God will help me do what I need to do. All will be well.

As if I needed further confirmation, my eyes were drawn upwards to a plaque that hangs in my kitchen – it says, “The Lord Your God Loves You.”

I found the encouragement I needed that morning, and *I was filled with hope.*



Hope is energizing. One of my favorite verses about hope is from Romans 5:5, which begins with the phrase: **“And hope does not disappoint...”** Thinking about this promise brings joy to my heart! The rest of the verse gives me the reason for my joy: **“because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”**



Artwork by Kirsten Malcolm Berry,
www.KirstenMalcolmBerry.com
Used with permission

This beautiful image of God’s love being poured out is displayed in Mary Bittner’s home. The quote that encircles the image is in Greek, and is part of that same verse from Romans 5:5 - “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

This is a beautiful reality, and it certainly describes how I feel about the state of our Order. God’s love for us, as a National Fraternity truly has been poured out. God’s love continues to pour upon us, and the Holy Spirit is at work within us.

This pandemic has not slowed us down. Despite the year that we have had, and even though once again at this Chapter we are together only virtually, ***we have not been***

disappointed. We continued to **“live a life worthy of our call”** and, thanks to the Holy Spirit, we have accomplished more than we could have ever imagined.





One of the many gifts that has been poured out upon us this past year is the gift of **prophetic creativity**.

We were first introduced to the topic of prophetic creativity in the Instrumentum Laboris for the 2021 General Chapter, “Animate and Guide with Servant Leadership”. Not only has this been a great topic of conversation, but we have also experienced **prophetic creativity in action** this past year.

One example of that creativity is the technology that we are using right now. The ability for us to meet virtually has broadened our reach, allowing us to come together more often and in greater numbers. Numerous virtual gatherings have been held across our National Fraternity – some quarterly, many monthly and some even weekly. Certain of these were regular meetings of the NEC, as well as meetings of our three Commissions and our many Committees, but ideas for different kinds of virtual gatherings evolved.

Our Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission (JPIC) met in focus groups with four different areas of interest – immigration, care for creation, spirituality and JPIC, and mindful dialogue. Virtual formation gatherings were numerous. There were formation workshops nationally as well as regionally, including one with Ohana ‘O Ke Anuenue Region in Hawaii. Weekly Formation Friday discussion groups sprang up in response to the Formation Commission’s wonderful “Formation Friday” offerings. Formation with Spanish-speaking formators continued with quarterly virtual gatherings. (How wonderful it would be to expand this idea and gather our Korean-speaking formators as well.) Our Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission offered weekly training sessions for YouFra animators, continuing to build on the enthusiasm for outreach to youth. Our three national councilors met regularly with their “councilor groups” of Regional Ministers, and Regional Ministers took the lead by gathering in Geo Groups as well.

All these gatherings resulted in fruitful discussions, Franciscan enrichment, and the building of relationships.



There was great creativity and fruitfulness!

As time went on new ideas sprang up. The NEC began to schedule virtual gatherings with newly elected Regional Council members. What a blessing this was for us to meet these newly elected Regional leaders! We could feel their energy, and see their enthusiasm and their willingness to serve. What a blessing to be able to interact with these new OFS leaders who we may not have otherwise had a chance to meet. These meetings filled me with hope. Those who serve on Regional Councils may well someday bring their gifts and leadership abilities to the National Level.

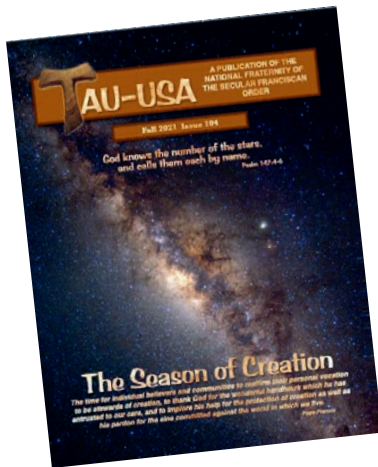
With no obstacles to being able to attend a gathering, our Commissions and Committees flourished. Members were fully engaged, and much work was accomplished. There were weekly meetings of various working groups who made progress on such projects as the revision of the Spiritual Assistant Handbook and the transition to our new Database. The Formation Visioning team met for many weeks in 2021, continuing their work on the new formation texts. Our Website team, now seven in number, met weekly for training and to share ideas that have greatly improved our national website.

I am particularly excited about two new groups that have formed this past year. One is a regional Diversity Group, and the other is our national Accessibility Committee. Each of these have been featured in TAU-USA articles. It would be wonderful to see similar groups developed in every region.

There have been opportunities to meet with the wider Franciscan family as well. Our Ecumenical Interfaith Committee joined with our Franciscan siblings from other congregations and faith traditions for gatherings of the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity. Our Franciscan Family Forum brings together friars, sisters, and OFS members at a monthly virtual gathering place. The Franciscan Action Network (FAN) coordinates “Justice Circles.” Many OFS members are part of these local grassroots communities. Inspired by the Franciscan charism, these groups come together to advocate for social and environmental justice. By the way, we are excited that FAN’s new executive director, Michele Dunne, is a Secular Franciscan. Michele has an impressive background in peace and justice work on an international scale. I look forward to visiting with her soon.

Speaking of the wider Franciscan family, this past summer the Franciscan family came together for an international webinar on Laudato Si. Our International OFS Council (CIOFS) asked our JPIC commission to produce a video for this webinar, and our multicultural councilor ensured that this video, like so many of our other materials, was translated and made available in Spanish.

Our National Fraternity also participated this year in a groundbreaking virtual conference hosted by the Franciscan Federation. The Federation is undergoing a transformation, adapting to the signs of the times and leading the way for a “*Franciscan renaissance*.” The wider Franciscan family is involved in this renewal and our National Fraternity has participated in ongoing Federation sponsored events to help bring this about. This conference opened our eyes to how God is calling all Franciscans to *work together*, and together we will continue to rebuild the Church and the world.



Has there been anything that’s not been virtual? Of course!

We have the TAU-USA, which is very real, and delivered right to your mailbox – a treasure trove of inspiration, ongoing formation, and news. It’s great to have a hard copy to refer to, or to pass on to someone to spur interest in the Order, although current and past issues are always available on our website.

But something else that is VERY real in our National Fraternity is our love for God and each other. This is seen in our prayer together, in the building of relationships, the increase in co-responsibility, the work and sacrifices made on behalf of the Order, the learning and growing through ongoing formation, and all the ways we are living the Gospel.

Much has been accomplished this past year through virtual gatherings, but technology can never measure up to the experience of real presence - being physically present to each other – and I can’t wait for the day when we can be together.

Physical presence enriches our prayer, our formation, our growth, our work. When we are present to each other we can more easily interact; we can make better connections; we can have those conversations that are so vital to fraternal life; and we can more easily grow in our understanding of each other.



But even now in our virtual circumstances, God is helping us in many ways to build fraternity. We just need to be open to the virtue of patience, and ask for the grace to persevere. We need to be compassionate and understanding. We need to be ready to forgive each other instead of assuming the worst. We need to be ***messengers of joy and hope*** in whatever current circumstance we find ourselves.

Certainly, this past year, hope did not disappoint.

So, ***where do we go from here?***

Let us hark back to something we talked about earlier.

Our identity.

Knowing who we are not only gives us hope – it gives us direction.

I'm reminded of what Tibor said four years ago in his Pentecost letter:

“We must have a clear vision about our identity. It is much more important to have a very clear knowledge of who we are, than to know what we are to do. Our identity is whom God wants us to see. Without knowing who we are we will never know what we should do, and will make lots of mistakes, even if we have a good intention.”

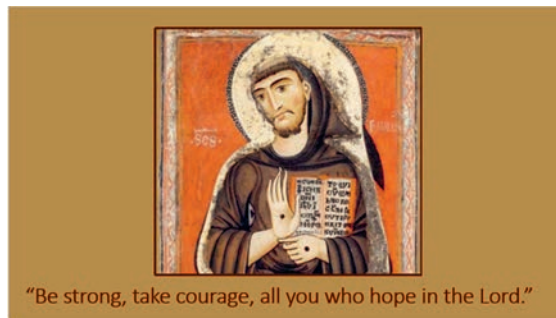


The prophetic creativity that has begun ***continues the trajectory*** that I spoke of last year and the year before. The work that began with the first visioning on Youth in 2017, followed by the visioning for Formation and JPIC, will continue to flourish. We have some big projects before us – the completion of our new formation materials and the revision of our National Statutes. These will come. The vision will have its time.

We will look forward to what God will do next...



AND -- we can look forward to the biggest celebration of 2022 -- our Quinquennial Congress! It will truly be a Franciscan Jubilee! What a way to celebrate all that God has done!



And God willing, we will be together!

We have God, and we have our Franciscan Charism, and we have each other.

For all that has been, we give praise and thanks!

For all that is yet to come, I say,

“Be strong, and take courage, all you who hope in the Lord.”

Many thanks to National Vice-Minister, Mary Bittner, for her help with this report. Many thanks also to the entire National Executive Council and our Commission Chairs who have all worked very hard this past year. We are a great team, and it is so true that “Teamwork makes the Dream Work”. I am very thankful for each of them.



STRENGTHENING OUR FAITH JOURNEY

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS

National Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission Chair

I recently enjoyed conversing after Mass with several young adults who were home for the semester break from college. One of them shared that he felt a bit lost off at school without his family and the friends he'd grown up with. He was especially concerned that his faith life had come to a standstill.

"It's hard to talk myself into going to Mass by myself," he admitted. "I spent my life going to Church on Sundays, and now I feel like a deer without my herd."

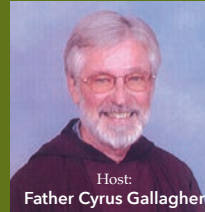
"I know what you mean," his friend added. "Our family attended everything! Mass, Reconciliation, pancake breakfasts, Lenten soup suppers... you name it. I can tell you all the Catholic Church rules and rites, and I still go to Mass, but I get so bogged down during the week, that I'm not sure what Church has to do with real life! I feel like it's just an obligation."

"I had an interesting experience," a third young person shared. "One of my new friends invited me to her church service. There were lots of people our age. They had awesome music and a great sermon. The pastor asked us to think back to when we last talked to God. That made me uncomfortable. I guess I haven't really been praying on my own. My friend talks about her 'personal relationship' with God. What does that even mean?"

The comments I heard from these college-age Catholics validated one of concepts the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FYA) Commission promotes: that if we focus on only one aspect of faith, we deprive ourselves of the fullness of faith. We need a personal life of faith; a formal system of belief; and shared faith experiences. None of us can survive in our faith if we grow in and strengthen only one area. For young people, this is especially important, considering their lack of experience, a bombardment of overwhelming changes, and a new, more mature look at faith's role in their lives.

This is one of the topics the FYA Commission will address at the Quinquennial in August. We will also shed light on why we need to connect with young people and how best to approach that challenge. We will also give you a chance to participate in a multigenerational activity. Jesse Manibusan, a popular musician and speaker, will offer a session for the young adults in attendance and entertain us all with an evening concert. Young adult YouFra members will conduct the service project and one of the evening prayer experiences. We invite you to join us and relish the gift of their presence with us. "Come to the Q: Celebrate and Renew!" Use the event to practice our Franciscan call to bring the gospel to our younger Catholics.

A Pilgrimage / Retreat to Rome, Assisi & San Giovanni Rotondo November 1 - 11, 2022



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Father Cyrus Gallagher

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Franciscan Living

Take Delight in the Lord

By Francine Gikow, OFS

I remember when each of my children was placed in my arms for the first time! I examined each one, marveling over every finger and toe, with their eyes gazing upon me! My children heard my voice and were comforted. I delighted in them, and they delighted in me.

Psalm 37, verse 4, tells us to “Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” If the desire we have is to love God, then we must learn to delight in Him. How then do we do this?

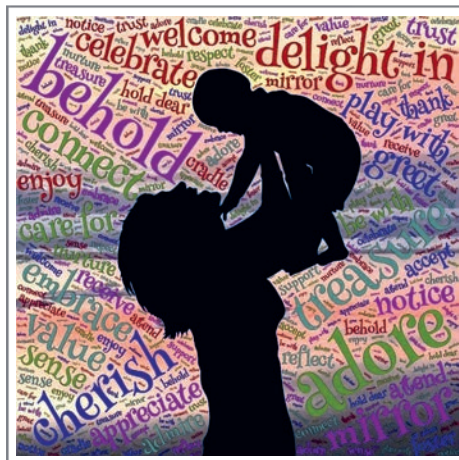
Delight, I suppose, is closely aligned with wonder and awe. However, I believe there is a difference. Wonder and awe arise in our hearts spontaneously as we view a rainbow, a beautiful sunset, or some other unexpected occurrence. We take extreme pleasure and satisfaction in the rainbow, sunset, etc.

In comparison, delight, when used as a verb, means “to please someone greatly.”¹ It could mean that I please someone else, or it could be reversed: when someone else pleases me. Delight, therefore, can be active and reciprocal: My God delights in me, and I take delight in him. This circle of delight allows joy to permeate our relationship...and with God, isn't that the mystery of God living within us? After all, Love (God, himself) is fertile, abundant, and never-ending.

In scripture there are numerous citations of God's delighting in us: “...I daily was his delight” (Prov 8:30) and “...delighting in the sons of men.” (Prov 8:31). But how do we take delight in *him*? How do we make a connection with God to do this?

To find delight in God is intentional—we must make some effort. We have to slow down and allow the God of our delight into our lives. We can find this delight as we gaze upon God through our persistence in prayer, scriptural encounters, and our availability to Him in the sacraments (especially the Eucharist). In this way,

we not only intellectually “know” God but we also have the ability to encounter him viscerally—in our body, heart, and soul. We begin to understand how to take delight in Him as scripture points to those who pursue the wisdom of God as “an unfailing treasure for men; those who get it obtain friendship with God ...” (Wis.7:14) “and in friendship with her [wisdom], pure delight...” (Wis 7:18).



You may want to read in Solomon's book of Wisdom, (Chapter 7) the attributes of wisdom, which is really another name for the Holy Spirit. Read and meditate upon it. Take one attribute each day and stay with it and let it speak to you. Let it become your prayer of praise for the attributes of the Holy Spirit: “...irresistible, beneficent... penetrating through all spirits... pure and most subtle” and is a “pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty... a reflection of eternal

light, a spotless mirror of the working of God and an image of his goodness.” (Wis 7:25-26)

As we contemplate, we make ourselves available to God so he can touch our hearts in order that we delight in him. If we stay with this delight, then the second half of Psalm 37:4 becomes evident: “...he will give you the desires of your heart.” God IS the ultimate desire of our hearts. I pray that we do not lose our delight and desire for him.

As our father, St. Francis says:

*“Therefore,
let us desire nothing else,
let us want nothing else,
let nothing else please us and cause us delight, except our
Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, the one true God...” (ER:
23:9)*

¹ <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/>

Ecumenical Interfaith Committee **Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity**



FRANCISCAN INTERFAITH CONFERENCE

by Donna Hollis, OFS, and Marie Bianca, OFS

“The People of God: A Sacred Prism,” was an interfaith gathering of representatives of various Franciscan groups, which sparked joy, peace, and spirituality for all who attended.

What a privilege it was for us, as members of the OFS-USA Ecumenical / Interfaith Committee, to attend this special event held Nov. 14-16, 2021, at the Graymoor Spiritual Life Center in Garrison, N.Y., a ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement. The Upper Hudson Valley was a riot of fall color, breathing renewal into our parched hearts. Little did we know that the colorful arrival was just the start of a life-giving conference. During these days together our Jewish, Muslim, and Christian speakers helped us understand our shared unity in the creation of God, with love at the center.

This gathering was presented and sponsored by the Roots and Branches Programs Ministry director, Fr. Masud Syedullah, TSSF. The goal was to offer an opportunity for those of different religious traditions to come together in prayer and community to build interfaith understanding and appreciation as expressed in and through the three Abrahamic faiths. The dedicated team represented Judaism (Rabbi Shefa), Christianity (Fr. Masud Syedullah, TSSF), and Islam (Iman Mohamed Bashar Arafat.)

This time of slowing down, listening, and entering the silence within ourselves and those around us helped us reflect on the fact that that all mankind is one, protected by the beloved hand of our Creator. We may express our beliefs uniquely, and as sons and daughters of the Creator we have many different colors to our skin and walk in different traditions, yet we were all created to love God and one another.

We learned some of the spirituality behind other faith traditions. We were led into chanting by Rabbi Shefa in the Jewish tradition, putting Scripture and prayer to music. We experienced Islamic spiritual practice led by Iman Mohamed Bashar Arafat’s singing the many names of Allah, intoning God’s praises. Iman Arafat also spoke of the things that make for peace. “You cannot make peace if you don’t sit with the Lord of peace, the source of peace, the originator of peace, the spring of peace, and the reservoir of peace,” he said. In essence, we surrender our will to God.

Fr. Masud Syedullah, led us into the Christian Tradition with the use of our bodies, meditative reading, and chants of Christian Spiritual practice. This is a doorway in which we talk through our faith what we believe in our hearts by giving expression to it.

Fr. Stephen Holton, an Episcopal priest from the Diocese of New York, shared how to weave relationships with others. He emphasized that the world needs peacemakers, which is why we need to encourage each other to take God’s good news to the streets. There are many wounded people, and we need to be their listeners, he said. In Genesis 18:1-8, when Abraham invites strangers into his tent, he is allowing himself to be vulnerable by feeding them and taking care of them. We need to follow Abraham’s example by offering God’s love, peace, and strength to those in most need. In that way we weave ourselves together with one another.

You may be asking, “What does this have to do with being a Secular Franciscan?” Catholic teaching encourages us to open our hearts to love and respect those whom we do not know. Like the Good Samaritan, we are called to stop along our way to help *anyone* in need, without first asking, “Are you Catholic? Are you Christian? Are you Muslim? Are you. . .?” This is living the Gospel, and living our Rule, for with a gentle and courteous spirit, we are called to accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. Is this path always easy? No. But we have each other to walk with us, to help us when we falter.

Each leader at the conference spoke about the symbol of light. In Isaiah 60:1, it says “Our Light has come.” Each of us at this gathering came to appreciate that Light, shining in each one present. At the end of the conference each participant was given a candle to remind us that we are bearers of that Light, and how we must the fire burning in our hearts. Our time together ended with a beautiful “sending forth,” with individual blessings given by each presider in their language and tradition.

We are thankful for all we leaned and experienced. We came away from the conference realizing that we are blessed to have a rich tradition calling us to embrace all mankind with respect, honoring our differences, as we dare to love deeply.



Left to right: Marie Bianca OFS, Fr. Masud Syedullah TSSF, Donna Hollis OFS



Left to right: Iman Mohamed Bashar Arafat; Fr. Stephen Holton (Episcopal Priest in the Diocese of New York); Donna Hollis, OFS (Secular Franciscan Order); Fr. Masud Syedullah, Third Order Society of St. Francis, Episcopal (TSSF); Rabbi Shefa, and Br. Mark Molter OLF (Order of Lutheran Franciscans)

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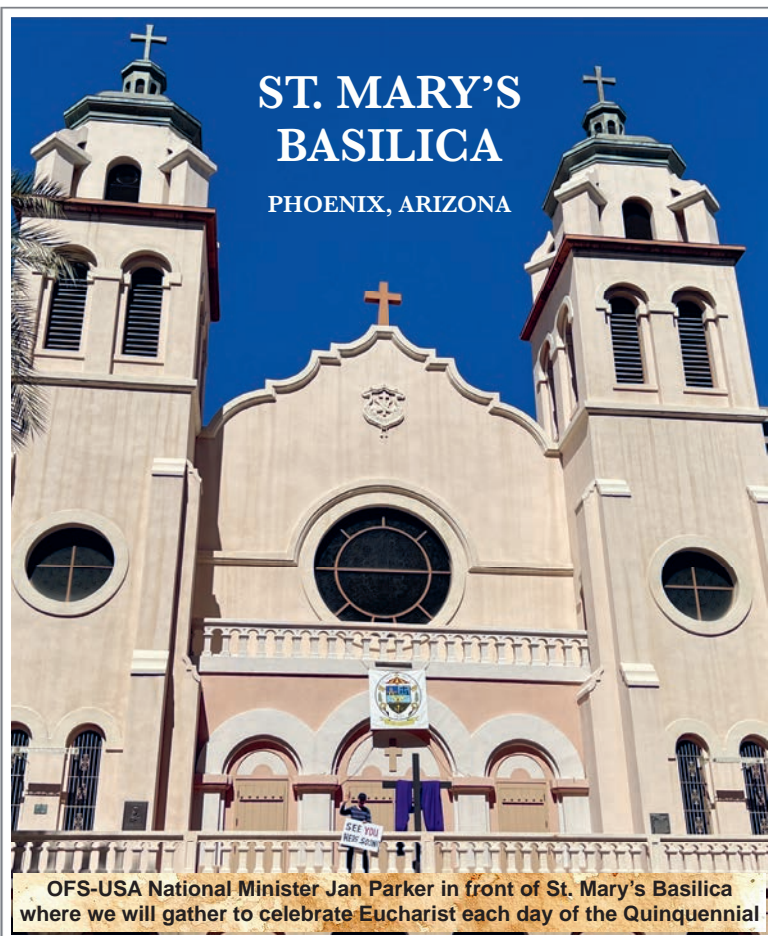
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