

TAU-USA

A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN
ORDER

Winter 2016 ISSUE 90



O Breath of God,
unite us in action!

2017 NAFRA Theme

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 NAFRA 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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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.



NAFRA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

A New Theme for a New Year *O Breath of God, unite us in action!*

by Jan Parker, OFS National Minister

Sometimes God speaks loudly and gives us very clear signs. That's exactly what I thought when I first heard our new national theme for 2017. It was at our Chapter last November that our inspired theme committee came forward and announced, "*O Breath of God, unite us in action!*" Wow! My first thought was, "What better news could there be? I was so happy. This theme fit perfectly with my "let's get it done" personality. I said a quick prayer of gratitude, "Thank you, Lord, this theme is great! It will motivate us so we can really get moving!" Just as quickly as my head was saying this, God spoke to my heart and said, "No, Jan, that's not quite it." What? Isn't this theme about *action*? I realized then that I had jumped to the last word because that is what I wanted to hear. In my hurry, I missed the point. I sat back to think about what God was really saying. In the weeks that followed, the message unfolded.

O Breath of God! Our theme is first and foremost a prayer. How beautiful and how right that is! As our Rule says, "let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do."¹ Our first focus then, before any action, is to be open and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us. "*O breathe on me, O breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the things you love and do what you would do.*"² If our work is not guided by the Spirit, then it is in vain. You might think I would know this by heart, but in my eagerness to accomplish things, it is easy to forget. I experienced a moment of conversion last December as I planned the agenda for our National Executive Council (NEC) meeting. In looking at our long "to do" list I was overwhelmed. Would we have time to cover everything? Where should we start? I called Mary Bittner to get her thoughts, and that's when it

happened. Mary helped me to step back from the "to do" list, and take a breath. In prayer we were led to the beautiful passage from Isaiah 55:1-13, particularly, "*My word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.*" A light turned on, and it all became clear. I knew then that we needed to start our NEC meeting with Isaiah 55, and ask ourselves, "Are we being effective? Are we caught up in projects without thinking about our objectives?" Peace filled me. This is how we would begin. The rest of the story? Our NEC meeting was blessed by fruitful reflection on God's Word, which led us to look at what we were doing, and why. Holy Wisdom then guided us as we covered every item on the agenda.

Our new national theme reminds us of the importance of beginning everything with prayer, so in every moment, let us call on the Breath of God to be with us.

Unite us!

Our theme unfolds further as we ask God to *unite us* in action. When we hear this call to unified action, we may first think of Franciscan fraternity, where we are enlivened for apostolic life.³ As Secular Franciscans, we come together, working side by side in our ministries and projects. To unite in action with our brothers and sisters is vital, but I believe this theme, and our charism, calls us to contemplate a wider, all-encompassing unity – a *communio*. St. John Paul II defined communion as "the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us to make us all one heart and one

¹ OFS Rule, Art. 8

² From the song, "O Breathe on Me, O Breath of God" by Edwin Hatch, 1878

³ OFS Rule, Article 22

soul.”⁴ St. John Paul II also noted that one of our great challenges in this millennium is to promote a “spirituality of communion.”⁵ He describes this spirituality as “an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are a part of me”... to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other's burdens” (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations that constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.”

This sense of communion is inherent in all Franciscans who in every moment and in every endeavor are to see in all persons the image of Christ⁶, and see in all creation the imprint of the Most High.⁷ For us, unity is not a distant idea but a reality that must guide our actions. We are brother and sister to all people, and with all creation. As we pray, “O Breath of God, *unite us...*” it is this image of unity that we must keep in mind.

In Action!

Finally and boldly our theme calls us to action, so let us not stand idly by. We have been told: *Set out into the deep! Go to the peripheries! Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel!* My sweet OFS family, yes, let us act. Let us be about loving and witnessing, but let us keep in mind the totality of our call, and our theme. Our need for God is great; let us gather often in the Upper Room where the Risen Christ invites us, and let him “breathe” on us his life-giving Spirit. Our need for each other is great; may the Breath of God unite us in a holy communion with all people and all creation. The need for action in this world is great; may we go forth rejoicing that we have been called to love and to live the Gospel.

It is clear to me that we have not been given a theme, so much as we have been given a prayer and a path. Let us pray now and in the year ahead, “*O Breath of God, unite us in action!*” and may all of our actions along this way befit the holiness to which we have been called.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte, IV.43

⁵ Pope John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte, IV.43

⁶ OFS Rule, Article 13

⁷ OFS Rule, Article 18

2021 Quinquennial Committee Chair Needed

The National Executive Council is seeking applicants for the position of Chair of the 2021 Quinquennial (Q) Committee. If you are interested in serving in this capacity, please send your answers to the following questions to both Jane DeRose-Bamman at janedbsfo@msn.com and Mary Bittner at mbittner@umich.edu. Please send your response by March 25, 2017. Include your phone, email address, name of your Local Fraternity, name of your Region and Date of Profession.

1. In a few sentences, please tell us about yourself (family, interests, hobbies, etc.)
2. What is your educational background and employment as they apply to this position?
3. What community activities (past and present) have you been involved in as they apply to this position?
4. What OFS leadership, service positions and/or activities (past and present) have you been involved in and at what level of fraternity (Local, Regional, National)?
5. Describe how your gifts, talents and experience lead you to apply for this position.
6. Have you attended past Q's? Which ones? Were you involved in some way (e.g., small Q fraternity leader, vendor, speaker, Q Committee member)?
7. What did you like best about the Qs you have attended?
8. What would you change?
9. What, in your opinion, are the major purposes of the Q?
10. What is your vision for the 2021 Q?

Thank you for your interest in this national opportunity to serve.

SPIRIT OF 2016 CHAPTER

'Rejoice and Be Glad'

By **BOB & MARY STRONACH, OFS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Continued on next page.





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

continued from previous page

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

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

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

church today.”

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

Like a Family Reunion

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

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

together.”

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

“We’ve talked about you... how well you do things,” such as the recent Quinquennial Congress, Chelito said.

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

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

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

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



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

and now.”

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

See Energy, Hope All Over

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

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

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

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

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



Formation Chair Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS

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

‘We Are Called’

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

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

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

“It’s a process.”

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

A Need to Contribute to Fraternity Life

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



The National Chapter in session.

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

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

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

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

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

So Much Depth to Franciscan Vision

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



Jerry Rousseau, OFS
National Treasurer

'Twinning' with Africa OFS

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

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

St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region has been supporting the vocational
Continued on next page.



Vocations Chair Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, spoke of plans to market the OFS vocation, including creating a vocations "landing page" on the web for referring interested persons.



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Formation in Africa

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

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

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

Later during budget discussions, the



Violeta Manibusan, OFS, of Guam

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

Transformative Work

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

blessed because they’ve woken up.”

•••

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

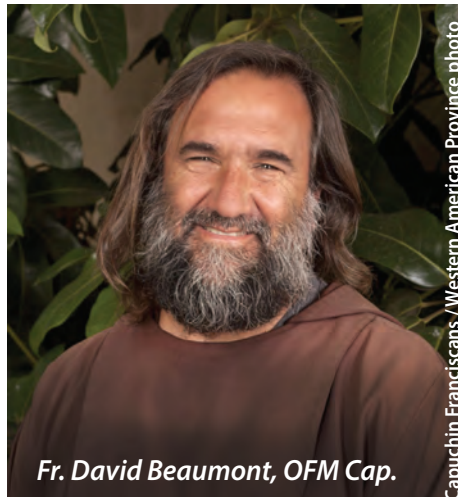
JPIC Award Recognizes Friar's Work with Indigenous People in Mexico

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

NAFRA Declares Stand for Peace in Face of Violence and Hatred

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

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

The statement continued:

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

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

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

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

Breath of God

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

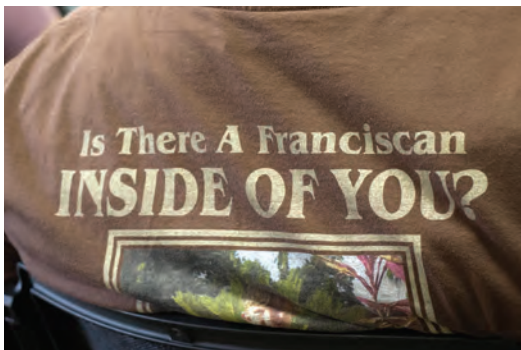
Ending with Hebrew words for "Come, Spirit of God", the theme is:

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



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

CHAPTER CANDIDS



Sharing The Vision

News from the National Executive Council (NEC) to the National Fraternity (NAFRA)

National Fraternity Visitation

The word visitation holds rich meaning for us. Say “visitation” and we may quickly think of Mary and Elizabeth, an infant leaping for joy and the Magnificat. As Secular Franciscans, this word also calls to mind Pastoral and Fraternal Visitations to our fraternities. This brings me to one of the highlights of our recent Chapter – our Visitation from the International Council (CIOFS). Like that visit of Mary to Elizabeth, this Visitation was a time of great joy and a wonderful manifestation of the love we share as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The National Executive Council (NEC) prepared for our Visitation by completing an extensive questionnaire. The resulting 20-page document, compiled by Vice Minister Mary Bittner and Br. Bob Brady, OFM, reflects very precisely the state of our National Fraternity. This extremely informative document was distributed to our Visitors, as well as to all Regional Ministers. It is available to anyone by request.*

Our CIOFS Visitors, Vice Minister General Chelito Nunez, OFS, and General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap., spent two days with the National Executive Council and five days with the National Council at Chapter. On the last day of Chapter, Fr. Francis expressed his gratitude for the sense of belonging he experienced with us, noting, “We need to make our brothers and sisters more aware that once you are admitted to a local fraternity, you are a member of the Secular Franciscan Order at all levels. To be called to serve at the regional, national, or international levels is NOT a promotion; the order is ONE. We need to clarify the concept of the international fraternity – it is *all the brothers and*

sisters in the world, not just the Presidency! Similarly, the National Fraternity is not the National Executive Council or the National Council, but *all the Secular Franciscans in the country*. The contributions of the individual members must flow to all levels of the order. If we understand that we belong to all of these levels of fraternity, the contributions at all levels make sense. It is a matter of formation. You (NAFRA) have so much potential, and the International Fraternity needs us to open up that potential to be used at all levels. We need to open ourselves to be used by the Lord.”

A full Visitation Report will be forthcoming, but the NEC has already discussed some of the recommendations suggested by our Visitors. Overall, our Visitors were complimentary towards our National Fraternity and impressed with the many gifts that our members so generously share. Chelito shared that she was overwhelmed by all the goodness she experienced during her time with us, describing her feeling as “*encandilada*” (roughly translates “dazzled by the light”).

I think I speak for many of us when I say we, too, were *encandilada* – dazzled by all that happened at our Chapter! Praise God for the Light of the Holy Spirit working among us, and working through our beautiful Visitors to bring enlightenment to us. I look forward to the growth that will happen as a result of this Visitation as we journey through this New Year. May we be open and receptive to what we hear the Holy Spirit is saying to us, and trust God to show us the way forward. May the dazzling light of Christ guide us always!

Other Topics Addressed at the National Chapter

Franciscan Action Network

The floor was open at Chapter for a discussion of the work of the Franciscan Action Network (FAN) and the concerns that have been expressed during the past year. All agreed with the plan proposed by the National Executive Council to arrange a meeting with

the President of the Board of Directors of the Franciscan Action Network to discuss those concerns.

Duns Scotus Trust Fund

The Duns Scotus Board of Trustees has approved a new grant application and a new funding cycle. The

application is available by emailing DunsScotusTrustFund@gmail.com.

Franciscan Youth and Young Adults (FYYA)

A National OFS Gathering on the topic of Franciscan Youth and Young Adults will be held July 27-30 in St. Louis, MO. The NEC will invite a group of individuals to attend this gathering to discern together the next steps for FYYA. (See related article in this issue of *TAU-USA*.)

Communications Update

To improve the flow of communications our Regional Vice Ministers and Regional Spiritual Assistants will soon have their own listserv and will be copied on all "NAFRA-L" emails.

Donations

Due to the generosity of our National Fraternity, the following donations were approved:

- \$1500 Franciscan Mission Service
- \$2000 Don Bosco pre-school (Venezuela)
- \$2000 CIOFS Solidarity Fund for African formation workshops
- \$2000 Franciscan Ministries, Inc. (Detroit)
- \$1500 Amazon Relief
- \$1500 Franciscan Family Apostolate
- \$1500 Franciscans International
- \$1500 Villa La Paz, Peru (Ministry of Dr. Tony Lazzara, OFS, former JPIC Award Winner) donated in memory of Deacon Tom Bello, OFS

National Opportunities to Serve

The National Fraternity is in need of servant leaders to serve in several areas. If you are interested in any of the following positions, or would like more information, please contact National Secretary Jane DeRose-Bamman at janedbsfo@msn.com.

National Calendar Coordinator / National List Serve Coordinator

We need two or four detail-oriented and technologically-skilled people to update and maintain our National OFS Email Lists and Google Calendar.

Website Development and Maintenance

Help is needed to develop a new NAFRA Website, see related article in this issue of *TAU-USA*.

2012 Quinquennial Committee Chair

See application in this issue of *TAU-USA*

Participants in National OFS Gathering on Franciscan Youth and Young Adults

See application in this issue of *TAU-USA*

***For a copy of this document send an email to ofs.national.minister.usa@gmail.com**

WEBSITE DEVELOPER NEEDED

After many years of quality outreach and service, the NAFRA website is due for a major redesign. The National Executive Council is seeking a Secular Franciscan who has the skills necessary to design, develop and maintain a website that will appeal to newcomers as well as serve our members.

The ideal candidate must have sufficient experience in Web Development and Multimedia Design or the equivalent to create and maintain a creative and interactive online presence for the NAFRA page. He/she will work with a committee of OFS to access our needs, write copy, and provide photos, etc.

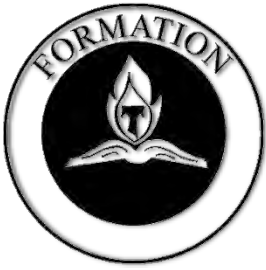
If you are interested in applying, please send your resume to Jan Parker at ofs.national.minister.usa@gmail.com or Jane DeRose-Bamman at janedbsfo@msn.com.

Please include links to websites you have designed and whether you would offer this service as member of a volunteer committee

ST. JOAN OF ARC REGION EXPRESSES GRATITUDE!

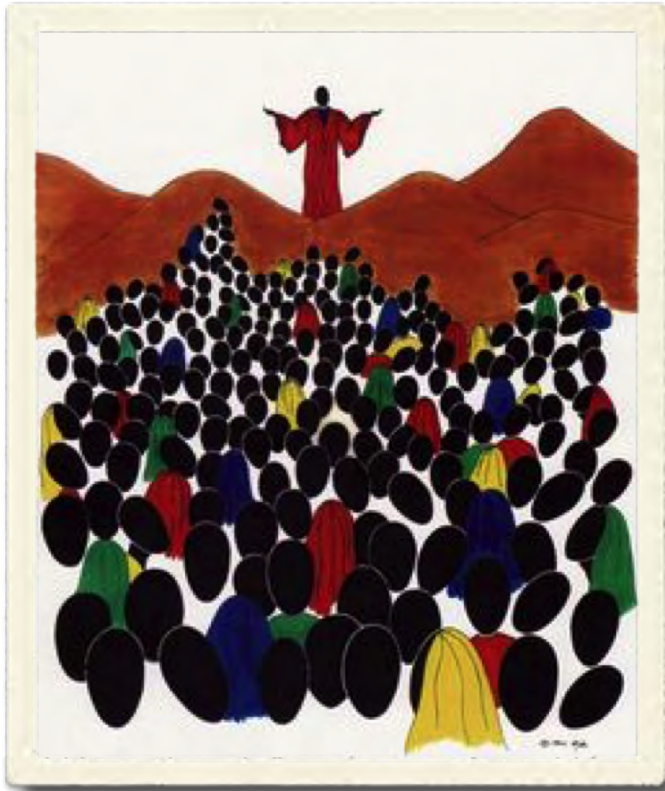
On behalf of St. Joan of Arc Region, we would like to say, "Thank You." These two words really doesn't fully express the amount of gratitude St. Joan of Arc Region wishes to convey to the National Fraternity for its generous monetary support for the six families in St. Joseph Fraternity who lost everything during the historic August flooding in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Their struggles are far from over, but your love and support lifts them up and truly helps them to persevere.

With much Humbleness and Love,
Cherryle Fruge, OFS
Minister, St. Joan of Arc Region



FORMATION COMMISSION

WE ARE CALLED ... to live the Gospel in Fraternity



The National Formation Commission met in September to prepare for the NAFRA Chapter. It is always a blessing to come together to pray and to be present to each other as we ponder a new project. Our discussion began with the challenges put before us at the summer Quinquennial. There, we were all asked to consider a radical change to *be who we say we are*. As our sharing continued, we centered on that “privileged place where we develop a sense of Church and our vocation.” Like Francis, we were individually called to a life of conversion, yet it is through the love, encouragement, support and the gentle correction of our sisters and brothers that we strive to live the Gospel each day. Our fraternities are the environment where we are welcomed. Through our process of prayer and sharing, support and encouragement, recognition of gifts and

relationship, the vision of our formation presentation was solidified. We share a synopsis of fraternity.

Fraternity: A Sense of Belonging and a Place of Joy

Francine Gikore, Storyteller

A sense of belonging was presented as a story that engages the brothers and sisters on a personal level and leads them into experience of “Belonging” to fraternity as family: past and present, local, regional, national and international. It is through our interpersonal relationships in fraternity, by discovery and learning about each other, that we learn to belong. Various Chapter volunteers were asked: “Who are you?” They described themselves using various ‘types’ of personalities commonly found in fraternity at all levels of fraternity life – such as the “wise” one, the “mothering type,” the “simple brother” and the “do-er.” No matter what gift a member brings, we all belong as we build up our fraternity family. Later on, these same people revealed who they really were: the names of the early followers of St. Francis – Lady Jacoba, Brother Leo, Brother Angelo. The connection was made between our current fraternities and the early Brothers. The question was asked, “Who do *they* say that you are?”

Fraternity: Where We Learn to Love and Be Loved

Anne Mulqueen, Spiritual Wisdom

The fulfillment of fraternal love requires that we sacrifice the demands of our individual egos so we can become one body in Christ – not in a closed way, but in a way that allows us the freedom to grow into the unique persons God created us to be. On the night before he was crucified, Jesus uttered the words that best describe fraternal love; “A new command I give you: Love one another. **As I have**

loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34)

The fulfillment of fraternal love has its source in Jesus Christ. Being able to love and be loved in fraternity requires that each person following St. Francis’ imitation of Christ receive and give others respect, affection and acceptance. Each must be willing to communicate on an intimate and authentic level. To love and be loved as Jesus commands requires commitment to our Secular Franciscan form of life.

No fraternity is perfect; therefore, to love and be loved in fraternity must flow from our love of God and our desire to do God’s will. Communicating on a deep and personal level and placing the needs of our sisters and brothers before our own enhance and solidify our relationships. Christ calls us to love our sisters and brothers just as they are, and not as we wish them to be. And remember, “Love never fails.” (1Cor 13:8)

**Fraternity: A Place of Challenge
and Growth;
A Place Where We Develop
a Sense of Mission**

Diane Menditto, Teacher

Life in fraternity is a fundamental element of our vocation as Secular Franciscans. We know this from our Rule and Constitutions. We *talk* about fraternity all the time. The challenge of fraternity life presents itself in how we actually *live* a fraternal life and how that life affects our mission as Catholics and as Franciscans.

Here are some of the joys and challenges we encounter as Franciscans:

Joys

- Support and encouragement from our brothers and sisters
- Collaboration in carrying out our mission of spreading the Gospel
- Shared prayer life
- Authentic example of how we are to live the Rule
- Stimulation in fraternity through dialogue and communal review of our lives
- Stimulation in fraternity through our cultural diversity

- Ongoing formation, which keeps us true to our vocation
- RELATIONSHIP

Challenges

- Willingness to LISTEN to and COLLABORATE with our brothers and sisters
- Willingness to yield to others
- Willingness to be creative in our thinking
- Willingness to seek authentic conversion and set an authentic example
- Willingness to see that those who are different (or think differently) have intrinsic value
- Willingness to be “poor enough” to be generous
- Willingness to use the gifts of every member to accomplish our mission
- Willingness to break down barriers rather than build walls

Many of the joys and challenges of our Franciscan life are intrinsically related to each other! If we are aware of our joys and seek to learn from and be strengthened by our challenges, we can move forward in our Franciscan mission to show, as St. Francis did, that it is possible to live the Gospel.

Take some time to rediscover your fraternity – local, regional, national, international. The *FUN Manual* has a chapter on “Fraternity and Francis” and Fraternity as a Fundamental Element of St. Francis Spirituality.

The NAFRA Chapter Formation PowerPoint will be available on the Formation website.

The Commission welcomes your questions, comments and experiences of fraternity. Email us at: Formationcommission14@gmail.com

Peace and Every Good,
Mary Anne, *-Facilitator -
Commission Chair*

If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging!



Secular Franciscans for the 21st Century
Lester Bach OFM Cap - Winter, 2016/17

THE TIME IS NOW!

* *Rule 13 - They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.*

OFS Constitutions - 2000 - Article 18.2

Reflection

Some people in the world seek power in order to dominate others. Tools of domination include: violence of many kinds, lies, hatred and revenge. On the other hand, Franciscans are called to promote visible, positive action. The power of love encourages relationships and concern for people. We build the goal of genuine peace and justice!

Assuredly a prayerful spirit is vital. The OFS Rule, article #14 (Next page), calls us to *take action* to provide effective ways and means to build the Kingdom of God among people.

We are called to *build a more fraternal and evangelical world!* "To build" includes building relationships among people. Contemplation moves us to trust the Trinity as we share ideas, actions, and love. Our lives model the spirit of the Gospel as well as spirit of St. Francis, fulfilling the words of the OFS Rule.

Dialogue (including 'attentive listening') helps move people to conversion as needed. We develop plans to deal with life's issues and create effective means to build the Kingdom of God.

WORDS TO PONDER

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, and every rocket fired, signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. The world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of laborers, the genius of its scientists and the hopes of its children.

President Dwight Eisenhower

1953 speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

God does not dominate our humanity. In Jesus, God embraces it. It is this option for relationship which defines the humility of God. ... Humanity was not created in the image of an autocratic, self-assertive and dictatorial God, but in the image of a relational, humble God. ... to be humble is to glory in the fact that we are created in love and redeemed through love in order to have a loving relationship with the Triune God who created and redeemed us, and with all creatures with whom we were created.

Circular Letter - October 4, 2005 - General Minister John Corriveau OFM Cap

One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now. We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programs. The Christian's program - the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus - is a "heart which sees." This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.

God is Love (Deus Caritas Est) - Benedict XVI - Paragraph 31.b

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

OFS Rule - #19

Here are some principles I've learned to emphasize before we begin a formal conversation process:

- * we acknowledge one another as equals:
- * we try to stay curious about each other:
- * we recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners:
- * we slow down so we have time to think and reflect:
- * we remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together:
- * we expect it to be messy at times.

Turning to One Another - Margaret Wheatley - Page 29

He who thinks that he is finished is finished. How true. Those who think that they have arrived, have lost their way. Those who think they have reached their goal, have missed it.

The Genesee Diary - Henri Nouwen

We seek to forgive, understand, and offer attentive listening. Dialogue helps build "relationships" in order to achieve the goals prompted by love!

The OFS Rule #13 and #14 (in the other column on this page) call for qualities that Secular Franciscans are meant to achieve. We are to follow the entire OFS Rule in our lives. The world's situation provides openings for Seculars to implement the OFS Rule as a model for others.

We need to do more than day-dream about a better world. The OFS Rule asks that we **build an evangelical and fraternal world to bring about the Kingdom of God more effectively.** We invest time, energy, forgiveness, social action, love, compassion and hope, while keeping in touch with the Trinity. Both **prayer and action** are needed to live a complete Franciscan life based on the OFS Rule.

Our Franciscan vocation requires:

1. That we follow the call from the Trinity with a dedicated mind and heart.
2. That the call brings people together in faith and love.
3. That the call moves us to collaborate in bringing peace and justice to people.
4. That the call is realistic, dealing with negative enticements that power, possessions and prestige may offer.
5. That we respond to the call to develop a prayerful contemplative spirit.
6. That the call creates in us an atmosphere of *shalom* (peace) where people are respected, loved, and live in a spirit of hope and gospel peace.
7. That our call moves us to participate in **building** the Kingdom of God.
8. That the call moves us to model gospel love, and opens us to the Holy Spirit, ready to bring positive alternatives to ourselves and the people in our lives.
9. That the call brings good news to people both by life and words. It's our way of being faithful to the OFS Rule.
10. That the call accepts **dialogue** as one means to discover and implement ways to achieve unity.

Cfr. *Seeking a Gospel Life* - Lester Bach OFM Cap
Pages 113-114 - (The above copy has been revised by the author)

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the first-born of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit will accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

OFS Rule #13

Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. ... let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

OFS Rule #14

Here are a few ideas on **discernment.** They are not exhaustive, but can help in its practice. Keep it simple!

- * *Take time to ask the Lord, in prayer, for the gift of knowing his preference for you.* It is his gift, but we need to desire it and pray earnestly for it.
- * *Clarify the question you are seeking to answer.* Concretize the issues you are dealing with. Avoid fuzziness about what you are after. Be patient in your seeking and continue to pray for the Trinity's help.
- * *If needed, seek advice from a competent person.* It helps to list the pros and cons of the situation. What is the advantage if I choose this way? What are the disadvantages? What are the consequences of the choice or choices I make?
- * *Consider the negative side of the issue as well as the positive side.* Consider positive alternatives and be prayerful, placing them before the Trinity.
- * *God has a preference* about what we do with our lives even though he leaves us free. He prefers things that bring us and others to fullness of life. We need a genuine relationship with the Trinity to accept and implement the Trinity's goal for us.
- * *Take time to choose effective decisions* that will bring new life and love to people in ways that reflect the Kingdom of God! Then ACT accordingly!

Lester Bach OFM Cap - Talk at Queen of Angels Retreat,
Saginaw, MI. - November 1, 1979

... By their profession they pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of St Francis by means of this Rule approved by the Church.

OFS Rule #2

... Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words. ...

OFS Rule #6

2. In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God (Trinity), are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.

OFS General Constitutions - 2000 - Article #13.2
Essential documents of the Secular Franciscan Order



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



VIOLENCE AND PEACE THE ORIGIN OF TWO OPPOSITE WAYS OF BUILDING SOCIETY

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National JPIC Animator

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Article 19, OSF Rule

In his Message for the 50th World Day of Peace, titled “Non-Violence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” Pope Francis urges families, faith communities, government leaders and the international community to practice non-violence and work to build a world of justice and peace.

I was delighted when I learned that the 2017 World Day of Peace message would be about Gospel nonviolence. It is a topic I have been most passionate about since getting involved in peace and justice work so many years ago. During my tenure as Animator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, I have consistently spoken about the many forms of violence and how we are not even aware of them most of the time; especially the way we communicate with one another.

The Holy Father’s message speaks of violence as producing serious negative social consequences, while peace promotes positive social consequences allowing the achievement of real progress. I am sure we have been in situations where the communication exchange was not at all peaceful; full of accusations and scathing criticisms. Did you feel progress being made? Most likely not. You probably felt like you were at a stalemate, at best. This kind of exchange is neither productive nor helpful. We tend toward this kind of communication without realizing the violent and negative effects on the persons involved.

Pope Francis’ message of peace is a call to all the faithful to live the nonviolent way of Jesus. Yes, we will have disagreements with our brothers and sisters, but we must live our call as Gospel people and learn to disagree agreeably. There will always be differing opinions. But remember, conflict is inevitable, violence is not. Instead of jumping to conclusions, take the time to understand the other before you are understood. Truly listen to your brother or sister and understand the meaning behind the message or the words spoken.

There is a tendency toward making assumptions based on opinion. What I mean is, we have an opinion

of the person or organization, and based on that opinion, we color everything they say or do in the light of that opinion, even if what they say or do is positive or just. They “rubbed you the wrong way,” so everything about them is viewed from that perspective. Many of us have done this. No judgment here, just fact. After all, we are human, right? Well, this is where your nightly examination of conscience comes in handy.

- What past judgments are you holding about a certain person or organization?
- Is every action of the person or organization held under the scrutiny of that past judgment?
- Are you willing to let those past judgments go and start each encounter afresh? Why or why not?

Truly reflect on these questions in light of the Gospels. This is the basis of living Gospel nonviolence. This is the basis of building viable and peaceable communities. This is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called the beloved community. As Seculars, we are the beginning of the beloved community; or at least we should be a substantial part of it. So, what can we do to begin to build this beloved community? And, what can we do to sustain it? First, watch our conversations and how we communicate with one another. Be mindful of how we are BEING towards our brothers and sisters. Second, set the right intention when in community with our Franciscan family. Do you intend to have a peaceful encounter? Do you intend to build bridges or build walls? Do you intend to treat your brother or sister as “other” and not as “object”?

This conversation will be ongoing throughout the year, leading up to the National Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Gathering this July 27-30, 2017 in St. Louis, Missouri. We will talk about nonviolent living through mindful and empathic listening, as well as other ways to live Gospel nonviolence. Watch your emails for early bird registrations. May you live as Jesus and Saint Francis lived – with Gospel nonviolence and as people of peace and justice.



Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity



Assalamu Alaikum

by Mike Carsten, OFS

Assalamu alaikum is the traditional Muslim greeting, which is not something most of our sisters and brothers hear every day. Nor do we often hear positive comments when the name Allah is used in reference to God. In today's world, there are certain buzz words that catch our attention and give us pause, which makes our anxiety rise. What is the conditioned response to our angst? Fear. Keep people out. We must "build a wall."

My wife Kathy and I work and serve the poor on the streets of Detroit, a stone's throw from the city of Dearborn. Dearborn is home to the largest population of Muslims in the United States. If I have learned anything serving the poor on the streets of Detroit, it is that poverty, misery, hunger, and fear know neither jurisdictional boundaries, nor honor or recognition of religious affiliations.

This past month, a young man volunteered with us as we served the poor. He is 19, a Muslim, and his family has sent him here from Turkey to escape the current political turmoil and violence in his homeland. He is a senior in high school learning our language and experiencing our culture. For this young adult's parents, the United States is viewed and used as "sanctuary." Coming to downtown Detroit and serving the homeless and poor was not anything that was on this young person's radar when his parents sent him here for an education. Yet here he was. How did he come to us? He was brought by another 19-year-old high school senior who is here in Michigan from Poland. They are both looking to serve, and at the same time experience a place of peace and community. Imagine! A 19-year-old Catholic high school senior works side by side, hand in hand with a 19-year-old Muslim high school senior, serving those in need regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious affiliation, serving with volunteers who are Secular Franciscans, Southern Baptists, Romanian Orthodox, Lutheran, and agnostic.

Our Rule, Constitutions, and National Statutes call for us in our Ecumenical and Interfaith efforts to move beyond talk. We are called to follow the example of the young adults I have mentioned above and fearlessly move out into our communities

From our Rule, we read:

Secular Franciscans

- ❖ should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters. *Article 5*
- ❖ are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. *Article 11*
- ❖ should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters. *Article 12*

- ❖ with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. *Article 13*
- ❖ place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly. *Article 13*
- ❖ seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue. *Article 14*
- ❖ trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone. *Article 14*
- ❖ strive to bring joy and hope to others. *Article 14*

We are called to **set ourselves free** to love God and our brothers and sisters — all of them.

It is my honor as the Ecumenical and Interfaith Chair to assist each of you to fulfill the plea of the National Fraternity.

O Breath of God, unite us in action!

2016-2017 Theme of the National Secular Franciscan Fraternity - USA

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee is here to help you in your journey, to encourage you to action, and then to help you tell your stories.

To empower you to “live the gospel of our Lord” and “make present the charism of our common Seraphic Father.”

To that end, we have created a new Ecumenical and Interfaith website: www.ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org.

The website is active; the list below is our beginning.

- ❖ Calendar of events
- ❖ Photo gallery for your Ecumenical and Interfaith photos
- ❖ A page for each Committee component:
- ❖ Ecumenical and Interfaith
- ❖ Joint Community on Franciscan Unity
- ❖ Interfaith prayer services for your use, and
- ❖ Links with related information.



Yes - O Breath of God, unite us in action!

Assalamu alaikum / Peace be upon you

Mike Carsten OFS

Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee Chair

Our e-mail address – info@ofsusaecumenicalinterfaith.org

***Share with us your Ecumenical and Interfaith experiences, photos and stories.
Please let us know how we can help you.***



REMEMBRANCE

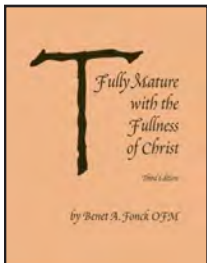


Father Benet Fonck, OFM

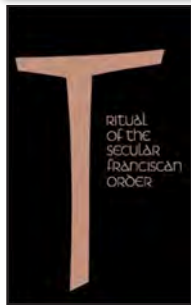
June 3, 1045 - December 23, 2016



Fr. Benet was a true champion of Secular Franciscans who gifted us in countless ways. Let us hold him, and those closest to him, in our thoughts and prayers. May the Lord surround him with His Light and fill his heart with peace. *Jan Parker, OFS*



Fr. Benet Fonck, Age 71, passed away peacefully on Friday, December 23, 2016 at Our Lady of Angels Retirement Home in Joliet, IL where he served as Chaplain from 2005-2012. He was born June 3, 1945 in Akron, Ohio to the late Anna Rita (nee Karabinos) and Arthur Fonck and was raised in Joliet, IL and Elmhurst, IL.



Fr. Benet was ordained a Priest June 3, 1972 and served parishes in Texas, Illinois and Missouri. He also served as the General Spiritual

Assistant for the Secular Franciscan Order in Rome from 1980-1985 and as a Liaison to friars in Manitowoc, Wisconsin in the early to mid 1990's. Father retired to St. Clare's Village in Alton, IL earlier this year. *Obituary*

Fr. Benet's Secular Franciscan Resource library is another gift. I particularly liked Volume 6, *Called to Build a More Fraternal and Evangelical World*, which connects each article of the Rule with a passage from the Gospels, New Testament, Old Testament, Psalms, writings of St. Francis and St. Clare, Franciscan resources, Vatican II documents, papal statements, and prayers. We could spend a very long time studying the Rule using this resource, which is still available from Amazon.com. *Vickie Klick, OFS*



Thank you for supporting the Secular Franciscan Order through your guidance and wisdom.

Grace Viola, OFS - Prayer Warrior of God

1905-2016



Grace Viola, a true prayer warrior of God, was called back to her Heavenly Father on October 30, 2016. Grace was 110 years old and a Secular Franciscan member of St. Bernard's Fraternity in Sunrise, Florida.

She was born Gracia Maria Balsamo on December 28, 1905, in Brooklyn, New York. She married Mariano Viola in 1928, and together they had 3 girls.

In 1946, Grace was professed as a Secular Franciscan. This past April she celebrated her 70th year of profession.

In 1974 she moved to Sunrise, Florida, and became an active member of St. Bernard Church.

Grace was a care giver, servant and prayer warrior for God. Grace cared for her father (who passed away at 104 years old) and also her blind sister. Grace served her parish by being an active member of the Legion of Mary, the rosary makers, the prayer group, the women's guild, and a Eucharistic Minister. She loved bringing Christ to the nursing homes in the area, giving the patients Christ in the Eucharist along with a loving heart to spend time with those who had no visitors or loved ones in the area.

As a Secular Franciscan, Grace was always there sharing her wisdom and spirituality. At 102, she still baked pies for the meeting and would recite poems that she had memorized in the third grade. She always had a kind word for all.

In the last few years before her death, Grace was our prayer warrior with rosary in hand and her special prayers that she recited daily.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and may your holy light shine upon them.

FRANCISCAN LIVING

VALUING OUR HOME

By Francine Gikow, OFS

I entered the room and I immediately felt different! It was as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders! I relaxed — for I WAS HOME!

The old saying: “Home is where the heart is” surely applied! It is a place where we are known for who we are and not for what we do. It is where we can be ourselves surrounded by love and support. A true home emanates joy, hope, peace, reverence and motherhood, fatherhood, brotherhood and sisterhood!

There was a lot of laughter in that room, a sharing of ideas and thoughts, respect, and communal prayer! Even though there were deep differences of opinion, there was a deep mutual respect, listening with the heart and compassion. Each one of us felt valued and loved! It was home!

Our temporary home was a room that enclosed the 2016 National Chapter, where Regional Ministers, our National Council, National Spiritual Assistants, and our International brother and sister, touched us with their wisdom, support, and love. It was our “home,” where we ate, drank, addressed “hard” subjects and “became.” As the National Formation Commission emphasized, it was a place of belonging, a place to love and be loved, and a place to go out to love others.

Fraternity can be a miraculous thing at the national and international level! But it is especially miraculous at the local level where most of us live out our Secular Franciscan vocation. We can easily take what we have for granted in our local fraternity. It seems that after years of living in fraternity, all we see are its faults. Sometimes it takes the enthusiasm of a new vocation to remind us of what we have. In fact, when I receive feedback from a new vocation about what drew them into the Order, they tell me it was often a feeling of joy that they felt when they visited the fraternity for the first time. Oh, how I lose sight of this *anima* and joy of a fraternity and often take it for granted!

We refer to a fraternity as a “living” community, and indeed it is! It lives by the energy and commitment of its various members’ personalities, spiritualities, apostolates, and gifts. When one new member is added, the personality of the fraternity is forever changed. It becomes different, and we, as members, become different as a result. Never underestimate the effect of your fraternity on your life! A good fraternity challenges us to become the person God wants us to be. It changes us, hopefully for the better, as we learn to live in relationship — a relationship not just with

each other but a reflection of the relationship of our triune God to others.

Yes, fraternity life is a powerful thing! In hindsight after 32 years of professed life, the importance of fraternity is finally sinking in! I have been changed. I have been softened. I have grown in humility. I have been forced to identify my faults, which I had heretofore not recognized or had refused to examine.

A good fraternity is able to bring forth from its members their unique gifts. Many times, it can recognize a gift, even when a member does not. We learn to trust their faith in us — especially when it comes to accepting nomination to an office of the Council.

A good fraternity challenges us, too. It can make us accountable if we are fooling ourselves by making excuses for not coming to the meetings. If we are not fully honest, they can call us on it. If we put our own needs, agendas, or interests, before others’, the fraternity nudges us to conversion. It is through this dialog in fraternity that we learn about our relationships and ourselves with God and each other.

In addition, a good fraternity supports us when we are undergoing crises of faith or health issues. Having the wisdom and knowledge of our elders in fraternity available to us is a great resource for us to tap into when we are experiencing “dark nights” or spiritual crises. Unfortunately, I have seen numerous times when a person in crisis keeps to him or herself and does not reach out to others who might have the experience and wisdom to assist.

On the other hand, fraternity is not always about such “heavy” issues! It is also about shared experiences in serving others, laughter about a good joke or shared companionship. It is joy in our relationship with others.

All this takes time... a lifetime in fact! But isn’t that we signed up for? We have committed ourselves to *this* fraternity for a lifetime (if we don’t move). We have committed ourselves not only to Christ in the way of St. Francis, but also to each other! We have committed to live in relationship, and through these relationships we learn lessons about what love really is! It is not just a poem written on a greeting card or a nice feeling. It is something more than that! It is the beautiful concrete living out of our vocation for Him, with Him, and in Him through others. By being ourselves, we make God available for others.



Spreading the Word About the OFS

In a past article, I referred to Article 45 of the OFS General Constitutions. If you reviewed the article, then you know that you are a member of the Vocations Committee. Don't worry, I won't be calling you to attend a meeting. Rather, I invite you to reflect on how you can fulfill that responsibility on a regular, if not daily, basis. In part, the article states:

The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves...

As an obligation, this is something that should be in the forefront of our minds, not just "I will get to it when I can." Often spreading the word is done without using words (by our actions)... but we also have to be ready to use words at opportune times.

The Vocations Committee is working with the Social Media Subcommittee to develop a strategy for getting the word out and tools to use to promote vocations to the Order.

The main goals of this effort are to:

- Inform the general public about the OFS;
- Develop and distribute outreach resources in digital and traditional formats;
- Stimulate an active dialog on how to live our faith and evangelical values;
- Create a digital space in support of OFS vocations and ongoing formation;
- Utilize social networking sites as effective tools for evangelization and promoting Franciscan vocations.

Initially, this effort is focusing on three areas:

1. Facebook Page
2. A Vocations Landing Page
3. Preparation/Update of printed materials

The landing page is being developed to provide basic information about the Order and graphics that tell the story about who we are and what we are all about. Updated templates of "printed" material (brochures and business cards) will be available on the NAFRA website in January 2017.

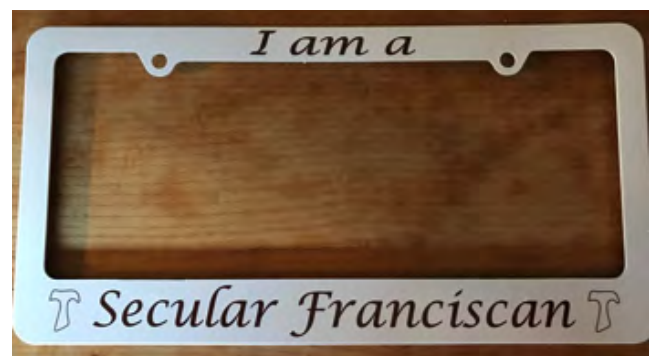
The various social media venues are great ways to get the word out. The Social Media Subcommittee is currently focusing on Facebook ("Like us" Secular Franciscans - NAFRA, USA on Facebook!), but they could use help with expanding to other social media venues. Email us at: OFSVocationsCommittee@gmail.com if you have some expertise to lend.

Check out and share the link for the new vocation testimonials posted to the Secular Franciscan Videos YouTube Channel. They are very inspiring stories!

As for some practical ways to promote vocations, the personal invitation still appears to be an effective means.

Another ice-breaker is available:

A license plate holder (\$5 each plus postage):



These are great conversation starters...so don't be surprised if someone comes up to you to inquire. To order for yourself or your fraternity members, email:

OFSVocationsCommittee@gmail.com.

Thanks for fulfilling your duty to promote vocations. Please continue to share your success stories to inspire others.

Report to the National Fraternity on Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FYA) Ministry

From the National Executive Council - October 2016

At its first meeting in December 2015, the current National Executive Council (NEC) made a decision not to appoint a Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FYA) Chair, but to spend some time of discernment reviewing the efforts of the past three chairs of the Youth Commission and to determine, together with the National Fraternity, the direction our youth efforts need to follow in the future. We agreed that no Youth Commission Chair would be appointed until that process was completed.

During this past year, the NEC devoted as much time as possible to this topic. In the spring of 2016, we compiled FYA and YouFra documents and resources, and at our May NEC meeting we began a review of this material. In July 2016, International Councilor Ana Fruk, OFS, and General Minister Tibor Kauser, OFS, attended our NEC meeting for a discussion on Franciscan Youth. We benefited greatly from their input and from our discussion. We have grown in our understanding of YouFra and what is ours to do in our outreach and ministry to youth.

What we have learned

1. Outreach to youth is a ministry, a service. It is possible that YouFra (referred to as FYA in the USA) can grow from OFS youth ministry, but we do not start with YouFra. Our ministry to youth offers service, knowledge of the Franciscan charism and, at the right time, introduces fellowship in YouFra as a possible vocational path. Likewise, our goal is not to win future OFS members, but our efforts could help youth discover an OFS vocation.
2. Youth ministry and the development of FYA are carried out locally, with local fraternity support and association.
3. There is no “one size fits all” approach for OFS outreach to youth. Youth ministry can take many forms. We answer the call to minister to, and with youth in the many various ways the Holy Spirit inspires and directs. There are many opportunities.
4. We can be open to OFS youth ministry with all youth and young adults using age-appropriate

means. Those OFS members who work with youth under the age of 18 need to refer to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People composed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and to abide by it.

5. We have had several different approaches in past years. We have learned from each of these approaches.
6. The organization of YouFra fraternities is outlined in the National FYA Statutes approved in 2004. Youth who are inspired to form a YouFra fraternity may choose a name for their FYA fraternity.

When General Minister Tibor Kauser, OFS, and Presidency Councilor for YouFra Ana Fruk, OFS, met with the NEC in July 2016, they noted the following:

- Outreach to youth is a service to youth. It is not an OFS factory.
- The path to YouFra starts small, moves to groups, and then goes to structure.
- OFS members have responsibility for YouFra, and should appoint an OFS fraternal animator to the YouFra group.
- Utilize the lives of Francis and Clare as touchpoints – youths relate to their stories.
- Three to six months after a group is established, introduce the members to YouFra. It takes five members to start YouFra. There may or may not be interest in YouFra, and that’s ok.
- Give them experiences, but look at their needs. Give proper content, not just meeting their desires. Help them learn discernment so they can discover their vocation in life.
- It may be easier to start Franciscan youth groups in Franciscan parishes or colleges – but there are many opportunities: Don’t give up.

- An OFS Fraternal Animator and the pastoral care of a Spiritual Assistant are very important in the development of YouFra.

Where we are now

1. Youth outreach is a priority. This current time of discernment is critical for the development of national leadership, but is not meant to stop any of the good work currently being done with youth. We applaud our OFS members who are currently involved in youth ministry. Other OFS members who are inspired to do so should not hesitate to begin youth ministry.
2. We have wonderful documents that provide the basic information we need.
3. The Holy Spirit is moving the National Fraternity in ways that will help set the stage for youth outreach all across our National Fraternity. There are new ideas from our Vocations Committee and Social Media sub-committee, and new developments in Communications and Public Relations. The NEC sees a connection between this movement and our build-up towards new national FYYA leadership. This new energy is exciting.
4. The NEC will continue this time of discernment with further study and discussion, follow-up on responses on the topic of Franciscan Youth from the Management of the Order survey, wider conversations to explore possibilities, and a 2017 National Gathering on the topic of Youth.

Where do we go from here?

With assistance from the National Fraternity Council, the NEC will compile a list of OFS members who (1) are actively involved with FYYA or YouFra, (2) have experience with youth outreach or youth ministry, (3) are interested in being part of a national OFS leadership in the area of youth, or (4) are interested in promoting Franciscan youth outreach. From this list, the NEC will invite a group of individuals to St. Louis in July 2017 to discern together the next steps, which we hope will include the appointment of a National Youth Commission Chair. Those interested in attending this important event should contact National Secretary Jane DeRose-Bamman OFS at janedsfo@msn.com for an application form. Applications will be accepted through March 15, 2017.

2017 National OFS Gathering on the Topic of Youth July 27-30, 2017

Are you interested in being part of national OFS leadership in the area of youth?

Are you interested in promoting Franciscan Youth outreach?

Do you have experience with youth ministry?

**If you answered yes to any
one of these questions we
would like to hear from you!**

The National Fraternity Council is seeking applicants for a special National OFS Gathering on the Topic of Youth to be held from Thursday, July 27 through Sunday, July 30, 2017, at the Renaissance St. Louis Airport Hotel in St. Louis, Missouri. This gathering will include prayer, sharing of Franciscan experiences, presentations on YouFra and FYYA resources, presentations by guest speakers and discernment on the appointment of a National Youth Commission Chair. A substantial part of the cost of this gathering will be covered by the National Fraternity.

If you are interested in attending, please contact National Secretary Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, at janedsfo@msn.com for an application form. Applications will be accepted through March 15, 2017.

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