

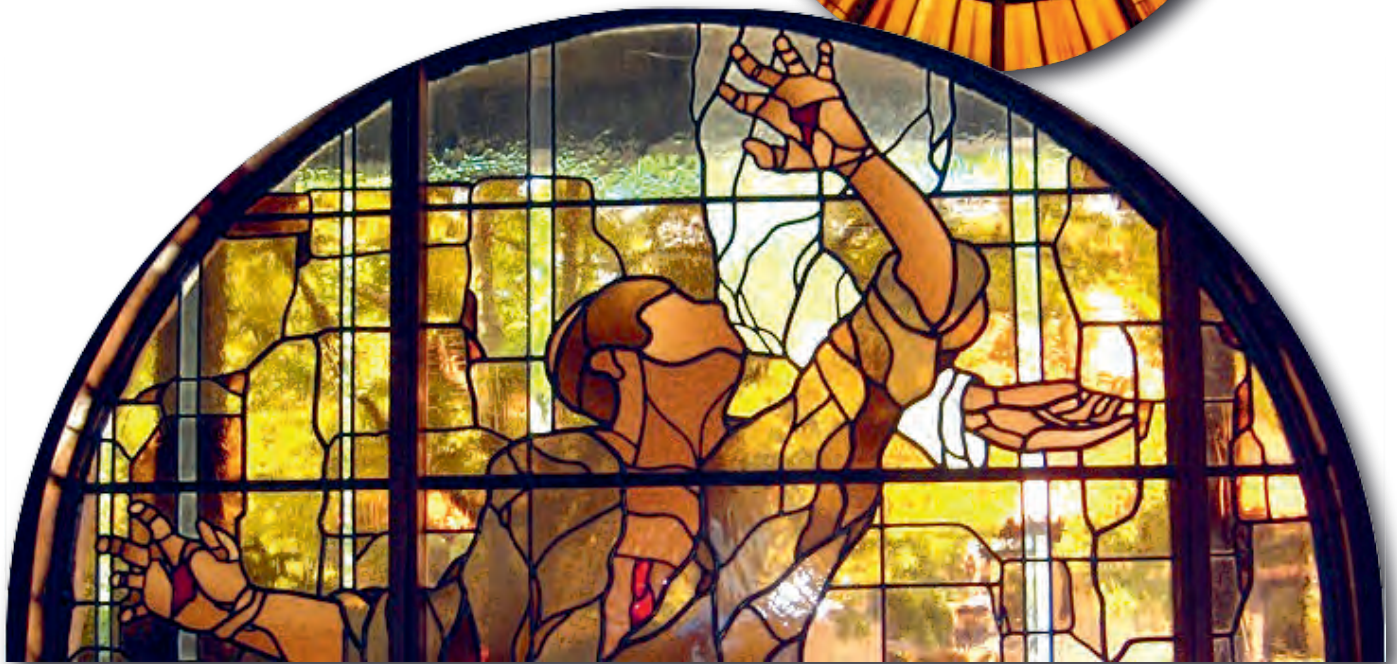
TAU-USA

A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN
ORDER

Winter 2021 Issue 102

LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF YOUR CALL

Secular Franciscan Order - USA
National Theme - 2021



Chapel window at the San Damiano Retreat, Danville, CA

*Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty, reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew that all are important and all are necessary,
different faces of the one humanity that God so loves. Amen.*

Pope Francis October 2020.

Mission to Share the Vision

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



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OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA



NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker OFS

A CALL TO PROPHETIC CREATIVITY

As Clare once said to Agnes, “*Let us be filled with a remarkable happiness and a spiritual joy!*” It is an exciting time for Franciscans as, one after another, God’s gifts to the Franciscan Order *just keep coming!* The newest three gifts to our Order arrived several months ago, and several months apart, but here in the light of this new year I call your attention to them. Let us look at these gifts carefully, for they will profoundly affect our Order as we move into 2021.

What are these *three gifts*? They are the new **Instrumentum Laboris** from our CIOFS Presidency, Pope Francis’s **Fratelli Tutti** and the **2020 Christmas letter** from our General Ministers. Each of these documents is unique, but for the OFS I see them linked in a single purpose. They are the next set of markers on our journey of renewal. I believe that, by way of these documents placed so directly in our path, *God is continuing to chart our course.*

For some time now, we have spoken of our journey towards the total renewal of our Order and of the trajectory God has set us on towards its fulfillment. This journey began with the promulgation of our Rule 40 years ago. Here in the United States, it has continued with many notable events marking our progress, most recently the visioning gatherings, which led us to re-examine our approach to our commissions of Youth, Justice and Peace, and Formation. Now the Holy Spirit is speaking again, calling us to move forward.

To me, God’s purpose in sending us these three gifts can be summed up in two words from the *Instrumentum Laboris* that jumped out at me as I read them: **prophetic creativity**. As I studied these documents, it became clear that we will not be able to achieve the goal of the total renewal of our Order without prophetic creativity. I believe God is calling us to focus our prayer and energy in this direction.

What is prophetic creativity? It is to see as God sees—to see with spiritual eyes—and then to act, allowing God’s grace to strengthen us to do his will. It is innovative action we take in response to the Holy Spirit working within us. Pope Francis is a master of prophetic creativity; so inspired and innovative are his words and actions that lives are converted. In *Fratelli Tutti* he calls all of us to be creative in building relationships, using the word “create” no less than 44 times. The General Ministers, in their Christmas letter, remind us that “change (conversion) is impossible without a motivation and a process.” They then call us to a prophetic stance, stating, “Jesus, more than anyone, teaches us how to live a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle.” St. Francis of Assisi, who followed Christ most closely, is an excellent model of prophetic creativity. How many times did he hear the Word of God speaking directly to him and immediately put it into practice?

In the *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL) the term “prophetic creativity” is applied *directly to the OFS*. Here the focus is on **servant leadership**, always accompanied in our legislation by two verbs “**animate and guide.**” This function of servant leaders, to animate and guide, is not limited to administration or bureaucracy but, most importantly, applies to the heart of our call—the *full realization of the Secular Franciscan life, both as individuals and as Fraternity*. This “full realization” is the renewal we long for. It is the goal given to us by the Church and emphasized repeatedly by our Popes. The IL states emphatically that to achieve this goal “**prophetic creativity is required.**”

As servant leaders, we need to implement prophetic creativity and plan for the future. This goes beyond the “day to day” running of the fraternity. The IL states, “We should always seek new ways that help the development of the Fraternities and the spiritual life of the sisters and brothers, being open to and

responding to the signs of the times.” So we must ask ourselves, *what will move our fraternities, and our Order forward, so we become what the Church expects of us?*

A good question at this point might be, does this requirement of prophetic creativity in the IL apply only to servant leaders? Certainly, the focus is on leaders, but the IL equally stresses the concept of “co-responsibility,” which applies to every member. Our General Constitutions states, “*The brothers and sisters are **co-responsible** for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.*” (GC 31.1) Think about this. We are responsible not only for the life of our own local fraternity, but for *the entire Order*. The IL stresses this point as well, addressing all of us and stating that “*in order to achieve our goals, **we must deepen our sense of co-responsibility.***” All members must be attentive to the call to prophetic creativity. We must ask ourselves—*what is my part?*

Let us all respond to the Holy Spirit’s call—a call to a season of **prophetic creativity**. Imagine the result of this. We would grow closer to God and to each other. We would engage more deeply in our vocation. Our lives and our fraternities would be more alive with enthusiasm, joy, and hope. We would experience a more intense commitment with unconditional participation. Our Order would become stronger in its witness. We would reach out in the world to build relationships and share the joy of fraternity with all we meet. We would live up to our potential, individually and as an Order.

I believe these three documents give us tools to accomplish this, so let us study and unpack them in the months ahead. Please make them part of your ongoing formation in your local fraternities. My hope is that we might have some teleconferences, perhaps on both a regional and national level, to share and discuss what we discover in these three gifts. God is calling us more strongly than ever to live a life worthy of our call, and as always, he is providing us with all we need.

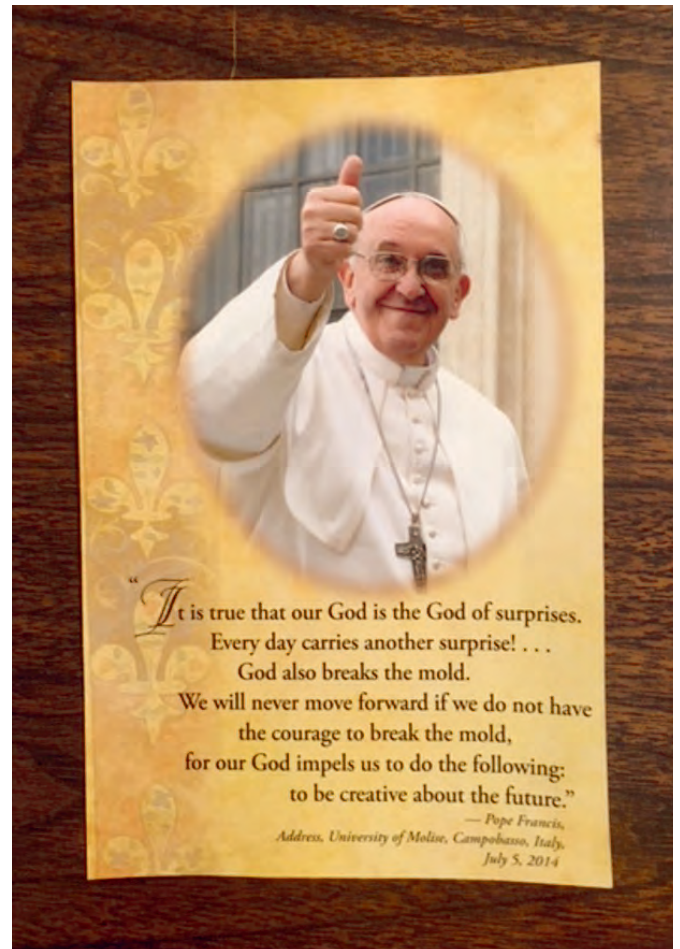
I will close with a story. Five years ago, I was captivated by a photo and a quote from Pope Francis that appeared in a “Year of Mercy” calendar. I cut it out, and it has hung on the wall next to the doorway of my office ever since. This photo of Pope Francis encourages me every time I walk through the door.

His “thumbs up” makes me smile; his words spur me on:

*“It is true that our God is the God of surprises. Each day carries another surprise! ... We will never move forward if we do not have the courage to break the mold, for our God impels us to do the following: **to be creative about the future.**”¹*

Pretty prophetic, right?

May this image, and these words, cheer us on as we enter this season of prophetic creativity.



¹ Address, University of Molise, Campobasso, Italy, July 5, 2014

2018-2021 NATIONAL PRIORITY
FRATERNITY LIFE

Brothers and Sisters All: Pope Francis Reflects on Fraternity

by Mary Bittner, OFS

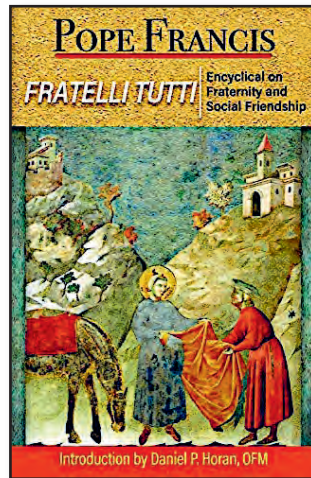
Pope Francis introduces *Fratelli Tutti* by acknowledging his inspiration from the life and words of St. Francis of Assisi. He then sets before us his own purpose: “It is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person, we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity. Brotherhood between all men and women.” [8]¹

After a description of the many problems facing today’s world, Pope Francis moves to an extended meditation on the parable we know as *The Good Samaritan*. This teaching underlies the lines of action the Pope would have us consider in later chapters. He invites us to use the parable as an examination of conscience of sorts. **Read the parable of the Good Samaritan ([56] or Lk 10:25-37, and [64-66]). In which of its characters do you find something to identify with? Why?**

Aside from the traveler himself, the first characters we hear about are the robbers. We can probably come up with examples of “dark shadows of neglect and violence in the service of petty interests of power, gain and division.” **What does the Pope mean when he asks if the wounded man will “end up being the justification for our irreconcilable divisions, our cruel indifference, our internal conflicts?” [72]**

The passers-by undoubtedly had their reasons for ignoring the fallen man [73-74]. **What are some of the justifications we might use to justify passing by or looking the other way when we encounter those who are suffering? What part do politics or the economy play in how we “see” (or don’t see) those who suffer in our society (the poor, the immigrants, those of a different faith or skin color or abilities)?**

Pope Francis cautions us that the passers-by “were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a Levite. This detail should not be overlooked. It shows



that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God.” [74] **How should our Franciscan vocation help us to “ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God?”**

Collusion between the robbers and those who pass by can contribute to an atmosphere of “disillusionment and despair.” [75] **What elements in our own culture might be like the “thieves” that rob people of their dignity? How do we support these thieves, or try to stop them? What might we do, as individuals and as a community of faith, to counter disillusionment and be “messengers of perfect joy?”**

“The parable eloquently presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our wounded world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan.” [67] **How might we be neighbors to those who are “wounded” in our own society? In the global community? Do we differentiate between the two? Choose one concrete thing you might do during Lent to be a neighbor to someone you might otherwise ignore.**

The Pope warns us that “...there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different,” and he suggests that “For this reason, it is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about *the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters.*” [86 (emphasis mine)] **How do each of the themes italicized above relate to our fundamental charism as Secular Franciscans? How can our lives speak “clearly and directly” in their regard?**

¹ All quotations are from *Fratelli Tutti*. Numbers in brackets refer to paragraphs. A PDF version of the full text of the encyclical can be found on the national website secularfranciscansusa.org/resources/ongoing-formation-resources/



Historic National Chapter

Secular Franciscans from around the USA and even the world were transported to the virtual realm for the first-ever national chapter held via video conferencing. With the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the globe, it wasn't a matter of whether to hold the annual chapter, but how... and how to make it a fruitful experience full of Franciscan joy and spirituality.

Mass launched the four-day virtual event on Oct. 21 and then brought it to a fitting spiritual close on Oct. 24. In between was a family fest with heartfelt sharing, conduct of administrative and business matters, inspirational formation sessions, presentation of the JPIC award, and even a virtual tour of Assisi (with a focus on St. Clare).
-- Robert Stronach, OFS

**THEME FOR 2021:
Live a Life Worthy
of Your Call**

SPECIAL SECTION BY
Robert & Mary Stronach, OFS,
and Sharon Winzeler, OFS



HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER



Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, celebrated the opening and closing masses for the virtual national chapter from his friary.

A Franciscan Approach to Today's Times

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, helped set the tone for a pandemic-caused virtual chapter by reminding attendees to take a Franciscan approach and see opportunity.

In the opening mass streamed from St. Joseph Friary in Hollidaysburg, PA, Father Christopher noted that many were experiencing anxiety in the midst of a pandemic as well as civil unrest.

"I cannot stop all of the issues from swirling around in my mind -- racial discrimination, fear and uncertainty with every breath we take, divisiveness in society, in our institutions, in our church, bigotry, lack of civility in public discourse, injustices against human dignity, preventive health and safety measures misinterpreted as restrictions on personal freedom, disinformation," he said.

Disruptions Can Be Opportunities

Father Christopher called on chapter participants to "see the disruptions" as "an opportunity to be alone with Jesus and go deeper and deeper."

Approach these unsettling times with a Franciscan heart, he advised, by maintaining a joyful attitude like St. Francis

of Assisi while being penitent and seeking conversion.

"The call to conversion is a change of mentality," he said. "It predisposes us to believe in the gift of the Kingdom of God proclaimed and inaugurated by Jesus. Being penitent introduces us to the extraordinary and intimate relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Fr. Christopher, who is past president-in-turn of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, urged Franciscans to listen to the Holy Spirit during these trying times. "Act in ways that bear witness to our vocation. This hidden treasure has not lost its value in the current conditions of the world and of the Church. To the contrary, it is even more valuable as a Gospel alternative to the lacerations that oppress and distress today's men and women."

Unwavering faith in the face of uncertainty helps us to accept and understand Jesus' words to be prepared against the unexpected, he said.

Fraterlli Tutti

In the chapter's closing mass on Oct. 24, Father Christopher pointed to the

encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, as a way to spread harmony in these trying times.

"Pope Francis is surely right to think that a confused world urgently needs some Catholic common sense." That is what he provides us in his latest encyclical, "universal fraternity put into dialogue with the Gospel. It points in the direction of the brotherhood and sisterhood of every human being."

He referred to the Gospel in which Jesus told his disciples, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another as I have loved you."

"Not just 'love one another.' Not simply 'love one another as you love yourselves.' No. 'Love one another as I have loved you.'"

A Good Model

Franciscans have a good model for this type of love, he noted. "St. Francis lived and taught this reciprocal love as Gospel living. He showed us how to love the Father by being in harmony with all creation. How to love the Son by imitating his life. And how to love the Spirit to be Advocate of the Order."

The encyclical is an expansion of
Continued on next page.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

Chapter Becomes Historic First in OFS History

By MARY STRONACH, OFS

As the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States planned for the 2020 National Chapter, they accepted the fact that COVID pandemic would require a measure of flexibility and creativity, an understanding of the new technology... and the ability to imagine the possibilities.

Forty-seven regional ministers, spiritual assistants and guests from around the country and world embraced this historic step in building and maintaining a sense of fraternity virtually.

The event provided some special benefits for those who would have faced travel challenges – no heavy baggage to pack and carry, no expensive, long, tiring trips, no fear of COVID-contagious.

On the downside, there were no early morning coffee gatherings where brothers and sisters could laugh and share, no late-night entertainment or long discussions about the future of the Church or the Order, and no Eucharist to receive and share.

However, the virtual model of Franciscan gatherings, including the National Chapter, has proven to be an uplifting, engaging, productive, welcoming way to bring the members of the Order together. With the exception of technological or serious health



Some participants brought beautiful background scenes to the National Chapter's video conferencing.

issues, there was no reason why a regional minister or delegate could not participate. We were all in the comfort of our homes, with a cup of coffee or tea in hand, the occasional grandchild or pet who would cross the screen. We had the best of both worlds – interactions with Fraternity brothers and sisters from around the country and a safe, non-COVID home environment. (Some had virtual backgrounds of beautiful landscapes and even outer space.)

Materials were submitted to everyone in advance, the program was planned to include opening and closing Masses

– with readers, music and inspirational homilies; presenters were prepared with shared Power Points that could easily be seen by all participants; spirited and upbeat leaders who provided guidance and updates on every aspect of the Order in the United States; spiritual assistants who offered perspectives and tips on how to handle the new reality.

With this historic, virtual Annual Chapter, the National Secular Franciscan Order has taken a leap in faith into a new reality – one which can connect Secular Franciscans, next door and around the world.

Continued from previous page. Catholic Social Teaching, he said, and a reiteration of the essentials of the Gospel, urging us to get back to the basics.

“Pope Francis stresses the importance of meeting others, of creating a culture of encounter, to really get to know one another. Covid-19 should not diminish

our desire to connect with one another. Computers and smartphones and video communications are at the ready.”

Pope Francis's example of ordinary human goodness working for the common good is exemplified in the life of St. Francis of Assisi as noted in **Fratelli Tutti**: “In the world of that time, bristling with watchtowers and

defensive walls, cities were a theater of brutal wars between powerful families, even as poverty was spreading throughout the countryside. Yet there Francis was able to welcome true peace into his heart and free himself of the desire to wield power over others. He became one of the poor and sought to live in harmony with all.” (#34)

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

'Where There Is a Need, There Is a Franciscan'



JPIC Animator Carolyn Townes, right, introduced JPIC Award Recipient Monica Olivera, left, during a chapter session.

JPIC HONOREE MONICA OLIVERA FOUNDED 'FIRST NATIONS OUTREACH'

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

Monica Olivera, OFS, is the 2020 recipient of the *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Award*. Olivera founded *First Nations Outreach* that serves remote Native American communities (as far as a 24-hour drive from the home of her Brother Jacoba Fraternity in Lawrence, KS).

Carolyn Townes, OFS, National JPIC animator, presented the annual award at the National Chapter on Oct. 22. **"It has been said, where there is a need, there is a Franciscan,"** Townes said, calling Olivera's service "love in action."

Reaching the Isolated

"I always had a vision to serve the poorest of the poor... I always assumed it was going to be in my country of origin, Peru," Olivera said. "I never imagined that my journey of faith would lead me to poor, remote communities in America."

She said the reservations are so remote that many of them do not appear on maps. Yet the need for help is great.

"I was moved when I saw the lack of appropriate clothing in the middle of winter and the lack of accessibility to basic needs," Olivera said.

After a visit to a Sioux community in South Dakota, she asked for donations from friends and filled a truck with toys and clothing. As *First Nations* continued its service, members found more isolated reservations in Arizona, Nebraska and Montana. "Our goal is to be led by the Holy Spirit to where we need to go."

Many of the communities have no stores, restaurants or banks, no access to running water, little medical service and limited job opportunities, Olivera said. Depending on the location, 50-85 percent of adults are unemployed. Life expectancy is low and there is a high rate of diabetes, addiction, suicide and crime.

Building Trust

"Yet they are people with undisputed strength and profound spirituality," Olivera said. "They have survived and lived this way for centuries to protect their culture and do not welcome outsiders. It took years to earn their trust to be invited to their communities." She said access to the reservation was the first miracle she experienced.

"The second miracle is how, with so little money available, we have been able

to bring Christmas to so many."

What We Do, Not What We Say

"We do not talk about our faith. People understand the Gospel message through what we do rather than what we say," Olivera said.

"We don't just collect toys and deliver them. We ask each child what they want for Christmas. We gather them and wrap them with Christmas paper and ribbon," she said. "We know the gift we bring to them is the only gift they will receive for Christmas."

Many miraculous interventions have graced the program, according to Olivera. One included fulfilling the expectations of a principal at St. Charles Mission School in Montana. "He made it clear that we could not bring gifts for just one classroom. If we were going to do it, we had to provide them for the entire school of 240 children."

She returned to Kansas and visited the principal of a local school about sponsorship.

"I asked, 'how many children would you be willing to sponsor?' With a big smile on her face, she said, 'all of them.'"



'You Cannot Quarantine the Holy Spirit'

NATIONAL MINISTER ADDRESSES STATE OF THE ORDER

By MARY STRONACH, OFS

National Minister **Jan Parker**, OFS provided historical perspective as she inspired and challenged the 47 regional ministers, delegates and guests during her State of the Order message.

Responding to Signs of Times

"You cannot quarantine the Holy Spirit" she said.

"In spite of the pandemic and all the upheaval, the work of prayer, peacemaking and building up of the Kingdom has continued in a thousand beautiful ways... We are moving forward in new ways, responding in faith to the signs of the times."

She quoted the General Constitutions (26.1): "...Secular Franciscans affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future." Then she added, "The pandemic is not squelching our desire for fraternity - it is strengthening it."

A Course of Renewal

She then took the attendees on an historical perspective of the Order in the United States from the development of the Pauline Rule of 1978 to the recent "season of visioning" when youth, formation and JPIC leaders, and spiritual assistants came together to help take the Order "on a course to renewal." She exhorted the brothers and sisters: "we must continue to look for the unexpected joy and open our hearts to this holy newness. We cannot stop now, and we won't. The Holy Spirit impels us."

"We are beginning to see the fruit from of our 'season of visioning'."

- In **Formation**, new initial formation texts are in the process of being written and "wonderful" resources such as "Formation Friday" have been assisting Regional Formation Directors.

- In the area of **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation**, there has

been a "real awakening." JPIC focus groups have formed, and there is more involvement by members at large. A "Franciscan-looking JPIC vision" is being developed, one that we need LIVE and SPEAK "justly, courteously, in peace and with charity."

- In the area of **Franciscan Youth and Young Adults**, "there is new energy and momentum for outreach to youth and young adults." An animator training on Zoom has provided new tools for outreach to support and establish YouFra fraternities.

She recognized the work of all committees, saying that "we have made great strides, but we have farther to go."

Future Plans

She said there were projects that she and the council would like to "make a reality." These included: a Communications Summit to "explore new ways for Public Relations, Website,

Continued on next page.

The Birth Home of St. Clare

In the area next to the cathedral of Assisi, San Rufino.



Virtual Tour Offers a Close and Personal Visit to the Home of Clare

Bret Thoman, OFS, owner and operator of St. Francis Pilgrimages, gave attendees a unique and personal perspective of Assisi by following the footsteps of St. Clare from her paternal home, the flight from her home on the night she joined Francis and ultimately to San Damiano where she lived the rest of her life.

The presentation covered Clare's cultural and religious journey, her personality and daily challenges. Included on this tour was a very revealing explanation of her canonization process with reports from some of the people who knew her. This virtual experience provided a front row seat of the countryside where she lived,

and the "door of the dead" from which she escaped to join Francis. In short, it was comprehensive tour with history, visuals, and anecdotes, but eliminated sore feet from the walking and climbing of the hills. For some of us, you might say that this was a perfect way to visit the home of our beloved St. Clare.

-- Mary Stronach, OFS

STATE OF THE ORDER

continued from previous page

Social Media, Database and TAU-USA folks to work together"; continued work on the database; "widening our embrace of culture"; updating the National Statutes, National Guidelines and the Spiritual Assistant Handbook; support of the newly formed "Franciscan Family Forum."

At the international level, the working document for the next General Chapter, called the **Instrumentum Laboris**, shines a "bright light on the path ahead."

Announcing the theme: "**Animate and Guide with Servant Leadership**," she emphasized that "servant leadership and co-responsibility truly is the way to move our Order forward." She explained that the **Instrumentum Laboris** is organized "according to the challenges of leadership."

She challenged the ministers to take the **Instrumentum Laboris**, review it and respond, considering what it means to animate and guide, to be co-responsible,

to be a minister or council member, to lead collegially, to listen, to collaborate. She said that each region would be receiving the complete document with instructions on how to respond.

In closing, she urged, "live a life worthy of your call," and quoted Francis' Psalm 7 from the *Office of the Passion*: "Cast off the weight of sin, and take up the Lord's holy cross, and follow the Lord's most holy commands to the very end. So be it. Amen."

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

'Now is the time to be physically apart but spiritually connected, appreciative of the deepest bonds we have, in touch with the integral peace we have with God, with creation, and with one another. It is time to become ever more aware that Jesus is the God of all nearness and He is the Lord of every distance and in Him we live, move, and have our being.'

- Fr. Chris Shorrock, OFM Conv

National Spiritual Assistants Focus on Impact of Pandemic

By MARY STRONACH, OFS

Not surprisingly, the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, understanding the impact that the pandemic has had on the brothers and sisters, took the opportunity to address the issues of this new reality.

"In these isolating moments, where can God be found?" asked President-in-turn Fr. **Christopher Panogoplos**, TOR. "What has isolation meant to you in these areas -- social, spiritual, emotional and political?"

Spiritual Impact of Pandemic

Br. **Alexander Escaleras**, OFM Cap, pointed to our responsibility to others. "We must consider the welfare of others who surround us even if our own life is not going the way we want it."

He shared a personal story about his brother, Deacon Steven, who died from liver disease complications in October 2019. A few days before his death, a cleaning lady shared with him, and family members present, her own suffering having just discovered that her daughter had diabetes and other problems. His brother, who had a tracheotomy and could not speak, raised his hands in the form of prayer. "Translation: 'I'm going to pray for

you.' Even as he lay there dying, my brother was given the grace by God to think of others in their need."

"Be safe and healthy," he closed, "and may God give you His grace to think of and help the other."

Social Effects of Pandemic

Fr. **Chris Shorrock**, OFM Conv, noted that social distancing goes against our psyche and our human tendencies. It can "easily lead to a sense of isolation and unrest, especially if we are in what has been described as being vulnerable due to age or any pre-existing medical conditions."

Quoting David Couturier OFM Cap, he said, "the challenge we face in this time of pandemic is how to deal creatively, contemplatively, and constructively with distance."

Individuals and fraternities are discovering new ways to meet virtually on plenty of online video platforms, he said. Prayer searches on the internet have skyrocketed. We've been attending Eucharist on-line; virtual groups have formed, some spiritual and others strictly social.

"Religious and spiritual practices

deliver something special when they are done socially -- a deep sense of community and connection with something larger than us," he continued.

"While these technological changes have shown promise in meeting people's more immediate spiritual concerns, months of self-isolation, rising unemployment and mounting death tolls will surely present fresh challenges."

Fr. Chris suggested that as we go forward, these on-line communities "will likely not be enough." And "what about our members who are not so technically minded?" he asked. "...and not being able to honor loved ones in funeral rites? The lack of these rituals, which bring people together, will surely affect the process of grieving."

"It is difficult to replace in-person human connection when we are at our most vulnerable," he added.

While we may someday return to our in-person celebrations and rituals, "some things will be forever changed by the crisis. And the new skills and online practices learned at this time

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SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

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will impact the ways Franciscans engage with the religious and spiritual into the future,” he said.

He concluded: “Now is the time to be physically apart but spiritually connected, appreciative of the deepest bonds we have, in touch with the integral peace we have with God, with creation, and with one another. It is time to become ever more aware that Jesus is the God of all nearness and He is the Lord of every distance and in Him we live, move, and have our being.”

Emotional Impact of Pandemic

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, who became president-in-turn at the end of the chapter, took the conversation further by noting:

“God created us with emotions, and he saw that it was very good.”

Emotions such as anger, sorrow, confusion, anxiety or distress “play a role for us,” he said. “They can help us

to develop a greater connection and to deepen our love. Conflict, in fact, can actually help us grow in love.”

Depression is a kind of anger; anxiety can lead to anger. We have to consider the blessings of anger, he said. The question is, “how do we express it?”

“Emotions are a gift. We have to learn to unwrap them,” he added.

As an example, he identified the work of Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, who, in an “incredibly courageous act” found a way to address their anger in a positive pro-active way. We must search for “creative solutions.” He reminded attendees that while emotions such as anger are natural responses, sometimes our reactions need to be adjusted.

Political Impact of Pandemic

We develop a well-formed conscience through prayer, Fr. Christopher noted. “Don’t jump to

conclusions. Listen to what God wants. Test what we feel. Listen to what the Church has to say historically.” He added that we need quiet to listen to one another – to experience the beauty of dialogue.

He said: “Franciscans are called to take seriously the demands of the Gospel, to be agents of reconciliation and peace. (We are called to) alleviate suffering; extend hope; provide for the well-being of others. There can be no two sides of this divide. All of us need to do better at encountering and accompanying one another on the journey of life.”

“Politics is something nobler than posturing, marketing, and media spin,” he said. These sow nothing but division, conflict, and a bleak cynicism incapable of mobilizing people to pursue a common goal...In thinking of the future, we do well to ask political leaders: ‘Why are you doing this? What is your real aim?’

National Budget Overwhelmingly Approved

While OFS membership was down by 339 members in 2020, NAFRA treasurer, **Claudia Kauzlarich**, OFS, reported that the National Fraternity was under budget because meetings during the pandemic had been canceled or had gone on-line. The ending balance for 2020 was \$485,932.

The proposed budget for 2021 totaled \$317,900. Expected income from fair share would be \$217,000, assuming membership at 12,275 and fair share at \$17 remain the same. If the National Fraternity were to use all the budgeted funds, the net loss would be \$100,900. This sum would be covered by money in savings, she said, adding that “we always project high and spend less.”

Because of the pandemic, some regional fraternities may have difficulty in paying their fair share, she said. In



Treasurer Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS

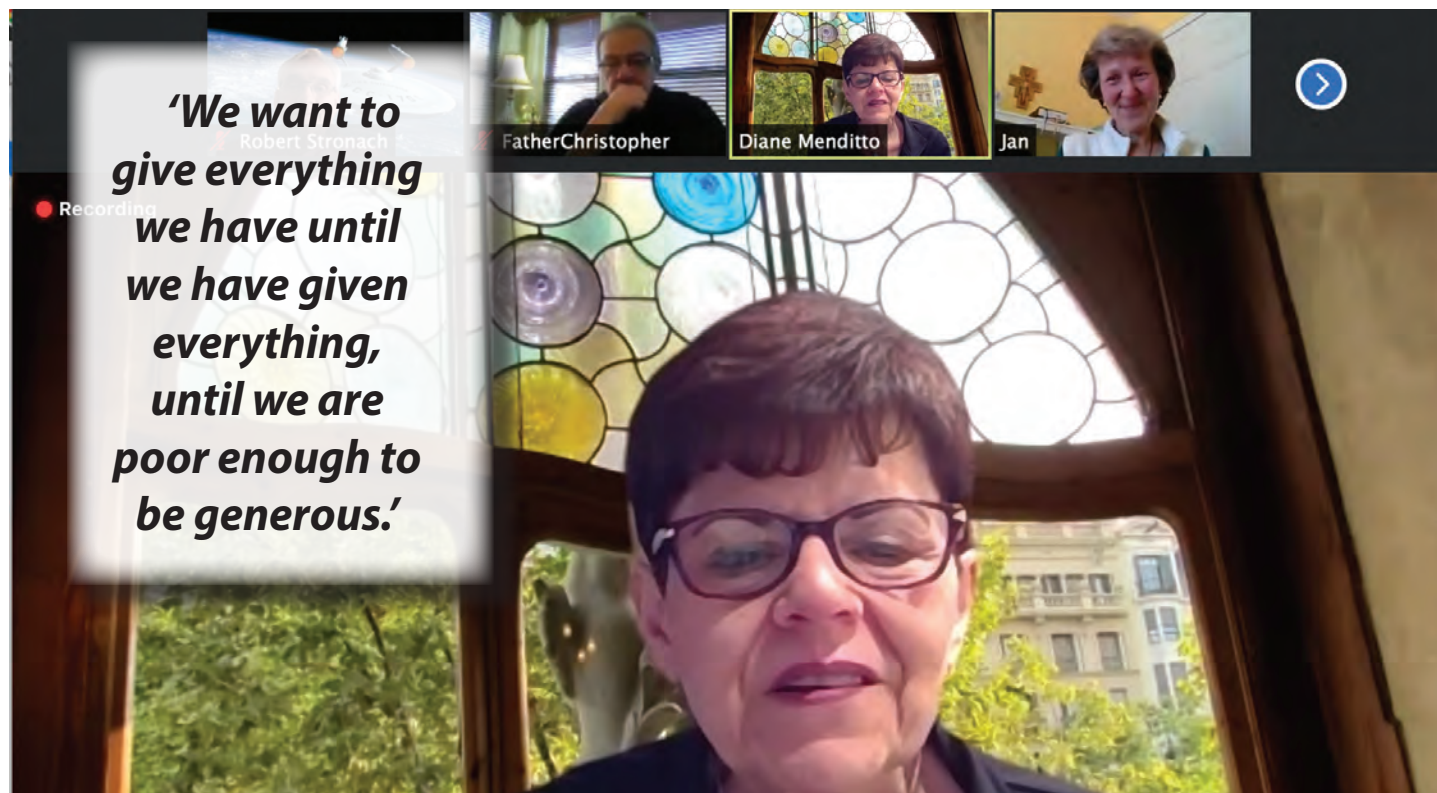
this case, the fraternity in difficulty should contact the National Executive Council. She said the hope is that other regional fraternities would consider helping by making a special donation. In 2020, she reported, this fund received donations from regional fraternities totaling \$2,490.

She also reported that negotiations

to reduce penalties were continuing with the Sheraton in Arizona where the Quinquennial had to be postponed due to the pandemic. The intention is to reschedule for 2022 at the same location, reducing the penalty.

The budget was overwhelmingly approved with 97% in favor and 3% abstaining.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER



Diane Menditto, OFS, National Formation Commission chair..

Local Fraternity Is the Heart of the Order

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

Calling the local fraternity the “heart-beat of the order,” National Formation Commission Chair **Diane Menditto**, OFS, pointed to the commitment Secular Franciscans make at profession “to accompany and take care of one another on our journey to the Father.”

In her presentation titled “*Fraternity: Our Way of Life*,” Menditto elaborated on five key elements to living in communion with one another — collaboration, community, communication, commitment, and conversion.

While explaining the art of Franciscan collaboration, she cited a report by former Minister General Emanuela DeNunzio, OFS, that represents the identity of Secular Franciscans in a triple dimension: Personal (inner life); Fraternal (co-responsibility); and Universal (the mission).

“The mission itself needs to be reflected not only in Gospel values, but in order to work for the fraternity, it also needs to be based on the gifts of its members,” Menditto said.

By championing the lives of our brothers and sisters in fraternity, we strengthen each other, she said, citing the *General Constitutions*, Article 30.2 on how fraternity should be lived.

“The sense of co-responsibility of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer and active collaboration in accordance with each one’s situation and possible obligations for the animation of the fraternity,” Menditto said.

The challenge of the community element means the “acceptance of and empathy for our brothers and sisters,” she said.

“We can go out and support others because we know we are loved and supported,” she said.

“We are not looking for others to serve us, but we are looking for ways to serve one another. We want to give everything we have until we have given everything, until we are poor enough to be generous.”

The communication element means listening with patience and humility, even when one doesn’t agree. Menditto encouraged regional ministers and councilors to communicate directly with the local fraternities they represent.

“This is one of the ways the local fraternities will know that we are listening to them,” she said. Listening as a method of communication applies to every level of fraternity.

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FRATERNITY: SPECIAL INGREDIENTS



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“If we truly want to serve one another and others in fraternity, listening to the needs of others should, no must, be the basis for whatever we do for one another,” Menditto said.

The fourth challenge of a Secular Franciscan is commitment to what one promised at profession.

“By profession we are committed to God, to one another and to all creation. This is called universal kinship.”

Living the Gospel life as a Secular Franciscan is a full-time experience, she said.

Finally, the biggest challenge of all is daily conversion.

“It is the only way we will accomplish the rest,” Menditto said, citing Article 7 of the Rule: “United by their vocation as brothers and sisters of penance, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls conversion.”

Daily conversion helps us to strengthen our mission outlined in the Gospel.

“This requires constant self-examination to be sure we reach out to others because we are not attached to ourselves.”

Using extensive quotes from “*Belonging to the SFO*” by Emanuela DeNunzio, OFS, (General Chapter 2008), Menditto recommended that fraternities:

- create a **School of sanctity** -- “Fraternity can promote in its members full development of the interior life: an intense liturgical life, sacramental and charitable life through practices such as fraternity prayer, Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, retreats and days of recollection.”

- create a **School of formation** -- “The spirit of belonging is nurtured when the Rule becomes the life of the brothers and sisters. It will assure a kind of assimilation of the spirit of the Rule in the life and in the history of each person. Those who are assiduous readers of the writings of Francis and of Clare and of the ancient biographies will be strengthened in their Franciscan identity. Therefore, Secular Franciscans should regularly read spiritual readings from the sources. We are agents of our own formation. We form ourselves so that we can form others.”

- be a **Witness of ecclesial communion** -- “It is essential that everyone make the decision to make himself/herself present in the lives of the brothers and sisters: rejoicing with those who participate, being mindful of those that

do not come, trying to find the reasons for which someone has lost the motivation. In order to promote the desire to gather in fraternity, the Council should plan meetings that are pleasant, productive and enriching.”

- **participate in the apostolic purpose of the Church** -- “The Rule recommends being creative in our apostolic activity -- examine our ministries. Society has changed, and the Church has renewed itself and is renewing itself again. The Gospel is always the same, but new approaches and new encounters with the Gospel and history are necessary.”

- be a **Presence in society** -- “In light of the social doctrine of the church, every fraternity should question its priorities in its own missionary commitment.”

...

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

“*The Secular Franciscan Order for an Evangelizing Mission Together with all the Franciscan Family.*” (Benedetto Lino, OFS, at the First International Congress for Missions and Evangelization-OFM-2014)

“*How Should An Order Like the OFS Be Managed at All Its Levels?*” (Benedetto Lino, OFS, XIV General Chapter, November 2014)

“*Belonging to the SFO*” (Emanuela DeNunzio, OFS, General Chapter 2008)

HIGHLIGHTS OF NATIONAL CHAPTER

Surprise Visit by Minister General

During the second day of the National Chapter, the attendees received a surprise visit from Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, of Hungary.

He brought a message of hope and appreciation, praying “that God will help us get out of this virtual world... but still happy to have the technology for us to meet across incredible distances so that we can see and listen to each other.” He invited all to pray for all those who do not have the equipment – in Africa, Asia, Latin America.

“Let us discover the power of prayer in interceding for others,” he said.

He asked the chapter to pray for the



Presidency as it prepares for a hybrid meeting in Rome where some members will be on-line and others will be

present.

He closed his message by simply saying, “I hope we meet in person.”

Committee and Commission Reports

As is the yearly practice, all committees and commissions submitted written reports to the National Fraternity. Below are highlights:

- **1-800-FRANCIS:** received 125 calls requesting vocation information.

- **A draft of a new book** on the history of the Order in the US should be ready for review by spring 2021.

- **The Regional Guidelines** for Archives will soon be available on the national website.

- **A new listing** of the documents of establishment available in the national archives at St. Bonaventure University was sent to the regional archivists.

- **The CNSA** welcomed Fr. Christopher Shorrock, O.F.M., Conv., who was appointed in November of 2019. Fr. Chris hails from Australia, and is currently living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is the former National Spiritual Assistant to the OFS National Fraternity in Australia, holds a doctorate in Theology, and taught at the Catholic Theological College in Melbourne, Australia, and the Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, UK.

- **Three emerging** fraternities in Missouri, California and Maryland requested documents of Canonical Establishment from the CNSA.

- **A working group** has been commissioned to draft a charter, vision and mission for the newly formed Franciscan Family Forum.

- **A document** on the Canonical Establishment of a Fraternity is in review stage and should be available soon.

- **The CNSA** published a document on “Clarification on Same Sex Attraction and Sexual Identity Issues.”

- **The Computer Committee** updated existing programs and revised login procedures.

- **The Ecumenical Interfaith** Committee held its first Ecumenical Interfaith Conference in July 2020.

- **Franciscan Youth** and Young Adult (FY/YA) presented an 11-week FY/YA animator training series on Zoom.

- **FY/YA created** a Formation Program Outline that clarifies the goals, methods and topics (in human, Christian, and Franciscan life) that accompany the stages young people

experience in YouFra.

- **Justice, Peace** and Integrity of Creation Commission Visioning II Gathering in May 2020 via Zoom provided the opportunity for 36 national leaders to discuss what Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation needs to look like in the United States – in the current times. Because of this event, JPIC Focus Groups on Care for Creation, Immigration, Mindful Dialogues and Spirituality were established.

- **The Formation** Commission co-hosted Zoom calls for Spanish speakers, provided weekly “Formation Friday” articles to regional formation directors; presented a national regional formation workshop in August 2020 where they unveiled the first draft and design of a chapter and its companion from the new formation program.

- **Public Relations** updated the Quinquennial Website and provided media coverage for national chapter as well as a special section in Tau-USA.

- **20th Quinquennial** Congress Committee continues its planning and will include both Korean and Spanish breakout sessions.



Our Life in Christ and Our Public Life

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, CNSA

I don't remember hearing about abortion until it was brought up for discussion in my high school English class. Abortion remains a hot topic after all these years, in spite of several commentators claiming decades ago that other issues would squeeze it out, but it still gets modest attention in many elections. Over my years as a priest, I've heard several confessions from women and a few from men, about how their choice for abortion has hurt their lives. As long as abortion is with us, it will continue to affect us.

My parents did an end-run around the public schools' family life education, which started in fifth grade. When each of us reached *fourth* grade, Mom took my sisters, and Dad took my brothers and me to the local museum, where father-son and mother-daughter classes learned about human physiology and development. Our entire family watched the development of the child from conception to birth on NOVA on PBS. We were watching the rerun when our grandparents were watching us. My grandmother entered the room just as the mother was giving birth. Her reaction: "What would your parents say if they knew you were watching this?" "Well," we said, "they already saw it with us."

Seeing the development of a child a stage at a time pulls back the curtain from the mystery of pregnancy and makes it just "common sense" that there is a child developing inside the mother. There is no magic point of a "formless blob" suddenly becoming "a human being."

When my high school English teacher brought up the topic for discussion, I was relieved to find out that the Church already acknowledged that abortion is the taking of human life. I was relieved that the Church was on the side of what, to my eyes, was clearly science.

There are many scientists who would frame things differently. But the simple, direct view of the development of a child in the womb is so powerful that many women leaning toward an abortion choose differently when they see an ultrasound.

Only three of us in that class thought abortion was at all questionable. The simple, direct proclamation of a woman's so-called "right to choose" is so powerful that it affects how people today interpret even the photography that clearly demonstrates there is a growing being. **We learn how to interpret who is favorable or beautiful or trustworthy in part from those around us and the way they interpret and interact with others.**

The Secular Franciscan Rule tells us to "be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of [our] human lives and [our] courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, [we] should make definite choices in harmony with [our] faith." (15)

Our public role extends far beyond the voting booth. My parents' direct and respectful approach to human life and development had a profound and lasting impact on me. Everything has a proper name, can be discussed with respect and without fear or shame. We can have a great impact when we deal openly, honestly, and without fear about every topic with each person.

For your reflection: *As you prepare for Lent, what has helped form your Gospel-centered approach to engaging in public life? Is there a challenge you still need to take up? How do you pray about this? What kind of choices do you make that are contrary to social norms but in harmony with our faith?*



FORMATION COMMISSION

by Anne Mulqueen OFS
Spiritual Assistant, National Formation Commission

This issue of *TAU-USA* is dedicated to our most recent National Chapter—the first of its kind to be conducted virtually. May God grant that this is the first and the last virtual chapter we will ever have to experience.

We are familiar with the line from William Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, where Juliet says to Romeo, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Adapting Juliet’s line I say, “A chapter by any other name would be called a meeting.” But what kind of a meeting? It is not simply a regularly scheduled meeting. A chapter is a special time of gathering.

The word chapter originally came to us from the Benedictines in around the 12th or 13th century. When the monks gathered, they would read and meditate on a chapter of their rule; hence the gathering took on the name *chapter*. Apparently, St. Francis was familiar with the term and used it.

What exactly is a chapter? What is involved when we call the membership to gather for a *religious* chapter? You might think this is an unusual topic for a formation article, and you would be correct. It is an unusual topic. However, I believe one of the objectives of formation is to help us understand why we do what we do. As agents of formation, we **assist** by feeding the mind as well as the soul of a person.

Basically, a canonical, *ordinary* chapter is a gathering of members who have the authority to govern a religious organization that meets at regular intervals. This governing body makes decisions and sets direction, bearing in mind the official guiding documents.

In the United States, there we are most familiar with two types of chapters: the annual national and regional chapter and the triennial elective chapter. If unusual circumstances were to occur that required convening the National or Regional

Fraternity, it would be considered an *extraordinary* chapter.

The International Fraternity (CIOFS) calls a *general* chapter every three years and gathers representatives from the entire Secular Franciscan Order throughout the world. The general chapter is a sign of our worldwide unity. CIOFS meets in elective chapter every six years.

Periodically, St. Francis called his brothers back to enjoy fraternity and to share their experiences on the road. He called these gatherings *chapters of mats*. While the brothers were still small enough in number to gather in one place, all the brothers came to the chapter of mats. Our Quinquennial celebrations are modern-day chapters of mats. All Secular Franciscans are called, and all are welcome.

Finally, since a chapter is a type of meeting, it is not necessary to refer to it as a “chapter *meeting*.” Using the word **chapter** is sufficient.

Now let’s move from the head, our intellectual understanding of chapter, to the heart, our formative, affective understanding of chapter.

Whenever Franciscans gather, they form fraternity. As an example, when the regional ministers and the national executive council come together, they form the National Fraternity Council. The same ideals and components of a healthy, vibrant fraternity apply to chapters. Therefore, much of what I write in this portion about chapters also applies to your local fraternity gatherings and council meetings.

Is governance, or business, a chapter’s primary focus? I don’t think so, but you may disagree. Yes, there is an agenda with many issues that must be discussed and voted on; issues that will affect Secular Franciscans not in attendance. However, I believe the governing body has an obligation that takes precedence over issues and votes. Their

first obligation is to come together in prayer to discern the will of God for the Order and the people they represent. Only by turning first to God for direction can they hope for the oneness of heart and mind to accomplish the tasks set before them.

Therefore, it naturally follows that every day of the chapter must be saturated in prayer; prayer in common and private prayer. Quoting our former National Minister and brother Tom Bello, “Leadership should never sacrifice the spiritual to business,” to which I add, prayer is our connection to God, and it is the Almighty who actually calls us together and blesses our work.

Just as every fraternity gathering should engage in ongoing formation, so too every chapter should allot time for ongoing formation.

Sometimes I think we use terms such as ongoing formation so often that we become *immunized* as to what the terms really mean. If ongoing formation is necessary, and we all believe it is, that means we are not yet fully formed. And if we are not yet the person we want to give back to God, that means ongoing formation is crucial. And if ongoing formation is that important, it must be a part of every Secular Franciscan gathering.

Have you ever noticed that during a discussion after a presentation, not everyone will comment on the same thing? People hear what they need to hear. That is the movement of the Holy Spirit, meeting the unique needs of each person. And that is what ongoing formation is meant to accomplish. And so it follows that we must be attentive and involved in our own ongoing formation.

Finally, not all ongoing formation occurs during its designated timeframe. God uses countless encounters and experiences to form us. These *aha* moments are the reward of being open to the Spirit.

All chapters set aside time for social and fraternal interaction. From the very first time I attended a gathering larger than my local fraternity, I wished every Secular Franciscan could have my experience. I was a newly elected local formation director, and I was attending the first National Formation Commission workshop. Some of you may remember that Commission led by Donna Marie Kaminsky, OFS. It was the first time I met Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv. My eyes were opened. It wasn’t the information shared that changed everything for me. It was the people I met; people just like me who were doing extraordinary things, and I knew I would never be the same. My vocation took on a new and deeper meaning.

I believe God wants that for all of us. God wants us to enjoy the life He gave us. God wants us to laugh and find joy in life. Social times enhance our sense of belonging. The human part of us needs to feel connected to others. Social times strengthen that connection and increase our own commitment. Gatherings larger than our local fraternities allow us to meet people we would normally never meet and develop lifelong fraternal connections.

We will have an opportunity to enter into and experience all of this at the forthcoming *Quinquennial Chapter of Mats* in 2022! And I promise you, there will be a minimum of business, if any. See you there.



Forming a
Coast-to-Coast
Franciscan
Province

The six OFM provincial ministers, meeting via Zoom to discuss the formation of a new coast-to-coast OFM province in the United States, took time out to share their thoughts about the incident at the National Capital with their brothers, and the rest of the Franciscan Family. The following is an excerpt from their letter.

As friars, we pledge to work with all who promote human dignity, the common good, and peaceful and respectful dialogue. We reject violence as a means to achieve a desired end and want to promote non-violent means to restore justice. We will pray for all our government officials, especially, President-elect Biden, that they will work together to heal the wounds within our country.



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



A FRANCISCAN CULTURE OF CARE

by Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National Animator

Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High,” and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship. (OFS Rule, Art. 18)

There is no doubt that we have come out of one of the most challenging and unprecedented years as a global family. Indeed, 2020 was challenging, yet it was a year in which we as a people of faith were called to a much higher standard. We were called to a place of deeper understanding and care for our brothers and sisters, as well as for Mother Sister Earth. Having to shelter at home did wonders for our environment – fewer cars on the roads, less carbon emissions, less pollution in the air. Although that is great news for our common home, it was not an intentional care.

In his message for the 54th World Day of Peace, Pope Francis speaks of this culture of care as a path to peace. There is no doubt that 2020 was a year when there was very little peace. In the midst of a global pandemic, we also experienced racial upheaval and economic unrest, not to mention political tensions during a contentious presidential campaign. We also witnessed our first responders and front line workers giving care to the hundreds of patients suffering from COVID-19. These caring men and women put their own lives on the line to give care to those who were unable to care for themselves.

In his World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis reflects on the story of Cain and Abel from the book of Genesis: *After killing his brother Abel, Cain answers God’s question by saying: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). Cain, like all of us, was called to be “his brother’s keeper.” “These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to*

a conviction that we share today, that everything is interconnected and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice, and faithfulness to others”.

God created all as relational beings, because God models the ultimate relationship – the Holy Trinity. It is in that relationship that the culture of care is made fully known. As the Holy Spirit is the love and care between God the Father and God the Son, we too are called to show that intentional spirit of care and understanding. Not judging, not criticizing, and not pointing the finger of blame; but caring, understanding and showing mercy and compassion.

In his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reflects on another very familiar story from the Scriptures – the famous parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable reveals the ultimate spirit of care and compassion – and to someone who is considered an outsider. This example of the culture of care is truly what leads to the path of peace. Just think about that poor man who was left beaten and unable to attend to his own needs. Religious leaders passed the man on the side of the road and quickly dismissed him, not even taking the time to see if he needed any care. What if you were that poor man? Our medical workers are the Samaritans during this pandemic. The original Samaritan in the parable did not even think about whether or not those robbers were still lying in wait. He immediately and intentionally

cared for the beaten man, even taking him to an inn to give him better care.

Pope Francis tells us that we are all called to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers – not just when it is convenient or safe; but whenever there is a need. Where there is a need, there is a Franciscan. Saint Francis was moved to care for the lepers, knowing they were the outcasts of the day. Our Holy Rule states: *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* (Art. 14). To build that world, we must intentionally and mindfully create a culture of care. Our Rule also states: *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* (Art. 13).

Personally, I have felt this most strongly during this past year, as I became a full-time caregiver to my mother, who suffered a stroke in 2019 and a

second stroke in 2020. I have experienced the mindful and compassionate care from my Franciscan brothers and sisters. One of the most compassionate acts is to give care to a caregiver. I have truly felt this. When I am ready to give in to the burnout, to the tiredness, I am kept going by my Franciscan family. It reminds me of the story of Moses when he was too tired to raise his arms so his armed forces would gain the upper hand in the battle against Amalek. When his arms grew tired, his people propped them up so the army had the victory (cf. Exodus 17:8-13).

I am truly blessed by the culture of care of the Franciscan family. Let us always keep our arms raised toward Jesus, and when our brother's or sister's arms are getting tired, may we always be there, in care and compassion, to hold them up.

Good and gracious God,
may you always grant us the grace
to create and maintain a culture of care
that leads to the path of peace.

We pray in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Secular Franciscan Order - USA

HELP NEEDED ON WEBSITE COMMITTEE

The Website Committee is seeking 1-2 additional members to help keep our website up to date. The ideal candidate would have a background in website maintenance, particularly with WordPress, plus the time to devote to improving our website (3-6 hours a week). We would also be willing to train someone who has a strong foundation in related skills and the desire to learn.

If you are interested, please contact Jane DeRose-Bamman at ofsusasecretary@gmail.com

Please include a brief summary of your Franciscan journey, and a description of your computer experience and capabilities.

Ecumenical Interfaith Committee Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity



MOST FRANCISCAN JESUIT, POPE FRANCIS SET THE BAR HIGH

by Donna Hollis, OFS, National Councilor

What was Pope Francis thinking when he took on the name of St. Francis of Assisi? I believe he was capturing what it was he wanted to do as a world leader, by way of St. Francis' memory, to energize the legacy as a key to a Christian response in the midst of a stressed and hurting world. When Pope Francis signed the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti at the tomb of St. Francis what was he saying? "Reawaken the spiritual energy that can contribute to the betterment of society" (paragraph 266).

In his opening remarks in the encyclical, Pope Francis, states, "This saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy, who inspired me to write the encyclical Laudato Si, prompts me once more to devote this new encyclical to fraternity and social friendship.... Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters" (paragraph 2).

Pope Francis sets the bar high for the Church and for all people of good will to understand and experience a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in the world. Our Ecumenical Franciscan family has been one of fraternal dialogue and respect for one another's beliefs, working together to build harmony.

Dialogue is far more than simple diplomacy. "The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society. Dialogue between the followers of different religions does not take place simply for the sake of diplomacy, consideration or tolerance. In the words of the Bishops of India, 'the goal of dialogue is to establish friendship. Peace,

harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love" (paragraph 271).

In Fraternal life we are called to reach out to all people in open dialogue and with an open heart, which enriches our own faith. How do we embrace harmony with all people?

To embrace that harmony, let's look at religious freedom. "One fundamental human right must not be forgotten in the journey towards fraternity and peace. It is religious freedom for believers of all religions. That freedom proclaims that we can 'build harmony and understanding between different cultures and religions. It also testifies to the fact that, since the important things we share are so many, it is possible to find a means of serene, ordered and peaceful coexistence, accepting our differences and rejoicing that, as children of the one God, we are all brothers and sisters'" (paragraph 279).

In what way do we as Catholics stay firmly rooted in our own faith while respecting others in the good that they do? "...[W]e ask God to strengthen unity within the Church, a unity enriched by differences reconciled by the working of the spirit. For 'in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body' (I Cor. 12:13), in which each member has his or her distinctive contribution to make. As St. Augustine said, 'the ear sees through the eye, and the eye hears through the ear.' It is also urgent to continue to bear witness to the journey of encounter between the different Christian confessions. We cannot forget Christ's desire 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21). Hearing his call, we recognize with sorrow that the process of globalization still lacks the prophetic and spiritual contribution of

unity among Christians. This notwithstanding, ‘even as we make this journey towards full communion, we already have the duty to offer common witness to the love of God for all people by working together in the service of humanity’” (paragraph 280).

Our Church has always shown us what it means to be catholic with regards to universal love. Even though I came from a Protestant background, I know this to be true. You might say I was raised ‘ecumenical’ because of my seeking out many different spiritualities and denominations along the way. In each encounter, I came away with a different part of the whole picture of who and what “God” is all about. My calling to become a Secular Franciscan is what led me to the Catholic Church. After watching the movie, “Brother Son, Sister Moon” in a movie theater, a fire was lit within me that became a blaze as I pursued my calling. This path led me to a Secular Franciscan Community that was living out the dream that I so craved. It was then I realized it would lead me into the Catholic Church. Because of the zeal to become a Franciscan, I stepped through a door I would not have entered so willingly if it were not for my calling. Through the process of becoming Catholic later in life, I found a richness that put all the pieces together. God sees within our hearts who we truly are and makes it possible for us to find Him already there.

This time during the pandemic has made us realize that we are all “in this together” and we

have found common ground in caring for one another. We realize more deeply the importance of our family and friends and how we need each other and the faith we embrace. We need to see the human family as “us,” not “them.”

Pope Francis concludes Fratelli Tutti with this thought: “Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by constructing new walls” (paragraph 284).

May we recognize the goodness in all people.

We are called to restore hope and bring about renewal, becoming a culture of encounter as described in Pope Francis’ encyclical.

Let us continue to be a people of light, bringing peace to unite a hurting world with healing words of comfort and acts of kindness; accepting all as children of God.



An Ecumenical Christian Prayer

Given in Assisi, at the tomb of Saint Francis, on 3 October, Vigil of the Feast of the Saint, in the year 2020, the eighth year of my Pontificate.

**O God, Trinity of love,
From the profound communion of your divine
life,
Pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of
Jesus,
In his family of Nazareth,
And in the early Christian community.**

**Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
Discovering Christ in each human being,
Recognizing him crucified**

In the sufferings of the abandoned

**And forgotten of our world,
And risen in each brother or sister
Who makes a new start.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
Reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
So that we may discover anew
That all are important and all are necessary,
Different faces of the one humanity
That God so loves. Amen.**



THE ROAD TO EMMAUS: A PERFECT MODEL TO FOLLOW

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS
National OFS Youth and Young Adult Commission Chair

Sharing the Good News with others is a mission set forth for all baptized people. The responsibility of inviting others into a Christ-centered gospel life, is one Secular Franciscans are especially called to when we say the words “Yes, this is what I want” at our profession. The gift of fraternity supports us as we come together to renew our own faith and grow in holiness through ongoing formation and shared ministries.

Our mission doesn't stop with fraternity life. We are called to go out into the secular world with our Franciscan spirituality, especially in reaching out to youth and young adults. The familiar story of Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) gives us a perfect model to follow. Jesus walked with the disciples as they talked, debated, grieved, and asked questions. He listened to their pain and anguish, offered his friendship, and broke bread with them, which opened their eyes and instilled in their hearts a burning desire for more. Hopefully, this is what happens in fraternity—we build relationships that allow an atmosphere of trust, love, and openness, encouraging members in their quest for holiness.

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, a statement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding adult faith formation, suggests that “to be effective ministers of adult faith formation we will first, like Jesus, join people in their daily concerns and walk side by side with them on the pathway of life. We will ask them questions and listen attentively as they speak of their joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties.”¹ They use the Emmaus story as the basis of their document.

Since its inception, the Youth and Young Adult Commission has promoted the Emmaus method. We recognize that it's important to share the gospel with young people through prayer and formation, but mainly by the work we do with attitudes of peace, joy, compassion, and love. Working together “can touch their hearts and minds and unfold the deep meaning of their experience in the light of all that Jesus said and did.”² Like the disciples walking with Jesus, young people, through a relationship with us, can “catch a glimpse into the heart of God and find a world made new.”³ We learn a lesson when thinking about what happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. “The pathway of their lives opened from confusion and despair into conviction and hope, and they began to grasp the height and depth of God's mysterious love.”⁴ A relationship with young people will likewise touch our hearts and help us see Jesus more clearly! In getting to know us and the Franciscan way of life, they may eventually want to form a YouFra (Youth Fraternity) or enter formation to discern a calling as a Secular Franciscan.

As you are aware, there are many young people who for a variety of reasons have walked away from the Church and even from a relationship with God. The book *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*, reminds us that “Each person who disaffiliates has a name, a story, and longings of the heart and mind, and all are grateful for the opportunity to have their story heard.”⁵ We can't do that unless we walk with our young people with a determination to build authentic relationships.

¹ United States Confraternity of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Our Hearts are Burning Within Us*, USCCB Publishing, #8

² Ibid, #9

³ Ibid, #11

⁴ Ibid,

⁵ A Study of Saint Mary's Press, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*, St. Mary's Press, 2017, pg. 7

How do we do this during our time of isolation?

The commission has a few ideas that might inspire you to come up with your own!

1. Heather Cherniack has begun “Holy Spirits” evening gatherings for dialogue among young adults. Her program is based on a philosophy like “Theology on Tap,” which suggests we need to meet young adults where they are (which right now is on social media!). Check it out by contacting Heather at youngfranciscan@gmail.com.
2. Young people are particularly drawn to nature. Many parks or hiking trails are still open if participants abide by social distancing and mask guidelines. Offer to host “pizza in the park,” a backpacking trip, or a river clean-up. Use the opportunity to listen to their stories and share your own.
3. We can help fulfill a great desire to serve. Ask a group of young people to meet virtually and come up with a common project, such as providing backpacks for foster children, filling socks with hygiene needs for homeless teens, or making simple blankets to give to trauma victims. Each person can work at home while visiting across the airways.
4. Prayer experiences appeal to young folks. With churches closed, invite others to experience a virtual prayer service. Each participant can create their own sacred space using a common element such as a candle to provide a feeling of unity. Sites such as www.crs.org have many prayers available, and after modeling young people will be capable of designing their own.
5. Create together! Each person will come to a virtual gathering with art supplies. Read and discuss Ephesians 6:10-17, then spend time using the supplies to make a breastplate, helmet of salvation, sword of peace, or whichever item from the passage they can relate to best. Share the creations.
6. Contact the commission if you have or know of a group of young people who are interested in meeting others. We have several YouFras (Youth Fraternities) who would love to connect with other young people in different parts of the country. kmmolaro@gmail.com



The “family” bond was so great in the St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity in Arizona, two of the members were married! Both the bride and groom had spent several years together in YouFra.



The St. Francis of Assisi YouFra works together on a Habitat for Humanity project. Here they helped frame the house. Notice the Franciscan joy in working together

FRANCISCAN LIVING

THE WIDOW'S MITE: LESSONS ON LIVING

By Francine Gikow, OFS

The story of the widow's mite in Luke's gospel, (Luke 21:1-5) always captured my imagination and wonder. How could a person who had nothing be so generous? How could she ignore how she would obtain her next meal? What would she live on?

The story of the poor widow giving all her money to the temple is extremely short and without a lot of detail, so use your imagination to relive the story. We are first informed that the rich put their gifts into the treasury followed by a poor widow who donated her "two very small copper coins." Although the widow donated only a meager sum of money, nevertheless Jesus directs our attention from the abundant contributions of the rich to the poor widow because "...she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (NSRV.C). Jesus' important lesson in this story, however, is the choice the widow made in making her donation.

The widow must have been well known in the temple and the Jewish community. They must have known her circumstances, her background, her family, and her deceased spouse. The temple must have been her spiritual home and where she met God. The story does not go into detail about who was in the temple with her, but we know there were rich people who donated money to the temple before the widow. Perhaps a few others might have noticed the woman who gave her few precious coins to the temple treasury, but she was immortalized when Jesus noticed, commented, and held her worthy of emulation. She might have been old and poor, but Jesus singled her out. Why?

Jesus understood the depth of her offering. She chose to give everything she had to God. She gave of her sustenance, her future, and her life. She gave of herself, fully and without reserving

anything for herself. Do we do the same or do we grasp and keep something for ourselves?

As a widow she had no means of support in her old age. She depended on others in her extended family and the community for livelihood, but she depended on God the most. The poor widow must have realized that all she had was given to her by God and that she was dependent on Him alone. By giving her coins to the treasury, she was just returning what had already been given to her- and for this she was grateful. She was so detached from her "ownership" of money and "things" that she had the freedom to return to God what was God's in gratitude.

Freedom, you say? How can you be free when poverty forces you to do things you do not want to do? How can you be free if you are limited to working for food, shelter, and the bare necessities? Answer: it is a paradox and a different definition of freedom. Rather, it is the freedom to love God without being concerned with attachments or "things." Asceticism (self-denial) is difficult. Her life was not easy, but her focus remained purely on God, without the hindrance or distraction of material things.

The widow must also have had great trust: trust in her God who provided all things to her, who accompanied her with his Presence, and consoled her. In comparison to many whose lives are filled with riches but remain unfulfilled, she was rich! Her fulfillment was in God!

The widow's mite story gives Secular Franciscans many important lessons for our lives: asceticism, poverty, and detachment; trust and dependence on God; and most importantly, single-mindedness in loving God. Freedom and perfect joy are the "fruits" of a life united in Love Incarnate!

***"Hold back nothing of yourself for yourselves,
that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!"***

(LtOrd, 29)

MY STORY: UNITY IN A MULTICULTURAL/DIVERSITY FRATERNITY

by Willie Guadalupe, OFS

I got involved in Multicultural and Diversity on November 3, 2012, when I was an REC councilor in my region. Our Regional Spiritual Assistant at that time asked whether I could assist with a newly forming bi-lingual group by helping with the formation for the Hispanic members. I knew that it was going to be a challenge, but not *how* challenging it was going to be.

Over the course of a year, I began observing a pattern. Each member stayed within their own social group and without conscious intent, self-segregated. The English speaking sat on one side of the group and the Spanish speaking on the other side. During the gathering's social time there was always a pleasant exchange of, "Hello, Hola" from each side. It became quite evident that the language barrier was preventing kindhearted, compassionate members from bonding in this group.

In one of our gatherings an orientee told the English-speaking leader she would no longer be able to attend formation because she had been diagnosed with cancer. I was out of the room and when I got back, I noticed that the English-speaking group was in a circle surrounding the member getting ready to pray over her and the Spanish group was just sitting at their table. When I approach them, I asked, "why are you sitting there?" and they replied "Oh Señora Guadalupe, you know we cannot speak English," and I responded "please get up and let us go and pray over her in Spanish. God understands all languages." As we prayed together and were united in prayer as brothers and sisters, it was a God moment. It was not just for one group or the other, because at that moment, everyone in that room felt the power of the Holy Spirit while being surrounded by prayers in different languages in unity as a Franciscan community.

At the next gathering, I was not sure what to expect after such a powerful spiritual encounter the previous month. As I entered the room, I immediately noticed the atmosphere was different—it was no longer "Hello and Hola." The power of prayer had bonded the separate groups right before my eyes. Through prayer, they were able to establish trust and love for one another. Unity was underway, and the language barrier was no match for God's divine mercy.

I am blessed and thankful to have experienced this profound God moment. However, it is important to note that this is not just my story—this is all our stories. At some point in all our spiritual journeys and our various walks of life, we either have or will experience the power of God's love and unity.

I would like to leave you with this reflection to keep the bond of unity in your diverse communities.

- ◆ **Recognize** the abundant diversity of cultures.
- ◆ **Respect** the differences.
- ◆ **Acknowledge** the validity of different cultural expressions and contributions.
- ◆ **Value** what other cultures offer.
- ◆ **Encourage** the contribution of diverse groups.
- ◆ **Empower** people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential

by being critical of their own biases.

◆ **Celebrate** rather than just tolerating the differences to bring about "Unity" through diversity. Be proactive in listening, accepting, and welcoming people and ideas that are different from your own.

Paz y bien!



We need to be bridge builders and turn those challenges into opportunities.



STEADY, FRANCISCANS!

By Josh Molidor, OFS

Many might remember the cute poster popular in the 70's that pictured a cat desperately hanging on to a branch with its claws! The depiction underneath was "Hang on, Baby!", and it became a common catchphrase, often used to this day. Words of wisdom for the struggles we are dealing with now.

About one year ago, the Covid virus started to circulate through the United States and the world, with the first national shutdown in April, and the virus is really raging now. Most fraternities have cancelled in-person meetings, and virtual gatherings are now the norm. That close connection we once enjoyed, that intimate gathering with family, is now replaced with something much less. Yes, thank God for the technology, but a Zoom meeting just doesn't fulfill our need to continue to grow the bonds between our favorite sisters and brothers in fraternity! Oh, what to do?

Well, let us make prayer and contemplation the soul of all we are and do. It's a good (Art.8) Rule of Life! Most have more alone time to pray for the suffering and pain around us, so use your time fruitfully. Finally, we have the spare moments to delve into the Gospels, as we always said we wished we did! Now the opportunity for contemplating His Wonderous Love is here for the taking. It seems we even have extra moments to study our Rule and Constitution. How many of us have gone in that direction?

While we cannot yet give those needed hugs to our sisters and brothers, we must still try to build fraternal bonds! Most all of us have phones, so let's more readily reach out and touch somebody, and less texting. Call everybody in your fraternity and spend time that way. Thank your council, both Local and Regional, for keeping it together. Share your stories, offer your talents up, never forget the shut-ins and suffering of our fraternities.

These plagues and pandemics come and go, but Our Lord's Love remains. Just over 100 years after Francis' passing, the Black Death hit Europe, and claimed 60 percent of the population. Franciscans have survived to this day! One hundred years ago, the Spanish Flu claimed 50 million worldwide, and we still are here to serve others in Christ Jesus! We have sadly lost many to this virus in the last year, but our light must grow only brighter. We are called to be that Hope that the suffering are looking for, the word of encouragement and help for those who have lost their livelihood, and the joyful message of the Risen Lord to all around us.

God has gifted us with the knowledge to produce a vaccine to overcome this virus. Never in the history of the world has this happened so quickly, Thank You, Jesus! Our fraternities will go back to gathering in a short while, we will once again hold visits and elections, and lots of love and hugs will happen at meetings once more. We will get through this with His Strength, and so in the words of St. Padre Pio...Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry!

THE ST. FRANCIS OPTION

by Bret Thoman, OFS

You may have heard of a book titled, *The Benedict Option*. It draws on the example of St. Benedict, who fled the decadence of early sixth-century Rome to live in the mountains as a hermit. He began guiding others in monasticism and eventually wrote a Rule. While western society entered into a centuries-long period of decline, religious life flourished in Benedictine monasteries, where monks safeguarded not only the Christian life, but also culture.

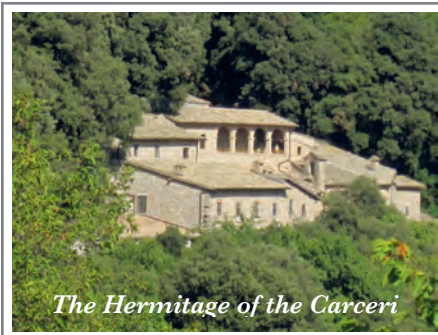
In an ever more decadent society today, the Benedict Option argues that contemporary Christians should similarly retreat from society, live in strong faith-based communities, and re-evangelize the culture from the outside.

But does God really want Christians to withdraw from the world? Is there another way?

What about a “St. Francis Option”?

St. Francis, like Benedict, also retreated to the mountains for prayer. Thomas of Celano wrote: “He frequently chose solitary places so that he could direct his mind completely to God” (*First Life*, Chapter 27, 71). He would often go to the mountain hermitages where he found great solace away from the world.

On the mountaintop, Francis fulfilled the first part of the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord,



The Hermitage of the Carceri

your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Surely, he felt freedom from the world with all its problems and difficulties, as

well as its contaminations and vices.

Here Francis appears to have exercised the “Benedict Option.”

Francis was drawn so strongly to the hermitages that he once felt tempted to take on the life of a hermit permanently. Not trusting in his own discernment, he asked a friar, Sylvester, as well as St. Clare and the sisters of San Damiano to pray for him to know the will of God. Clare and the sisters received the same response as Brother Sylvester: Francis was called by God not only for himself, but to bear fruit and bring others to God. He had to continue preaching, they told him. (See *Fioretti*, chapter 16).

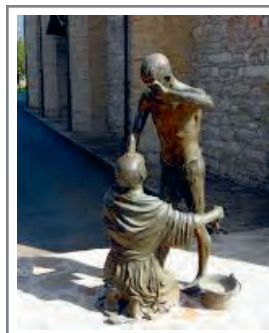
Hence the hermitage for Francis was to be temporary, never permanent. It was not a monastery. Francis was called to leave his beloved retreat and go back down to the valley to serve the lepers, the community, and the Church.

Here the Benedict Option for Francis ends.

The charism given to Francis was not one of retreat or flight; it was one to both prayer and service.

In serving the lepers, Francis was responding to the second and complementary part of Jesus’ great commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

This dichotomy was the characteristic hallmark of his spirituality. Francis would spend his life retreating temporarily to the mountains followed by a return to the valley. Going up to remain alone with the transcendent God in prayer to receive strength and coming down to the valley to serve the lepers and preach in the cities.



Statue of Francis serving the leper at Rivotorto

This was known as the “Total Gospel Life” in Francis’ era. And it is what could be called the “St. Francis Option” in our own.

The St. Francis Option challenges us to discern the delicate balance between the contemplative life and the active life. It balances the

response of the two sisters, Mary and Martha – the one who listened to Jesus’s voice, as well as the one who looked after his needs (see Matthew 26:6-13). It keeps the gaze fixed on God above but does not avoid dirtying one’s feet and hands in the world below.

In this, Francis was really walking in the pathway of much bigger footsteps. For it was Christ himself who prayed in the mountains in solitude and also served the people in the valley. For though Christ “often withdrew to the wilderness to pray” (Luke 5:16), he always returned to the people where he preached, healed, performed miracles, and taught.

May the example of St. Francis guide us in discerning our decisions for this new year.

Bret Thoman, OFS’s newest book is: *The Knight and the Lady: A Journey into the Spirituality of Saints Francis and Clare*

Where There Is Hope...

by Kate Kleinert, OFS

...there is an elective Chapter! There are a number of planets that need to align for our National Elections to take place next October – will CIOFS be able to send someone? – will we be able to travel? – will the pandemic be under control enough to allow all of the above?

Right now, all we have is HOPE, but we are forging ahead as if it will all happen. **Let us act as if it is so, so that it will be so!** I have started the timeline to make sure all the deadlines are met on time, which means before you know it, I'll be asking for nominations. *Thinking* about nominations can start now! So start thinking about each position and who would be best for that job. Nominations will be solicited for:

- National Minister**
- National Treasurer**
- National Councilor 3**
- National Vice Minister**

- National Councilor 1**
- International Councilor**
- National Secretary**
- National Councilor 2**

The official announcement of the Elective Chapter takes place six months before the scheduled day of elections. At that time, nominations will be accepted for any or all the positions listed. All permanently professed members may make nominations. Spiritual Assistants and Candidates may make suggestions for nominees to a professed member. You may nominate more than one person for a specific position, and you may nominate yourself.

If you are interested in being on the Nominations Committee, I'm looking for a professed member to help with the process. If you are interested or would like to know more about the duties please send an e-mail to me at kkleinert@msn.com

If the planets *do* align, we will be meeting at Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House in Lake Dallas, Texas, Oct 26-31, 2021. Keep those prayers going up for a successful Chapter!

Franciscan Pilgrimage

Capuchin Priest, Father Cyrus Gallagher will lead a 10 day Pilgrimage/Retreat to Rome and to the Franciscan Treasures of Italy: Greccio, Assisi, San Giovanni Rotondo and the tomb of St Padre Pio. This Pilgrimage/Retreat is designed to be a peaceful and relaxing experience, for the "mature pilgrim". At least two nights will be spent at each hotel. Daily Mass will be celebrated with ample time for personal devotion. Optional evening conferences will be available, when possible, with an emphasis on **Secular Franciscan Spirituality**. In preparation, participants will receive a monthly email reflection on Franciscan Spirituality. Register early to receive significant saving.

For a colorful brochure, on-line or printed, contact Fr Cyrus at 719-661-1145 or cyrusgallagher38@gmail.com

Register with confidence. In the event the pilgrimage is cancelled, you will receive full refund.



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20th Quinquennial Congress

*“To celebrate and renew our Franciscan calling
in the spirit of conversion”*



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**More information regarding registration
and hotel reservation will be available
soon.**

Information will be posted on the OFS website: <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/>

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