

Communio

That All May Be One

Newsletter of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region
Secular Franciscan Order

Winter 2015

Epiphany

Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see: heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man, one whom the whole universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body. As they look, they believe and do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, gold for a king, myrrh for one who is to die.

Peter Chrysologus: Sermon,
Christian Prayer, p. 1965

Someone to love. That was Greccio, that was Christmas. [Francis] prayed for all the lonely people in the world that they would understand what God's enfleshment meant to them personally. God was like us now in everything but sin. And He let Himself be touched and handled by everyone who would come to Him. Someone to care for, someone to touch. That was Greccio, that was God become a man.

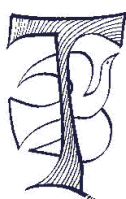
Francis left Greccio that year with a new heart, for the brothers would keep alive the custom of celebrating Christmas in that fashion. And the people of Greccio would spread the word to the next village, and from there it would cover the whole of Italy and maybe the world. Someday, perhaps, all people could look at the altar crèche at Christmas and know they had someone special to love, someone divine to care for. And they would begin to love anew.

Murray Bodo, OFM,
Francis: The Journey and the Dream, pp. 69–70

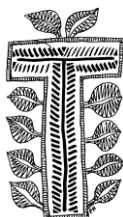


The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





Editor’s Journal: A wealth of epiphanies

A richly blessed and Happy New Year to each of you.

As *Communio* goes to press (runs through my printer, then gets emailed to our fraternities), we’re about to celebrate the feast of the Epiphany.

So, it’s appropriate that almost every article and column in this issue contains some kind of epiphany — a moment of intuitive understanding, a flash of insight, in which the writer discovered something about him or herself or saw a new way of looking at things.

Jo Ann Rademacher walking the Camino de Santiago, me learning about conflict resolution, and so on.

Bret and Katia Thoman, from Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga., and their children, are now living in Loreto, in the Marches region of Italy. Lunched with them in September, a week after they moved into their new three-story apartment, which has a view of the Adriatic Sea and the Basilica of the Holy House of Mary. First night they were there, there was a fireworks display over the basilica. I managed not to drool — enviously — from the balcony as I absorbed the daytime scenery.

In between directing pilgrimages, Bret plans send us articles about this region, important to the Franciscan family but one that many of our members may not be familiar with. In his first article, in these pages, he writes about realizations and adjusting to a mindset quite different from his own.

The Magi brought gifts to the newborn Child. What gifts will our epiphanies bring to us this year?

Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, is Communio editor. She is a member of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity in Hendersonville, N.C., and spiritual assistant to Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

Fraternity takes time for Advent retreat

Every year on the second weekend in December, our fraternity, St. Clare of Assisi, in Aiken,

S.C., holds a community Advent retreat at the Monastery of St. Clare in Traveler’s Rest, S.C. The monastery has a beautiful retreat house, which is a perfect setting for us to come away from the busyness of secular preparations and focus on our interior preparations for the coming of our Savior.

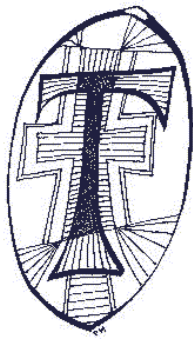
This year, we were blessed to have Father Jeffrey Kirby as our retreat director. The focus was on the virtue of hope, emphasizing that we have “two bags” to choose from.

One is the bag offered by the world: that if I don’t get everything that I want, if my life is not visibly perfect, then it’s not worth living.

The other is the bag offered by the hand of God: true hope, which lies in knowing him; that as our Creator/Father he loves us and wants only what is best for us. Ultimately, we are in his care — a joyful hope in knowing that we are saved.

Carole King, OFS

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Minister's Message: "Be the Joyful Face of Christ to All"

The following is a synopsis of the highlights of the 2014 National Fraternity Chapter, Oct. 21–26 at Lake Dallas, Texas, at which I was privileged to represent the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region.

In my report to the BSSF Region Executive Council on Dec. 5, I condensed my observations to three pages covering the six-day agenda. This synopsis further condenses this yearly chapter into the more meaningful spiritual and formational experiences. The entire week was spent in fraternity, spirituality, formation, and the accomplishment of that business necessary to continue the mission of the National Fraternity in the year ahead. The theme to come out of this gathering for 2015 is **"Be the Joyful Face of Christ to All."**

During his keynote address, Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, national minister, reported on the state of the Order in the United States. Based on information received from the Regional annual reports, we have 12,739 professed members and 1,014 candidates. While we continue to decline in overall membership, the trend is slowing. These members belong to 637 fraternities, an increase of 31 established since last year.

Deacon Tom reminded us that this is the "Year of Consecrated Life" (Nov. 30, 2014 – Feb. 2, 2016.) We are encouraged to make attempts to gather the Franciscan Family during this year (First, Second, and Third Orders).

OFS demographics were reviewed: ages of members under 35 (less than 1 percent), 35–50 years of age (8 percent), 50–65 years of age (35 percent), 66+ years of age (56 percent). Deacon Tom reminded us to keep our focus on communications (website, social media, Tau-USA, translations) in order to establish one-on-one dialogue with members and those seeking vocations.

Anne Mulqueen, OFS, led us in ongoing formation using the Prayer of St. Francis before the San Damiano Crucifix. She mentioned that this was a different way of looking at servant leadership. Authority, she said, is, before anything else, a spiritual authority that is placed at the service of the Gospel.

Consider this prayer as 7 Traits of a Franciscan Servant Leader:

1. "Enlighten the darkness of my heart" — We don't see things as they are; we see things as we are.
2. "Give me right faith" — This leads to beatitude living.
3. "Certain hope" — Hope is a life force that keeps us going.
4. "Perfect charity" — As a Franciscan servant leader, your heart will be broken because the pain of another will be yours.
5. "Wisdom" — We need prayer time; trust God in all things. (Trivia can hold a leader hostage and waste energy.)
6. "Understanding" — Jesus does not call us to failure.
7. "That I may discern your holy and true will." — Listening in prayer is key to understanding God's will. Scripture supports God's will. Spiritual knowledge is gained by exercising virtues such as patience and humility. Results are not the goal — love is. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (pain and suffering can exist parallel to joy). Accept the cross.

In summary, use existing tools (essential documents, servant leader handbook, websites, bibliography, etc.). Pray first, then lead! Servant leadership is a school of spirituality — an opportunity for personal growth.

We also had an opportunity to share with other regional ministers in break-out sessions exploring "best practices". OFS = the signs of the times. People want to "see" what they are

looking for. How are we exhibiting our vocation? We must be credible examples — ambassadors of the way of God. So much more than what we look like — we are called to be the merciful presence of God.

During the JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) presentation we were asked if we had a heart at war or a heart at peace. Doesn't matter what you are doing for Justice; if you have a heart at war you will not make a difference. Who are you? "I am a beloved son or daughter of the God of peace." Do you believe that? Are you behaving as a beloved child of the God of peace, as siblings of the nonviolent Jesus?

The Youth/Young Adult Team spoke of a 5- to 10-year plan to reverse trends (increase number of OFSs under 35 and 35–50). Form multigenerational groups. Address definitional and directional issues.

The National Formation Team stressed the fact that Scripture guides us: "This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I want with all my heart" (St. Francis). We go from information to transformation, moving forward "with swift pace, light step, and unswerving feet" (St. Clare).

The Vocations chair discussed how to attract more people to the OFS and shared the BSSF Region video produced by Carole King, OFS, of Saint Clare of Assisi Fraternity, Aiken, S.C. We need you! Quality, not quantity. Don't underestimate what God can do through you. 2015 vocations, campaign: Prayer and Action.

In the reports from the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) we heard: "The quality that sets saints apart through the ages is humble gratitude for all things. ... You and I will abandon the illusion of control and surrender our hearts to the will of God. ... The Order needs less and less of your ideas and minds and more and more the guidance of the Holy Spirit. ... No matter the consequences, be faithful to the Gospel."

Some things about spiritual assistants are changing. Much of what is happening is not within our control. Can we let the Spirit direct us as this unfolds? Secular spiritual assistants need to be suitable and well-trained. We are an Order with a basic charism of conversion of heart. TOR (Third Order Regular) and OFS: for centuries we shared a common Rule.

We also heard from the Ecumenical-Interfaith Committee. All have attributes that we can share with one another. TSSF (Third Order, Society of St. Francis: Anglican Franciscans): 3,500 members worldwide; OEF (Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, members from a number of denominations): about 60 members; OFS: about 14,000 in United States. Action: join an interfaith group in your area.

One highlight was a discussion on how we participate in the International Fraternity of the OFS. This consists of 115 National fraternities (69 established – 46 Emerging), 360,000 professed members (Note: Cameroon, recognized during the International Chapter in November, is the 70th established national fraternity); YOFRA (Youth Fraternity): 66 countries with 49,000 members.

Consider "twinning" with a fraternity halfway around the world.

Four official OFS languages: Spanish, Italian, French, and English. Much good information is available on the international website (www.ciofs.org).

What does the presidency and council do, you might ask? At present, there are three major projects: Project China: (100+ fraternities with 7,000+ members, all underground); Project Haiti: schooling for children/adults, workshops for seamstresses, water purification, orphanages, economic support); Project Africa: 28 percent of national fraternities are in Africa (12 established, 12 emerging, and three newly forming).

Year of the Family: Pope Francis will be coming to Philadelphia (September 2015).

Budget discussion and approval also took place (smoothly). Throughout the week, specific items of business on the agenda were covered, such as OFS Disaster Relief Team, recordkeeping, *TAU-USA* for candidates, etc.) and the announcement of various "save the dates":

- 2015 Summer Seminar: July 9–12, Loretto, Penn.;
- 2015 JPIC Retreat: Aug. 20–23, Belleville, Ill.;
- 2015 National Formation Workshop: TBA;
- 2015 NAFRA Chapter of Elections: Oct. 13–18, Clinton, N.J.
- 2016 Quinquennial Congress: July 1–6, Inverness Hotel, Englewood, Colo.

Wishing all of you a holy and healthy New Year. Peace and All Good,

Jerry

Jerry Rousseau, OFS, minister of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, is a member of the Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

Regional Executive Council Recap: Meetings of Aug. 1 and Dec. 5–6

By Christine Washington, OFS

Our Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis (BSSF) Regional Executive Council (REC) continues to work hard serving the needs of our Region.

Aug. 1, during the Annual Regional Gathering (ARG)

Carolyn Townes, OFS, the chair of our regional and national JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) commissions, reported that John Lash, director of the Georgia Conflict Center in Athens, Ga., was given a grant from the OFM friars to do the Restorative Circles program for our BSSF Region. Restorative Circles will be the focus of our Area workshops.

The REC changed the name of our BSSF Hispanic Commission to the Multicultural Commission. Willie Guadalupe, OFS, continues to chair this important commission.

Greg Savold, OFS, regional treasurer, reported that there is a major change in the 2015 Proposed BSSF Budget: at the end of 2014 our Fair Share Contribution to NAFRA (National Fraternity) will now include candidates. This is policy for the OFS worldwide.

Dec. 5-6, in Greenville, S.C.

Willie reported that *The Franciscan Journey* formation book by Father Lester Bach, OFM Cap., has been translated into Spanish. It is awaiting approval by the National Executive Council. Willie has translated into Spanish our BSSF documents: “The 12 Elements of Franciscan Spirituality” and “The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life.”

Jerry Rousseau, OFS, regional minister, said that the Annual Report we distribute to our members is drawn up according to the data NAFRA (National Fraternity) needs to know. When Jerry receives the fraternities’ annual reports, he summarizes what we put in the Annual Report and sends it to NAFRA.

The next two sessions for the spiritual assistant training program will be at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, Feb. 6–9 and May 15–17. The commissioning of this class will occur at the 2015 ARG. Final training for the current class will be Aug. 4–6 at Ridgecrest.

The REC approved the request for a newly forming group (NFG) to start in Anderson, S.C. Congratulations to this group, to its sponsor, Our Lady of Good Counsel Fraternity in Greenville, S.C., and to our BSSF Region. We ask God’s blessings on the members of this NFG.

The REC approved the “BSSF Training Program Election Policies.”

Please keep our Regional Executive Council in prayer as we continue to do the work the Holy Spirit has for us to do in serving our brothers and sisters.

Christine Washington, OFS, is the secretary of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Regional Executive Council and a member of St. Joseph of Cupertino Fraternity in Bessemer, Ala.

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation The Key to Nonviolence: A Summary (Part 3 of 3)

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

In this final installment of my three-part series, I want to sum up my reflections on the insidious violence we do as a collective body, as well as look at a few solutions.

I attended the first of our three on-the-road formation workshops — the Area 2 workshop, held Nov. 14–15 in Spartanburg, S.C. The Area 3 workshop will be held Feb. 13–14 in Durham, N.C.; Area 1 workshop in Dahlonega, Ga., March 20–21. (See page ? for more information.)

They're a bit different this year. Instead of the usual Saturday workshop, we chose a Friday-evening-all-day-Saturday format. The three workshops focus on conflict resolution, using Restorative Circles.

Our sister and *Communio* editor, Joanita Nellenbach, OFS, also attended and will give a more in-depth picture of the weekend (see pages 7–9); but I want to focus on why I thought this topic would be a good idea. In my daily life as the peace and justice animator — locally, regionally and nationally — I hear a lot of stories about conflict and fraternal disagreements, which escalate into members not speaking to one another or even leaving the fraternity. This is very sad to me.

We are a family. When you have a disagreement with your family member, you don't leave; you stay and resolve the issue.

Over the years, I have attended many courses and workshops on conflict resolution and nonviolent communication. I truly believe everyone needs to avail themselves of at least one training on conflict management. Conflict is a necessary part of the life of a relationship but not when it is poorly dealt with or avoided and becomes an insidious act of violence.

Avoidance of conflict is an act of violence. Allowing an issue to hang in the air without any resolution is doing violence — to yourself and to the other. Jesus tells us to settle with our brethren when we have an issue; bringing in other members of the community when needed. Our Lord is very wise and knows that we all have our own perceptions about the events that happen. What one person deems a harmless joke, another sees as hurtful and insulting. I have personally been a mediator in this kind of insidious violence. If I had not intervened on behalf of the hurting party, there could have been much more pain all around.

Two of the key components to resolving a conflict are two of the five PEACE Principles: Empathy and Active Listening. Having empathy for another is putting yourself in the other's shoes; becoming aligned with their feelings and experiences. Active listening is not just hearing the other; it is listening with the whole body, with a heart ready and open. Both of these principles are nonjudgmental and noncritical.

My easy three-step process to anything that is conflicting or stressful is to stop, take a breath, and ask. We are never in the present moment when we are confrontational. We are either worried about a future event or reflecting on a past hurt.

Stopping allows you to collect yourself and your thoughts. When you consciously breathe, you are in the present moment. Then, ask a question. More often than not, conflicts arise because someone perceived some wrong or hurt, which never may have been the intent. If you are feeling the sting of someone's words, stop, take a breath, and ask the person what was intended by the remark. Asking questions not only can diffuse a potentially violent situation, it can also soften it



to the point of having dialogue.

A great question to ask during a conflict is, “What do you need me to understand?” When a person is confrontational, there is usually an unmet need.

First, seek to understand, then to be understood. It could be something as simple as just needing to vent, or as complex as a member dealing with the pain of grief and loss. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says that, as much as it is possible with you, keep the peace (cf. Romans 12:18). And Jesus tells us that the blessed peacemakers are called children of God (cf. Matthew 5:9). In these matters, you want to be the maker and maintainer of peace, not the incendiary for violence.

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, is a member of the Our Lady Queen of Angels, Emerging Community, in Columbia, S.C.; the regional and national animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation; a Franciscan Action Network board member and action commissioner, as well as a promoter for Pace e Bene’s Campaign Nonviolence.

Workshops teach Restorative Circles for conflict resolution

By Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

“Conflict is Inevitable; Violence is not,” Georgia Conflict Center’s motto, is the basis for Restorative Circles, its approach to resolving conflicts without the animosity that can drive people apart.

“Restorative Circles” is the topic for the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis (BSSF) Region’s on-the-road formation workshops for 2014–2015.

The **Area 2** workshop was held Nov. 14–15 at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church, Spartanburg, S.C.; 37 people attended. Coming up:

- **Area 3** workshop, Feb. 13–14, Avila Retreat Center, Durham, N.C. Registration deadline is Jan. 15.
- **Area 1** workshop, March 20–21, Hidden Lake Life Teen Camp, Dahlonega, Ga. As with the Area 3 workshop, registration deadline will be three weeks prior to the workshop.

Each workshop begins on Friday evening and ends on Saturday afternoon and requires that participants commit to attending the full workshop.

From the Georgia Conflict Center, Athens, Ga., at the Area 2 workshop were: John Lash, director; his wife, Gaiea Goldberg; Tina Guthrie, OFS, program director; Banu Obaoglu Vaughn; and, Tod Kington, director, Shawnee Conflict Center, Carbondale, Ill. Tina is also a member of San Damiano Fraternity in Athens.

“What we talk about is a restorative approach, rather than a punitive one,” John Lash said. “Injustice can breed injustice. How do we respond to harm and conflict?”

“Why are you interested in (Restorative Circles)” he asked the attendees.

“Because there’s conflict in fraternities, which doesn’t resolve anything,” said Jennye Taylor Johnson, OFS, of St. Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity, Charlotte, N.C. “People lash out in emails. If it hasn’t happened now, it may later. I’m here to know what I can do to help resolve that.”

“Some conflicts go on for years,” Gaiea said. “How different it could have been if it had been resolved at the beginning.”

Restorative Circles was chosen as the workshops’ topic to give fraternity members tools that



will enable them to resolve conflicts without silent seething or leaving the fraternity.

“They’re teaching a technique,” said Sara Nell Boggs, OFS, BSSF Region formation director, at the Regional Executive Council meeting, Dec. 5–6. “This isn’t therapy.”

“In every fraternity there are conflicts: leadership, cultural,” Jerry Rousseau, OFS, BSSF Region minister, said at the meeting. “It has to come back to who are we and what are we called to be. We are called to let go of self and become the other.”

Georgia Conflict Center obtained a \$6,000 grant from the Order of Friars Minor’s Holy Name Province, which has given the center several grants in the past.

“In the spring, I did a six-week workshop here in Athens,” John said. “It occurred to me that these Franciscans are naturally in the realm of peacemaking. I talked to Father David, to Jerry Rousseau, and to Carolyn Townes (BSSF Region JPIC animator).” Father David Hyman, OFM, had been stationed at University of Georgia Catholic Center in Athens.

John also spoke on conflict resolution at the BSSF Annual Regional Gathering in August. So, what is Restorative Circles?

As was explained at the November workshop, “Restorative Circles (RC) is a process of addressing conflict between people within the context of their community. RC is a series of

<div style="font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">[</div> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“Conflict is Inevitable. Violence is Not.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Georgia Conflict Center</i></p> <div style="font-size: 4em; line-height: 1;">]</div>	<p>meetings among those involved in a conflict either directly, indirectly, or structurally. RC meetings rely on reflective listening to offer everyone an opportunity to speak and be heard.”</p> <p>It’s all about preserving the community. And it’s different from mediating a dispute. In that process, a mediator is brought in from outside; but in RC, we have a facilitator who is a member of the community.</p>
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To set up a restorative system, you find other fraternity members who are interested in this approach and invite them to get involved. While not everyone in the fraternity has to buy in, the majority of members agree to use Restorative Circles. Those initially reluctant, may be more receptive after they see how the process works.

In our Region’s workshops, we learn that there are actually three circles:

- Pre-Circle — identify a specific action, understand its meaning, and confirm the informed consent to participation of all involved;
- Circle — mutual comprehension, self-responsibility, agreed action;
- Post-Circle — investigate participant well-being; then celebrate, understand, and/or explore new actions.

At the workshop, the steps in the process are described, then we break into small groups in which someone serves as the facilitator, another is the person who has been hurt, someone else is the one who did the hurt, the others in the group are other members of the fraternity. This is repeated with various scenarios, so that everyone has a chance to play each role.

“The process is to support, not suppress, conflict,” John Lash said. “Conflict is OK, violence is not. Conflict does not go away because you avoid it. Conflict is human. When you suppress people, it’s a way to keep people under your thumb.”

Dr. Charles Meyer, OFS, of St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Augusta, Ga., is a psychiatrist who has worked with harm-and-conflict situations for 49 years. “I saw this as something I can use in negotiating administrative organizational issues,” he said.

“I didn’t know what I was getting into,” said Bonnie Wacker, OFS, of St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity in Spartanburg. She found Restorative Circles beneficial. “It will help me to not stew about things. I can go to (others), and they’ll come to me.”

During the workshop, Bonnie even approached another member of her fraternity to discuss

an issue, and they reached mutual understanding.

“It made me feel wonderful, and her too,” Bonnie said. “It was gentle. I think it’ll be very beneficial for me personally. I’ve avoided conflict, but now I have a way to work with it. Then it just goes away.”

Restorative Circles:

A Personal View

By Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

They seem to be at odds: We’re to be “bearers of peace”; yet, conflict is inevitable. But is it?

Yes, I believe so, from what I learned at the on-the-road formation workshop in Spartanburg, S.C., in November.

Conflict, I used to think, is when I confront someone about some issue I have with that person.

Rather, as I understand it from the workshop, the *conflict* is how I feel about what happened. Someone, for example, said something that offended me. I’m hurt, upset, so I’m not at peace. And if *I’m* not at peace, I can hardly be a bearer of peace. I’m certainly not a “messenger of perfect joy.”

The *violence* is in the confrontation. Or, if I’m really upset or have let that hurt fester, the *violence* is when I walk away from the fraternity, tearing the fraternity’s fabric, which is supposed to be wholly preserved.

“Members who find themselves in particular difficulties,” our Rule tells us, “should discuss their problems with the council in fraternal dialogue” (Art. 23). All too often, though, that doesn’t happen. They may be apprehensive about approaching the other person.

Restorative Circles is a good approach, but for it to work I have to decide not to discuss my personal upset with my 10 closest friends in the fraternity or elsewhere. Taking them all into my confidence (“You understand this is just between you and me.”) makes me feel great and, of course, my 10 closest friends will agree with me, therefore validating *my* position. Maybe it will become us (those who agree with me) vs. them (the people who don’t agree with me). Now my side is a faction, and the fraternity is divided.

Or — if I really care about my fraternity — I decide to forego complaining to my buddies, fraternal or otherwise. I call for a Restorative Circle and get to know my brother’s or sister’s viewpoint. What was she feeling when she said what she said? What was going on his life at that time? Could it possibly be that he or she has a valid point?

Fraternities have been destroyed or severely damaged by grievances that haven’t been dealt with. But, somewhere there is, or used to be, this statement: “The good of the fraternity and the good of the Order come before self.” If that’s no longer in our formation materials, it should be brought back.

Hurts certainly need to be addressed before they fester, grievances must be dealt with in ways that heal rather than divide. We talk about poverty. What riches of anger or hurt do we hoard? In true Franciscan poverty, can we let them go?

Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, is Communio editor. She is a member of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity in Hendersonville, N.C., and spiritual assistant to Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

“Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be guild up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transformative power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

OFS Rule, Art. 19



Spiritual Assistant's Words of Wisdom

By Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv.

A YES, an Advent, and an Incarnation. Isn't that the way it happens, for the most part?

Recently, Maggie Byrne, our campus minister at Syracuse University, entered a course in spiritual direction. There is a practicum to be fulfilled. She knew, from talking with students, who would be open to the spiritual direction experience and help her fulfill the requirement.

When I asked her how it was going, she responded with one of the biggest smiles I've ever seen on her face. The experience for the minister and the students is most rewarding. Students are telling other students about the opportunity. And Maggie is getting more requests from students.

A Yes. A couple years ago, Maggie spoke to me about her long-range plans. It was either a masters in theology or a course of study in spiritual direction. She chose the spiritual direction plan considering it to be more valuable as a practical and ready tool of service to students.

An Advent. A coming, the right time, it's now. With two of our major programs — the TEC (To Encounter Christ) retreat and the CCMLI (Catholic Campus Ministry Leadership Institute) operating quite well, the welcome surprise opportunity of doing spiritual direction will not only enhance the students' ability to "process" their personal retreat experience but also their participation in the Leadership Institute program.

And, finally, an Incarnation. This triumvirate of elements has come together and is causing great excitement. A student approached me last Sunday, looked at me and laughed, and then said, "Paul was God's fool — you are God's tool!"

"You so frequently speak of us as God's instrument.," he continued. "I watch the students here at the (Catholic Campus) Center doing so many different things. In my three years I've seen the beginnings of programs. Some worked and some didn't. BUT those that did have taken off like rockets. The energy, the enthusiasm, the conviction of themselves taught me many lessons."

He looked at me, smiled, and said, "Continue being the tool!"

In the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, a name has been changed. Our newest commission has gone from the Hispanic Commission to the Multicultural Commission. In support of your recognition of a need for a multicultural approach, you are so right. We must step outside of our comfort zones. Today it's recognizing the call to accept all peoples, tomorrow it will be a matter of sharing time and talent. We as Franciscans are to model peace, harmony, unity. We are to look for what unites us and is common to us rather than what divides us. We are to identify and celebrate each other's gifts.

The first reading, from Isaiah, on Dec. 2 presents the image: the lion lying down with the lamb — if only! And all it takes is a YES, a time for coming, and an embodiment.

Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv., is a member of Our Lady of the Angels Province, USA, which has its headquarters in Ellicott City, Md. He is Catholic chaplain at Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y.

Ongoing formation is part and parcel of Franciscan life. Without *ongoing formation* people remain stuck in one way of seeing everything. Many people resist change because it requires a personal change. *Daily radical interior conversion* (OFS Rule, Art. 7) is easier to talk about than to accomplish. Spiritual Assistants are called to support, encourage and participate in the *ongoing formation* programs of the fraternity. The SA, like all Franciscans can make a difference by sharing ideas and possibilities that enhance both fraternity life and the personal lives of the OFS members.

Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order, p. 13

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION**Calendar: January thru August 2015**

* confirmed

V+ follow-up visit

<u>2015</u>	Fraternity/Location	V Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors E Presider/Ecclesiastical Witness
*Jan. 8	Fr. Solanus Casey, Morehead City, NC	E Frank Massey/ Msgr. Moeslein
*Jan. 10	St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Augusta GA	E DorothyAnn Rowland/ Dcn. Tom Shaver
*Jan. 11	Stigmata of St. Francis, Duluth, GA	E Julie Lorenz/Laura Haukaas
*Jan. 18	Seven Dolors of the BVM, Nashville, TN	E Barbara Garrison/Fr. Showraiah
Feb. 7	St. Pio of Pietrelcina, Decatur, AL	V+ Jerry Rousseau/Barbara Smith (fraternal only)
*Feb. 13-14	Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Hilton Head Island, SC	V Charles Meyer/Willie Guadalupe
*Feb. 15	Sts. Francis and Clare, Knoxville, TN	E Barbara Garrison/Faye Martin
*Feb. 21	Our Lady of Good Counsel, Greenville, SC	E Jerry Rousseau/Joanita Nellenbach
TBD	Our Lady Queen of Angels, EC, Columbia, SC	V DorothyAnn Rowland/Faye Martin
Mar. 7-8	Channel of Peace, Chattanooga, TN	V Julie Lorenz/Joanita Nellenbach
Mar. 8	St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Elizabeth City, NC	E Paula Zanker/Pat Wilkerson
Apr. 11-12	Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC	V Jerry Rousseau/TBD
May 9	Immaculate Conception, Jonesboro, GA	E Barbara Garrison/Faye Martin
June 7	St. Maximilian Kolbe, Charlotte, NC	E Jerry Rousseau/Willie Guadalupe
June 12-13	Crucified Christ, N. Charleston, SC	V DorothyAnn Rowland/TBD
June 12-13	St. Joseph Cupertino, Bessemer, AL	V Barbara Garrison/TBD
June 26-27	St. Michael the Archangel, Spartanburg, SC	V TBD/Joanita Nellenbach

Aug. 7-9, Annual Regional Gathering, Ridgecrest, NC — Pastoral and Fraternal Visitation

Secular Franciscan Lenten Retreat

March 14

9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church
309 Gower St., Greenville, S.C. 29611

Planned are Talks in Morning and Afternoon,
Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament,
Stations of the Cross, Reconciliation
Lunch Provided

No cost for retreat, but registration is required

Free-will offering will be taken for speakers

RSVP by March 1 to Alice Ramos, OFS, (lekceorha@att.net)
of Our Lady of Good Counsel Fraternity, Greenville

**New Council
Congratulations!****St. Thomas More Fraternity**

Wilmington, N.C., Nov. 16
Minister: Brenda Wells, OFS
Vice-Minister:
Marie Mallon, OFS
Secretary: Linda Keir, OFS
Treasurer:
Greta Strittmatter, OFS
Formation Director:
Mary Hellman, OFS

Exploring the Marches: an important Franciscan region



By Bret Thoman, OFS

This past summer, my wife, Katia, and I moved with our two children, Claremarie and Iacopo, to the Marches region in Italy.

We live in Loreto, a picturesque town of 10,000 residents, overlooking the Adriatic Sea on one side and the Apennine Mountains on the other.

Loreto is known for the Holy House of Mary, which has been here since 1294 and is housed within a magnificent basilica. With Loreto as

our base, we organize pilgrimages to this region, to Assisi, and to all of Italy. We also work with the OFM friars in their retreat center next door to the apartment we rent. Our life is one of prayer, service, and community.

In 2004, Katia and I met friars of the Province of St. James of the Marches, including Father Ferdinando Campana, OFM, provincial minister. It was an encounter that, looking back, was life-changing. It didn't change my life in the direction I would have wanted at the time, but it was transformational in the way God wanted, in his time. I suppose this is how God operates his graces so often in our lives: thy will, not mine, be done.

At that time, I was ready to move to Italy immediately to begin working with the friars organizing pilgrimages together. Instead, it took 10 years. I had a lot to learn.

Known historically as the Marches of Ancona, the Marches' long and important Franciscan history began with St. Francis's first missionary journey, in 1208, when he had only three followers: Bernard, Peter Catani, and Giles.

The Legend of the Three Companions says: "Francis united with Giles, went to the Marches of Ancona, the other two set out towards another region. Journeying towards the Marches, they rejoiced in the Lord."

Paul Sabatier, a pioneer in Franciscan studies, wrote: "The Marches of Ancona became and remained the province more truly Franciscan than every other." Further, the *Fioretti* — the *Little Flowers of St. Francis* — were written by a friar in this region.

Becoming Franciscan

But I will get more into the Franciscan history in the Marches in future articles. Before I return to the friars, a little background on us. After a big Italian wedding in 2002 (Katia is from southern Italy), we moved to my hometown outside of Atlanta, where I was a pilot for Atlantic Southeast Airlines.

Right away we began formation in Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga. We were deeply attracted to Franciscan spirituality. Katia had developed close relationships with the OFM friars and the Franciscan Alcantarine Sisters when she lived in Assisi, where she attended university. I had been to Assisi several times as a student, and Francis played a role in my own conversion. Our experiences in Assisi led us to the Secular Franciscan Order. We were professed in 2006.

Yet, even though our life was good — I had decent long-term career prospects, we had a great faith community, we had close friends — something seemed missing. Katia's Franciscan experiences in Assisi were still on her heart; and I, too, wanted to do something more service-oriented for God. So, Katia got in touch with Sister Armanda Parenti, one of the sisters she had

known in Assisi; and her former spiritual director, Father Emidio Alessandrini, OFM, both of whom were now working with the friars of the Marches province.

Getting to know the friars and sisters

Father Ferdinando Campana, OFM, new provincial of the OFM Province of St. James of the Marches, was working hard to promote the Marches as the “Land of the *Fioretti* — the Little Flowers” — a type of fourth Franciscan destination in central Italy, along with Rome, Assisi, and La Verna. He was organizing mini-pilgrimages for young people visiting the sites of the *Fioretti* and converting some of the old Franciscan friaries into places of prayer and places for the poor. In fact, he was actually looking for families to help them in their new projects. We were eager to learn more and explore the possibilities, so I took some time off from work and we went to Assisi.



Father Ferdinando, Sister Armanda, and Father Emidio were going to be in Assisi and could meet us

around 8:00 p.m. after dinner in our hotel, Casa Leonori. Equipped with my notebook — full of potential job descriptions, bulleted ideas, questions, and plans — I rushed Katia down to Casa Leonori’s lobby at 7:45. After 8:00 came and went (with no friars/nuns), I started to get a little irritated.

“Where were they?” I repetitively asked Katia in the same way a little kid asks his parents from the back seat, “Are we there yet?”

This was her country and she knew two of the three; surely she should know where they were. An hour or so later, we decided to head back to our room and more comfortably wait for “the call.” After more questions, “Are you sure they’re coming?” and me no longer able to keep my eyes open, I finally resigned myself to that sinking feeling that we’d been stood up. I put my pajamas on and tried to talk myself out of that subsequent miffed feeling of, “I flew all the way to Italy for *this*?”

Yet, I did my best to talk myself of negative feelings: How could I be mad at friars and nuns? Surely they’ve got a good excuse, I thought to myself as I lay in bed ruminating on our next steps and plans for the future.

At some point, I vaguely heard some kind of electronic ringing or something, followed by someone aggressively shaking me, and Katia’s voice saying, “Wake up, they’re here, they just called, they’re downstairs.” After wondering, “Where am I?” and “Who’s here?” I recovered my senses enough to ask, “What time is it?” But there was no time to answer; we had to get dressed and go downstairs to meet Father Ferdinando, Sister Armanda, and Father Emidio. As I rushed downstairs while running a comb through my hair, I grabbed Katia’s cell phone: 12:45 a.m.

“Did we wake you up?” Father Ferdinando asked with a smile.

“No,” I lied, “I was up. Where I am from, we always have meetings with important people in the middle of the night,” I tried to joke.

The three of them were wide awake and conducted themselves as spritely as if it were 1:00 in the afternoon. Apparently, such middle-of-the-night rendezvous were ordinary occurrences for them.

After I shook off the fog and the meeting began, I realized that I had left my notebook in my room. Darn! But it didn’t take me long to recognize that it would have been useless anyway. The meeting was all over the map: topics rambled back and forth touching on American politics,

what it was like to fly airplanes, the situation of the friars in Italy, and occasionally his province and their affairs — then back again.

Learning new ways

In the beginning, I kept trying to move the line as straight as possible from A to B; that is, how to get us from the United States to the Marches. But I couldn't seem to get a clear answer. It was as if the line started at A, went forward a little bit in the direction of B, then back, then up and down, then around in circles, and even towards C. After a while, the meeting seemed to conclude, and it was decided that Katia and I should come and stay in his region for a month or so to "get to know the friars and the reality there." We could come in June. Nothing concrete. Nothing formal. Nothing in writing. Just, "We look forward to seeing you again." So we did.

June was similar to our initial meeting with Father Ferdinando. We met many friars of the Marches. And we realized pretty quickly that most of the friars here reasoned quite differently from the way I did; they had very different attitudes towards things like time, material possessions, and money.



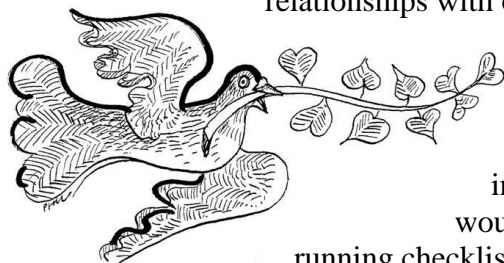
Take Father Costantino Capitani, OFM, for example; an elderly friar living in a hermitage called San Liberato. One day I asked him to take us to a place called the Cave of the Friars in the hills somewhere near his hermitage; he knew where it was, as he had cleaned it up many years earlier when he was young.

After turning off the paved road onto a dirt road that descended and eventually narrowed into something of a mule trail and got quite steep, he finally decided he couldn't drive any longer; so, we had to walk. I looked back at the steep rocky incline and wondered how he would get his Fiat 600 back up the mountainside. He didn't seem concerned as we continued on foot to find the cave.

We never found it, nor was he able to drive the car back up the steep hillside. I got it up only with an aggressive running start. I asked him what he would have done had we not been able to get the car out. He said he didn't know, maybe he would have called a tow truck. A tow truck? Really? It was as if he were dealing with an old piece of luggage.

I later found out that Father Costantino had entered the Order in his early teens; and for the first half of his life in the Order, the friars didn't touch money — literally. Dealing with money and property was something fairly new to them. The provincial, as well, had entered the Order when he was just 14. He, too, had grown up in a Franciscan culture that operated much as had St. Francis himself. The friars lived poverty in all its aspects: they owned nothing and what they had was given to them. Things came and things went. Thus, they were very detached from material things.

In time I came to realize that the friars' attitude towards material things, projects, time, relationships with others, etc., was fundamentally one of *gift*, not one of *possession*. This was quite different from the way I viewed the world. I realized that if I were to be able to serenely work with the friars, my entire way of life and mode of thinking would have to change: my American-instilled values of efficiency, planning, and organization would be useless here; my professional pilot training — running checklists and striving for on-time departures — would definitely not work; nor would my personality traits tending towards conventionalism, security,



and predictability do me any good either.

No, if I were to be successful here, all that would have to go out the window, and I was going have to adopt a whole new way of doing and being. In fact, it had taken a lot of (necessary) time before I'd matured in my own Franciscan spirituality enough to be able to make the leap and move over here. I had a lot of interior work to do on simplicity and poverty first.

Today, we help the friars in their retreat center with groups of all kinds, doing whatever they need: we help people get checked in, drive people to and from the train station, serve food in the refectory, or whatever else is needed. Yes, I still shake my head from time to time at the way they do things, and I will always be American at heart. Therefore, we have our own sense of independence. We live as a normal family taking kids to school, karate practice, parties, etc. Yet, we are connected to a very long Franciscan tradition in this crazy, yet wonderful Land of the Little Flowers.

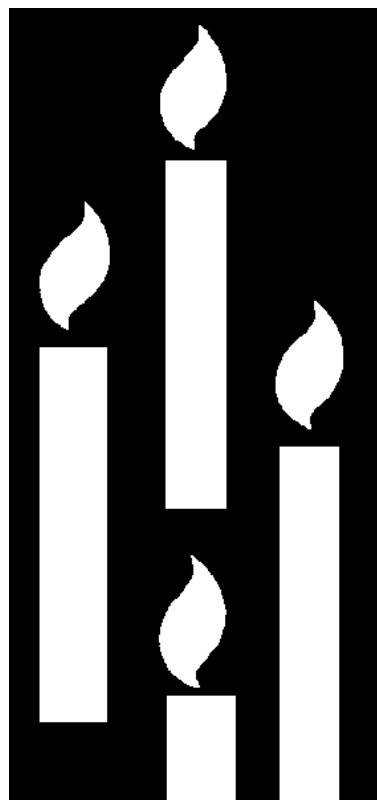
Bret Thoman, OFS, is a member of Immaculate Conception Fraternity in Jonesboro, Ga., and director of St. Francis Pilgrimages.

Retreat cements fraternal bond

Editor's Note: After completing the requirements for entering candidacy, including private discernment retreats, Frank and Joann Colini, Brenda Harris, and Gene Ray MaGruder, of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity, Hendersonville, N.C., made a second retreat, Oct. 31–Nov. 2, in La Foresta, the guest house at the Monastery of St. Clare, Travelers Rest, S.C. Brenda shared her thoughts about the retreat in the fraternity's November newsletter. Her article is reprinted here, with permission.

By Brenda Harris, OFS

Our retreat was magnificent. I could never have imagined that it would have been so perfect.



We were all close to each other going into the retreat, but I for one, and I think I speak for all, have never felt more complete in family, friendship, and brother/sisterhood. I know that nothing will ever break the bond we formed this weekend. We are planning to make it an annual retreat at the same time every year.

Joann opened our retreat Friday night with a beautiful candle ceremony that included a St. Francis candle and four individual candles, each with one of our names on it. She read a passage from the Gospel of Matthew, and then we each lit our candles from the St. Francis candle. Afterwards we sang a beautiful hymn; well, at least we tried to sing, ooowww.

We prayed together, we laughed, we cried, and we ATE, and ATE, and ATE. We talked about our lives, learned about each other, shared intimate feelings about ourselves, our families, and fraternity.

Spending time together in silent prayer, we somehow felt/stayed completely connected. We were all moved when Gene read one of the readings as we prayed the Liturgy of the Hours, something he would usually have felt apprehensive about. I watched him later, sitting at the table and, although I do not know what he was reading and writing, he had pulled a Bible from the bookcase and he was writing his thoughts about what he was

reading. This is not an easy thing for him to do, but he seemed totally at ease with it.

We prayed the Crown Rosary and the Divine Mercy from a CD. It was beautiful. Not just for what it was but for the sight of it. If you can picture the four of us, laid back with eyes closed, primarily in a circle with Gene sprawled out in a big chair by the fire, Frank in a recliner, and Joann and me snuggled under a blanket on the sofa, all praying the Crown Rosary together. Then, on Sunday afternoon, Gene in his usual chair, Joann and me in recliners, and Frank propped back on the sofa with feet up, we recited the Divine Mercy. When it was done, we all just lay there, mediating on the prayers.

On Sunday we ate lunch and talked about our feelings regarding the weekend. I mentioned how impressed I was that Gene had done that, and I could see the pride in his face. I know he felt a new confidence in himself.

We had spent the afternoon cleaning the house so that Sister Kathy, OSC, didn't have to do it. Another picture in my mind that will last forever: Without a single discussion of who, what, or how, we just all jumped in. Had I been a fly on the wall, I am sure I would see that we looked like an ant or bee colony all working together, intermingling, trading off jobs, picking up where each other left off. A true family team in motion.

In the end we didn't want to leave. We lingered on and on until we were forced to leave because it was starting to get dark. As we made our way out the door we shuffled and rotated around each other finding any reason to walk back in the house one last time. We hugged and kissed each other every step of the way until we were in our cars and sadly pulling away, feeling separated for the first time in 48 hours. Sad in the moment but happy for the love and companionship we had formed this weekend.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention Frank, our keeper of the flame. He worked diligently throughout the entire weekend collecting firewood and keeping us warm by keeping the fireplace lit. And our chipmunk Gene (our little Brother Leo), who scurried about on Saturday afternoon collecting walnuts for me to bake with just because I mentioned it would be great to have them.

To: Gene, Joann, and Frank, A HUGE "THUMBS UP." I love you guys!!

On Nov. 17, the feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the four were received into the Secular Franciscan Order as candidates for perpetual profession, in a ceremony that combined the Rite of Admission and Evening Prayer.

Crèche display sponsored
Blessed John Duns Scotus
Fraternity, Garden City, S.C.,
sponsored a crèche display on the
feast of the Holy Family. This was
our first attempt at this endeavor.

It went very well, with more
than 250 people attending before
and after all Masses on the
weekend. We had 60 different
crèches from around the world.

Many people shared about
their own collections and said they
were willing to share some with us
next year at the Holy Family
festival of crèche celebration.

Ellen DeKleva, OFS, minister

So it is that, no matter how enlightened one might be with the light of natural and acquired knowledge, one cannot enter into oneself to delight in the Lord except by means of the mediation of Christ who says: I am the door. Those who enter through me shall be saved; they shall go in and out and find pasture. But we do not draw near to this door unless we believe in Christ, hope in Christ, and love Christ. If we wish, therefore, to re-enter into the enjoyment of truth as into a paradise, we must do so through faith in, hope in, and love for the mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ, who is like the tree of life in the middle of paradise. — St. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God*, Chapter 4:2

I surrender!

By Carole King, OFS

“United themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father’s hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions” (OFS Rule, Art. 10).

Pondering this concept of redemptive obedience in an attempt to meditate on this article, the adjective “redemptive” stood out to me for the first time. Redemptive, salvific, saving — ahhhhhh! **Sacrificial!**

The obedience of Christ that led to our salvation was a sacrificial obedience. It was an obedience wherein the lord Jesus literally gave up his will to the Father. It was an obedience that led to a brutal death for him.

But that death (followed by Resurrection) was the very beginning of the coming of God’s kingdom. That bitter death became a sweet beginning in the hands of God the Father.

So, when our Rule calls me to follow and witness to the crucified Christ in every circumstance of my life, it is calling me to that very same sacrificial, redemptive obedience. It is calling me to place my own will into the Father’s hands. Believe me, that was a LOT of pondering!

And then came the wondering. I wondered how I could even begin this “letting go” to surrender in obedience to the will of God.

I was at Mass when the “AHA!” moment came. The Gospel reading was of the Annunciation. In listening to that beautiful dialogue between Mary and the angel, I could almost feel the astonishment and fear as she tried to make sense of what the angel was saying.

“How can this be...” she asked. I’m sure a million questions screamed through her mind in that single instant.

But the words of the angel provided the answers: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. ... And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age ... for nothing will be impossible for God” (Lk 1:35–36). With that reassurance came Mary’s statement of belief and pure trust in God: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Mother Mary is my answer!

“The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently” (OFS Rule, Art. 9).

To imitate Mary’s obedience is to imitate Jesus. The “how” is not easy, but it is simple. Just as the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary and filled her with the lord Jesus, he will also overshadow my own life and fill me with the strength and grace to accomplish his holy will.

Just as Mary carried Jesus in her womb and brought his presence into the world, I can carry Jesus in my heart and bring his presence into my little part of the world, preaching his Gospel and witnessing to him by the way I live my life.

As Mary surrendered her will to the Father in that beautiful moment of grace, I too can surrender my will. It may not be all at once, but I can start now, in this very moment, with the grace of God for whom nothing is impossible. With Mary, I can say, “May it be done to me according to your word.”



News from CIOFS —

New minister general elected for Secular Franciscan Order



Tibor Kauser, OFS, 55, Hungary, is the new OFS minister general, elected during the 14th OFS General Chapter, held Nov. 1–9, in Assisi, Italy. The term for all offices of the newly elected International Presidency will run 2014–2020.

Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, national minister of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, was among the nominees for minister general.

Tibor, elected in the first ballot, was already serving in the presidency council, being responsible for the English-speaking countries during the past six years. He became the fourth minister general of the OFS, after, most recently, Encarnita del Pozo, OFS, Spain; Emanuela De Nunzio, OFS, Italy; and Manuela Mattioli, OFS, Venezuela, who was minister general when the OFS Rule of 1978 was approved.

Alongside Tibor, the chapter elected Chelito de Núñez, OFS, Venezuela, as vice minister general. Chelito was also a member of the outgoing presidency, where she had been councilor for the Spanish-speaking countries for 12 years.

In regard to the other councilors, only one of them came from the outgoing presidency of the International Council of the OFS. This was Ana Fruk, OFS, who was representing Franciscan Youth, but is now elected for the Europe-1 Area comprising English- and German-speaking countries.

Presidency councilors responsible for specific areas:

- Attilio Galimberti, OFS, Europe-2 English/Italian Area;
- Ana María Raffo, OFS, Spanish/Latin America Area;
- Silvia Diana, OFS, Portuguese/Spanish South/Latin America Area;
- Jenny Harrington, English North America/Africa Area;
- Augustine Young, OFS, English Asia/Oceania Area;
- Michel Janian, French Area;
- Andrea Odak, OFS, Bosnia-Herzegovina, was elected councilor of the presidency, representing Youfra (Youth Fraternity). She will also be international coordinator for the Franciscan Youth.

The new presidency council was installed during a thanksgiving Eucharist celebrated in the Upper Basilica of St. Francis, with the Father Nicholas Polichnowski, TOR minister general, as main celebrant. Links to view the Thanksgiving Mass for the new Presidency:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spXDN5KPyTY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVB2-rz7DHs>

CIOFS
(Concilium Internationale
Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis)
is the
International Council (Presidency) of
the Secular Franciscan Order

General Chapter approves goals

The OFS General Chapter approved goals for the coming years.

Communication, formation, presence in the world, vocations, Franciscan youth, emerging fraternities, and the family will be the main goals or focal points for the International Council of the OFS during its six-year term.

Each of these goals consists of several specific proposals — among others forming a durable pool or team of translators; a greater use of social networks; increasing the sense of belonging to

the universal Fraternity; continuing special attention for formation; furthering development of existing aid projects; elaborating an international program for promoting vocations; and maximizing support to the Franciscan Youth and its relationship with the OFS.

All this under the overarching goal of the OFS International Fraternity at all levels; i.e., to identify and to use better methods and programs of guidance and animation of our Order.

The task to identify specific ways to reach those goals and the final redaction of the document was entrusted to a specific commission and to the new Presidency, which will be publishing the document some time after the official conclusion of the General Chapter. T

El Camino de Santiago in the Footsteps of St. Francis

By Jo Ann Rademacher, OFS

The Camino de Santiago — the Way of St. James: St. Francis made the journey in 1214.

With my backpack and a special prayer request, I walked from the town of St. Jean Pied de Port (St. John at the Foot of the Pass) in southern France to the city of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, a distance of 800 km or 500 miles.

My purpose was to visit the tomb of St. James the Great, one of Jesus's 12 Apostles and one of his three most intimate friends, with a prayer petition and in thanksgiving for his protection on my journey.

Little is known of St. Francis's journey to Santiago.

The Little Flowers of St. Francis (an Italian translation of

The Deeds of Blessed Francis and His Companions), written around 1396, states in Chapter 4:

“And Saint Francis with the other companions went to Santiago. When they arrived there, remaining in prayer during the night in the Church of Saint James, God revealed to Saint Francis that he must found many places throughout the world because his Order was to expand and grow into a large number of friars.”

Thousands of pilgrims from all over the world have journeyed to the Apostle's tomb at Santiago de Compostela; so it is no surprise that Francis himself also undertook this pilgrimage.

I read that St. Francis departed Assisi in 1213 arriving in Santiago de Compostela in 1214 and returning to Assisi in 1215. He and his companions walked north, then west out of Italy into southwestern France. They crossed the Pyrenees into Spain through the Somport Pass in the northern region of the then-kingdom of Aragon. His route continued south to the town of Jaca, then turned west, joining the main Camino Francés (French Camino) route at Puente la Reina in the then-kingdom of Navarre. From there he traveled on the same route that the Camino Francés follows today, although there have been some detours added over the centuries.

Reaching the town of Puente la Reina, one walks through what is, traditionally, the same archway over the same bridge and on the remnants of the same ancient Roman road that St. Francis would have walked on in 1214. So, for a brief while I was walking in the exact footsteps of St. Francis.

Decisions and plans

It is said that your pilgrimage begins the moment you decide to walk the Camino. My interest was piqued when my husband, Ed, and I were on a Marian pilgrimage and visited Santiago on our way from Fatima, Portugal, to Lourdes, France, last year. We met a couple on that pilgrimage who had walked the last 110 km of the Camino from Sarria to Santiago, and we



became more interested in doing the pilgrimage. In 2010 I had read a book called *Hiking the Camino* by Fr. Dave Pivonka, TOR, and had seen the movie *The Way*, which got me excited to visit Santiago during our Marian pilgrimage.

Our plans started to take shape in March 2014 as we researched pilgrimage details and looked at options for how to get to the starting point in St. Jean. Unfortunately, Ed could not make the trip due to starting on home kidney dialysis. I was prepared to journey alone when our daughter, Heather, asked if she could travel with me.

Pilgrims who walked to Santiago in medieval times took back home with them a scallop shell to prove they had made it all the way there and back. The scallop shell thus became a symbol of pilgrimage. Today, pilgrims who walk The Way tie a scallop shell on their backpacks as a reminder to themselves to preserve the ancient traditions of the pilgrim and also to remind themselves that their destination is not as important as the journey itself. In the spirit of a pilgrim I attached a shell to my backpack and a silver shell to my Tau. Some of you may have seen me wearing it at the Annual Regional Gathering in August. It was my way of witnessing to my faith while on the Camino, and it did spark a few conversations.

Stepping out

So, it was with a humble heart and a growing devotion to St. James that I began my pilgrimage to Santiago to venerate his tomb and to ask his intercession for a special prayer request, that of finding my husband a kidney donor. We flew to Paris and took the train south to St. Jean Pied de Port. Upon arriving, we checked in at our pilgrim hostel (albergue, pronounced al-BEAR-gay), the Beilari, showered, then hand-washed our clothes — a routine repeated each day of our journey.



Next we went to the pilgrim office and received the first stamp (sello) on our credentials, indicating that we had started our pilgrimage in St. Jean. The credential is your pilgrim passport. To stay at albergues and to receive a compostela (a certificate of completion issued by the Cathedral of St. James), you must carry your credential and get it stamped by the hospitaleros (personnel) in the albergues or at cathedrals, churches, hotels, bars, and town halls

along the way. On Aug. 27, we left the albergue with high hopes of reaching Santiago de Compostela and the tomb of St. James, carrying on our backs only the few things we needed for our trip.

They say that the Camino is a metaphor for life. And so, on the first day, hiking uphill for hours, I began to reflect on my life. The mountain became a metaphor for my journey towards God, reaching up to him but finding myself weak and unprepared for the journey.

I found a resolve and a strength in me that I didn't know I had and that could have come only through a faith that, "with God all things are possible." I knew that if I made it through those first two days, I was going to make it all the way to Santiago. I also knew that I could not do it alone; I needed to rely on Christ to help me along the way through the kindness of others. Walking in the spirit of St. Francis meant that I would have to walk with humility in poverty, chastity, and obedience.

For the Body

The first stage of the journey, from St. Jean to Burgos, is said to be for the body. There is a lot of uphill hiking on uneven ground. It took about a week for my body to accustom itself to getting up and walking for hours each day. As the days passed, I found myself growing stronger but still unable to cope with the hot sun, the rocky pathways, and the uphill treks. Each town was

at the top of a hill, so at the end of the day, when you're hot and tired, there was always an uphill hike into town.

And the rocks! I never would have thought there were so many rocky, uphill/downhill, washed out gully-type paths on the Camino. The rocks hurt my feet and made me lose my balance and almost fall. They were a burden for me and caused my feet to become sore and blistered. In Grañon, after almost three weeks of walking, I was bragging about having no blisters and was trying to instruct another pilgrim about how to take care of his feet. The next day I got my first blister.

I learned to persevere through the pain in my feet and the ache in my back and to take better care of my feet and my body. I learned humility in asking others for help and in receiving help from others; to not complain but to just take things as they were and make the best of them. In planning to walk the Camino, I was forced to pack my backpack with the bare necessities of clothing, water, and a few provisions. I learned that there is a lot in life I can do without; things that get in the way of drawing me into a closer relationship with God. And so I learned the first lesson of the Camino: **humility and poverty.**

For the Mind

The second stage, from Burgos to Leon, is said to be for the mind. This stage is called the Meseta, and, for the most part, is flat. Some call it boring. I didn't find it boring and not necessarily flat as there were some slight uphill and downhill stretches, but it was mainly flat. One day I stopped to look behind me, and all I saw was a perfectly straight path disappearing into the horizon; ahead of me was the exact same view. It was as if I was caught up in some sort of time warp with no beginning or end.

This monotonous walking led my mind to do some wandering, and I began to think about eternity, with no beginning and no end, a place where things "just are." I watched the ants, beetles, slugs, and snails on the ground going about their daily routines, not even aware that I was watching them. And I, able to step on them without warning, snuffing out their lives before they knew it (which, to my knowledge, I never did!).



Sort of like God watching over me and I not knowing or even thinking about my relationship with him. How he could call me home to him at any hour, under any circumstance, and how I must be ready for that day. I know God called me to make this pilgrimage, and even though I walked it as a prayer and petition for someone else, God showed me that I must walk this only for myself. That out of this experience I am to change and become more like him in all things. Each morning I lifted up my prayer to him: "Lord, accept all my joys and sorrows, all my pain and suffering and all my delights and wonders of this day. I lay them down before the foot of your cross. Use them as you will." So I learned the second lesson of the Camino: **obedience.**

For the soul

The third stage, from Leon to Santiago, is said to be for the soul. Prayer becomes more frequent and more intense. I called upon Jesus many times throughout my pilgrimage and he answered me. But this last stage becomes tedious walking, and I just wanted to get to Santiago so I wouldn't have to walk anymore!

Life is that way most of the time. We go through our daily routines not even thinking about what we are doing or why we are doing them. We do things without a second thought, unaware of the present, out of time with creation.

It was in this stage that I began to bless the rocky paths and thank God for the beautiful rocks he had created. When I did this, they no longer were a burden for me. Yes, they still hurt my feet and still made me lose my balance, especially when they were wet and slippery from the rain; but at the end of the day it didn't matter. I had persevered with the help of our Lord and was

rewarded with a clean bed, a hot shower, and a good night's rest. And so I learned the third lesson of the Camino: **chastity** — staying true to one's self and being pure enough in prayer to thank God for even the things I couldn't control; the trials in my life that are a part of growing in holiness.

Reaching the 100 km marker just outside of Melide was a bittersweet moment. Knowing that my journey would be over in a few days, yet not wanting it to end. On Oct. 15, we walked the final kilometers into Santiago in the pouring rain and blowing wind — a miserable day and we were soaking wet even though we were wearing all our rain gear. Yet, I praised God for the rain that waters the earth and sustains life and asked him to just get us to our destination safely.

Santiago — and lessons for a lifetime

It was afternoon before we entered the city of Santiago and found our albergue. We showered and changed into clean, albeit damp, clothes. No use trying to wash our worn clothes as it was 100 percent humidity and nothing was going to dry. By that time the rain had stopped so we made our way to the Cathedral of St. James and into the pilgrim office to receive our compostela, a certificate welcoming us to Santiago and stating that we had walked the whole way to visit the saint's tomb.

The next day we visited the Church of San Francisco to obtain a very important document, issued by the Franciscan friars only every 100 years. It is a compostela issued in memory of St. Francis's visit to Santiago in 1214. This year was the 800th anniversary year of the visit, so the church was issuing this special compostela that would not be issued again until 2114.



People ask me why I decided to walk the Camino. The only answer I have is that I felt called to do so. After reading the first book about the Camino several years ago, it kept coming back to me until I could no longer dismiss the yearning in my heart to make the pilgrimage.

It is not a walk in the park. Rather, it is a long and arduous journey filled with many moments of joy and sorrow, of pain and suffering, the lows of great disappointment and the highs of great triumph. It is a part of me now. I reflect on what it means in my life and know that everyone's Camino is different.

You can't walk someone else's Camino just as you can't live someone else's life. Your life IS your Camino. Accept what is, let go of what was, and have faith in what will be. I found out a lot about myself, what I am really capable of, and how much I can endure to reach my goal. I grew in my relationship with God and learned to embrace the charisms of St. Francis.

“Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go” (author unknown). As the naturalist John Muir wrote: “Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt.”

Jo Ann Rademacher, OFS, is a member of Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity in Duluth, Ga.

Secular Franciscan Websites

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region — www.bssfsfo.org

National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States (NAFRA)

www.nafra-sfo.org

Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (CIOFS)

International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order

www.ciofs.org

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Brother Pacifico Sees Tau on Francis

When he was still living a secular life, a certain brother whose name was Pacifico, found the servant of God at San Severino where he was preaching in a monastery. The hand of the Lord came upon him, and he saw Francis marked with two bright shining swords intersecting in the shape of a cross. One of them stretched from his head to his feet, and the other across his chest from one hand to the other. He did not know the man by sight, but once he had been pointed out by such a miracle, he recognized him immediately. He was exceedingly amazed, frightened, and goaded by the power of his words. Pierced as it were by a spiritual sword coming from his mouth, he completely despised worldly displays and joined himself to his blessed father by profession. Afterwards, he made progress in every moral aspect of religion. Before he became minister in France, as indeed he was the first to hold the office of minister there, he merited to see a great Tau on Francis's forehead, which displayed a variety of different colors that caused his face to glow with wonderful beauty. The man of God venerated this symbol with great affection. He often spoke of it with eloquence and used it at the beginning of any action. In those letters which out of charity he sent, he signed it with his own hand. It was as if his whole desire were, according to the prophetic text, to mark with a Tau the foreheads of those moaning and grieving, of those truly converted to Jesus Christ.

St. Bonaventure,
"The Minor Legend of St. Francis," in
*Francis of Assisi, Early Documents:
Vol. II, The Founder*, p. 693

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