

Heavenly Sounds for a Ragged Earth

Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm



There have been moments in my life as a musician and composer that have given me joy I thought could never be surpassed. And then.... I told you about my two concerts in Italy in late September. Well, this issue of the Legionnaire is late because of them. It was within both of those concerts that I experienced such happiness and joy when I heard over forty world-class musicians perform 90 minutes of my music, including the world premiere of my new setting of St. Francis' own



Canticle of the Creatures for orchestra, chorus and soloist.

The first was September 17, Feast of the Stigmata of Francis and was performed in the magnificent splendor of the Basilica of San Pietro in Perugia (above). Friar Alessandro Brustegni, ofm, was soloist and took the full church to the Baroque coffered ceiling with his expressive tenor. 46 musicians played selections from my album *The Nature Suite* along with other works and the new *Canticle*. Needless to say, the thrill of hearing a new work performed for the first time was a bit overwhelming, especially when performed by a fellow friar of such talent. The Basilica was SRO which added to the beauty.

The second concert on September 20 was in the Basilica of Santa Chiara in Assisi. Most of our readers know my love for Clare so to perform my 2nd concert there was doubly thrilling. It was another enthusiastic and sensitive audience and even



the Poor Clares were present in their cloister. Andrea Baratti was soloist that night and his tenor caressed each note with passion. These were concerts were the 17th and 18th I've been part of in Assisi, Perugia, Milan and elsewhere in Italy over the years. Because these were to honor the 800th Anniversary of the *Canticle*, so many great musical friends joined together and the astounding spaces were some elements that made these so special. Some of the musicians themselves teared up during performances because every one of these highly skilled artists poured their hearts into every single note and every word of every text. I cannot find the words to express what I experienced during both concerts and am thrilled to repeat my new *Canticle of the Creatures* here in St. Peter's on October 4, the Solemnity of Francis, composer of text and music of the *Canticle*.

32 pilgrims accompanied me to Italy. In addition to these concerts we visited all four major Basilicas in Rome for this Holy Year of Hope. Rome was stretched to the max with thousands of pilgrims from around the world. It was 90 degrees that day and hectic. We headed north to visit Bologna, Parma and then Orta where the cool water and mountain breezes were a welcome respite from that Roman heat. Our days there were delightful but what disturbed people was news from the U.S. It seems that two well-known Catholic prelates, Cardinal Dolan of New York and Bishop Robert Barron of Minnesota, made public pronouncements that didn't sync well with many of our group, and with many believers at home. They both issued statements about death of Charlie Kirk, an evangelical speaker who had a large following of young people in the U.S. Dolan likened him to St. Paul and in an interview with Fox News in St. Paul, Bishop Barron said "He always made it clear that the most important thing in his life—the thing he most wanted to be remembered for—was not his party affiliation or political philosophy but his Christian faith." With over 3 million followers on Facebook this man was unbelievably popular, to say the

least. But what upset many Catholics was that Charlie Kirk also advocated for Christian Nationalism. In 2021, Kirk told a congregation, "The Bible says very clearly to 'Occupy until I come'", a verse often cited by followers of the [Seven Mountain Mandate](#) to assert that before Jesus returns [evangelical](#) Christians must dominate seven areas of society: government, media, education, business, family, religion, and entertainment." He also made false facts accusations about the separation of church and state, particularly strong ones I've read declaring that this country is a Christian nation, which it is not. Read both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States and you will not find the name of Jesus Christ in either document. The Declaration mentions God four times as Creator, Supreme Judge, Nature's God; not one of these concepts of God are the God revealed by Jesus Christ. Huge difference! And the Constitution has absolutely no mention of God at all, not one. And why not? Three reasons: it is a document of religious neutrality, a blueprint for effective republican government and its purpose to provide for "justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty." Yet we have plenty of people like Douglas Wilson who advocate for a Christian Nationalism that looks and feels like another country in the 1930's. Fear tactics engender hate and superiority that clash dramatically with the basic Gospel message of reconciliation, peace and "plenty good room" for all God's children! Murderous attacks on churches and synagogues reveal the depth of hate and division in this country. Since I wrote the last article there have been 25 mass shootings in the U.S. with 15 people killed and 70 injured in 29 days of September.

Why should I speak of all this as we celebrate and remember Francis of Assisi and our friar presence in the Loop? Read the stories of our founder himself. Francis' first twenty some years were shaped by warfare with neighboring Perugia and gang rivalries between Assisian themselves. When townspeople protested the ponderance of the Holy Roman Emperor, Francis himself helped demonstrators tear down the royal castle, La Rocca Maggiore, pulling it apart stone by stone. Even after his tumultuous conversion fueled by violence and being a POW, Francis often came face-to-face with political leaders. And remember that the medieval popes were also political leaders with vast papal armies. Papal armies? Yes.

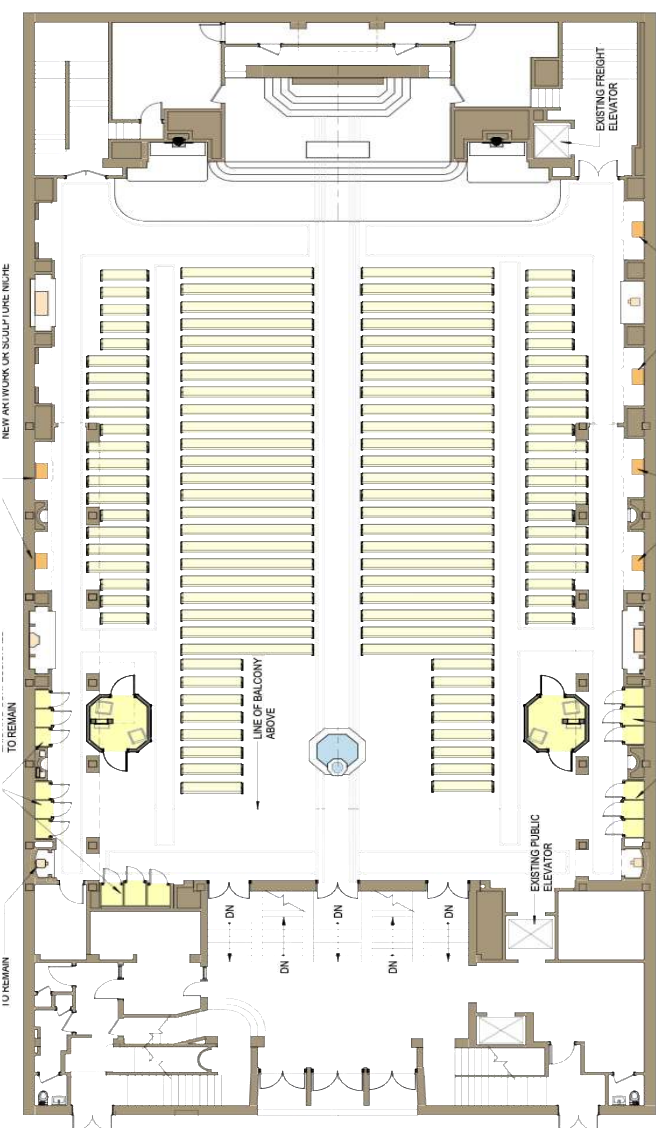
The earliest sources and biographers recount numerous tales of Francis ministering to and even confronting various political entities. One tale is that he confronted a wild gang in Perugia; they'd been threatening the safety of townspeople. Francis dared go right up to them, asking for peace. They laughed him off but did leave people alone after their encounter with Francis. In the second book of Celano's *Life of St. Francis* there's a passage about his effects on people: "he took care to plant this holy religion everywhere [by being holy, simple, humble and poor] and in faraway places his glowing reputation, from an even more glowing life, helped greatly to spread the Order. The Lord gave him a learned tongue. With it he confounded the opponents of truth, refuted the enemies of the cross of Christ, led strangers back to the way, made **peace** between those in conflict, and bound together those in peace in a stronger bond of love"

I came home from Italy with my heart torn between the exhilarating experience of the arts at their best and the strife and very ugly reality of the divisiveness in the Catholic Church, one that parallels that same ugly reality in the fabric of the "land of the free". But we made a Pilgrimage of Hope through four Holy Year doors and the Door of the Basilica of Francis in Assisi. If ever we Franciscans need to be vocal about the realities of hate, fear, and animosity leading to violence, it is NOW. We cannot wimp out in pulpits; we have to lead people to BE PEACE. We must educate people that this little man of peace was never afraid to preach bravely and that by virtue of our Baptism, are called to be a person of reconciliation.

How do we do that? Certainly each of us must be honest with God and admit our sinfulness. We have to show the world by example that we can strive to revivify the Common Good. We can, ourselves, seek the forgiveness of God in the Sacrament of Penance, then offer God's gift to others. Our world aches for justice as babies starve to death because of terrorist governments. The united states of pain, I've often thought of as an appropriate lower case name for ourselves right now. As I write this in late September masked ICE officers are floating down the Chicago River on boats and near the Loop. What is this? All the more reason that the Franciscan ministry of confessions flourish for another 150 years. This sacrament of healing has been our hallmark all these years. It has calmed believers through the aftermath of the Chicago Fire, two world wars and numerous other conflicts, the Great Depression, the Great Migration and countless years of social and ecclesiological change. Through all the pain, millions – literally millions of sinners – have found the embrace of God's forgiveness at St. Peter's in the Loop. And we are now going to offer our future penitents a beautiful space in which to find that endless forgiveness from God.

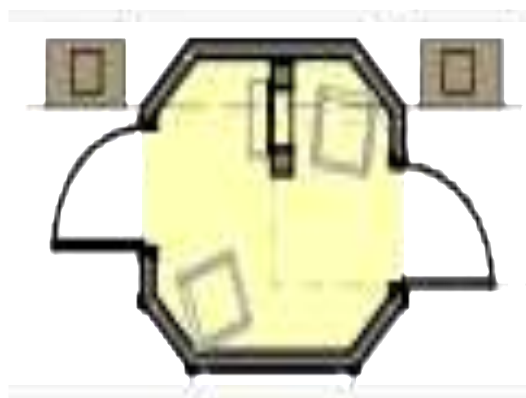
I wrote in January 2024 about our project of twenty years: to hopefully build on either side of the church interior two new chapels for the Sacrament of Penance. The dream is about to come true, friends, and it is very exciting. We have worked with MKB Architects over the years to design two identical and fully accessible rooms on either side of the church. Pro Studio will do the construction. Each person will have the option of facing the confessor or confessing behind a screen. These rooms will be soundproof, warmly lit and a simple and prayerful environment for those celebrating this tender and pastoral sacrament. Completion date may be near Easter of 2026. We have wanted to get this Sacrament out of the lower level since Covid, and

place it back into the church nave. Then we will again have use of the entire auditorium for classes, concerts and other events. There are solid theological reasons behind the design I'd like you to understand.



The floor plan of the church shows the position of the two rooms (yellow) and the baptismal font at the head of the middle aisle. The font is purposely central in the floor plan because one cannot approach the Table of the Lord without first being baptized. It is octagonal in shape to theologically recall the 8th Day of Creation. In biblical heritage God created everything in six days and rested on the seventh. The Eighth Day symbolizes the beginning of the Christian era, the Resurrection and a whole new era of salvation history. It may be hard to tell from the drawing but the two confessionals will also be octagonal, echoing the Eighth Day of Creation. Theologically what these three elements in St. Peter's will proclaim when one enters is this: welcome to our baptizing and reconciling community of faith. Be at peace with us and our God.

The construction itself will mostly be done off site at Pro Studio, then assembled here. Work in the church will be minimal, the bulk being electrical etc. done with minimal mess and never done during Mass. Below is the floor plan of both confessionals to help you see the accessibility for the largest of wheelchairs and comfort of each penitent.



Below you see the exterior with wood in the same tone as throughout the church. The design will allow for privacy, ample lighting and AC. This is an expensive project yet generous donors offered over \$90,000 just in response to my article last year. It's very obvious to me that our community wants to bring new life to our ministry of

Reconciliation. You are most welcome to offer a gift to help us with this project to beautify how people are both welcomed and embraced with God's forgiveness. We are excited and so very grateful for your constant support. 150 years of Franciscan ministry and presence is about to take a wonderful new step into the future. We can't live in the past but must walk humbly with our God. As always, you must know that you are in our daily community prayers and are remembered at every single Eucharist celebrated here. We pray that God fill your life with peace and, during this Holy Year of Hope, help you see the positive effects all of us have on the world and fill broken hearts with hope and the good things that flow from the heart of God. St. Paul reminds us that all of us are given the ministry of reconciliation. Soon we will have a beautiful new way to experience God's forgiveness! Stronger, more loving people who will offer light, hope, beauty and forgiveness to our ragged world!



Pace e bene ~ Fr. Bob Hutmacher, ofm