

Communio

That All May Be One

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

Summer 2020



St. Clare's place in the dormitory in San Damiano, at Assisi, Italy. (Photo by Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS)

St. Clare's Miraculous Vision

"Just as the memory of her Christ was present to her in her sickness, so too Christ visited her in her sufferings. At that hour of the Nativity when the world rejoices with the angels at the newly born child, all the ladies went to the oratory for Matins and left their mother alone weighted down by her illnesses.

"When she began to think about the Infant Jesus and was greatly sorrowing that she could not participate on His praises, she sighed and said: 'Lord God, look at how I have been left alone in this place for You!'

"Behold, that wonderful concert that was taking place in the church of Saint Francis suddenly began to resound in her ear. She heard the jubilant psalmody of the brothers, listened to the harmonies of their songs, and even perceived the very sounds of the instruments. The nearness of the place was in no way such that a human being could

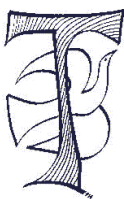
have heard this unless either that solemnity had been divinely amplified for her or her hearing had been strengthened beyond human means. But what truly surpasses this event: she was worthy to see the very crib of the Lord!

"In the morning when her daughters came to her, blessed Clare said: 'Blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, Who did not leave me as you did. In fact, I heard, by the grace of Christ, all those solemnities that were celebrated this night in the church of Saint Francis.'"

Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., editor and translator,
"The Legend of Saint Clare," *The Lady: Clare of Assisi, Early Documents*, p. 306

The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

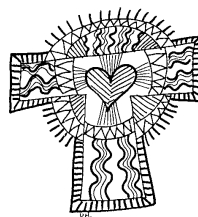
Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate





Editor's Journal

It may surprise some people to learn that a 13th century saint is the patron of television. Yet, as Arnaldo Fortini notes in his book *Francis of Assisi*, it was the “episode,” described on page 1 of this issue, “along with the prophecy to her mother that Clare would be a light to illumine the world (that) led to her being designated the universal patroness of television by Pope Pius XII in 1957” (p. 366).

Of the 20 witnesses who testified in the process of Clare’s canonization, at least



Street artist creates chalk painting of St. Clare in Piazza del Comune, Assisi’s main square. (2015 photo by Joanita M. Nellenbach. OFS)

three — Sister Filippa, Sister Amata, and Sister Balvina — said that they had heard Clare describe this event (see pp. 161, 165, 172, “The Acts of the Process of Canonization of Clare of Assisi,” *The Lady: Clare of Assisi, Early Documents*).

In Italian, Clare’s name is Chiara, which translates as “bright, shining, clear.” She certainly had a clear vision of the Nativity-night events in the church of St. Francis in 1252, on that last Christmas Eve of her life. She was apart from all of her sisters that night.

Whether or not we are ill, we too are physically separated from our fraternity brothers and sisters because of the coronavirus.

None of us, as far as I know, has been gifted with bilocal vision, the ability to see things far away. We do, however, have the technology of video conferencing. Some of our fraternities are conducting council meetings and fraternity gatherings by using these methods. I pray that every fraternity will take advantage of this technology to see each other long distance until we can be physically present to one another.

We celebrate the feast of St. Clare on Aug. 11. I’d like to suggest that we pray to her not only for healing (through God’s grace she did heal people) but also for her to help us use modern

technology in the best ways we can to be together virtually even if we can’t gather in person.

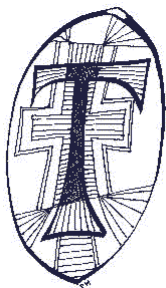
The Lady: Clare of Assisi, Early Documents gives 1255 as the year when “The Legend of St. Clare” was written. Several people, including Thomas of Celano, have been proposed as the author, but no one knows for sure. It’s worth noting that in medieval times a “legend” was not a myth or fable, as we might think of it now. “Legend” comes from the Medieval Latin *legenda*, meaning a narrative of an event, or something to be read.

Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, Communio editor, 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.

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Minister's Message



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the Lord give you peace!

Here we are in this summer of 2020, living our lives to the fullest (Really? During a pandemic?), as we adapt to the many changes that have occurred since mid-March that have literally impacted how we go about our daily doings.

I don't know about you, but if I didn't have my Franciscan spirituality and vocation I might not see the big picture that has been placed before me as I spend quiet time trying to process all that has happened in our country and the world and what I am supposed to do.

Even in these times of social distancing and isolation, you, the brothers and sisters of each fraternity, have not allowed this to keep you apart. You are and have been flexible and sought alternative ways to hold your monthly gatherings and council meetings.

Many of you are using virtual platforms to be present to each other, see and hear everyone, have ongoing formation, conduct business, and socialize. Those not comfortable with virtual forms are telephoning often and checking on their sisters and brothers' well-being. I commend you all for keeping your commitment to fraternity life and living fraternal communion while we learn to live with the COVID-19 virus.

The National Fraternity has prioritized fraternity life for 2018–2021. It is noted that to help us achieve this priority we need to focus on the following aspects of fraternity life: deepening our Franciscan vocation, growing in fraternal communion, and cultivating universal kinship.

You may find specific resources for these on our national website (secularfranciscansusa.org). On the homepage, you'll see this:

OFS-USA National Priority 2018-2021 Fraternity Life



Scroll down a bit and click on:

[Formation resources on "Fraternity Life" can be found here.](#)

As Jesus tells us: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (Jn 15:12). And, "Children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1 Jn 3:18).

St. Francis of Assisi addresses love of others in "The Earlier Rule" for his Order, "Chapter XI: The Brothers Should Not Revile or Detract, But Should Love One Another" (*Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume I, The Saint*, 72).

God bless you and keep you as you love one another and serve one another during these times of awakening!

You all know the Annual Regional Gathering is cancelled for this year of 2020. We will have our Regional Fraternity Council meeting virtually on Saturday, Aug. 8 at 10 a.m. An email link will be sent to you in advance. If you, as minister, cannot attend, please delegate your vice minister or other council member to act in your stead, as there is business to be presented and voted upon. I just wanted to give you a "heads-up" notice here.

Thanks, and be safe and protected. Remember in prayer those in our region who have tested

positive for the COVID-19 virus. There is a small number to the best of my knowledge.

Peace and all good,
DorothyAnn

DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's minister, is a member of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head Island, S.C.



Regional Spiritual Assistant: Profession and a Call to Serve July 3, The Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle

By Deacon Thomas Shaver OFS

In his discussion on the presentation, “Profession in the SFO: Gift and Commitment,” by Father Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap., Father Richard Trezza, OFM, focuses on the call to profession being a gift of the Holy Spirit.

One of the main “take aways” for me was the statement that it wasn’t a fraternity member that invited us or called us to look at the OFS; rather, it was the Holy Spirit and the grace of God calling us, like St. Francis, to rebuild the Church.

We rebuild the Church in so many ways that sometimes we are not even aware of the impact we make. The overriding message that I heard in Father Trezza’s discussion was the statement that God calls us to the Order. The second message regarding profession and fraternity is: “Those to be Professed in the SFO should realize that from now on they will belong to a special family within the Church which will entail **not only rights but also obligations and responsibilities**” (emphasis added).

I recommend that you read all of Father Trezza’s discussion — the chapter, “Profession and the Secular Franciscan,” in the FUN manual — to get a fuller understanding of this call.

In this article, I want to concentrate on a particular point in Father Trezza’s chapter: participation in fraternity life.

In the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, we focus on the Four Pillars: Spirituality, Formation, Apostolate, and Fraternity. Fraternal life is critical to the health and vitality of the fraternity. Only by full participation in fraternity life can the other three pillars be accomplished for the greater glory of God.

Accordingly, I want to speak to a personal sense that my brothers and sisters in our region aren’t all taking this pillar/element of Franciscan spirituality seriously. I sense a general apathy regarding participation in the fraternity on two fronts: first, when we are called to serve on council; second, the evaluation process prior to a fraternal/pastoral visitation.

Serving as ecclesial witness at elections, all too often I’ve seen only one person on the slate for each council office. During the election, nominations for each office are opened three times. I have heard people nominated and, sadly, have heard the nominees decline the nomination.

For your consideration: Nomination for an office should not be regarded (actually isn’t) coming from the fraternity member. It is the Holy Spirit’s call to serve the fraternity. This call is a gift from God. “Isn’t it arrogant to decline a gift from God?”, my former spiritual director, Father Linus DeSantis, OFM Conv., once asked,

I understand that there may be issues that cause one to decline the nomination; namely, poor health, small-children demands, or elderly relatives who need our care. Still, I turn to an adage that has guided my involvement in the Order as well as my activity as a deacon: “The will of God will never lead you, where the grace of God cannot keep you.” We need prayerfully to

reflect on whether or not we are making mental excuses to decline the opportunity to serve.

My second concern involves the questionnaires distributed to the fraternity members prior to a visitation. A questionnaire for each council member, and one to both council and non-council members.

On several recent visitations, I received only a couple of the questionnaires from the members. Personally, I would expect 100 percent participation with both sets of questionnaires. Unfortunately, that isn't always the case.

These questionnaires are meant to provide the visitors with critical information that helps them with their evaluation of the health of the fraternity in general and to make recommendations to help the fraternity specifically.

Visitors have about six to eight hours with the fraternity, at best; and four to six hours, at worst. They observe, ask questions when necessary, and make recommendations based on observations and the responses to the questions. Almost always, visitors, prior to the close of the fraternity meeting, are asked if they have any questions. If there are no questions, or after any questions have been answered, the visitors will open the floor to questions from the fraternity members. Typically, based on my observations, there haven't been that many questions, if any.

As a visitor, I can almost tell the health of the fraternity by the questionnaire responses and whether there are questions at the end of the visitation. The more questionnaires and questions, the healthier the fraternity. Obviously the converse is applicable: fewer questionnaires and questions, the unhealthier the fraternity.

The point I am trying to make is that at profession we agree to fully participate in the fraternity's duties and responsibilities. Those include accepting God's call to serve on the council. Our responsibility to the fraternity also includes completing in a timely manner the questionnaires and information requests of the local, regional, and national fraternities, which are the "hierarchy" of our Order.

The work of the fraternity is not the sole responsibility of the fraternity minister, although all too often he or she has assumed that work by default or as a potential ego issue, both of which are false assumptions. Their responsibility is to lead and encourage the involvement of their fraternity members in the work of the Order.

That said, there is actually a third element of this line of discussion; namely, answering the call to spiritual assistance in our Order.

As you may be aware, there aren't as many Franciscan friars as there used to be. We saw the OFM Capuchins leave our region last year. Like the Capuchins, the OFM friars of Holy Name Province are leaving because of the reduction in the number of friars within their province. Their leadership is reassessing the needs and duties of the province. With fewer friars to serve as fraternity spiritual assistants, we Secular Franciscans must fulfill that responsibility.

About two months ago, I sent a letter to our region's fraternity ministers, asking them to invite their members to consider becoming spiritual assistants. To date, I have received only one request for the invitation to apply for the spiritual assistant program.

For the past eight to 10 years we have been told that we are an autonomous Order, for which we are to take responsibility. The friars will assist us, but their limited staffing resources mean they can no longer assure us that they will provide local spiritual assistants. Because of this we initiated use of Franciscan Family Connections, the program that trains professed Secular Franciscans to be fraternity spiritual assistants.

If you hear the Holy Spirit speaking to you, please contact me at tshaverofs@gmail.com and I will promptly send you the invitation and application for the spiritual assistant formation program.

Please look inward and ask yourself whether any of the above issues apply to you: When am I so busy with "stuff" that I cannot fulfill my obligations to my Order? How does my whole life

show that I recognize and accept that I have made a solemn promise to God and my Order to fully participate in the Order to the best of my abilities?

At my ordination as a deacon, one of the questions required the response: “With the help of the Lord I do.” Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, wrote, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

The call to serve our Order is God’s call to a gift of grace. How would you answer Father Linus’s question, “Isn’t it arrogant to decline a gift from God?”

Deacon Thomas Shaver, OFS, Brother and Sisters of St. Francis Region’s spiritual assistant, is a member of Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity in Johns Creek, Ga. He serves at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Marietta, Ga.

Congratulations, Newly Professed



Newly professed and presiders: David Shick, OFS (left); Joan Monti, OFS; Deacon Phil Rzewnicki OFS; Anna Rzewnicki, OFS; Jeanne Casciere, OFS; Michael Oeser, OFS; Lynn Oeser, OFS, formation director; Ben Whitehouse, OFS; Gladys Whitehouse, OFS; Father Steve Kluge, OFM, spiritual assistant; Alexandra Rommel, OFS; Lee Cunningham, OFS, minister.

Nine Secular Franciscans in Padre Pio Fraternity in Raleigh, N.C., declared their permanent profession to the Order during the Liturgy of the Word on June 27, at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Raleigh.

The profession had been postponed from May 16 because of the COVID-19 restrictions. Father Steve Kluge, OFM, referenced the pandemic in his homily.

“If we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will get through this no matter how long it lasts,” he said. “The world needs more Secular Franciscans to be the hands of Christ. You are more courageous than you know because you are saying ‘yes.’ You will be Christ in the midst of all this suffering.

Because of social distancing restrictions, only the newly professed and the presiders were at the ceremony. Padre Pio Fraternity will host a celebration at a later date.

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.secularfranciscansusa.org

Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (CIOFS)

International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order

www.ciofs.org

Poem, Prayer, Peace

By Kathi Traywick, OFS

God started placing little nudges in my heart to explore the Secular Franciscan Order right



after my husband died. My father died the next year. A short time later I started formation.

In that desert time, the good Lord gently called me to this beautiful life. Out of the desert of emptiness, loss, and pain he made beautiful things bloom and healed my heart and soul.

He planted me firmly in the North Georgia mountains amidst his beautiful creation and a loving little community. During that sheltered peaceful time of formation, he spoke; I tried to listen and

began to journal and write.

Recently, I came across this poem I wrote at that time and started to pray with it. As I prayed, I was brought back to that same place of awe and wonder. Praying in nature, I once again felt loved and sheltered in God's cradle, safe and secure.

Praying with it I have realized this time we are in right now is a desert time of emptiness and loss, quiet reflection and longing for God. This, too, is a time for conversion and formation.

May these simple words bring you God's peace and joy:

Morning

In the shelter of nature's cradle, You come tiptoeing with the deer
A hawk winging on the thermals, Your spirit free
Your song echoing in the trees welcoming the day.
Light dancing through the woodland, bringing life to your creation
So quiet
So perfect
Miracles, miracles, miracles
My human mind cannot drink it all in
You are too awesome for my comprehension
When I am still you shout
my eyes blinded by Your creation
My senses wild
in my quiet You unfold Your glory
My heart explodes with gratefulness and thanksgiving
You bring joy where there is despair
Comfort in my sorrow
Blessed peace, blessed peace

Kathi Traywick, OFS, is JPIC animator in Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity, Blairsville, Ga.

Image of sun shining through trees: SnapShot.com

On the Common Good: Politics, Partisanship, and Secular Franciscans

By David V. Cruz-Uribe, OFS

At my first meeting of the Regional Executive Council, last February, a big item on the agenda was planning for the upcoming (but now, sadly, canceled) Annual Regional Gathering.

As part of this, the council read through comments that participants submitted after the 2019 ARG. I was struck by a number of complaints that revolved around two intertwined ideas: topics addressed at the ARG were “too controversial” and were “too political.” I was surprised, as nothing in the agenda or the contents of the talks (as reported to me — I was not there) struck me as either.

On reflection, however, I realized that I had run into this attitude on social media. Since the



murder of George Floyd and the ensuing anti-racism protests, it has become more frequent. Immigration, the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, racism, police violence, Black Lives Matter: these subjects, and others, are considered controversial and political and, therefore, Secular Franciscans should not bring them up.

I think this attitude is mistaken: As Franciscans, we are called to be both *controversial* and *political*. Here I want to explain why and to

address what I believe are some common concerns.

It all begins with our Rule. Article 15 says:

“Let them individually and collectively be in the **forefront** in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith” (emphasis added).

To be at the forefront of any movement to promote justice will be, inevitably, controversial. Addressing social and political injustice requires challenging either the people who support the injustice (for whatever reason) or the larger number who are made uncomfortable by any attempts to change the status quo. As Martin Luther King Jr. said in his “Letter From a Birmingham Jail,” addressing religious leaders (including the bishop of Birmingham) who felt the demonstrations he was leading were provocative and unwise:

“I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.”

So, if we are going to be obedient to our Rule, we are going to have to, at times, make other people uncomfortable by proposing controversial ideas and courses of action. Moreover, this also means we are going to have to make ourselves uncomfortable. Like any examination of

conscience, we need to ask ourselves, “What have I done, and what have I failed to do” to confront this evil? This discomfort is not a goal: As Franciscans, our goal should be peace and justice. But at times it will be painful for ourselves and others; these are the labor pains of a better world:

“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (John 16:21–22).

With regard to the complaint that these controversial topics are “too political”: I agree they are political, and that is a good thing. Politics, as St. Thomas Aquinas — following Aristotle — taught, is devoted to the common good. Or, as our Rule puts it, it is action in “*service of the human community*” (Article 16).

Here we need to distinguish between political and partisan. To be political is to address ourselves to the broader concerns of the community and public life. To be partisan is to advocate for the positions of a particular political party or ideology. These are closely related, as supporters of parties and ideologies often highlight specific problems or argue for their preferred solutions.

The Church in general, and the Secular Franciscan Order in general, are not to be partisan: As a Church and an Order, we do not support particular political parties.

But the Church can and must be political. In response to charges that the Church should not comment on social and economic questions, Pope Pius XI was clear:



“[T]hat principle which Leo XIII so clearly established must be laid down at the outset here, namely, that there resides in Us [the Pope] the right and duty to pronounce with supreme authority upon social and economic matters. ... For as to these, the deposit of truth that God committed to Us and the grave duty of disseminating and interpreting the whole moral law, and of urging it in season and out of season, bring under and subject to Our supreme jurisdiction not only social order but economic activities themselves” (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 41).

In the same way, as Secular Franciscans, to be faithful to the Church and to our Rule, we must also speak and act upon social, economic, and political questions if we are to bring our faith to bear “*in the field of public life*.” In doing so, we are guided by Catholic social teaching, which, as Pius XI explained, is the application of the moral law to these questions. The range of issues covered is broad and includes many that are regarded as both controversial and political.

The Second Vatican Council, in the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes*, 27, gave one list of concerns. Later, in his encyclical, *Veritatus Splendor*, 80, Pope St. John Paul II quoted this list as examples of grave and intrinsic moral evils:

“Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as subhuman living

conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat labourers as mere instruments of profit, and not as free responsible persons: all these and the like are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilization they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice, and they are a negation of the honour due to the Creator.”

These are the evils we Franciscans are called to address. In doing so, we will often find ourselves aligned with the stance of one political party or another, or find ourselves criticizing the actions of the government (controlled by one party or another). This, in and of itself, does not make us partisan. Instead, this alignment reflects what the Second Vatican Council said at the beginning of its constitution:

“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1).

So, the next time the discussion — in your fraternity, on social media, or here in the pages of *Communio* — turns to something “controversial” or “political,” don’t condemn it out of hand because you associate it with a political party or movement you oppose. Instead, ask yourself: What does the Church teach on this matter? Why is this so controversial, and why do I find it so unsettling? What do I personally, and we as a community, need to do to advance the common good in this situation?

David V. Cruz-Uribe, OFS, is an Area 1 councilor in the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region and a councilor at large in St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity, Bessemer, Ala.

Images: lifeofpix.com social justice photos

Congratulations, New Council

St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity, Spartanburg, S.C., June 27



Front row: Paula Duncan, OFS (left), formation director; Esther Kelly, OFS, secretary; Patricia McKenna, OFS, councilor; Jim Johnson, OFS, councilor.
Back row: Bonnie Wacker, OFS (left), vice minister; Carol Drum, OFS, treasurer; Jane Morris, OFS, councilor; Sara Nell Boggs, OFS, minister.
(Photo by Michaelleen Davis, OFS)

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: Franciscan Peace and our Unconscious Biases — Part 3

By Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

As you may recall from our last installment, unconscious biases are the assumptions, stereotypes, and unintentional actions we make toward others based on identity labels, like skin color or gender.

Most of our biases are stored in our subconscious; therefore, we may not even be aware of them. Yet, we make our decisions based on these unconscious biases. More often than not, we tend to make biases toward others.

But what about the biases we make against ourselves?

Mary Franciscan is a wonderful and loyal member of her fraternity. She attends all of the gatherings, and she regularly contributes to and participates in whatever activities the fraternity is involved in. Mary takes great pleasure in serving her fraternity in this way. She loves her vocation and is devoted to the Franciscan way of life.

And yet, whenever she is asked to serve on her local fraternity council, she declines. She has every excuse — she is too busy with work, busy taking care of family members, involved in parish activities. She simply has no time to serve on her fraternity council.

Yet, she still attends every function of the fraternity. She even contributes greatly to the formation sessions. She would make a wonderful formation director. Again, Mary declines. She is told she could get a team of people together, and she would not have to do all the work herself. She still declines.

Does this scenario sound familiar? Have you been in Mary Franciscan's shoes? Can you relate?

Mary Franciscan does not believe she would make a good formation director. She does not believe she would do a good job serving in any capacity on the council. She constantly says she wouldn't be good at that, or she could not do that.

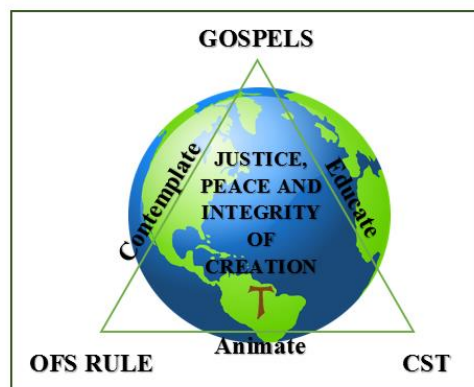
This is an example of a negativity self-bias. We believe we are not able or capable to be or do something because we either feel we are not worthy, we are inadequate, or not qualified. Like the saying goes: God does not call the qualified, but he does qualify those he calls. This bias is insidious and detrimental to the life of a company or a community because it limits the growth of that company or community.

Obviously, there are times when you cannot serve because you are the caregiver of a loved one or there are health issues and the like. These are understandable circumstances, and you do the very best that you can in those situations. God is calling you elsewhere at this time and season, and you must heed that call. And notice, caregiving and health issues are calls you cannot decline. They land at your door and you must open that door and deal with whatever enters. You have the choice to decline serving your fraternity or your region. When those opportunities land at your door, you have the option to ignore the knock.

I received the knock at my door in 2003. I had no idea what Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation was; and, quite frankly, I tried to ignore the knock. But you know what? The knocking

SPIRITUALITY

FORMATION



FRATERNITY

APOSTOLATE

did not stop and when I took it to prayer and discernment, I decided to open the door and invite the stranger in.

Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation was a stranger to me. I had done other types of peace and justice work in the past, but this was a bit different: more formal and with a Franciscan focus. I decided to learn about it and perhaps make it a new friend. Well, it has become a tried and true friend for these past 17 years, and I am so grateful that I decided to let that stranger in.

What is the worst thing that could happen if you decided to open the door? Supply your own answer to that question.

But you could learn something new, perhaps make new friends and associations, and grow in your Franciscan spirituality.

In these times, we are facing unprecedented changes within our society: a global pandemic, economic strife, racial tensions and unrest. These are new strangers that are showing up at our door. The question, “What can I do?”, is more and more at the forefront of people’s thoughts. Here is the chance to disrupt your biases, about self and others, to be a part of the solution.

If you feel the urge to protest or march, by all means do so — but please take precautions. Do your homework; know what you are protesting for. Don’t just become part of an angry mob. Protest for positive change in the system.

Listen and learn from others, especially other people of color. Listen to their stories and learn from them. Don’t assume you know what they need or want. Our biases can often prevent us from really listening because we think we already know. Again, disrupt those biases by deeply listening, with an empathetic heart. Put yourself in the shoes of the other person, without judgment.

This is something you can do in the immediate. It is simple, but not easy. It takes disrupting the patterns of behaviors you have known for years and doing something new. Like anything worth doing, it takes practice. And remember, practice doesn’t make perfect; practice makes permanent.

If you are interested in being a part of listening circles via Zoom, please reach out to me. Let us raise our voices as Gospel beacons in the manner of St. Francis and our Lord Jesus.

May the Lord continue to give you peace.

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, a member of St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity in Aiken, S.C., is the JPIC Animator for the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, the National JPIC Animator, and a member of the International Commission for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation.

The St. Francis Option

By Bret Thoman, OFS

You may have heard about a book titled *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* by Rob Dreher.

It draws on the example of St. Benedict, who fled the decadence of Rome to live in the mountains as a hermit and began guiding others in monasticism. While western society entered into a centuries-long period of decline, religious life flourished in the monasteries as monks safeguarded not only the Christian life, but also culture.

In an ever more decadent society, the Benedict Option argues for today’s Christians to similarly retreat from society, live in strong faith-based communities, and to re-evangelize our culture from the outside.

But does God really want every Christian to withdraw from the world? Is there another way? What about a “St. Francis Option”?

You probably know that Francis, like Benedict, often retreated to the mountains for periods of prayer and contemplation. From the beginning of his conversion, Francis found great solace in



Path to the hermitage of Santa Maria di Valdisasso, on the mountain above the village of Valleremita in Italy's Marches Region. St. Francis visited this hermitage several times. (Photo by Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS)

the hermitages, away from the problems of the world:

“In the clefts of the rock he would
build his nest
And in the hollow of the wall
his dwelling.
With blessed devotion he visited the
heavenly mansions;
And, totally emptied of himself,
He rested for a long time in the
wounds of the Savior.
That is why he often chose
solitary places
To focus his heart entirely on God.”

(“The Life of Saint Francis”
by Thomas of Celano,
Francis of Assisi, Early Documents:
Vol. I, The Saint, pp. 243–244)

On the mountaintop, Francis surely loved God with all his “heart, soul, and mind.” Likely, he also felt freedom — from people, their problems, and their difficulties. For Francis, the mountains were like the vertical beam of the cross: the part that pointed up, to God.

This is the “transcendent” aspect of Francis’s spirituality. Here Francis appears to be have exercised the Benedict Option.

However, like Peter, who wished to build “three tents” and stay on Mount Tabor (see Matthew 17:4), Francis was not to remain in permanent retreat. And here the Benedict Option for Francis ends. Francis (like Peter) had to descend to the “valley,” where his work would be carried out.

There God revealed how he wished for him to live: he renounced his possessions, rebuilt churches, began to preach, and begged for alms. Yet, the culmination of his conversion was when he embraced a leper (see Francis’s “Testament” 1-3, *FA,ED: Vol. 1, The Saint*, p. 124).

In serving the marginalized, Francis embraced that other aspect of Christian spirituality: immanence. For the cross has two beams — horizontal as well as vertical. Down in the valley, Francis lived out the second imperative of the Gospel: loving neighbor as oneself.

The charism given to Francis was not solely one of retreat or flight; it was also one of service to people. Yet, Francis continued to periodically return to the mountains for retreat and prayer throughout his entire life. Thus, Francis spent his life alternating between the mountains and the valley.

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

healed, performed miracles, and taught.

Francis's life, thus, would not be prayer alone or ministry alone; it would be both to the contemplative and active life. It was transcendent, as well as immanent. Francis's mountains would include both Sinai as well as the Mount of Beatitudes. Never the first or the second — but both — one in fulfillment of the other.

This is known as the “total Gospel life.” It is what I call the St. Francis Option.

During these uncertain times in our country and world, may the St. Francis Option offer us direction, as well as hope.

Bret Thoman, OFS, is author of Francis of Assisi: Passion, Poverty, and the Man who Transformed the Catholic Church.

Franciscan Reaches Out to Make a Happy Birthday

By Ann M. Cole, OFS



My friend Ann Malaborski, fellow parishioner and assistant to our pastor, and I have been visiting our friend Marge Amlotte, who is in long-term care in a nursing home in Murphy, N.C.

Marge and I have been close friends for years. She was an active Catholic much of her life: CCD teacher for zillions of years, choir member, and participated in many other parish activities.

Her only daughter has serious cancer problems and lives in Greensboro, N.C., so there are no relatives here. Now, because of the coronavirus, no one is allowed to visit Marge, including Ann, our pastor, and me.

July 7 was Marge's 87th birthday, so Ann and I decided to visit her at the only place

possible — the window of her room at the facility.

We made posters, bought balloons, and attached my paper-plate “Happy-Birthday” message to two tomato stakes. Ann made a beautiful Happy Birthday poster, and off we went to Marge's window at the nursing home.

Using the tomato stakes, we put up the paper-plate message, and Ann taped her beautiful poster to one pane of the window. Marge was so happy. She is wheelchair-bound and can't walk but wheeled her chair towards the window. We sang the “Happy Birthday” song as loud as we could and she heard us. We were able to converse a little from our cell phones and her phone. It was a glorious day for her and for us. We left all our art work there in front of her window, so she could reminisce during the day.

Perhaps, my guardian angel prompted Ann and me to get together to do this. I probably wouldn't have had the courage to come out of my own medical problems to attempt such a project. But I found that the world was not in such chaos after all.

One can find ways in which to comfort those who are lonely, very ill, or some other unhappiness during these trial times. I can see St. Francis doing something like this too for his brothers!

Ann M. Cole, OFS, is a member of Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

In Memoriam for Our Brothers and Sisters Who Have Embraced Sister Death



By Christine Lukesh, OFS

If you've been present at our Annual Regional Gatherings (ARG), you probably joined in the candlelight memorial service commemorating our Franciscan sisters and brothers who had gone before us during the previous year.

Disappointing as it will be for us not to gather at Ridgecrest Conference Center this August, your brothers and sisters from Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity in Hilton Head Island, S.C. would like to offer a not-quite-

virtual version of the memorial service we would have hosted for you at 7 p.m. on Aug. 8.

It's our sincere hope that at that time, you will pause in prayer for the repose of these beautiful souls — and for comfort and peace for those they left behind.

We remember the following Franciscans from our Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Regional Fraternity who left us between Aug. 2019 and July 2020, with deepest condolences for their fraternity sisters and brothers who sorrow for them.

Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, N.C.

Marian McKelvey, OFS, Dec. 7, 2019

Immaculate Conception Fraternity, Jonesboro, Ga.

Rose Campbell, OFS, June 26, 2020

Our Lady of Good Counsel Fraternity, Greenville, S.C.

Mary Pat Morris, OFS, September 23, 2019

Padre Pio Fraternity, Raleigh, N.C.

Louis Coker, OFS, July 13, 2020

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Augusta, Ga.

Martha ("Marty") Baumann, OFS, September 26, 2019

Laura Haukaas, OFS, December 29, 2019

St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity, Hendersonville, N.C.

Esther Dutt, OFS, September 25, 2019

Father John Salvas, OFM Cap. (former Spiritual Assistant), April 21, 2020

St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity, Bessemer, Ala.

Ernestine Poellnitz, OFS, August 19, 2019

Boyd Mackey, OFS, January 13, 2020

St. Michael the Archangel Fraternity, Spartanburg, S.C.

Jane Rioux, OFS, August 13, 2019

Eileen Martin, OFS, November 30, 2019

St. Thomas More Fraternity, Wilmington, N.C.

Frank S. Bindewald, OFS, September 15, 2019

Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary Fraternity, Franklin, Tenn.

Jean Mezera, OFS, March 1, 2020

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name: you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
through rivers, you shall not be swept away.
When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned,
nor will flames consume you.
For I, the LORD, am your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your savior. ...
You are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you, ...
Fear not, for I am with you;
from the east I will bring back your offspring,
from the west I will gather you.
I will say to the north: Give them up!
and to the south: Do not hold them!
Bring back my sons from afar,
and my daughters from the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 43:1b-3a, 4a, 5-6

Reflection

Years ago, one morning just minutes away from my office in Clifton, N.J., I stopped short at a quick red light. Ahead, I could see that the traffic crossing the intersection was blocked by a sedan stopped in front of the green light, with other drivers honking impatiently and pulling around the stopped car. I could see an elderly man in the driver's seat and thought he was slumped over.

When my light changed, I drove through the intersection and pulled over. I ran to the stopped car and tried to open it, but the doors were locked; the man inside was asleep or unconscious. Another driver had already called 911, and an ambulance was there within minutes.

An elderly woman came to my side, near tears. "Is he all right?" she asked. "He's my best friend. I was following him to Mass, because he just got out of the hospital."

Unfortunately, her friend had died — peacefully, really — at the wheel. I did what little I could to comfort her before I went on to work, but I've often thought of that sweet woman and the shock she must have had on her way to morning Mass.

There is no easy time to lose a beloved friend, and certainly the events of 2020 have made these losses even more difficult. In other years, you might have visited your ailing brother or sister at home or in a medical facility, bringing them comfort and peace; you might have prayed with them, a rosary or the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

But the coronavirus pandemic has robbed us of many opportunities we take for granted. There has been no visiting at hospitals or nursing homes (not even for spouses, children, or siblings), and even a few minutes at a dear friend's bedside at home is discouraged, whether or not they were infected with the virus. All you can do is rely on the information a spouse or family member has been given, and even that information may be second hand.

If you are unable to accompany your dear one to the threshold of Sister Death, we share your

deep regret. If you were deprived even of the chance to see them off with a lovely funeral, we shoulder that sorrow with you as well, in our prayers.

But your mourning continues. If you've lost your spouse or your longtime roommate, you still find yourself listening for their voice or their footsteps, or feel tearful when you open a closet door and find their



fragrance lingering there. You may reach for the phone to ask them for a recipe or to talk over "Final Jeopardy." Or to offer to pick them up for Mass.

Maybe you're waiting for the consolation of a peaceful, reassuring dream about your beloved sister or brother. May our loving God grant you such a vision — like the guard in the reading from Habakkuk that will be proclaimed on Saturday morning, Aug. 8. This is what the guard finally hears the Lord say:

"Write down the vision
Clearly upon the tablets,
so that one can read it readily.
For the vision still has its time,
presses on to fulfillment, and will not disappoint.
If it delays, wait for it,
it will surely come, it will not be late" (Hb 2:2–3).

Continue to pray, listen and pray. Console yourself with the words of Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones." More precious than that dear brother or sister was to you, they rest now in the arms of the Lord. They watch over you together with more love than you can imagine.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt 5:4).

As one Secular Franciscan sister from our region wrote in a message shortly after our last ARG, "May we all pray for a happy and peaceful death for ourselves when we come to the end of our life on Earth. May we welcome Sister Death with joy and not fear." And may the gift of happy memories soften the losses we've had this year.

Christine Lukesh, OFS, is formation director of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head Island, S.C., and a Brothers and Sister of St. Francis Region Area 2 councilor.

Illustrations:

Row of lighted candles artistic, Linnaea Mallette, Public DomainPictures.net

Hands and Heart, @marisa05,

(<https://www.twenty20.com/photos/7f47979b-a139-4935-bf46-25cf8916d15d>)

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR
SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS (V) AND ELECTIONS (E)
September 2020 through January 2021**

* confirmed	V+ follow-up visit	(observers in parentheses)
Date	Fraternity/Group & Location	V Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors E Presider/Ecclesial Witness
Sept. 11–12	Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg, Blairsville, GA	V Carmen Madero/Dcn. Tom Shaver
Sept. 12	Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, (Cancelled: To be rescheduled) Burlington, NC	E Ellen Ferrone/Pat Wilkerson
Sept. 12	St. Clare of Assisi, Aiken, SC	E DorothyAnn Rowland/Ken Wessling
Oct. 12–13	Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, NC (To be rescheduled)	V Martha Roman/Dcn. Tom Shaver
Nov. 10–12	St. Anthony of Padua, Fayetteville, NC	V Martha Roman/Dcn. Tom Shaver
Nov. 15	St. Thomas More, Wilmington, NC	E Martha Roman/Pat Wilkerson
Dec. 10*	Five Georgia Martyrs, St. Simons Island, GA	E Christine Lukesh/? (DorothyAnnRowland)
2021		
Jan. 9	St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Augusta, GA	E Christine Lukesh/Dcn. Tom Shaver
Jan. 10	Stigmata of St. Francis, Johns Creek, GA	E
Jan. 24	Padre Pio, Raleigh, NC	E

Directions for Zoom Room

Zoom is a cloud video conferencing tool where participants can see and hear each other in real time. It can be used on Windows, Mac, iOS, and Android. You can access it on a desktop, laptop, smartphone, or tablet.

There's no special software to download, and it is very user friendly. Whatever device you have, you will need a web camera and audio. On most devices, these built in. If you do not have access to a "smart" device, you can also call in and hear and talk but cannot be seen by or see the other participants. Optimum usage is by having the audio and video access.

If on **PC** or **Mac**, log in to <https://zoom.us> and click on Sign Up For Free. Enter the email you want to use. Then click on Sign Up. You will receive a confirmation email. Click on the link to activate your account. Enter your name and password. Remember to keep your password

**Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis
Regional Executive Council Roster**

Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS

Vice Minister: Carmen Madero, OFS

Secretary: Nora Wessling, OFS

Treasurer: Ken Brooke, OFS

Formation Director: Dianne Ambrose, OFS

Spiritual Assistant:

Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS

Area Councilors

Area 1

David Cruz-Urbe, OFS; Sharon Loiselle, OFS

AL: Bessemer;

GA: Athens, Blairsville, Conyers, Duluth, Jonesboro;

TN: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

Area 2

Betti Pettinati-Longinotti, OFS; Christine Lukesh, OFS

GA: Augusta, St. Simons Island;

NC: Asheville, Charlotte, Hendersonville, Newton;

SC: Aiken, Charleston, Columbia, Greenville,
Hilton Head Island, Spartanburg

Area 3

Ellen Ferrone, OFS; Martha Roman, OFS

NC: Burlington, Elizabeth City, Fayetteville, Greensboro,
Morehead City, Raleigh, Wilmington, Winston Salem;

SC: Garden City

Archivist: Sara Nell Boggs, OFS

Communio Editor

Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS

Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Animator

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

Multicultural Commission Chair

Position Vacant

Youth/Young Adult Fraternal Animator

Joe Vodenichar, OFS

Prayer Ministry (online prayer requests)

Area 1: John Martin, OFS

Area 2: Dorothy Huebner, OFS

Area 3: Bob Sabisch, OFS

Fraternity prayer coordinators submit prayer requests.

handy so you have it to sign in for meetings. Click Activate to activate your Zoom account.

If on a **tablet** or **smartphone**, go to your APP store on IOS, visit the Apple Store and, search Zoom, and click to download.

For **Android** visit your Google Play and search Zoom, Click Install. You will sign up for an account the same way as above.

The account and usage are free.

If you do not have access to any of these devices and only have a phone landline or cell, you can call in to the meeting.

A week before each meeting you will receive an invite from me. It will have a link for you to click onto that will take you to the room or further down in the message will be the phone number. You will then receive a reminder invite the day before our meeting.

We have a permanent room. Our meeting room id # is 6421174193. If you access by phone to call in, dial 1-614-558-8656 and use the meeting ID 642 -117-4193.

Further Questions: Contact Dianne Ambrose, OFS, BSSF regional formation director, at Ambrosedianne6@gmail.com or at 706-338-2402.

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