

OFS News

Mother Cabrini Regional Fraternity of the
Secular Franciscan Order

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Minister's Message

by Vickie Klick, OFS

Dear sisters and brothers,

As we go into the time of preparation that the Church calls Advent, what I think of is not so much preparation (though we have plenty of that to do!) but waiting. The waiting the Church calls us to may be something like the waiting that Mary experienced during those final weeks before the birth of her son. I've heard it said that the last trimester is designed to make a woman look forward to labor(!). In Mary's case, she had nine months to reflect on the words of Gabriel and the prophetic words of Elizabeth (and the wordless response of John the Baptist in Elizabeth's womb). I think Mary was wondering what this child would be, knowing that He had already changed HER life. There was nothing she could do but wait...

How often we are in situations where there is nothing we can do but wait! I don't know about you, but that is one of my least favorite situations to be in. I associate "nothing to do but wait" with minor things like traffic jams, but more urgently with situations where the tests have been done and we're waiting for the results, or hospice has come in and it's only a matter of time. In all cases, though, "nothing to do but wait" challenges my need to do SOMETHING – anything at all. At least in a traffic jam, it's often possible to escape to another street...and that's doing something, whether it takes longer overall or not.

Thinking about waiting brings to mind one of the (many) virtues I seriously lack: patience. I've learned (the hard way) to recognize at least some of the times when I am helpless in the face of a situation, and do my best to leave it in God's hands. Is that patience, or resignation? Does it matter?

I found an article on the Knights of Columbus website on the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to St. Thomas Aquinas. One paragraph struck me:

So often in life we fret and get frustrated about our lack of patience. Saint Thomas

points out that patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit's Gift of Fortitude. Thus the true remedy for our impatience does not within ourselves, but with God. That power, given in Fortitude, makes it possible for us to endure and persevere through all difficulties, great and small, through the guidance and confidence communicated to us by the Spirit. www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis360.pdf

As I investigated further, it became clearer to me that there are two types of patience. One is the kind I understand here, when we are patiently enduring because there's nothing else we can do. The other kind is more difficult: it's the everyday kind where someone does something annoying, and we can either put up with it (patiently) or complain.

To return to my original theme, it seems clear that Mary, conceived without sin and full of grace, would have had both kinds of patience. In those last days before the birth of Jesus, she probably needed to exercise both of them in full. (Can you imagine her finding out they had to travel all the way to Bethlehem when she was nine months pregnant?) We can all turn to Mary for help when we too must wait, whether we're in line to renew a driver's license or sitting in the waiting room outside the ICU.

In this joyful time of waiting, may you be blessed by the Incarnate Word with every grace you need to prepare for His coming. May you bear the inevitable trials of traffic, crowds, and competing demands on your time with God-given patience. When Christmas comes, may you welcome Him again with an open and peaceful heart.

Blessings at Christmas and always,
Vickie 

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The *SFO News* is the official publication of the Mother Cabrini Regional Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Submission deadline is the
20th of each month.

CALENDAR

Unless otherwise indicated, all events are at Mayslake Village (Oak Brook).

- **Election & Visitation dates subject to change. (E=Election/V=Visitation)**

January

- 14: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
- 15: St. Francis, Crystal Lake Fraternity (V)
- 22: St. Anthony, Oak Lawn Fraternity (E)

February

- 18: Apostolates Workshop
- 26: St. Anthony, Rockford Fraternity (V)

March

- 01: Fair Share, Census, and Annual Reports due
- 10: St. Anthony, Joliet Fraternity (V)
- 17: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
- 25: St. Francis, Steger Fraternity (V)
- 28: San Damiano Fraternity (V)
- 31: Candidates' Retreat, Day 1

April

- 1: Living Waters Fraternity (V)
- 17: Brother Jacoba Community (V)

May

- 05: Candidates' Retreat, Day 2
- 19: Chapter of Ministers

June

July

- 3-8: Quinquennial Congress, Chicago, IL
- 14: Council Meeting 9:30 a.m.

August

- 04: Regional Gathering, Feast of the Portiuncula
- 23: San Jose Fraternity (V)

September

- 08: Junipero Serra Fraternity (E)
- 08: Wellspring Community (E)
- 10: NW Franciscan Community (E)
- 29: Leadership Workshop

October

- 06: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
- 16-21: NAFRA Meeting – Denver, CO
- 28: St. Thomas More Fraternity (V)

November

- 04: St. Elizabeth Hungary Fraternity (E)
- 11: Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration
- 17: St. Francis, Fox Valley Fraternity (E)
- 18: St. Juliana Fraternity (E)

December

- 08: Regional Chapter of Elections

Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Br. Joe Middleton, OFM

As a man of prayer, longing for righteous understanding and the beautiful way of developed contemplative space, I have often thought of Francis's evolution. For example, why did he have so much trouble with the friars who kept pestering him to allow them to have breviaries or other books for theological or spiritual studies?

I remember that in the time of Francis the models for religious communities were positively set by monastic standards established in ancient times (even in his time) by communities of monks and nuns. And they had honed and polished the monastic process of prayer to a perfectly beautiful state that worked well for them and shone the light of the church across the Christian world and rose and lifted up to heaven honor and praise lovingly presented to God. In my mind I'm sure that Francis loved and learned much of his spirituality from the monks but it seems to me that their lives and their well-developed ways of prayer were not a perfect fit for him. For the monks and nuns there was a particular place and lots of prescribed times to pray but for Francis that place was everywhere and the proper time was always, without ceasing.

As Francis matured in his understanding of just what God was calling him to do, he was more inclined to take off with Leo on a journey to a place apart from the business of the Middle Ages and the Church magnificent. Prayer and his need for solitude eventually won his heart and soul to the extent that he relinquished the leadership of the young order of penitents to others. For he was bound to be true to what God was calling him to do, and recognized the need for his brothers who made their needs known that they for the love of God needed breviaries and books. And when the

great orator theologian St. Anthony was commissioned to teach the brothers, he first sought the approval of the founder of the dream, Francis. And his response was to give Anthony his blessing and approval while at the same time encouraging him to be careful not to extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion. In consideration of this tender admonition I would like to lovingly say as I often do, we Franciscans, we people of prayer, we can do more and we can do better.

Having said all this, I want to clearly state that I am in no way suggesting that we should not pray with the deep and wonderful breviary designed by the monks or other tried and true mechanical formulas we have more or less always used, but we would do well to apply a generous amount of Francis's spirituality and example. Take extra time with these prayers. Clear your mind and spirit so as to be receptive to what you hear and see. As in liturgy of the hours we generally pray in choir; sometimes we speak the words of a psalm and sometime we listen to the voice of another proclaim those carefully gathered words. Remember, this structure was designed to be sung; it is not ideally suited to be read as a narrative. It is poetry, historic preservation of human experience, and ultimately our spiritual foundation to be built upon and rebuilt again. So when we join together to pray these beautiful words let us say them with a slow and lyrical pace. Our voices directed to our hearts rather than to the grand assembly; our ears open not just to each other but to be receptive to the sweet spirit of the ever-present God in our midst. Let us pray, making a gracious investment of our time and our very selves.

Your Brother Joe M, ofm 

In-Formation

By Nick Noe, OFS
Regional Formation Commission

The Gift of Christmas

Three weeks ago, I decided it was time to reorganize my files, including my Franciscan files. As I was filing papers I found a single page document titled “Franciscan Spirituality in Seven Steps.” It was written in 2002 by Fr. Joseph Schwab OFM, Director of the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona. As I read down the page, I stopped at the third step, which read as follows:

Christmas is more important than Easter.
The resurrection depended on the Incarnation, not the other way around. The Incarnation is the greatest thing God could do in terms of creation. God incarnated in order to affirm that we are called to be co-lovers with the Holy Trinity.

Given that Christmas was less than two months away, I decided to stop reading and think for a while about the Franciscan view of the Incarnation and its importance in my own life.

The basic tenet of Christianity is that God became human in the person of Jesus. Just the thought of God becoming human is in itself enough to shatter all your neurons and blow your socks off. The reason it doesn't is because of our human limitations. We can deepen our relationship with God, but no matter how deep we go, God will remain mystery to us. And no matter how much interior work we do, we remain mystery to ourselves. Mystery is the reason Francis kept asking the questions, “God, Who are You?” and “Who am I?” And it is this reason T.S. Eliot wrote the following in his *Four Quartets*: “The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.”

Why did God become human in the person of Jesus Christ? Although mystery must be part of any answer, as humans we must still try to answer the question. If you were to ask most Christians in the western world, the response would be along the lines of “to atone for the original sin of Adam and Eve and for all sin.” The atonement view has dominated western Christian thought from early Christianity up to the present time. And noted

theologians such as St. Anselm and St. Thomas Aquinas have argued the Incarnation was a ransom for sin. But if so, then the ironic conclusion is that sin was necessary for Jesus to come. The idea of sin being necessary is clearly stated in the Exultet sung at the Easter Vigil: “O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam.”

The atonement view of the Incarnation never made much sense to me, but the Franciscan view makes a great deal sense. One could say the difference between the atonement and Franciscan views of the Incarnation is the difference between “O happy sin” and “O happy Love.”

Duns Scotus argued that to say sin caused the Incarnation is to say that evil caused good, which is illogical. But more importantly, from Francis through Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and others, the Franciscan view of God has always been the “All Good,” and what pours forth from that self-diffusing goodness is “Love.” The Franciscan view of God is Trinitarian, a Trinity that can be thought of as a circle of Love, where Love flows out through the Son, the Incarnate Word, forming creation and the world as we know it. Based on scripture and early theological thinking, Duns Scotus asserted that the primary purpose of creation is for the Incarnation, and therefore the Incarnation cannot be an afterthought or Plan B due to sin. The Incarnation was Plan A in that God always wanted to share his divine love with others through his Incarnate Word.

We often think of St. Nicholas as the model for giving gifts at Christmas. But God's self-gift through the Incarnation should be our model, and it should be celebrated with praise, joy and thanksgiving during the Christmas season. Yes, the Christmas season can be too busy and hectic, and that we should change. But we do gather together with family and friends to exchange gifts, share with one another around the dinner table, and celebrate Christmas Mass. We also remember those who are no longer with us in body, but are present in spirit in “the close and holy darkness.” Love is present at these times and as St. John has told us, “where there is love, there is God.” May you and your family, including your Franciscan family, *Have a Blessed Christmas!*

Nick Noe 

JPIC NEWS—FAN Advent Reflection Awaiting a Prince of Peace

For the First Sunday of Advent, FAN features excerpts from a reflection by Fr. Jacek Orzechowski, OFM (Holy Name Province), a new member of FAN's Board of Directors. The Advent reflection is a resource from Holy Name Province's JPIC Directorate.

In the first reading (for the *First Sunday of Advent*), God speaks to the people of Israel at a time of great crisis. The Israelites are beaten and taken into captivity in Babylon, where they face death as a people. Their temple lies in ruin and with it, their hopes for a better future. And yet, it is precisely in this time of greatest need and desperation that Yahweh promises to "raise up for them a new leader, a prince of peace who will do what is right and just in the land." Then, "Judah shall be safe and Jerusalem shall dwell secure." This passage is a bold affirmation of faith in the Creator God who hears and responds to the cry of the poor and their yearning for freedom. The people of Israel will be able to find a true freedom and security -- not in a military power and political alliances -- but in their faithfulness to God, the only source of a true and lasting peace....

For nearly 2,000 years, Christians in the Holy Land have lived out the Gospel. It is from them that our ancestors received the faith that we now profess. Now, however, the Christian Palestinian population, especially in the West Bank areas such as Bethlehem is rapidly diminishing. It is feared that the Christian holy sites will become museums as Palestinian Christians emigrate. The indigenous Christian Arab population yearns to dwell in peace and security, but the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict makes their hope for a normal life and a better future exceedingly difficult.

While we wait for God's promise to be completed, we too are called to stay vigilant and look for signs of God's redeeming action in our world today. When we open our eyes to see what is happening now in Palestine and Israel, we are able to see many signs of hope in which God's dream of justice and peace is taking root in the land of Jesus.

Read one such story and more of the reflection [here](#).

Churches Speak for Peace in the Middle East

In addition to Fr. Jacek's reflection, Holy Name Province recommends a simple *statement* from Churches for Middle East Peace (*CMEP*) on the violence in Gaza. HNP JPIC staff member Russ Testa participated in a CMEP meeting with leaders from the Department of State on Nov. 20. The group pressed the case for visible U.S. leadership to achieve an immediate cease fire in Gaza, and a process to move towards a more stable resolution. If the current violence cannot be ended and a process forward cannot be realized soon, there is fear that the violence will spread to other nations in the region. Our prayers, and our voices joined with others for peace, are clearly needed.

You are also invited to join "A Christmas Simulcast: Message of Peace from Washington DC & Bethlehem to the world" on Saturday, Dec. 8 from 10-11:30. Watch live at www.hcef.org or join a DC gathering. Listen to traditional Christmas carols sung in Arabic and English and exchange of our Messages of Peace. Visit the [HCEF website](#) to learn more. (Consult FAN website for further details)

*O Come though Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thy Advent here.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel. 📖*

New Councilor for Communications Needed

Gloria Huerta, OFS

If you are presently a newsletter editor and want to make a meaningful contribution to the Mother Cabrini Region, I sincerely encourage you to step up to the role of Councilor for Communications. I am presently looking for a replacement as I am no longer able to fulfill the role on a long-term basis. It is a very fulfilling role and you won't regret saying "yes".

If you are interested, please contact either me (pr@ilsfo.org) or Vickie Klick at (minister@ilsfo.org). Thank you. 📖

On behalf of all of the outgoing Mother Cabrini Regional Council we want to thank you for your support these past three years. Pray for guidance during our election on December 8th.

We wish all our brothers and sisters and those they hold dear a blessed Christmas and New Year. 📖