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and may or may not reflect the collective view of the Region.

Minister's Message for January 2018

By Lorna Miressi, OFS

A Blessed New Year to All!

Many of you will not be receiving this message until the New Year. Some will see it before 2018. Either way, it is my sincere prayer for all of you that your Christmas was joyful, and your New Year will be the same.

I am going to "cheat" this month and give you a message which I read from *The Word Among Us*, one of my favorite daily reflection meditation guides. Each day I read the readings of the day and a beautiful one-page reflection. The guide is published by Joseph Difato, PhD, along with several authors who contribute each day of the year.

The reflection is from Wednesday December 20th. The Gospel is the story of the Annunciation. I am leaving a couple parts out due to space limitation, however it will not affect the meaning.

"Nothing will be impossible for God (Luke 1:37)

"As we ponder the story of the Annunciation today, let's turn to our heavenly Father, who delights in accomplishing the impossible:

'Father, nothing is impossible for you. You spoke a word, and everything came to be. Out of the chaos of nothingness, you brought forth life and light. You promised the barren Abraham numerous descendants, and your word was fulfilled. Time and time again you pour out your life where there seems to be only death.

No obstacle is too great for you.

[see page 40 of *The Word Among Us*, December 2017]

'I think (too,) about the Virgin Mary. She had her whole life ahead of her, with so many possibilities. I can see unexplored possibilities in my life too. I have hopes and dreams that I cherish, even if I don't know how to see them through. You brought life to Mary in an unexpected way. Her inexperience was not an obstacle to you, and neither was Joseph's hesitancy. So I trust you to help me bear fruit in the way that you desire it. I will try to say yes to you today, and wait expectantly to see how this will come to be.'

'Lord, nothing is impossible with you! I choose to believe that truth more than the impossibilities in my life. Like Mary, I will believe even when I can't see how you will make me fruitful. []. Thank you for all the ways you have already brought your life to me. I look with joyful anticipation to see how you will continue!'

"Heavenly Father, you have made everything out of nothing. I praise you because you can do all things."

God's Peace to all!

Lorna ☩

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REGIONAL CALENDAR 2018

All events are at Mayslake Village unless otherwise noted

Saturday, January 20th Regional Executive Council Meeting ?*Per Capita/Census/Fraternity reports due*

Saturday March 10th Regional Executive Council Meeting

Sat./Sun. March 17th/18th Candidates' Retreat

Saturday May 19th Chapter of Ministers/ Election of New REC

Summer Seminar, Loretto PA (Date TBA)

Saturday July 14th Regional Executive Council Meeting

Saturday August 4th Regional Gathering - Feast of the Portiuncula

Saturday September 15 Formation Leadership Workshop

NAFRA Chapter - Date and Location TBA

Saturday October 6th Regional Executive Council Meeting

Sunday November 11th Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration - Location TBA

Saturday December Chapter of Elections (*Date TBA*)

Spiritual Assistant Message

Brother Marc S. is on vacation and will not be writing a column this month. We wish him a blessed Christmas, and remind him to watch the eggnog consumption. 📺

“Let us free Christmas from the worldliness that has taken it hostage!” the pope said in a tweet Friday. “The true spirit of Christmas is the beauty of being loved by God” This is not the pope’s first swipe at the over-commercialization of the Christmas celebrations.

This week, Francis told a group of schoolchildren that if Jesus Christ is removed from the holidays, Christmas is emptied of all significance. Addressing a group of youngsters who came to the Vatican for the blessing of the figures of Jesus for their Nativity scenes, the pope told them that only a Christ-centered celebration is the “real Christmas.”

The pope thanked the children for their “joyful presence” in Saint Peter’s Square, then invited them to pray at home in front of the manger scene with their families, allowing themselves to be attracted “by the tenderness of Jesus child, born poor and fragile among us, to give us his love”.

“This is the real Christmas,” Francis said. “If we take away Jesus, what is left of Christmas? An empty feast.”

The pope is not alone in thinking that Christmas has become too commercialized.

Although he proposed no alternative, Father Desmond O’Donnell said that Christians should replace the word “Christmas” with something more meaningful, saying that Christmas has been hijacked by “Santa and reindeer.”

“We’ve lost Christmas, just like we lost Easter, and should abandon the word completely,” Father O’Donnell said. “We need to let it go; it’s already been hijacked and we just need to recognise and accept that.”

A recent study by the Pew Research Center revealed that about 55 percent of U.S. adults say they celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, with 56 percent believing the religious dimension of Christmas is less emphasized now than it was in the past.

While nine-in-ten Americans intend to celebrate the holiday, about half say they plan to attend church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Nonetheless, Americans’ belief in even the miraculous events surrounding Christmas remains significant. Pew found that more than half of Americans still believe in the essential elements of the Nativity story surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, with a full 66 percent of U.S. adults affirming that Jesus was miraculously born of a virgin. 📺

by [THOMAS D. WILLIAMS, PH.D.](#) 23 Dec 2017
Brietbart.com

IN-FORMATION

By Nicholas Noe OFS

Christmas, All Year Long

"(Our Lady) was consenting not only to bear her own child, Christ, but to bear Christ into the world in all men, in all lives, in all times, not only in secluded lives, protected lives, the lives of holy people, but into the lives of those haunt-ed by worry, by poverty, by debts, by fears and temptations, subject to chance, to accident, to persecution, and to the fortunes of war." (Carlyle Houselander (1901-1954), *The Reed of God*; cited in *This Day on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception*)

In order to meet the deadline for this January issue of *OFS News*, I am writing this article a week before the great Feast of Christmas. And I can honestly say that this year I feel the Spirit of Christmas at a much deeper level than in some previous Christmas Seasons. Yes, I still have cards to write and a few more gifts to buy, but the busyness that seems to accompany the Season doesn't seem to matter this year. So I feel I must write about Christmas, although the article will be read (if read at all) by most of you after December 25 and more likely early in the New Year.

The Christmas Season doesn't end on the 25th of December, of course. The twelve days of Christmas continue through January 5. And the traditional date for the Epiphany is January 6, although it is celebrated by the Church on January 7 this Christmas Season. The Feast of the Epiphany tells the story of the Magi bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child born in Bethlehem. However, the modest gifts of the Magi in no way compare to the great gift given to us two thousand years ago. When God became human in the person of Christ Jesus, divinity and humanity were united in a loving embrace, just as the material and spiritual were united at the point of creation 13.8 billion years ago. But Jesus, and his way of life as described in the gospels, gives us a visible image of an ineffable and invisible God, shows us the way to salvation, and tells us God is a loving

"Abba".

The Incarnation is a mind-blowing, earth-shaking and mysterious gift. It's mysterious because God is mystery and we ourselves are mystery. St. Francis recognizes and accepts this mystery when praying, "Who are you God, and who am I?" And perhaps T. S. Eliot best described our understanding of this great gift when he wrote in *The Four Quartets* that the Incarnation is a gift we only half understand.

The true Spirit of the Christmas Season may seem to be fading given the frenzied shopping, the cries to "put Jesus back into Christmas," the numerous discarded Christmas trees on December 26, and a gradual disbelief in the whole Nativity story. Yet it seems an underlying Christmas Spirit continues to exist and even thrive. Nativity crèches may not be in public places, and many people may say "Happy Holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas, and yet people seem to be more joyful, outgoing, generous, compassionate, and even a little more hopeful and peaceful during the Christmas Season.

Certainly the Christmas symbols of brilliant lights, decorated pine trees, carols and hymns, and crèches in churches all contribute to the Season. However, celebrating Christmas brings people together in a variety of ways and this tends to tap into the deep realization we all know to be true; we are more than individuals. We are somehow all connected, even beyond our immediate families. We are brothers and sisters to each other, and we realize we share "life" together. So we are more open and joyful during the Christmas Season, and we cheerfully talk to strangers, help the poor and vulnerable, smile a lot, and are even more hopeful that "all matters of things will be well."

For Franciscans, Christmas doesn't end on the 26th of December or January 6. We celebrate the Incarnation all year long and follow in the footsteps of Jesus in the manner of St. Francis. We are messengers of perfect joy and bearers of peace, a joy and peace that comes from living the gospel life. 📖

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

By Luana Lienhart, OFS

Grace and peace to you, sisters and brothers! After the pushing, pulling, and lifting Sister Marylin mentioned in her last column, Advent has made me think a lot about listening. We've watched and waited for the Lord, so the next logical step is to listen to Him, right? I've tried researching how many times the command to listen, hear, or heed comes up in Scripture, and lost count.

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone!" Deut 6:4

"Only *listen* to me, and you shall eat well; you shall delight in rich fare." Isa 55:2

"Hear, Israel, the commandments of life. *Listen* and know prudence!" Baruch 3:9

Since this occurs so much in Scripture, I assume God knows this is a massive stumbling block for us. In conversations with others or in prayer, do we really listen? Do we just wait to talk? Do we take time to really hear each other out, or do we make assumptions based on our own experiences and biases? One reason our political climate is so toxic, I think, is because we have a lack of charity and willingness to really listen to those with whom we disagree.

I've personally had experiences of racism and sexual abuse and harassment where I wasn't believed. If you've ever wondered why accusers wait so long to report, it's because we are often not heard nor believed. Or our experiences are minimized. Of course due process is important, and I'm not saying everyone is racist; I'm just saying we can and must do a better job of listening to each other.

Listening isn't the same as agreeing, condoning, or making a judgment. It's being attentive, without commenting, interrupting, or waiting to talk. It's also considering that one's own biases may be incorrect. It's attending to someone while they bear their soul. When people trust us with their stories, let's truly listen to them.

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Please also consider that women know what sexual harassment is; we know what it is to be sexual objects in ways men never experience. Women can and do sexually victimize men, but it's not reinforced by literally every aspect of our society. The same goes for racism. That you may not see it personally or have that same experience doesn't mean it's not real.

Hearing these stories can be uncomfortable, but it's even more uncomfortable for someone to say your struggle isn't real. Let's listen to the police officer who works hard to keep us all safe. Let's also listen to the unarmed black man who was racially profiled by police. We can do both; we don't have to choose.

We recently celebrated the Jubilee Year of Mercy; the natural next step is to make 2018 the Year of Active, Charitable, Listening. 

