

## Minister's Message: Incarnation!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us ..." (Jn 1:14) I feel especially at this time of year how very blessed we are to be Franciscans! Even though Christians are known as Resurrection people and the Easter Triduum are our high holy days, Francis had such an appreciation of the Incarnation and what it meant. He fully recognized the almost inconceivable act of love of our God for us, in emptying himself and becoming one of us – and not as a king or a warrior, but as a vulnerable, tiny baby! That was the point of that first celebration in Greccio. When Francis said, "For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he

lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed," it was not to make the people feel guilty because Jesus was born in poor surroundings. Rather, he hoped to help all to realize the extent of God's love for us, that He would *choose* to be born simply and humbly. Francis' response to God's love through Jesus was in kind – overwhelming love for God and Jesus, and this is why Christmas was so special for Francis – and for us!

I invite you, individually or, even better, in fraternity, to read the Greccio story in First Celano, Chapter XXX, paragraphs 84-87. It will enrich these holy days we share together.

■ **Mother Cabrini Celebration.** I think all who attended (and I'm guessing we had

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## Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

"I want ..." "What I really want is ..." "D'you know what I really want?"

With Christmas approaching, these words will be on the lips of thousands of children, and even some of us "older kids". Indeed, don't we all want something? In fact, many things. Sometimes our wants are very self-serving. But it must be said that wanting is not always bad. Many of the wants we voice may be for the good of others.

We can also draw a line, faint as it may be, between wants and needs. Just recently, someone was telling me about her daughter buying something expensive for her which she neither needed nor even wanted. So, whose need is being met in such an instance? If we want so desperately for another to have something, whether

material or immaterial, are we conscious of whether indeed that person is of the same persuasion? No matter how good such a "thing" might be for the other person, we need to respect the fact that she or he may have no desire or need for it.

As I say this I'm aware of the times I've badgered others who smoke about the value of quitting. It would be so good for them! I know – I was there. I also believe I'm saying this because I care about them – I'm saying it for *their good!* But more honestly, I'm also being controlling. I want to *change* the other person. And then *I* will feel good! So, a lot of this has to do with *me* feeling good about myself.

With Advent upon us and perhaps the beginning of making out some kind of wish-

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To be appointed

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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 20<sup>th</sup> of each month.**

**Professions**

- **Charles Behrens**, SFO and
- **Frank Lopez**, SFO of St. Juliana Fraternity (Chicago) made their Professions on October 19.

**Rest in Peace**

- **Peter Higgins**, SFO of St. Pascal Satellite Fraternity (Chicago) has died; date unknown.

**In the News**

Along with his wife, Sheila, **Dcn. John Farrell**, SFO of St. **Juliana Fraternity (Chicago)**, was one of four recipients of the St. James Award, presented by the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle at its annual Chicago Jubilee Banquet on September 15. Formed by Richard Cardinal Cushing in 1958, the Society is an international organization of diocesan missionary priests who volunteer for a minimum of five years of their priestly lives to service in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

**Interested in an SFO Pilgrimage to the Holy Land?**

Fr. Chuck Faso, OFM has led over 20 pilgrimages to the Holy Land and is considering arranging a special pilgrimage for Secular Franciscans. If enough people are interested, he will organize one. For more information, or if you would like to participate, please call Fr. Faso at 773.276.3386.

**Events of Interest**

**December 12:** Fr. Dudley Day, OSA will speak on "Teaching the Faith in the Modern World" from 11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at the Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson, Chicago. The former executive director of the Institute on Religious Life, Fr. Day is the associate pastor at St. John Cantius Parish (Chicago). Cost is \$30 and includes a full-course meal. Reservations are due by **Dec. 9**; call Maureen at 708.352.5834.

**Mother Cabrini Celebration: Thank You!**

by Gail Vannetter, SFO; Minister, St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Rockford)

I would like to say thank you to all the fraternities that participated in the Mother Cabrini Celebration on November 16. I know it was an extremely long drive for the majority of attendees.

The celebration was beautiful; Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM is an extremely beautiful person. When I looked into the crowd and saw the faces of my fellow brothers and sisters, I was so overwhelmed with emotions.

I want to personally thank Chris Bruhnke, SFO and Stephanie Sormane, SFO for all their help and support; if it was not for them I do not think I could have made it through this wonderful experience.

Becoming a Franciscan was a great day in my life but I must say one of the greatest days in my life was the day I attended our Regional Gathering in August. There were times when I felt my fraternity was on an island completely by itself, but after attending the beautiful event in August, boy was I ever wrong. I only needed to look beyond the hills and turns, because there you all were. To know I have the support from other brothers and sisters, I now know that nothing is impossible.

Once again, you will never know how important you all are to me. Thank you again, and may God bless all of you. ☩

**"Francis, Build Up My Church ..."**

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

Wow! What a wonderful time of year; time flies by so quickly doesn't it? I've been savoring the beautiful colors of autumn and now the snow has begun flying. During Thanksgiving, we all were feasting, thanking God for all He has bestowed on us during this past year. The good times and not-so-pleasant times, the times when God drew us so closely to His Heart. We thanked Him for the close relationships we've received as gift, and know that as I say thank you for all this and so much more, I remembered all of you, my brothers and sisters, my very special family.

■ **Korean Fraternities.** On November 9, the Living Water (Chicago) and St. Thomas More (Des Plaines) fraternities celebrated the Rite of Admission for Fabiana Han, Julia Joo, Agnes Kim, Serena Kim, Isabella Lee, Angela Park, and Christina So. Each of the newly-admitted looked like beautiful angels in their Korean costumes! God bless you in your quest for God with St. Francis!

■ **Mother Cabrini Celebration.** So many of you traveled great distances to celebrate Mother Cabrini's feast day! As always, it was a true experience of fraternal love. The food was great, hugs were in abundance, and again I rejoice in seeing so many of our spiritual assistants. Thanks for all you do.

■ **Formation Materials.** By now, all local fraternity ministers and spiritual assistants should have received the formation materials I sent from Fr. Irudaya Sami, OFM CAP., International Spiritual Assistant. As I said in my accompanying letter, "these materials are simply too good not to share!" Our National Formation Team strongly suggests that each fraternity copy and share these materials.

■ **Reflections.** Continuing from previous months, here are more reflections from Fr. Lester Bach, OFM CAP. on love and friendship as covered at our Regional Retreat.

In the fourth conference, "Baptism and Our Franciscan Profession", Fr. Bach said, "The Secular Franciscan Order exists within the Catholic Church." This is important to remember. Francis was always obedient to the Church, the mystical body of Christ. "Baptism has made us members of the People of God, a community of believers". Profession into the SFO is a reconfirmation of our Baptismal promises and entry into this community of believers.

Father pointed out that this entails "listening to and implementing the word of God; contributing to the *building of the Kingdom of God* through living the blueprint

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of the Gospel.” He said,

- “We **will** be a priestly people, united with Christ, and offering ourselves and our activities to God as our spiritual sacrifice.
- “We **will** be a prophetic people, i.e., faithful to the word of God and faithful to living the Gospel. In addition,
- “We **will** live the SFO Rule since the Church offers it to us as our way of following the Gospel. This will be our way of being loyal to the Church and rebuilding it as needed.”

■ **Thoughts on Advent.** By the time this newsletter comes into your hands, the Advent Season will be upon us. I’d just like to leave you with a few words from “The Manger

He Made In Celebration of the Lord’s Birthday” (*Francis of Assisi: “The Saint”, Chapter xxx*):

“His highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention was to pay heed to the holy gospel in all things, to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to retrace His footsteps completely with all vigilance and all zeal, all the desire of his soul and all the fervor of his heart.

“Francis used to recall with regular meditation the words of Christ and recollect His deeds with most attentive perception. Indeed, so thoroughly did the humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion occupy his memory that he scarcely wanted to think of anything else.”

God bless you all with His peace and the wonder of His love! 📖

## St. Francis and the Crèche

Excerpts from “The Manger Scene: A Priestly Meditation/Origen from St. Francis”, by Friar Joseph Mary, FI; [www.airmaria.com](http://www.airmaria.com)

Of all the Christmas decorations we so lovingly place around our homes, the one that is indispensable as it is central to the meaning of Christmas is the Crèche or Nativity Scene.

The Christ Child in the manger and other pictures of the story of Bethlehem have been used in church services from the first centuries. But the crib in its present form and its use outside the church originated with St. Francis of Assisi. Through his famous celebration at Greccio, Italy on Christmas Eve, 1223, with a Bethlehem scene including live animals, he made the crib popular. Since then it has been a familiar sight in Christian homes all over the world.

... For the Saint, Christmas had always been the Feast of Feasts, yet he did not think it had been celebrated as it could have been. The poverty of Christ had become lost in the extravagance of the Christmas festivities. An idea occurred to him and while on a visit to Rome, he received permission from the Pontiff to put his idea to work.

... We give here the account in the very words of Brother Thomas de Celano, who was there when it happened and who wrote it down:

“Blessed Francis called a friend about two weeks before Christmas and said to him: ‘If you desire that we should celebrate this year’s Christmas together at Greccio, go quickly and prepare what I tell you; for I want to enact the memory of the Infant Who was born at Bethlehem, and how He was deprived of all the comforts babies enjoy; how He was bedded in a manger on hay, between an ass and an

ox. For once I want to see all this with my own eyes.’ When the good and faithful man had heard this, he departed quickly and prepared in the above-mentioned place everything that the Saint had told him.

“The joyful day approached. The Franciscans were called from many communities. The men and women of the neighborhood, as best they could, prepared candles and torches to brighten the night. Finally the Saint of God arrived, found everything prepared, saw it and rejoiced. The crib was made ready, hay was brought, the ox and ass were led to the spot and Greccio became a new Bethlehem. The night was radiant with joy. The crowds drew near and rejoiced in the novelty of the celebration. Their voices resounded from the woods, and the rocky cliff echoed the jubilant outburst. As they sang in the praise of God, the whole night rang with exultation. The Saint of God stood before the crib, overcome with devotion and wondrous joy. A solemn Mass was sung at the crib.

“The Saint was dressed in deacon’s vestments, for a deacon he was. He sang the Gospel. Then he preached a delightful sermon to the people who stood around him, speaking about the nativity of the poor King and the humble town of Bethlehem.”

The parishioners and pilgrims who came to Greccio for Midnight Mass and witnessed the Christmas manger scene were much impressed with the simplicity of St. Francis’ crèche and it was from there that the tradition took hold and spread around the Catholic world. 📖

**Calendar**

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

**January**

17: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

**March**

01: Per Capita, Census, and Fraternity Annual Reports due

21: Apostolic Action Workshop

**April**

04: Candidates' Retreat, Day 1

18: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

**May**

02: Candidates' Retreat, Day 2

16: Chapter of Ministers

**June**

20: Leadership Workshop

**July**

18: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

**August**

01: Regional Gathering, Feast of the Portiuncula

**October**

09-11: Regional Retreat, Marytown, Libertyville

17: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

**November**

15: Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration (*location TBD*)

**December**

12: Regional Elections (*to be confirmed with NAFRA*)

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about 150 brothers and sisters there), will agree, we had a wonderful, wonderful afternoon together! Deepest thanks to Gail Vannetter, SFO, Minister of St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Rockford), Fr. Peter Sarnicki, OFM CONV., their Spiritual Assistant and Pastor of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, and all members of the fraternity for their outstanding hospitality! St. Stanislaus is very beautiful – and very Franciscan!

Our Regional Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Donald Blaeser, OFM, gave a wonderful homily, encouraging us to use the gifts we have been given by God and to speak out about Francis and our way of life so others will hear and perhaps be moved to join us. We were able to hang the 2007 Quinquennial Quilt from the balcony of the church so all could see it easily and completely (pictures next month).

After Mass, we had a tour of their Polish museum and then a wonderful meal and good conversation. This truly was fraternity! Full marks to Chris Bruhnke, SFO, our Regional Councilor for Fraternal Life, for getting the word out and encouraging the brothers and sisters throughout the Region to attend. We all had a great time!

■ **International Chapter.** I recently received emails from Hungary about the International Fraternity's elections.

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list, let's consider the difference between wants and needs.

In fact, let's take it a step further and consider the idea of hope. That is, the virtue of hope. We might indeed hope for a lot of good things that are quite different from personal wants or even needs. Personally, I hope for world peace, and for the economy to take an upward turn, especially because of the poor who are the ones most hurt by the present downturn. I hope that the new president and administration will bring about an end to war, a respect for life at *all stages* from conception to natural death, and many

Encarnación del Pozo, SFO was elected to a second term as Minister General, and Doug Clory, SFO Canadian Councilor, was elected Vice-Minister. This is very good news! More information can be found at [www.ciofs.org](http://www.ciofs.org), including pictures!

■ **Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** From the OFM Sacred Heart Province: "A call to all Franciscans to a day of prayer and fasting on Wednesday, 10 December 2008, World Human Rights Day, to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to be in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in the DR Congo; Palestine/Israel; India and wherever people are suffering violence. Let us use 'The Peace Prayer of Saint Francis' and/or 'The Canticle of Creatures' to unite our voices in a cry for world peace with universal justice and respect for all of God's creatures."

I invite all of us to participate in this special day of prayer and remembrance.

As we enter this wonderful holiday season, let us be thankful for all the blessings and graces we have received. Let us celebrate the Lord's birth deeply and sincerely. Let us embrace all with love. And let us move toward the New Year with peace and hope in our hearts.

May God bless you all abundantly! ☩

other improvements.

These and other things may have no impact on me personally, so I don't exactly need them, and whether I want them is irrelevant. But these and many other things are my *hopes*.

As followers of St. Francis, whose hope led him to bring about a better Church and a better world, let's take a good look at what we're hoping for. And during this Advent season of preparation, let's make it our prayer that we might do as St. Francis did and help to bring hope to life.

A very Merry and Blessed Christmas to you all! ☩