

## Minister's Message: We Start Anew!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

People laugh at me when I say that I still haven't gotten used to the new millennium—*but it's true!* It truly blows my mind that we're entering the ninth year of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Time moves entirely too fast!

I'm writing this the evening of December 20—I've been out of town for the college graduation of my great-nephew (*that* makes me feel old—but I guess I am!). Returned with a terrible cough and entirely too much work to do, especially for my parish, and having finished distributing the Giving Tree gifts today, I was looking forward to a quiet night tonight—until our Regional Formation Director, Sandy Kisel, SFO, reminded me that our articles for the *SFO News* were due. So, here goes my best effort under the circumstances.

Honestly, I can't wait for December 26! It's wonderful that we have the entire season of Christmas to celebrate our Lord's birth, and not

just a day. All the secular pressure doesn't make the holiday much fun for me. It's wonderful being with family on the "big day", but I long for peace and quiet to fully appreciate what we're celebrating. I long for that time—and need it—because with the beginning of the New Year, we have much work to do.

I haven't really had a chance to go over everything that was accomplished at the National Chapter in October—the brief summary in the November *SFO News* needs elaboration and that will be forthcoming. I think we mentioned the NAFRA Formation Workshop planned for 2009. *That has now been cancelled* because the International Fraternity approved some excellent formation resources at the General Chapter in Hungary in November. NAFRA's new Formation Director, Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO, thought it better to organize all the new material first and decide the best way to disseminate it, so it will be

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## Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

How are you feeling as we begin this New Year? Are you optimistic about the new administration that will be in office in a few days? Are you pessimistic and disgusted with the scandal in our Illinois governor's office? Are you down about the economy, the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places, and the poverty in many areas? Or maybe you're feeling hopeful about the goodness and generosity we've seen during the Christmas Season and on the part of many charities and ministries and those who are giving their energy and life-blood to them.

The beginning of a New Year is always an occasion for us to take stock. To start afresh both in our own lives and in global issues. We each have a part to play. We each contribute—for better or for worse—to the grand scheme of things. Whether it's in the vote we cast in elections or the way we raise children or the

attitude we carry around wherever we go, coloring everything we do.

Obviously it's our faith that is the greatest, most important component of our lives, and that which, hopefully, contributes to our actions and even our attitudes. To be hopeful is a sign that our faith is so deeply rooted in our being that we know our God is in charge of our world, and, as the saying goes, "draws straight with crooked lines". And when we are filled with hope, we convey that virtue in the way we carry ourselves, in the way we treat others, the way we make our decisions—the very way we approach life.

To be filled with hope, of course, does not imply being optimistic. Optimism can be a façade, and can be a denial of the reality of evil. Optimism can be the wearing of rose-colored glasses and with it an inability to address the need for change or correcting wrong.

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Elisabeth Shin, SFO

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To be appointed

*Councilor for Communications/*

*Public Relations:*

Lisa Wathen, SFO

*Councilor for Fraternal Life:*

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**Submission deadline is the  
20<sup>th</sup> of each month.**

### Local Appointments

Best wishes and prayers for the newly-appointed Spiritual Assistants for the following fraternities:

- **San Damiano Fraternity (Chicago):**  
Fr. Jim Perluzzi, OFM
- **St. Bernardine of Siena Fraternity (Wayne):**  
Sr. Madge Karecki, SSJ-TOSF
- **St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity (Frankfort):**  
Sr. Marilyn Renninger, OSF
- **St. Joseph Fraternity (Chicago):**  
Fr. Ed Shea, OFM
- **St. Mary of the Angels (Chicago):**  
Fr. Hugh Zurat, OFM
- **Wellspring Community (Chicago):**  
Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, SSJ-TOSF

### Events of Interest

**January 18:** Bishop J. Peter Sartain of the Diocese of Joliet will celebrate the second annual “Celebration of Life Mass” at 2 p.m., Cathedral of St. Raymond, 604 N. Raynor Ave., Joliet. A special blessing and send-off will be given to those attending the March for Life (Jan. 22) in Washington, DC. For more information, see [www.dioceseofjoliet.org/life](http://www.dioceseofjoliet.org/life).

**January 20:** A workshop, “Treasures of the Triduum”, for preachers, liturgy directors, musicians, and anyone wanting to enter more deeply into the Paschal mystery, will be held at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein. For more information and to register, call 847.837.4542.

**January 31:** Sponsored by a consortium of pro-life groups throughout the state, the 2009 SpeakOut Illinois Conference will be held from 8:30 a.m.–3 p.m. at the Westin Lombard Yorktown Center, Lombard. Speakers include Fr. Thomas Euteneuer, President of Human Life International, and Dr. Alveda King. Cost is \$50 per person before Jan. 19, \$60 afterward. For more information and to register, call 312.422.9300 or visit [www.speakoutillinois.org](http://www.speakoutillinois.org).

## “Francis, Build Up My Church ...”

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

### Reflections on the Incarnation

As I write this, Christmas is days away, snow is on the ground, and it’s so beautiful! The Master Artist’s hand is always creating and making all things new and wonderful!

St. Francis loved pondering the life of Jesus from the Gospel, and since other books were very costly and rare, Francis read and reread the Word of God, especially as we know about the Crib, the Cross, and the Eucharist. This was the basis for his spiritual formation.

In thinking about what to write this month, the passage from 2 Phil comes to mind, “Jesus, though in the form of God did not deem equality with God, *something to be grasped at.*”

Perhaps I am very simpleminded and everyone else understands this in great depth because it’s so obvious. Human poverty compared to the poverty of God becoming man, God’s own creation! Almighty God with no limits becoming fragile flesh, an infant, subject to man without a home or bed, lying in a shelter with animals. He who was King of an everlasting Kingdom without end received no recognition or favors; few recognized Him or were watching for His coming. There was no earthly throne for Him except the arms of Mary, His mother, a manger, and the throne He longed for within every heart. He wanted no one to be afraid to come to Him so He became the smallest and the poorest of all, setting aside His glory, majesty, and power, even accepting rejection of a place to be born and a bed of cold, damp, smelly straw.

What kind of love is this? God’s love has no limits! Often when I think of this and reflect on Jesus in the Eucharist, I think of Mary and Joseph preparing the cave for His coming, freshening it, preparing it for Jesus. I think of our souls and the preparation we make before receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. Mary, help us. Prepare us to receive your Son, to give Him a worthy dwelling place. Help us to repent and remove the stench of our sins and the coldness of our hearts and the many busy activities with everyday things that so often that rob Him of the adoration and love He’s due, and us of His presence. Jesus comes to us “*in the form of God*”, perfect in every way, subjecting Himself to the darkness of Mary’s womb for 9 months, Spirit and Life, Redeemer, Divine fire in our midst, a beggar.

“He took the form of a *slave*” (2 Phil). Is this

reference to mortals being subject and slave to every temptation, weakness and so many passions of the flesh and death?

A slave was one having no ownership or rights over himself; his will was governed by a master. His it was to simply submit, be subject, and obey throughout his whole life until death. But Jesus was a slave of love, a lamb who laid down His life for us, submitted to everything for us; He subjected His Will and suffered for us. This was His Will and the Will of His Father, to give new life, to make all things new, to make us family, mothers, brothers and sisters, co-heirs of the Kingdom and spouses.

To what do we owe this *love* and humility, simplicity and poverty? My thoughts turn again to Mary: “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46-47). Francis gave us an example and the Church has commissioned us, “Build up My Church, which has fallen into ruin”. We must let each word of the gospel penetrate our very beings, read and ponder them over and over until we become gospel; we must pray — be in communion with Christ our Savior and receive Him often who is the Light and strength of our lives. We must strive to remain in His presence wherever we are, whatever we are doing.

How do we magnify the Lord? Mary is our model. Even while Jesus was in her womb she communed with Him, walked with Him, reflected on the word of God in her womb now as in the Ark of the Covenant. God was fulfilling His promises to mankind. God lived in her, reigned in her. Mary’s “yes” was for all time a “yes, this is what I want” to God. She never turned back on her “yes”, her consecration to Him; never set limits to her “yes”. Mary made Christ present as a mirror reflects what it sees.

“...God has done great things to me and Holy is His name”. Let us make this a New Year especially for the Lord, giving thanks for all He has done. Let us renew our consecrations with Mary, praying often, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

I wish for all of us this New Year, God’s peace in our hearts, in our midst; His burning life within us all; a burning realization of our life and mission individually and as an Order of the Church, and the strength and perseverance and length of days to fulfill that mission in our lifetime with the love only God can give.

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## Formation News

■ **National Formation Workshop Has Been Postponed.** Due to extraordinary and exciting events from the General Chapter in Hungary, the workshop has been postponed until 2010. Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO, our new National Formation Director, indicated the Formation Commission's intention is to introduce a series of topics normative to the formation of all SFOs nationwide.

■ **New Manual for Formators.** CIOFS concurs with our National initiative and has begun to release a new "Plan of Studies", especially studies for the formation of formation directors and

teams. While we have some of these materials, others are being translated. Instructions will be released through training workshops, and teaching aids, lesson plans, presentations, handouts, and possibly DVD recordings of sample lessons may also be released during these sessions.

The plan is to help us experience the deepening of our charism and call, to enflame us again with the desire we had when we all pronounced our "yes, this is what I want" at our professions. If you have any thoughts, suggestions, needs, questions, or ideas you'd like brought to the attention of the National Formation Team, please email me at [formation@ilsfo.org](mailto:formation@ilsfo.org). ■

## St. Francis: Patron Saint for Pro-Life

by Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR; from *GrayFriar News*, Summer 1995

I once heard a Franciscan preacher tell the following story about St. Francis. One cold day in very early Spring, the saint was standing in front of an almond tree. The tree was still dormant and leafless from the long Winter. St. Francis gave a command: "Almond tree, speak to me of God!" According to the story, the almond tree immediately burst into full bloom.

I must confess that I have never come across this story in my reading of Franciscan literature. However, I have often thought about its meaning. To me, it makes two things very clear. The first is that the beauty and majesty of God are reflected in the wonderful gift of life. The second is that St. Francis saw God and praised Him as the Author of all life. Literally, life spoke to him of God.

Allow me here to share some brief reflections on these two points. First, let us look at life as God's gift to us. All life, we believe, comes ultimately from God alone, the living God. This is expressed simply in the Nicene Creed we profess each Sunday. Speaking of the Three Divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity, we say: "We believe in... the Father, the Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth... in one Lord, Jesus Christ... through Him all things were made... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life."

The life-giving hand of God extends to all His living creatures, beginning with the plants and animals, for they live and grow and reproduce. But it is especially in every human creature, every man and woman, that life as God's gift is most wonderfully reflected. "Then God said: 'Let us make man in Our image, after our likeness' ... God created man in His image; in the Divine image He created him; male and female He created them" (Gn 1:26-27).

The dignity of every man and woman is rooted in the fact that they are made in God's image and likeness. What elevates every human creature above all other creatures is that we possess an immortal soul, with its exalted powers of intelligence and free will. "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being" (Gn 2:7).

St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure, two great Doctors of the Church, taught that because of their immortal soul and its powers, man and woman possess a "capacity for God," an

openness to God, an ability to know and love God and share in His eternal life forever. This gives to each human person their God-given dignity and rights, including the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now the right to life is the foundational right, if a person is not guaranteed and given the right to life, how [can] he or she enjoy any of the other God-given rights!

St. Francis stands as a perfect example of one who recognized God as the Giver of life. His prayers reflect this. For example, in his "Praise of God," written on Mount [Alverna] after he had received the Sacred Stigmata, he prays: "You are Good, All-Good, the Highest Good, Lord God, living and true ... You are our eternal life, great and admirable Lord God almighty, merciful Savior." He understood Jesus' teaching that God "is the God of the living" (Mk 12:27), and that Jesus Himself had come that we "might have life and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10).

St. Francis' recognition of the dignity of each person can be seen in a sort of ascending order. It was said of St. Francis that he Contemplated God "in every creature, especially in man, and more so in the Christian, but above all in the priest, and in a very singular manner in the Supreme Pontiff, who is the Vicar of Christ our Lord on earth and head of the whole Church" (Capuchin Constitutions of 1536, #7). He recognized the reflection of Christ in each one of them.

St. Francis then translated his thoughts and words into actions as he worked to uphold the God-given dignity and Christ-likeness of each person. He cared for the poor and the hungry, he sheltered the outcasts and visited the lepers, he preached peace and forgiveness between hostile neighbors as well as warring armies, he consoled those who suffered and preached the Gospel message to the spiritually poor. He wanted everyone, all his brothers and sisters from least to greatest, to share in that fullness of the life Jesus came to bring us. St. Francis was thoroughly "Pro-Life," and as such, he played a great part in transforming the society of his day.

At our time in history, a great Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has called us back to living out "the Gospel of Life." He reminds us that we must all, in our way, work to counter a veritable

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**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*)

**Minister** *continued from p. 1 ...*

understood and implemented by the greatest number of people. Smart man!

We also need to clarify and implement the restructuring of the apostolates; I think this will be relatively easy. And we need to update everyone on FAN's activities, and the Peacebuilding and Care of Creation workshops that are being developed by Pace e Bene. We have so many opportunities to learn and grow!

Speaking of growth, in the visitations that we conduct throughout the Region, I would say the main concern of every fraternity is growth—how to attract new brothers and sisters to the SFO—and how to encourage our current professed to be more active. The answers to that question are varied, but there are some solutions that apply to all. First, there's nothing like personal invitation. We all need to be more vocal about how we are blessed as SFOs, how we appreciate our vocation, and encourage others to give us a try. However, we also need to be discerning regarding who we invite to "come and see". Not everyone has a vocation to the SFO—and that's OK. For a review on who would and would not make a good candidate for the SFO, please reread

**St. Francis** *continued from p. 3 ...*

"culture of death," as he calls it, which is threatening to engulf the world with its materialism and immorality and its total disregard for the dignity of human life, and replace it with the God-given "culture of life." We do this through prayer as well as through various expressions of Christ-like charity, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, counseling the doubtful, consoling the sorrowful, forgiving injuries. In a word, as St. Francis did in his time, we must become "heralds of the Great King," working to

**Assistant** *continued from p. 1 ...*

But hope is the virtue of finding God's presence even in the midst of problems. Indeed, Jesus Christ was born into this world with all its problems and tensions and evil. What an image of hope his very birth presents to us! No wonder St. Francis was so awestruck with the Incarnation. Francis lived in a time when there was corruption in the Church, the Crusades going on, and feudalism in the culture that spelled gloom for the poor and held them in their place of subservience.

Francis of Assisi was not an optimist. But he gave

Chapters 2 and 4 in *Catch Me a Rainbow, Too*, by Fr. Lester Bach, OFM CAP.

As for keeping our professed active and interested, I suggest, for starters, two things. First, dialogue at gatherings is crucial. We are all on a journey which lasts as long as we live, and we all need to share that journey with others. If our professed aren't given an opportunity to express themselves, they'll start to feel they're not a part and will become less active. Another is to recognize the fact that we all live in a secular world, with unavoidable responsibilities that will sometimes take us away from the monthly gathering or other fraternity activities. Our brothers and sisters need to know that the fraternity understands, and that they were missed. We need to be upbeat and positive; being negative or frustrated will turn off the professed, and encourage the inquirers and candidates to look elsewhere.

So—we have our work cut out for us in 2009. Let's support each other, as we are called to do in our Rule, and really make a difference this year. In the meantime, may the remainder of the Christmas Season be special for you, and may you see the New Year full of promise. God bless you all. ☒

establish His Kingdom by a love that shows itself in deeds of justice, truth and charity. We must begin with the first step, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant it may appear. As Mother Teresa, our outstanding model today of Pro-Life love for Jesus and others, often states of her work with the dying destitutes in the streets of Calcutta: "If I did not pick up the first dying person, I would never have picked up 50,000 dying persons!"

Brothers and sisters, let us begin again our efforts to live the "Gospel of Life," with St. Francis as our "Patron for Pro-Life." ☒

us an example of hope—hope that he lived out in action, by dedicating his life to God, by ministering to lepers and the poor—indeed, becoming one of them. And his example spoke so loudly that he acquired brothers even though that was not his original intent.

As we begin this New Year let's follow the example of St. Francis. If we look with eyes of faith we will see Christ infused in our world in any and every place. And that will bring out the hopefulness in us that we can put into action in everything we say and do.

New Year blessings to you all! ☒