

Minister's Message: Plans and Goals

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we move into 2009, I'd like to share with you what I would like to accomplish in this, the last year of my term as Minister, and how I hope you will help me.

■ **Franciscan Action Network (FAN).** It's important that we do everything possible to encourage individual membership in Franciscan Action Network (FAN). There is no money involved, but individual members constitute the network through which FAN sends its message and encourages participation when action is needed. I have the impression that many of you are fearful of this membership, so I'd like the opportunity personally to explain what it means. Therefore, I hope to arrange cluster meetings where I can meet with representatives of each fraternity to answer

questions and demonstrate how easy registration on the web site is, and what you will receive once you're registered.

■ **Transitioning to the JPIC Model.**

Additionally, with respect to the apostolates, I would like to facilitate the transition from the commission model to JPIC for all fraternities in the Region. This will begin through information I will be sending to all local ministers shortly. I don't believe there's anything complicated about this transition; what we will continue to do won't differ much from what we've done before. The difference will come from our motivation – because all that we do, whether it's in the apostolate area or anything else, must flow from who we are as Secular Franciscans. That is the whole point of this change, and I really don't think

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Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Is it just me, or does the Christmas Season seem too short? I mean, after all the build-up of about four weeks of Advent, then we have Christmas, and suddenly the whole season ends with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which this year was on Jan. 11. That's just two weeks and three days of Christmas! Heck, I've still been playing Christmas music in my car and in my room weeks after it's "officially" over.

At least I was comforted this year with the Church placing the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on a Sunday! There are some years – 2007 was one such – when the Baptism of the Lord was on a Monday – the day after the Feast of the Epiphany! And so Monday, Jan. 8 was the end – two weeks to the day after Christmas. I'm sure there are ecclesiastical minds far greater than mine that determine such things,

and there must be some terribly weighty reasons for them, but to me it's a crime.

And as long as I'm on the topic, let me add one more infraction to my list of crimes. The Church holds up for us not one or two but three major Epiphany events: the coming of the Magi, the Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan River, and Jesus' first miracle: turning water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. The crime is that we almost *never* get to hear the third one, from Jn 5:14-21. The account of the miracle at Cana is read on Saturday, Jan. 7, when the Epiphany falls on Sunday, Jan. 8. Imagine how rarely that occurs, and Saturday is not a day when people are gathered in greater numbers. The last time that occurred was in 2006. Do you remember it? Why do they do this to us?

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Monica Marko, SFO

Treasurer:

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Councilor At-Large:

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Councilor for Apostolates:

To be appointed

Councilor for Communications/

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Councilor for Fraternal Life:

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Rest in Peace

- **Ruth Anne Coyne**, SFO of St. Francis Fraternity (Fox Valley) died December 25.

Local Elections

Best wishes and prayers for the newly-elected officers of **St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Evergreen Park):**

- *Minister:*
Joann Lipka, SFO
- *Vice-Minister:*
Constance Berger, SFO
- *Formation Director:*
Mary Jo Dolce, SFO
- *Secretary:*
Mary Ceil McManus, SFO
- *Treasurer:*
Rosaleen Neven, SFO

Events of Interest

February 7: World Marriage Day (observed Feb. 8) honors husband and wife as the foundation of the family, the basic unit of our society, saluting the beauty of their faithfulness, sacrifice, and joy in daily, married life. To celebrate World Marriage Day, Worldwide Marriage Encounter is sponsoring a free showing of *Fireproof* at 12 p.m. at the Sycamore State Street Theater, 420 W. State St., Sycamore. *Fireproof* has touched the hearts and impacted the marriages of millions of moviegoers. Fireproof your marriage—learn the secrets to a lasting marriage. Seats are limited; for reservations, call 815.739.2907, or email fireproofmovie@gmail.com.

March 14-15: The Bishop Lane Retreat Center is holding “A Quiet Lenten Women’s Prayer Retreat” at 7708 E. McGregor Road, Rockford. The retreat will offer participants time for thoughtful prayer with Mass, Reconciliation, Scripture, Adoration, and, if desired, personal prayer with the retreat leader. Cost is \$75. For more information or to register, call 815.965.5011 or email blrcprograms@dpsrfd.org.

“Francis, Build Up My Church ...”

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

Reflections on the New Presidential Administration

On Feb. 2 we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. In the Liturgy, we pray: “Christ Jesus, in obedience to the law, you desired to be presented to your Father in the temple, teach us to offer ourselves to the Father with you in your Church’s sacrifice.”

We have just sworn in our new President, Barack Obama. Once, when complaining to a dear priest friend about someone in politics, I was admonished that, like it or not, we must pray for our politicians. It’s not for us to judge President Obama now, but to put ourselves to the task of supporting him, spiritually and morally, with justice, peace, love, and prayer. As part of this, there are many groups organizing prayers for him and his administration. For example, CatholicCulture.org is hosting a perpetual 30-day Rosary for Obama’s administration, “that it may be animated by an authentic perception of the Good, leading it also to oppose intrinsic evils such as abortion, euthanasia, fetal stem cell research, human cloning and homosexual marriage.” Even though the Rosary is already in progress, all are welcome to pray and sign up for time slots. For more information, visit www.catholicculture.org and click on “Rosaries for Obama”.

Already, there are many out to tear apart our new president, but when I read his Inauguration

speech online, I was able to pick out various words and paragraphs that I personally applauded. Mind you, I didn’t vote for Obama! But, I do encourage everyone to read his inaugural speech and pray that a holy fulfillment of these words comes to pass.

Time itself will tell how much heart was in that speech, how much gut. But how much will we do to assure that God will guide our new president to make right choices and lead him in goodness for everyone? Are we willing to “offer ourselves to the Father with Jesus’ own sacrifice of Himself, through our priests’ hands as sacrifice? Do we recall how Francis burned with desire to travel to the Sultan bearing the love he bore in his heart, to share Christ’s love with those who didn’t know Him?

Ongoing Formation

Reflection: Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, speaks of Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness. Mary pronounces the words: “My soul magnifies the Lord” (Lk 1:46). “In these words she expresses her whole program of life: not setting herself at the center, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor—only then does greatness enter the world. Mary’s greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify (mirror) God, not herself. She is lowly:

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How the Third Order Started

by Leonard Foley, OFM, *et al.*; excerpted from *To Live As Francis Lived: A Guide for Secular Franciscans*

On one of his wanderings Francis met a merchant named Luchasio in the town of Poggibonsi. Luchasio had been a rather hard man who watched his money very carefully, though he was strangely generous to the poor, gave lodging to pilgrims and helped widows and orphans. Francis seems to have had no influence in his conversion but gave him and his wife, Bona Donna, a norm of life. After this Luchasio devoted all his time to works of charity, especially care of the sick in the hospitals. He wore a rough tunic of a simple peasant with a rope around his waist. When he was home, he worked in a little garden he had retained after parting with his other possessions

and whose produce he sold. If this way of life did not bring him enough, he would go out and beg.

A number of people with the same spirit gathered around Luchasio. Francis gave these followers (later called the Brothers and Sisters of Penance which means those who turn to God from a sinful and idle life) a rule of life. They sought to imitate *in the world* the ways of Saint Francis and his Brothers. As soon as they entered the Brotherhood, they pledged themselves to give back all unjustly acquired goods—which in many cases meant to give up everything—to pay the tithes which they might owe, to make their wills in time to prevent strife

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her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:38, 48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. ... Mary is a woman who loves. ... As a believer who in faith thinks with God's thoughts and wills with God's will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves."

Activity: Discuss Chapter Two—"The Way of Life". With a copy of the Rule in hand, reflect/share articles of our Rule that speak to you of this.

Formation News

In December, St. Juliana Fraternity (Chicago) invited me for their Christmas celebration, and I had the joy of visiting and sharing formation and fraternity with them. Florence, KP was never so pleasant! I really enjoyed our chat. As always, there was food galore and I was very moved with the responses during our formation discussion. Thank you for your hospitality! I had a wonderful time and hope to be invited again.

Hope to see everyone at our Regional events this year! God bless you with His peace and great love. ☒

Franciscan Life Campaign 2009

by Russell Testa, Franciscan Action Network (FAN) Executive Director

As the new Congress and the new President begin their work, it is imperative that their constituents—all of us—challenge them to strive for policies that will support life, born and unborn, human, animal, and plant. Such efforts constitute a consistent ethic of life.

FAN has designed a simple legislative advocacy campaign to create a chorus of voices on this issue. The campaign is simple because, at present, no pro-abortion legislation has been submitted, and we want to do all we can to keep it that way. In addition, we are facing a significant economic crisis that threatens life, both born and unborn. We are facing a growing ecological crisis that threatens life through global climate change. We are facing the threats of armed conflict in multiple nations.

Confronted with these present threats to life, we must encourage our Members of Congress to focus on these threats and not add to the threats to life with legislation like the Freedom of Choice Act

(FOCA) or other measures that will support abortion.

Our love for the gift of God's self in the Incarnation compels us to action in support of a consistent ethic of life. I hope each of you will participate in the Franciscan Life Campaign [see www.franciscanaction.org for details] in the following ways:

- **Pray** to support all life.
- **Reflect** on how to more fully support life.
- **Act** by writing your Members of Congress to oppose FOCA and support a consistent ethic of life.
- **Act** by joining thousands in Washington, DC calling for legislation to combat global climate change, so that all of God's children and creatures may have abundant life.
- **Invite** others to join you in standing up for life.

Thank you for all that you are doing to defend and support life. ☒

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among their heirs, not to bear arms, not to take an oath except in special extraordinary cases, and not to accept public office. They wore a poor and distinctive habit and divided their time between prayer and deeds of charity. They generally lived with their families, but sometimes, like the Friars Minor, they withdrew into solitude.

They soon came into conflict with the public authorities because of their principles. At Faenza, for instance, the citizens had joined the Brotherhood in great numbers. The mayor wanted them to take the usual oath of obedience by which they would oblige themselves to take up arms when the authorities ordered it. They refused; taking up arms was against their Rule. The dispute soon spread all over Italy. As a sort of punishment the cities subjected the Penitential Brothers to special taxes and forbade them to give their property to the poor. Cardinal Hugolino, a friend of Saint Francis, took up their defense. When he became Pope, he ordered the clergy to take the side of the Penitential Brothers and to see that they were not injured in any way.

The Pope wished to unite the scattered brotherhoods into one body. Around 1221, Cardinal Hugolino and Francis wrote the first formal Rule for the Third Order. We do not have this rule, but it was certainly the foundation of the Rule of 1228 which we do have.

For nearly eight centuries, this gathering of the faithful has been striving to live the Gospel life *in the world* under the direction of the Franciscan Order and according to the Rule of Saint Francis as approved and adapted by the Church. It is therefore: a) a brother/sisterhood of lay people (though diocesan clergy may also be members), b) attempting to live the evangelical life "in the world," in the ordinary circumstances of the life of lay people, in home and school, factory and office, c) following a Rule or way of life, d) with spiritual assistance from other branches of the Franciscan family or certified individuals, e) approved and adapted by the Church. Whatever else Francis was, he was Catholic, seriously concerned to have the approval of the Church at a time when many reformers, in good or bad faith, were attempting to reform the Church by tearing down its structure or leaving it altogether. ☒

Calendar

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

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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it's going to be difficult for us to "get it."

■ **Apostolic Action Workshop.** I'd like to give you a little preview of what we're planning for the Apostolic Action Workshop on March 21 at Mayslake. As you may be aware, FAN and Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service have developed a close relationship. Pace e Bene developed a new program called "Engage," and have expanded that to "Franciscan Engage" specifically for FAN. I am attending an introduction of that program in Scottsdale in February, and will be sharing it with all of you at the March workshop. In the meantime, here's how Pace e Bene describes the program:

"Every day, throughout the world people face the daunting challenge and consequences of violence and injustice. Some people confront this violence with violence. Others remain passive in the face of this destructiveness. Neither of these approaches, in our estimation, lead to long-term solutions because they often fail to address the root causes of violence or stop the cycle of destruction, resentment, and retaliation that violence and injustice create.

"There are a growing number of people around the world, however, who are using the more effective approach of creative nonviolence, the subject of our study program, to bring about change in their societies. People are also using nonviolence to challenge personal, interpersonal, and social patterns of violence in their own lives. The more we are equipped with the vision and skills of nonviolence, the greater the chance for the emergence of effective nonviolent solutions in our lives and in the world."

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I suppose I should be happy because at least we who are Christians carry on a bit longer than the commercialized world in which we live, which shuts down Christmas on December 26! As someone told me a long, long time ago: Be thankful for small gains.

And now we're about to begin the Season of Lent. At least we get a breather, since it starts on Feb. 25 this year and not as early as last year. Remember that one? Feb. 6. Wow! We hardly put the tree away and it was here.

So, maybe Lent coming is a good reminder that what I should do with all this bellyaching is to "offer it up". But I'd like to

■ **Lay Spiritual Assistants.** Now, I need some help from all of you! First, you may be aware that there is a real shortage of spiritual assistants generally, including our Region. The number of Franciscan friars and sisters who can give their time to our fraternities is diminishing and we really need SFOs to consider becoming certified lay spiritual assistants. The program developed by NAFRA is called "Franciscan Family Connections." It is a correspondence course of 12 chapters contained in a book of 128 pages. My understanding is that those interested must be professed for a minimum of 5 years and must be approved by the Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the friar province to which their fraternity is bonded. For those who are qualified, I would really appreciate your considering looking into this program. Perhaps this is something we could talk about at those cluster meetings I will organize shortly.

■ **Regional Elections in December.** The other area in which I need your help is with **candidates** for our Regional council – elections will be this December. I know there are good people out there who could serve the Region extremely well, and who only need to be asked. I'm more than happy to do the asking, if you all will just tell me who they are. We also need a **Nominating Committee**. I'd like to hear from those who are interested in helping with this project. Just send an email to *minister@ilsfo.org*.

Blessings, brothers and sisters! I'm anxious to work with all of you to make this a really meaningful year for our Region! 🙏

think that my bellyaching has at least something to do with the fact that, as a Franciscan, Christmas means so much to me. It's such an amazing, unfathomable thing that our God has done for us – becoming incarnate, living life as a human being, and not just playing at it, but going the whole way, from birth to death. Awesome!

We do well at paying close attention to the ending of the story – Passion, Death, Resurrection. My only plea is, can't we take a bit more time to savor the sweetness of the beginning of the story – Jesus' birth and early years?

OK, I'll offer it up. 🙏