

Minister's Message: Leadership Workshop – and JPIC!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I hope you continue to enjoy the Easter Season—May has been such a happy month with First Communion, Confirmations, Professions—and, at last!—the arrival of warm weather!

■ **Chapter of Ministers.** Our Chapter on May 16, I believe, went very well. There was excellent representation—all but two canonically established fraternities were present—unfortunately, the two missing were our Spanish-speaking fraternities. Additionally, the entire Regional Executive Council was present and, although not required, one of our two satellites was represented, as well as our new Newly-Forming Group.

■ **Mother Cabrini Award.** As you know, we voted on the future of the Mother Cabrini Award, and it was decided to discontinue it. However, the celebration of

Mother Cabrini's Feast Day (November 13) will continue as always on the Sunday closest to the feast day. This year it will be on Sunday, November 15. We believe we have a host fraternity, but we are awaiting confirmation, which we hope to have soon.

■ **Leadership Workshop.** On Saturday, June 20, we will have our Leadership Workshop, and because this is an important election year for the SFO (National and Regional elections are taking place, as well as a few local fraternity elections, and many local fraternity elections next year), it will focus on council positions, the qualities of servant leadership, and discerning qualifications. Full information is in the mail.

■ **JPIC.** In our discussions over the last year about the apostolates and moving from the

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Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Last month I wrote about *prayer* as the first of the four components of the usual SFO gathering/meeting, the other three being *ongoing formation*, *business matters*, and *social time*. I'd like to go on with more of what an SFO gathering is to look like.

The second important ingredient for our time together is *ongoing formation*. Let me begin by saying that this is also true for us friars. Recently, we friars of St. Gratian Friary had a friary chapter, and we spent a significant time sharing what it means for each of us to be a Franciscan, and some honest disclosure of where we believe we are falling short of living our commitment. It was a great experience.

In terms of what happens at each SFO gathering, variety is the spice of life. There is

no end to what we might do to have a spirit-filled *ongoing formation* session. The *Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership* offers 10 questions that can provoke some thought as to what might constitute a good direction for our *ongoing formation*.

We always need to keep in touch with the Holy Rule, and one way or another delve into what it tells us about living our lives as Franciscans. Many resources and many different approaches are possible. I always believe that having some sharing is worthwhile, so that we support and also challenge one another.

Most of you are probably familiar with the book, *Catch Me A Rainbow Too*, by Fr. Lester Bach, OFM CAP. I've read it and find it to be a treasure-trove of material for *ongoing*

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Professions

- **Linda Boyer, SFO,**
- **Lois George, SFO,** and
- **Paulette Havelin, SFO** of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Frankfort) made their Professions on May 2.

Local Elections

Best wishes and prayers for the newly-elected officers of **Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe Fraternity (Chicago):**

- **Minister:**
Juan Ponce de Leon, SFO
- **Vice-Minister:**
Soledad Martinez, SFO
- **Formation Director:**
Theresa Herrera, SFO
- **Secretary:**
Elvire Diaz, SFO
- **Treasurer:**
Dolores Gurrola, SFO

Events of Interest

June 13-14: Fr. Denis G. Wilde, OSA, Associate Director of Priests for Life, will be preaching at St. Theresa Catholic Church, 455 N. Benton St., Palatine, at the following Masses: June 13 at 5 p.m., and June 14 at 7, 8:30, 10, and 11:30 a.m. Following the 8 a.m. June 13 Mass, Fr. Wilde will lead participants in prayer for an hour outside an abortuary located at 1455 E. Golf Rd., Des Plaines. For more information, call Phil Zarob at 847.358.1998.

June 25-28: A 4-day seminar, "Franciscan Spirituality for Secular Franciscans", will be held at Saint Francis University, Loretto, PA. Presenters are National Formation Director Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO and Vinal Van Benthem, SFO. Cost for the full weekend is \$235 single/\$195 double, which includes room, meals, shuttle, and registration fee. For more information, email Sandra Kisel, SFO, Regional Formation Director, at formation@ilsfo.org.

Around the Region

■ **Northwest Franciscan Community of the IHM (Palatine).** Continuing their "Youth Prayer Partners" apostolate begun in early 2008, members have been praying since October for a new group of children preparing for Confirmation. The children have just completed their first year of study and will begin the second and final year of preparation in the fall. As with the previous group of students, members pray weekly (at minimum) for their assigned students.

■ **St. Francis - St. Louis Fraternity (Chicago).** All are invited to attend the fraternity's celebration of the 50th Ordination Anniversary of Fr. Wenceslaus Church, OFM, which will start with Mass, followed by a reception. The celebration is also the fraternity's Open House and

visitors are welcome.

- **Date:** June 7 (Sunday)
- **Time:** 12:30 p.m. (Mass)
- **Location:** St. Peter's Church
110 West Madison St.
Chicago

For more information, contact Norman Mosk, SFO.

■ **St. Juliana Fraternity (Chicago).** In April, members collected and delivered four boxes of donated items to the Franciscan Outreach Association.

Also, members had been praying for children at St. Juliana Parish (Chicago) who were preparing for First Communion in April, and Confirmation in May. ☒

God Is Love!

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

"By faith we accept as real what we cannot prove nor see; we not only accept but we even risk our life and our eternity on the conviction that the purpose of our earthly life lies beyond the present form of our earthly existence."
(Carroll Stuhlmuehler, CP) *"Faith consists in doing our best, and then surrendering this best that God may take it beyond our power and dreams."* (ibid)

Do we believe in God's love for us beyond what we can feel, even when He seems totally gone and everything seems fallen into ruin; totally fruitless? Do we believe in God's love when we are totally dry and cannot see God's action in and around us? And do we believe in God's love when He offers us the cross? Do we embrace it; draw close to God and allow Him to draw us into Him? Do we say, "Amen, let it be done to me as you Will? Yes, Lord, I believe."

When we are striving with all our energy to fulfill our consecration to God and are met with what seems to be the total absence of God, when everything around us is falling apart, do we still know He is present and loves us? Sweet contradictions ... do we still believe even then? Do we believe in God's love when humiliation and insult become

our companions and temptation knocks at our door? Do we believe God always has a plan for us and in His love never forgets us?

I am the vine and you are the branches, abide in Me and you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing. The vinedresser prunes back the branches so that they may become more fruitful; God empties us/purifies us so that He can fill us with life-giving waters; God stretches us so that we may be filled even more with His graces and virtues, so that we may be even more fruitful in His time, for His Kingdom, for souls.

Do we recall God's action in our past, His gentle assurances, the many gifts of His love ... do we remember? Love doesn't walk out the door during tribulation, but remains through thick and thin, through the good times and the difficult. God is love; He is preparing us for a Kingdom not of this world. Do we believe?

"Live in My Love with all your heart; as the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you."

June powerfully speaks to us of God's love as we celebrate the feasts of the Sacred

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Francis' Love for the Eucharist and Mass

Excerpts from “The First Disciples”, “The Imitation of Christ” and “Prayer” by Ivan Gobry, *Saint Francis of Assisi*

[St. Francis'] faith was oriented especially toward the Eucharist, and therefore toward the churches that housed the Body of Christ. In his testament, which he begins by telling of his conversion, he mentions first his ministrations to the lepers. Then he adds:

“Then the Lord gave me such faith in the churches that I simply prayed in these words: We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches throughout the world; and we bless you, because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world. Then the Lord gave me, and continues to give me such a great faith in the priests who live according to the rules of the Holy Roman Church, because of their sacerdotal character, that even if they persecute me, they are the ones to whom I want to have recourse. I act this way because in this world I see nothing of the Most High Son of God that is perceptible to the senses, except his most sacred Body and Blood, which they receive and of which they alone are the ministers. And I want these most holy mysteries to be honored and venerated above all else, and housed in places that are exquisitely decorated.”

... Love for Christ leads to love of the Eucharist—the living Christ offering himself on the altar for our salvation and reserved among us for our adoration. Francis left behind an exhortation on the Body of Christ that displays flawless doctrinal knowledge of this mystery:

“Every day the Son of God comes to us under humble appearances; every day he descends upon the altar through the hands of the priest. And just as he revealed himself to the apostles in truly human flesh, so too he reveals himself to us now in the consecrated bread. They, when they looked upon him with their fleshly eyes, saw only his flesh, but because they contemplated

him with their spiritual eyes, they believed that he was God. May we, too, when we see with our fleshly eyes the bread and wine, be able to see and believe most firmly that they are the most sacred Body and Blood of the living, true Lord. This, indeed, is the manner that he has chosen to remain always with those who believe in him, as he himself said: ‘Behold, I am with you until the consummation of the world.’ ”

In his “Letter to All the Faithful”, Francis recalls the institution of the Eucharist and repeats the first words of the formula of transubstantiation. Then he comments: “The Son of the Father wants us all to be saved by him, and to receive him with a pure heart into a chaste body. ... We must confess to the priest all our sins and receive from him the Body and Blood of our Lord. Anyone who does not eat his flesh and drink his blood cannot enter into the Kingdom of heaven.” ... The *Legenda antiqua* relates that:

“Blessed Francis had a great respect and a profound devotion for the Body of Christ. That is why he had it written in the rule that the friars should surround the Eucharist with great care and a lively solicitude in the provinces where they were staying, exhorting and encouraging the clerics and priests to reserve the Body of Christ in a decent, suitable place; and if they did not do so, the friars should do it in their stead. ...”

... Francis, as we have seen, had a special devotion to the Eucharist. Celano writes: “He burned with love for the sacrament of the Body of the Lord and remained dumbstruck before this mercy full of charity and this charity full of mercy. It would have seemed to him to be committing a serious sin if he had not at least attended Mass each day. He received Holy Communion often, so devoutly that his devotion was communicated to others.” ■

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Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and as we celebrate Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi. Let us celebrate God's love for us wherever and however He leads us. Let us just believe.

Formation News

■ **Candidates' Retreats.** Thanks to all who attended the Candidates' Retreats! We had an even greater turnout this year at both of the retreat dates! At the close of the May session, I was actually surprised at how many candidates were present and delighted in having a moment to speak with them all.

Again, special thanks to our Regional Spiritual

Assistant, Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM; Regional Vice-Minister, Javier Orozco, SFO; Vickie Klick, SFO; Sr. Marilyn Renninger, OSF; National Minister and local spiritual assistant, Patrick Mendés, SFO; Mary Farrell, SFO, for her help with registration; and Irene DiFiglio, SFO of St. Clare Fraternity (Oak Brook), for her assistance setting up the Chapel for the Liturgy; and to all the others who made the retreat such a success.

■ **National Workshop.** It may not be too late to register for the Secular Franciscan Leadership Seminar, “Franciscan Spirituality for Secular Franciscans”, endorsed by the National Executive Council. See the “Events of Interest” sidebar on page 2 for more information. ■

Calendar
<i>Unless otherwise indicated, all events are at Mayslake Village (Oak Brook).</i>
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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commission model to JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation), I wanted to share with you portions of the report of Fr. Pio Jackson, OFM, the JPIC Coordinator for Sacred Heart Province and a fellow FAN Commissioner, to his brothers regarding the recent JPIC meeting in Rome:

From the Guidelines of Animation 2009, 3.1.1: "Living and preaching the Gospel through works of reconciliation, peace, justice and care for creation is not one activity among others: parishes, schools, youth ministry, care for the Secular Franciscans and religious women, missions, etc. Rather, it is an essential dimension of our vocation, like prayer, fraternity, minority and evangelization. JPIC is a way of life and mission; through it we are challenged by the great issues of humanity and committed to the cause of all people, that all might live with dignity. Thus, JPIC embraces all our life; it is a central axis which passes through all the dimensions of our religious and Franciscan life; prayer, fraternity, formation, economics, vows, mission, etc. All friars, whatever their age or ministry, are called to integrate these dimensions in a balanced way through the course of their lives." ...

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formation. There are 24 chapters, so if one were taken each month, we would have two full years of material to ponder. In addition, he offers other references which can be explored and questions for personal reflection and sharing.

Of course, the writings of St. Francis are outstanding for us to review and ponder, as well as some of the early biographies of the saint. The latest and best edition of these sources can be found in the 3-volume series, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, published in 1999 by New City Press, New York. This has replaced the *Omnibus*, and while some may refer to the *Omnibus*, it is best that we as Franciscans use the latest and best books that are available.

Clearly, we can do well to learn more and ponder deeply the elements of our Catholic Christian faith, such as Sacred Scripture, the Mass, and so on. However, these cannot be

This year of 2009, 23 animators from across the globe have gathered to once again immerse ourselves into the heart of Franciscan living so we can better hear the cries of the poor and serve with humble, open and compassionate hearts. ...

We are aware that we must be witness not only to others but to ourselves and our own Franciscan family as well. Everyone has asked what they can take back to their sisters and brothers, not only in their communities but their excluded, needy, or poorest of the poor, and how they can better show this face of Francis to them.

Above all, we see ourselves as called to be disciples of Christ and Francis. Not to imitate, mind you. This distinction was made to us by one of the professors. We cannot try to superimpose 13th century Franciscan living into the 21st century modern world. We are called to witness and serve the Living God who is as fresh as the Spirit and whose finger writes in sign our redemptive history with grace and hope, where we are open to embrace them and proclaim them for the sake of all.

I don't believe this message pertains only to the Friars but to all Franciscans! Blessings everyone – hope to see you on June 20! ☒

the only focus of our *ongoing formation*, since we ARE Franciscans, and so we do need to look again and again at the Holy Rule, the Constitutions and the various elements of our Franciscan spirituality that is so rich.

Actually, that brings me back to recommending books by our wonderful friar, Fr. Bach, such as *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* and *Pick More Daisies*, because in them he weaves together our Franciscan calling with references to Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and our various Franciscan documents. I mean, how comprehensive can you get?

Finally, I think we do best if we see our call to keep up on our *ongoing formation* not as an obligation, but a privilege. Then we experience delight in constantly unfolding the richness of our Franciscan and faith tradition.

Stay tuned for more on the other two components of an SFO gathering next month. ☒