

Minister's Message

by Vickie Klick, SFO

Dear brothers and sisters,

As I write this, we're back in winter for at least a week after a brief taste of spring. Lent - at least in the northern hemisphere - is certainly a time of anticipation as well as an opportunity to exercise patience, even in the ordinary way of things. I hope your Lent has been fruitful and that Easter will bring you renewed joy as nature bursts into new life around us.

The regional fraternity needs your prayers. On May 21st we will celebrate our annual Chapter of Ministers with our triennial fraternal and pastoral visitations being conducted by National Vice Minister Elaine Hedtke, SFO and National Spiritual Assistant Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap. As part of our preparation for visitation Fr. Lester specifically requested that I ask every fraternity in the region to pray for the success of our visitation at their meetings. We need the Lord's help in this as in everything we do. Thank you for your individual prayers and for those of your fraternities.

In our brief taste of spring in mid-March I was reminded of the reasons why we need other people on our spiritual journey. St. Paul compared the spiritual life with the training and discipline of an athlete. Serious training for competition in any sport is not usually done alone. We tend to try harder when there's someone else to compete against. St. Paul describes what happens if one practices alone as "shadowboxing" - very different than blocking punches from a real training partner.

For example, I rode my bike alone for my first ride of the season and thought I did fairly well, all things considered. The next two rides I rode with other people who were going at progressively faster speeds. I worked MUCH harder when the alternative was to be left behind! Moreover, on my next solo ride, I worked even harder because I knew I could do more, and wanted to do more - even though I had no one to keep up with. No more shadowboxing - for now at least!

Another example of "shadowboxing" is viewing our spiritual life as solid based solely on our own assessment. However, in fraternity we are accountable to one another for how we are living the Gospel life. We recognize in the way others live the Rule that there may be changes we need to make and their example calls us to conversion once again. Each time the fraternity meets we have a chance to learn new ways to grow in our vocations!

As we approach Easter, let us give thanks for our brothers and sisters in fraternity and remember how much we need them. This is a great time to think about ways in which each one of them has been an example for you in living the Rule. When you recognize a positive way someone has shown you how to live the Secular Franciscan life, consider letting him or her know. We can write notes or call them about how we see the Rule being lived. This could be a very meaningful exercise, whether done alone or in a group. You might recognize some new ways to live parts of the Rule, or simply be able to appreciate another member of your fraternity more. The Rule will come alive as you recognize each article in one or another of your brothers and sisters. And, just maybe, you'll learn something new about yourself as a Secular Franciscan, whether it's an opportunity for conversion or an opportunity to just say "thank you."

May our celebration of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ bring us closer to Him and make us more aware of the unconditional love of God for every one of us. May we accept that love and share it in turn with everyone we meet.

Peace and blessings, Vickie☒

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The SFO News is the official publication of the Mother Cabrini Regional Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order.

CALENDAR

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

- **Election & Visitation dates subject to change.**
(E=Election/V=Visitation)

January

- 15: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
- 17: San Jose Fraternity (E)

February

- 15: St. Junipero Serra (V)
- 26: Apostolates Workshop

March

- 01: Fair Share, Census, and Annual Reports due
- 14: NW Franciscan Community (V)
- 19: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

April

- 2: Candidates' Retreat, Day 1
- 17: St. Thomas More (E)

May

- 07: Candidates' Retreat, Day 2
- 12-15: National Formation Workshop, Belleville, IL
- 21: Chapter of Ministers - Fraternal & Pastoral Visitation

June

- 07: St. Clare Fraternity (Oak Brook) (V)
- 12: St. Juliana Fraternity (V)
- 23/ Summer Seminar - "Fraternity"
- 26: Loretto, PA
- 26: St. Anthony Padua (East Side) (E)

July

- 10: St. Elizabeth of Hungary (V)
- 10: St. Maximillian Kolbe (E)
- 16: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
- 23: St. Francis of Assisi Fox Valley (V)

August

- 06: Regional Gathering, Feast of the Portiuncula
- 07: St. Bernardine of Siena (V)

September

- 10-11: Regional Formation Workshop for Ministers/ Formation Directors
- 18: St. Mary of the Angels (V)

October

- 02: St. Francis/St. Louis (V)
- 15: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.
- 25-30: NAFRA Meeting

November

- 13: Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration (location TBD)

Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Br. Joe Middleton, OFM

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This time of the year we are invited to attend to the obvious changes in the natural world as we transcend from all that is winter and all that we've been through into all that is springtime and summer and all that will be. Our church, too, remembers where we have been as a people and encourages us all to participate fully in a process of preparation for all that happens during Holy Week as we remember our Lord's passion and the great gift and foundational hope of Easter that is to come. As good Franciscan folks we know this. It inspires and delights us as it always does. We know of the life giving benefit we have access to and we claim it and proclaim it as truth. It's how we live and one of the dependable ways we recognize God more clearly in the world and in each other and I might hope in ourselves too. I also hope that we are not spending too much time splashing in the safe places along the shore but rather that we have already gone far into the deep; swept away by the beauty of our traditions and our wonderful world.

I want to share with you a small fragment from a Lenten reflection composed by one of our most inspired local Franciscan evangelist, Fr. Robert Pawel, ofm. Fr Bob says in his Ash Wednesday reflection; Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return, that "we must remember because we are subject to massive forgetting. We are prone to amnesia. We have amnesia of our origins and our destiny. And we lose track of our vocation, we are called to service, entrusted with the garden, with all the animals, and with all living things. We also forget what God remembers; that we are a daily creature of God's daily care, endlessly being formed and being continually breathed into. We are endlessly being summoned, guarded, and fed.

Our lives are continually surrounded by the loving kindness of God, who wills for us more good than we can will for ourselves."

I gathered this material when I asked him for the deep reflection that I shared with you last year as I remember. So hear it is:

Fast from judging others;
Feast on Christ living in them.

Fast from bitterness;
Feast on forgiveness.

Fast from harsh words;
Feast on words that build up others.

Fast from self-concern;
Feast on compassion for others.

Fast from discontent;
Feast on gratitude.

Fast from discouragement;
Feast on hope.

Fast from anger;
Feast on Patience.

Fast from facts that depress;
Feast on facts that uplift.

I invite you to prayerfully compose your ideas in a similar statement.

Your Brother Joe M, ofm 

Adult Ed Opportunity

Awakening the Dreamer Symposium - April 9th
At the Wheaton Franciscan Motherhouse

Tentative schedule: 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. program, including lunch, followed by liturgy at 4 p.m. (optional)

Stories and prayer from our Franciscan tradition will be woven into the program.

The symposium provides an exploration of four questions:

Where Are We?

An examination of the state of environmental, social and personal well-being

How Did We Get Here?

Tracing the root causes that lead to our current imbalance

What's Possible for the Future?

Discovering new ways of relating with each other, with the Earth and looking at the emerging Movement for change

Where Do We Go from Here?

Considering the stand we want to be in the world and our personal and collective impact

For more information, contact the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office of the Wheaton Franciscans: justicepeace@wheatonfranciscan.org or 630-909-6635 or go to website at <http://www.taucenter.com/programs.html>.

In-Formation

By Patrick Mendes, SFO
Regional Formation Director

My Franciscan journey – a reflection of what I have learned and how I have grown over the years, shared with you in the hope of offering you hope, courage and joy on your Franciscan journey.

The seed of my Secular Franciscan vocation was planted early in my life by my parents, who themselves were Secular Franciscans. Article 17 of our Holy Rule tells us parents should “joyfully accompany their children on their journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and by being attentive to the vocation of each child.”

My parents did just that, not just by assuring that we had a good Christian education in school, but at home as well. They modeled for us what it means to love God and our neighbor.

Small wonder then that in my Junior year of college, I would want that “something more” in my adult life that I experienced in my own family and so I began my first tentative steps toward what would become my Franciscan life and journey.

Article 22 of the Holy Rule tells us “The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.”

As I took those first tentative steps in initial formation I discovered this to be true. The Spiritual Assistant (title was Director then) and the Novice Master (Formation Director) were knowledgeable, encouraging and supportive. The fraternity, even though it was very large, was very welcoming and it didn’t take long to feel like “family.”

As I continued through formation, learning more about the Franciscan charism, the life and ministry of St. Francis and St. Clare, and learning what it meant to be a Franciscan and how to live our life, I grew to understand what it meant to be a community of love.

Shortly after Profession on April 16, 1961, I graduated from college and went into the Air Force. All the time that I was away members of the fraternity wrote to me, sent me the fraternity newsletter, and sent their prayers. I never felt alone.

In the time following the Second Vatican Council, amidst the changes in the Church, and especially with the publication of the documents on the laity, the Order began its study of our place in the modern world and in June 1978 the current Rule was

approved by Pope Paul VI. We had a much learning to do and a different way of seeing our vocation as Secular Franciscans in the modern world. Though our charism of living the Gospel life after the manner of our Holy Father Francis has never changed, our approach certainly has as have the expectations the Church has of us and of all the Catholic laity.

We struggled with our implementation of the Holy Rule. In the USA we developed “apostolic commissions” as they related to the “active articles” of our Rule, Articles 15 – 18 and began to find ways in which to live these parts of our Rule.

Through all of these changes and adjustments we were never alone. There we were in our local Fraternities, the communities of love, supporting one another and encouraging each other and together we succeeded.

Fraternity at every level – local, regional, national, and international is a community of love. At every level we support each other moving toward our common goal of going from gospel to life and life to gospel.

All through these years my fraternity has “been there” for me through life’s ups and downs, celebrating the good times such as my graduation from college, my commissioning in the Air Force, my first civilian job, my first faculty appointment, and the difficult times of my life, such as the deaths of my parents and siblings; my serious illnesses and all those in between times.

We are also called to a life of service to one another. I have served as formation director both locally and regionally; as Minister locally, regionally and nationally. I have served on countless committees over the years. Our service is never about ourselves. It isn’t a power or ego trip, nor is it about prestige. It is about serving the community of love.

I suggest that you reflect on your gifts and willingly put them at the service of your fraternity at every level.

In conclusion, I want to thank all of our brothers and sisters, living and deceased who have been and continue to be an important part of my life. You have been my support, my mentors, my companions on the journey and the reflection of Jesus and His most sacred heart to me for these past 50 years. There are not sufficient words to thank you all.

My prayer for you continues to be that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will surround you with His love and fill your lives with His abundant blessings. **✠**

JPIC – Next Steps

By Stephanie Sormane, SFO
Councilor for JPIC

We had a well attended JPIC Workshop on February 26. A great deal of information was shared, but the good part is, it's readily available for review if it wasn't all taken in the first time around. We began the day with a review of C4C (which stands for Care for Creation), the new process which has been developed by Franciscan Action Network (FAN).

Briefly, the process consists of a book and a DVD, with additional materials available from the FAN web site. The process is divided into six sessions: 1) Telling the Franciscan Story; 2) Opening the Book of Creation; 3) Hearing the Cry of the Poor; 4) Speaking in the Public Square; 5) Reading the Signs of the Times; and 6) Doing What is Now Ours to Do.

At the workshop we reviewed the first session only, which was relatively easy because it's a story we are familiar with. Still, if the process is properly structured within the fraternity, there's a fair amount of material which needs to be read before each session, so a fraternity, or part of a fraternity that is considering taking this journey, needs to be willing to do the work.

One of the best parts of the reading material for the first session is a comparison of the position of our secular society with respect to care of creation with the mainline Catholic position and the Franciscan position. With a review of Catholic Social Teaching and the life of St. Francis, a Franciscan environmental ethic is suggested which states:

Whatever tends to see the intrinsic worth of Creation, the divine in and through Creation, and promotes healthy, just, sustainable, inclusive and loving family ties between God, all people and Creation is good and right, and whatever promotes the opposite is not.

The DVD includes statements from well-known Franciscans, including Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM and our own Fr. Larry Janezic, OFM. The C4C process is available for a \$100 donation and may be ordered from FAN on their web site. I suggested that clusters might like to get together to purchase the C4C materials together, and I still think that's a sound idea. However, a number of fraternities seemed happy to purchase the process on their own. Of course, the Region has a copy which can be loaned out to interested fraternities. Please contact me for further information.

In the afternoon I showed a portion of the first webinar produced by NAFRA and CRS regarding the Courageous Initiative the SFO is participating in with CRS in their Catholics Confront Global Poverty campaign. The 8-minute segment was a talk by Kent

Ferris, SFO, our National JPIC Councilor, regarding our need as Franciscans to answer this call. I sent the links to the first two complete webinars to all who attended the workshop who had given me email addresses and to all ministers. If anyone else would like this information, just email me – stefsfo@sbcglobal.net.

Finally, we watched a webcast that was produced by FAN entitled "Creativity for Creation," which deals with many of the environmental problems we are facing today and what we as Franciscans, both individually and in community, can do to help. The entire webcast is about 1 hour 45 minutes in length, is made up of a panel of 5 experts on the environment and was a real eye-opening experience at least for me. To watch the webcast, just go the FAN's web site, www.franciscanaction.org, scroll down to "Creativity for Creation," and click on the link.

We also talked about the creation of Action Circles throughout the country, which is a main activity of FAN at this time. Action Circles come together to discuss local, national and international environmental concerns and seek ways to educate others about these matters and how we might be able to make a difference. We have a small Action Circle in this Region – there are 4 of us now and we'd love to have others join us. If you're interested, please email me at (stefsfo@sbcglobal.net). Our next meeting will be on April 10.

What comes next? I'm off to Washington, DC this week for a FAN meeting and then to Ecumenical Advocacy Days, which includes visits with our Representatives and Senators on the Hill. I'll be reporting on that next month. 

Please pray for...

Clare Messmer, member of Prayer & Praise Ministry, St. Francis Fox Valley Fraternity, who recently had surgery for a broken hip.

Andrew King, St. Francis, St. Louis Fraternity, who also is seriously ill.

Rest in Peace

Earleen Soprych – St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, March 5th. As many of you know she was the first Regional Minister, 1994-1997. In spite of her many illnesses Earleen was an exemplary Secular Franciscan and will be missed by all who knew her.

Florence Conrad – St. Maximillian Kolbe Fraternity, March 18th. Florence was 97 years old and provided hospitality for her fraternity since 1985! She too, will be greatly missed.

May our risen Lord grant both these dear sisters eternal light, happiness and peace.