

## Minister's Message

Dear brothers and sisters,

Happy Easter! May the celebration of God's infinite love for us touch your heart so deeply this year that it transforms your soul, making you truly able to bring the love and light of Christ to your family, friends, co-workers, and everyone and everything in God's creation with whom you come in contact.

The Triduum, in particular, is a good time to reflect on our own way of the cross and consider how God has led us to follow in Christ's footsteps so far. How have you experienced conversion? Some of you, like me, have come to the Catholic Church from other Christian denominations; others were baptized as adults after being raised in a non-Christian religion or no religion at all; others of you are faithful cradle Catholics who still had to experience a deeper call to conversion, or you wouldn't be Secular Franciscans today.

Remembering my own reception into the church, I am most impressed by the way God in his goodness dealt with me. When we went to visit my United Methodist family at Christmas, I had no intention of becoming Catholic. Neither of us was attending church...until Christmas Eve, when my husband announced he was going to midnight Mass and that I was going with him. I was surprised, to put it mildly! We went to Sunday Mass during our visit and continued when we returned home.

Just a few weeks later I got up the courage to go to the rectory and tell the pastor I wanted to become Catholic, and I hoped to be able to receive Communion at Easter. He could have told me I needed to wait and start RCIA in the fall...but he didn't. Instead, I was received into the church that Easter! God doesn't always make the impatient wait!

(I admit that I was a bit disappointed when our pastor explained to me that conditional baptism was no longer practiced -

despite being quite certain that my grandfather, a Methodist minister, had baptized me as an infant, I liked the thought of experiencing it as an adult.)

Once I became Catholic, I knew that my newfound faith required more from me than simply attending Mass every Sunday - that might be enough for a cradle Catholic, but I knew I needed more. Some time during my first year as a Catholic, I discovered the Secular Franciscans at St. Peter's. I remember the man who met with me telling me that in years past, I would've had to wait a few years after becoming Catholic before I could enter the Order.

Once again, God was kind to me and honored my desire to move quickly! I started as a postulant a few months later, and was professed just 38 months after becoming Catholic. (This was well before we lengthened the period of formation to help ensure that our candidates were as well prepared as possible for a lifetime commitment.) Of course, that was still only the beginning! The way of the cross as a Catholic and a Secular Franciscan has enabled me to find meaning in the many sufferings inherent in ordinary life: job problems, family illnesses, conflicts, deaths. As Christ was stripped, so we experience the pain of loss in many areas of our lives, and that will continue until the time of our own passing, when we will finally let go of the last things of this life and, we hope, receive the joys of heaven. As Article 19 of the Rule says, "Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father."

May the joy of Christ's resurrection fill your hearts and minds for the next fifty days, and always....

Peace and blessings, Vickie 

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The *OFS 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.**

**REGIONAL CALENDAR 2015**

All events are at Mayslake Village unless otherwise noted

Saturday, January 17  
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Monday, March 2  
*Per Capita/Census/Fraternity Annual Reports due*

Saturday, March 21  
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Sunday, April 5 *Easter*

Sat./Sun., April 11-12  
Candidates Retreat (*tentative*)

Saturday, May 16  
Chapter of Ministers

Thursday-Sunday, July 9-12  
*Summer Seminar – Loretto, PA; topic “Servant Leadership”s*

Saturday, July 18  
Regional Executive Council Meeting

Saturday, August 1  
Regional Gathering – Feast of the Portiuncula

Saturday, September 19  
*Formation/Leadership Workshop*

Saturday, October 3  
Regional Executive Council Meeting

October 13-18  
*NAFRA Chapter/Chapter of Elections, Clinton, NJ*

Sunday, November 15  
Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration location TBA

Saturday, December 5  
Regional Chapter of Elections



**Spiritual Assistant’s Message**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Happy April Showers to you. This is a statement of the obvious but to me it is somewhat interesting the way our Catholic seasons and our monthly seasons played out this year. Almost the entire month of March this year has been Lent. Then, April begins with Holy Week then Easter proper, the octave of Easter, and the fullness of Easter Time all the way through April and most of the merry merry month of May.

Another most important event this month is the annual candidate’s retreat which will take place on Saturday April 11<sup>th</sup> and Sunday April 12<sup>th</sup> at Mayslake Village. This very special event is produced by our regional formation council headed by our wonderful brother Nick Noe, OSF. I expect that he will talk about these days in his section of this newsletter.

I will simply say that this retreat is carefully designed for those in initial formation and their formators with related formation teams. And don’t forget to RSVP through your fraternity so that we have an accurate account of how many people to expect so that we can prepare the space and provide enough food and beverage for a happy day for everybody. At last a few words about the ultimate afore mentioned happy day we have to celebrate this month. We have traveled through the penitential journey of Lent.

We prepared ourselves to stand at the foot of the cross in order to relieve the brutal experience of the passion of our tender and innocent Lord Jesus. Then we waited together living with the emptiness of our tabernacles and the absence of the guiding light of the churches fire. But then with our broken hearts weeping we are given a jolting revelation by St. Magdalene and we remember. We remember what he promised. We remember that the story and life begins again like springtime. And from where I stand, I am convinced that especially because we are Franciscans we know for certain that we are after all redeemed and liberated Easter people. This also means that we are free again to express our happiness and assent by freely proclaiming Alleluia in response to any good occasion.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

May you all be blessed and thrilled by the seasons of Eastertime and springtime this year, as always, your brother Joe M, ofm

P.S. One more special event this month which may be of interest to you will be the Solemn Profession of two of our friars from the Sacred Heart Province on Saturday April 25<sup>th</sup> beginning at 11:00 a.m. here at St. Peter’s in the Loop. Secular Franciscans would be welcome.

Op. Ed. – The emailed March edition had an incorrect Volume and No. – the corrected *web* version will show ‘Vol. 21 No. 4’

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**In-formation** – By Sr. Marilyn Renninger, OSF  
Regional Formation Commission

Hi, Everyone!

Lent is rapidly taking us to the Triduum, and then the Resurrection of Jesus, which is the foundation of our faith. Easter is such a great festival that it takes fifty days (seven weeks) to celebrate it. Perhaps if we made a list of our seven greatest blessings, we could celebrate one each week. Then we'll be less likely to fade before the lilies.

St. Paul said, "If Christ is not raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain." There is no Easter without the Cross. So, just as Jesus accepted the cross as part of God's will, so too, we accept our crosses when experiencing the ups and downs of daily life. Jesus was victorious over suffering and death. We share that victory. We are resurrection people! Jesus continues to live and make his home in each of us. Do we live as if we believe this? And does it show on our face?

Because we are Franciscans, we celebrate the founding of the Franciscan Order, our way of joyfully living the Gospel. In the spring of 1209 Francis and his first companions went to Rome to have their way of life approved. It is recorded that Pope Innocent III gave verbal approval. Traditionally Franciscans annually renew their profession on (or around) April 16, recalling Francis and his first followers professing to live the Gospel way of life. Your April fraternity gathering is a good time for you, as Secular Franciscans, to renew your profession and commit yourselves again to the Gospel life according to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

St. Francis' dream became a reality in the fraternities of the Third Order, now called the Order of Franciscans Secular, OFS. As members of the Franciscan Family we each are to do our part in **rebuilding the Church**.

St. Francis reflected the image of Christ through his life of poverty and humility. Today, Pope Francis calls us to do the same.

As we joyfully follow Christ in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi, let us commit ourselves again to the ideals of the Gospel and "wake the world".

Remember that we are resurrection people so rejoice always! Wishing you a Blessed and Happy Easter season filled with great joy, peace, love, and everything good!

Sr. Marilyn 

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Excerpt from Feb. 18, 2015 Time.com

Pope Francis' Guide to Lent: What You Should Give Up This Year -

"What are you giving up for Lent?" It's a question a lot of people will get these next few days. If you want to change your body, perhaps alcohol and candy is the way to go.

But if you want to change your heart, a harder fast is needed. This narrow road is gritty, but it isn't sterile.

It will make room in ourselves to experience a love that can make us whole and set us free.

Now that's something worth fasting for.

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Excerpt from Feb. 19 Focus Blog

Here we selected 10 of his best tips:

1. Get rid of the lazy addiction to evil
2. Do something that hurts
3. Don't remain indifferent
4. Pray: Make our hearts like yours!
5. Take part in the sacraments
6. Prayer
7. Fasting

"We must be careful not to practice a formal fast, or one which in truth 'satisfies' us because it makes us feel good about ourselves

8. Almsgiving
9. Help the Poor
10. Evangelize

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On Sunday, Pope Francis spoke about the Christian season of lent, the period of prayer and penance leading up to Holy Week and Easter. "Lent," said the Pope, "is a time of combat" and "a time of spiritual battle against the spirit of evil." 

## Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

*Protect the Fragile World in which We Live*

By Barbara Elkins, OFS, JPIC Councilor

I am writing this on the first day of spring, which has fallen on Friday in the 4<sup>th</sup> week of Lent. I look out onto my yard that had been covered in thick snow just a few weeks ago to discover the small purple buds of my crocus plants twinkling in the sun. As I await the Easter season and the colorful blooms of spring flowers, I reflect on the beauty of creation.

*"Small yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples."*

~ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 216

We do indeed live in a fragile world. As a school librarian, I recently assisted students in their research on biomes and ecosystems. I was reminded of the importance of maintaining balance within an ecosystem, for it is necessary in order that all the organisms within that system can survive. These balances involve food, water, oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon. In this time of rebirth, let us reflect on the current issues that threaten our fragile ecology and take some steps to promote the integrity of creation.

### PRAY

When I attended the JPIC Rally in 2012, we walked the beautiful Way of the Cross located on the grounds of The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, IL. We recited *The Stations of the Cross with John Paul II: On the Path of Ecological Conversion* prepared by Fr. Jacek Orzechowski, OFM, in collaboration with members of the Franciscan Action Network. These Ecological Stations of the Cross provide thoughtful reflections on caring for creation. This 9-page printable resource may be downloaded at [www.hnp.org/jpic/pdf/EcologicalStationsENGLISH2012small.pdf](http://www.hnp.org/jpic/pdf/EcologicalStationsENGLISH2012small.pdf)

### LEARN

In anticipation of Pope Francis' forthcoming encyclical on the environment, DePaul University is hosting a free conference entitled "Fragile World: Ecology & the Church" on April 8-12. Michael A.

Perry, OFM, Minister General of the Franciscan Order will be presenting one of the keynote addresses. For information: call (773) 325-4158 or <http://worldcathweek.depaul.edu>

The Global Catholic Climate Movement, an international coalition of Catholics collaborating to bring awareness to the climate crises, provides an excellent resource to learn more about Catholic teaching on climate change. On their website they state: "From Genesis through Revelation, Catholics accept as a revealed truth that creation and its order is a good that we must embrace and steward. This has been echoed and championed by Church leaders for two millennia. In response to what God has given the human race – clean air, life-sustaining water, fruits of the earth's harvests, and the bounty of the sea – we are called to honor God our Creator for these many blessings. We are obliged to respect these gifts, which are for all people."

Take some time to learn about the Church's teaching on these issues by visiting <http://catholicclimatemovement.global>.

### ACT

Are you looking for some practical applications in which to care for God's creation? Lent serves as a time to be mindful of the ways that our daily choices impact everyone. A *Lenten Carbon Fast* calendar [www.gwIPL.org](http://www.gwIPL.org) provides us with specific actions that will reduce our production of climate pollution and help to preserve God's great gift of Creation.

This year, Catholic Relief Services celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their Rice Bowl project. They provide a Lenten calendar that offers scriptural reflections and practical tips for your consideration. Check it out at [www.crsricebowl.org/family-activities](http://www.crsricebowl.org/family-activities).

Small changes can make a difference. Increase your awareness of how your daily choices impact our natural resources and find ways to share your knowledge with others.

*"Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which 'bear the imprint of the Most High,' and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship." ~ OFS Rule, Article 18* 