

Minister's Message: Goals for a New Year!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I hope you are all enjoying a beautiful Christmas Season and wish all of you much happiness and fulfillment in the New Year!

The New Year is usually the time for well-meaning resolutions and goals—and that's good! We all need new beginnings and it's a great time to make plans for improvement—whether it's cleaning out the garage or improving our prayer life. With that in mind, I'd like to challenge all of us, including myself, to improve as Secular Franciscans—and we've been given the impetus from NAFRA!

When I reported on the October National Chapter in the November *SFO News*, I mentioned briefly that the Chapter had unanimously approved the restructuring of the apostolates. Why was this decision

made? What does it mean for us?

The decision was made because it was felt that, in an effort to "do" the apostolates, our Rule of Life had been moved to second place. The apostolates became projects, rather than a part of the *Rule* to which we professed. But the apostolates *are* a part of our *Rule*—to be specific, they are Articles 15 through 19 of our *Rule*. Thus, if we are truly trying to *live* our *Rule*, the apostolates will take care of themselves.

Our *Rule* is well summarized in Article 4: "The rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people." *This* is where our

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Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Peace and everything good to you this Christmas Season! I still have the Christmas spirit! In fact, I seem to have a larger dose than ever this Christmas Season.

Contributing to it this time was the joy of singing Handel's "Messiah" again. This was my 4th year in a row to participate in the "Do It Yourself Messiah," at the Civic Opera House. And I've participated in and enjoyed this annual Christmas time favorite on many previous occasions.

Of course, the quirky thing about singing the "Do-It-Yourself Messiah" is that we are part of the production and part of the audience all at once. And in the opera house that holds over 3,000 people, it's quite an extravaganza. Perhaps I should also mention that tickets are just the right price: free.

I must say things seem to be going right for me this Christmas Season. I went out to buy a few gifts for some of my family members, not knowing what in the world to get, and came home that day with the task accomplished, complete, done! In addition, I got all my cards in the mail in time ... just in time, that is, to get to their destinations on time.

And those Messiah tickets? When I went online to get them, they were all gone. So my friend, Fr. Arthur Anderson, OFM, and I went on faith—I think he thought I was a little presumptuous. And when we told an usher we had no tickets, a young woman standing there said, "Here—we have two extra." God bless her! We thanked her profusely. Isn't God indeed incarnate in our world?

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Council Members

Minister:

Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Vice-Minister:

Javier Orozco, SFO

Formation Director:

To be appointed

Secretary:

Monica Marko, SFO

Treasurer:

Stephen Lanterman, SFO

Councilor At-Large:

Elisabeth Shin, SFO

Councilor for Apostolates:

Nancy McKenna, SFO

*Councilor for Communications/
Public Relations:*

Lisa Wathen, SFO

Councilor for Fraternal Life:

Chris Bruhnke, SFO

Councilor for Visitations:

Jacqueline Leo, SFO

Councilor for Vocations:

Norman Mosk, SFO

*Councilor for Youth/
Young Adult:*

Sandra Kisel, SFO

Spiritual Assistant

Fr. Donald Blaeser, OFM

Newsletter Editor

Lisa Wathen, SFO

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

**Submission deadline is the
20th of each month.**

Professions

- **Helena Klee**, SFO, and
- **Rosemary Westfallen**, SFO, of St. Juliana Fraternity (Chicago) made their Professions on November 18.

Rest in Peace

- **Helen M. Close**, SFO of St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity (Fox Valley) died November 2.

Events of Interest

February 16: Rescheduled date for tour of the PASS Pregnancy Care Center, 17214 S. Oak Park Ave., Tinley Park. Time and details to be determined. For more information or to attend, contact Daniel and Susan Willenborg, SFO.

Living the Gospel of Life

Pro-life human rights activists in Colorado may be on the verge of a major breakthrough in the struggle against the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision. The group Colorado for Equal Rights received permission from a unanimous vote on Nov. 13 in the state Supreme Court to begin collecting 76,000 signatures needed by May 13 to bring forward a ballot initiative that would grant the status of legal personhood to the unborn.

For more information, visit www.coloradoforequalrights.com or call 719.749.2164.

Sources: Fox News 31 (Colorado), LifeSiteNews.com

“I remember an experience as a resident on a late-term abortion. ... I remember seeing the baby move underneath the sack of membranes as the caesarean incision was made ... The thought came to me, ‘My God, that’s a person.’ ”

~ David Brewer, MD, military physician and abortionist for 10 years

Around the Region

■ **Northwest Franciscan Community of the IHM (Palatine).** In honor of St. Francis’ Feast Day, at their October gathering members each donated one bag of nonperishable food for a local food pantry, and a can or bag of dog or cat food for an animal rescue center.

In December, the fraternity held its annual Christmas card project for the guests at

Franciscan Outreach. Members signed and stuffed 500 Christmas cards; each contained a customized prayer card with the Blessing of St. Francis on the back, and a \$1 gift certificate for a fast-food restaurant.

■ **St. Pascal Satellite (Chicago).** Established in 1937, the fraternity celebrated its 70th anniversary in December. ■

Mother Cabrini Celebration

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

As previously reported, Ruth Meylor, SFO of St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Rockford), was the announced recipient of the Mother Cabrini Award at the Region’s celebration of the Feast of Mother Cabrini on Sunday, November 11. The celebration was held at St. Patrick’s Crane Road Church in St. Charles, beautifully hosted by St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity (Fox Valley). Many thanks to Chris Bruhnke, SFO and the rest of her fraternity for their outstanding hospitality!

The presider for the Mass was Fr. Larry Janesic, OFM, who was also the recipient of the “I Come to Serve Award”. Fr. Janesic was

nominated by both of the fraternities he serves as Spiritual Assistant—St. Francis - St. Louis (Chicago) and St. Francis of Assisi (Crystal Lake). Fr. Janesic’s great service to the poor, as Director of Franciscan Outreach Association, was also acknowledged.

The other nominees for the Mother Cabrini Award, Mary Licata, SFO (St. Francis - St. Louis Fraternity, Chicago) and Lorraine Schuch, SFO (St. Clare Fraternity, Oak Brook) were also acknowledged and honored. We then all sat down to loads of delicious food and lively conversation. ■

Transforming the World in the Spirit of Sts. Francis and Clare

by Sr. Sheila Kinsey, OSF

A member of the Wheaton Franciscans, Sr. Kinsey is on the FAN Steering Committee and FAN Commission. Our Regional Minister, Stephanie Sormane, SFO, is also on the FAN Commission. Due to space limitations, following is a shortened version of her article.

On Dec. 7-8, 2007, Franciscan men and women from across the United States gathered in Washington, DC for the inaugural meeting of the newly-launched Commission of the Franciscan Action Network (FAN). FAN’s mission, as a network of friars, sisters, secular and ecumenical Franciscans, along with the men and women with whom they minister, is to embark on an action-oriented plan to achieve authentic social transformation by viewing proposed strategies, development initiatives and economic endeavors through the lens of Franciscan values. FAN intends to focus on U.S. policies and how they

impact the world. FAN’s advocacy efforts shall be strategic, acquiring critical upfront information for effective implementation.

The Commission agreed to accept responsibility for increasing the visibility of FAN within the Franciscan family and beyond. FAN has been divided into six geographic regions in the U.S., and representatives from each were present at the Commission meeting. Although the Poor Clares were not present, they were with the group in prayer. ... Commissioners accepted the challenge to make every effort to enhance communications between groups within the total network. Members expressed a commitment to participate in regular conference calls with affiliates and to report their findings to the Commission.

It was decided that the Commission would

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engage in a formation process to assist FAN in its effort to keep on task and to provide a resource for the spiritual, technical and other practical aspects. Of course, at the heart of the matter lies FAN's intention to apply Franciscan values and echo the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare in all elements of this local, national and international movement. The following list summarizes the areas of Franciscan heritage that must be reflected in any endeavor:

1. Advocacy will not dehumanize or demonize those with whom we disagree.
2. Poor and marginalized will fare better after the action for change.

3. Framework insists on a consistent ethic of life.
4. Non-partisan focus involves bi-partisan actors.
5. Policies involve reconciliation of injustices in larger social sphere.
6. Work will be in a collaborative and consultative manner.
7. Being prophetic will be balanced with making noticeable improvements in peoples' lives.
8. Love in action is our method and process for actualizing how we follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Filled with the spirit, the Commission committed to prepare for the first formal gathering of the total membership of FAN on March 7, 2008, which will be tied to the annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days on March 7-10, 2008 in Washington, DC. Stay tuned for more details. ■

Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI's Message for World Day of Peace, 1 Jan. 2008

from the Vatican, 8 December 2007; www.oecumene.radiovaticana.org/en1/Articolo.asp?c=173082

The human family, a community of peace

1. At the beginning of a New Year, I wish to send my fervent good wishes for peace, together with a heartfelt message of hope to men and women throughout the world. I do so by offering for our common reflection the theme which I have placed at the beginning of this message. It is one which I consider particularly important: *the human family, a community of peace*. The first form of communion between persons is that born of the love of a man and a woman who decide to enter a stable union in order to build together a new family. ...

The family, society and peace

2. The natural family, as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman, constitutes "the primary place of 'humanization' for the person and society", and a "cradle of life and love". The family is therefore rightly defined as the first natural society, "a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order".

3. Indeed, in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is *the first and indispensable teacher of peace*. It is no wonder, therefore, that violence, if perpetrated in the family, is seen as particularly intolerable. Consequently, when it is said that the family is "the primary living cell of society", something essential is being stated. The family is the foundation of society for this reason too: *because it enables its members in decisive ways to experience peace*. It follows that the human community cannot do without the service provided by the family. Where can young people gradually learn to savour

the genuine "taste" of peace better than in the original "nest" which nature prepares for them? *The language of the family is a language of peace*; we must always draw from it, lest we lose the "vocabulary" of peace. In the inflation of its speech, society cannot cease to refer to that "grammar" which all children learn from the looks and the actions of their mothers and fathers, even before they learn from their words.

4. The family, since it has the duty of educating its members, *is the subject of specific rights*. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which represents a landmark of *juridic civilization of truly universal value*, states that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State". For its part, the Holy See sought to acknowledge a special *juridic dignity* proper to the family by publishing the *Charter of Rights of the Family*. In its Preamble we read: "the rights of the person, even if they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family". The rights set forth in the *Charter* are an expression and explicitation of the natural law written on the heart of the human being and made known to him by reason. The denial or even the restriction of the rights of the family, by obscuring the truth about man, *threatens the very foundations of peace*.

5. Consequently, whoever, even unknowingly, circumvents the institution of the family undermines peace in the entire community, national and international, since he weakens what is in effect *the primary agency of peace*. This point merits special reflection: everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace. ... ■

Calendar

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

January

12: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

March

01: Per Capita, Census, and Fraternity Annual Reports due

15: Apostolic Action Workshop

29: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

April

05: Candidates' Retreat, Day 1

May

03: Candidates' Retreat, Day 2

17: Chapter of Ministers and National Visitation

June

21: Leadership Workshop

July

19: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

August

02: Regional Gathering, Feast of the Portiuncula

September

12-14: Regional Retreat, St. Francis Woods, Frankfort

October

25: Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

November

16: Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration (location TBD)

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concentration must be! In everything we say and do, the first thing that should come to mind is, "What would Jesus do?" If we're not sure about that, then, as Article 4 goes on to say, "Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel."

Living our *Rule* – following the gospel – is not easy! That's why we meet in community – to support one another. The point is not to find fault – but to encourage! Article 7 says, "Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily." That is, we all mess up, and we all need to start over every day. Since we're all in this together, there is no place for finger-pointing; only forgiveness, reconciliation and moving on together.

So, in the future, we need to ask one another not so much "What are we doing for the apostolates?" as "How are we living the *Rule*?" Authentic Franciscans strive to live the *Rule* – the Spirit of the *Rule* – which is the gospel of Jesus Christ – and there is nothing that will attract others to our way of life more than our authentic witness to it! Let's really work together toward this goal!

May the Lord bless our efforts to be more like his Son! May the examples of St. Francis and St. Clare light our way! ☒



"The object of a new year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul."

~ G.K. Chesterton



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So I'm fixing to keep this Christmas spirit well into the New Year. Seems like a good idea to me. I think we would all do well to keep the Christmas spirit continually. As we begin year number 2008, we can do no better than did St. Francis and that is to live in a constant spirit of wonder and awe that our God became enfleshed, incarnate, one of us. It's clearly too much of a mystery to be confined to one brief season of the year, and too much of a joy to be put aside for even a day.

So I'm hoping and praying that the spirit of Christmas may suffuse the whole of 2008. I pray that we might all renew and reinvigorate our commitment to being Franciscans: following our Incarnate Lord more closely, more wholeheartedly. I pray that we may use every means available to do that, such as faithfully attending fraternity meetings, offering our services and energy in the fraternity and in our parish community, and giving of our time and energy to the poor and suffering Christ we meet daily.

And if we do carry a spirit of joy and wonder, why not share it by inviting others who seem to be good Catholics and practicing their Faith, to join us as Franciscans? Invite them to join the party – our year-round celebration of the goodness, love and wonder of our God who has transformed our world for all eternity by entering it in time.

May God bless you abundantly in this New Year. ☒