

Minister's Message: Happy Lenten Journey!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is one of my favorite seasons of the Church—such a good time for reflection, to start good new habits—and also to look forward to spring! I wish you all a most meaningful and productive Lent!

I am keeping my message short this month because I'm also including an article on page 3 by Anne Mulqueen, SFO, NAFRA's International Councilor, about the International Chapter in Hungary last November—do read it as it deals with important aspects of fraternal life!

Please come to the Apostolic Action Workshop at Mayslake Village on Saturday, March 21. Flyers have just gone into the

mail to all local ministers. We will be introducing Pace e Bene's upcoming Franciscan nonviolence training process, now entitled "Instruments of Peace," as well as discussing the transition from the Commissions to the JPIC model for our apostolates. The Pace e Bene process will be a good ongoing formation resource, because it deals with peacemaking on a personal and relational as well as community basis.

Also, the Candidates' Retreats at Mayslake are coming up on April 4 and May 2. Be sure your Candidates are signed up for these important Regional formation events; a mailing was sent out recently.

Looking forward to seeing many of you at Mayslake on March 21! ☒

Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear "Brothers and Sisters of Penance",

As you probably know, that was the original title of the Third Order of St. Francis, which we now call the "Secular Franciscan Order". Penance! Living a *life* of penance! That's what the original lay followers of St. Francis were all about.

So we might say that you were made for Lent! I mean Secular Franciscans and Lent fit together like a hand in a glove. This has been at the heart of your calling from the get-go (not that we friars are to be different).

Listen to the way St. Bonaventure describes your origins in Chapter IV of his *Major Legend of St. Francis*, dated 1260-1263:

"For set on fire by the fervor of his preaching, a great number of people bound themselves by new laws of penance according to the rule which they received from the man of God. Christ's servant decided to name this way of life the Order

of the Brothers [and Sisters] of Penance. As the road of penance is common to all who are striving toward heaven, so this way of life admits clerics and lay, virgins and married of both sexes."

They were "set on fire by the fervor of his preaching". Well, while we haven't had the privilege of hearing his preaching, we do have the writings of St. Francis and many inspiring stories about his life. And always St. Francis pointed toward Christ—the reason for us to do penance—to grow closer to Christ, to become more like Christ, to grow deeper in love with Christ. No matter what we do during Lent, this ought to be at the heart of our penance.

Some years after St. Bonaventure's monumental work, Bernard of Besse wrote his *Book of Praises of St. Francis*, dated 1277-1283. In Chapter 7, he wrote:

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Rest in Peace

- **Alice Kealy**, SFO of St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Oak Lawn) died February 3.

Local Appointments

Best wishes and prayers for J. Patrick Mendés, SFO the newly-appointed Spiritual Assistant for **St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Oak Lawn)**.

Directory Updates

St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (formerly of Evergreen Park) has changed its meeting location:

St. Germaine
9711 S. Kolin, Oak Lawn

St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity (Crystal Lake) has changed its meeting location and time:

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
1023 McHenry Ave.,
Crystal Lake
3rd Sunday, 1:30 p.m.

Events of Interest

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.

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 \$220 single/\$180 double, which includes room, meals, shuttle, and registration fee. After April 30, the cost increases to \$235 and \$195, respectively. For more information, email Sandra Kisel, SFO, Regional Formation Director, at formation@ilsfo.org.

Francis and the Tau

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

When I survey the wondrous cross, my God, how great thou art!

Through the book, *A Franciscan Symbol, The Tau*, by Damien Vorreux, OFM, I hope these reflections of Jesus, the Cross, and Francis and the Church might refresh our memories and our love of the Tau, (our habit and the sign of our Order, of who we are). I hope it will be an opportunity for our hearts to be stirred in prayer this Lenten Season while beholding the crucifix, to give thanks to God for the calling He has given us and the greatest gift of all, His only begotten Son.

Francis was present at the Fourth Lateran Council, and it was there that Pope Innocent III announced to all the prelates that he had given St. Francis and all desiring to follow him approbation of their evangelical life and rule, promising Francis that even more would be given him later.

It is here the Tau makes its appearance. Pope Innocent III opened the Council with the words of Christ, “I have desired with a great desire to eat this Pasch with you (Lk 22:15),” noting that *Pasch* means *Passover*. He expressed the hope that the Council, the new Passover, may become the occasion of a triple passing: *corporal, spiritual and eternal*. The corporal passing would be realized in the departure of an army for the liberation of Jerusalem; the spiritual was to be the passing from one state to another, that is, a conversion, a reform of the universal Church; as for the eternal passing, from life to the true Life, it was to be accomplished by means of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

As to the spiritual passing, he commented on Ezekiel 9, and made his own the words of God to his prophet, “Pass through the center of the city and *mark with a Tau* the foreheads of the men who weep and wail because of all the abominations which are committed there,” adding, “The Tau is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and its form traces a cross like the one which was presented before attaching Pilate’s placard. The Tau is the sign borne on the forehead if one is to manifest the radiance of the cross in all one’s conduct if, as the apostle says, one crucifies one’s flesh with its vices and sins; if one affirms, ‘I want to put my glory in nothing

other than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified for me and I to the world’ ... he said therefore: ‘Be champions of the Tau and of the Cross!’ ”

Francis took the Holy Father’s words as though having been spoken directly to him. The pope said, “Mercy will be granted to those who bear the Tau, a mark of a life, of penance and renewal in Christ.” The Tau became the sign of the Order and its mission. So Francis preached the Tau of penance everywhere, for from the pope he was stirred to arouse all men to an evangelical conversion, “*to a passing into Christ*”.

Again the pope spoke of the Tau, the sacramental and Eucharistic life, “*to live in penance and receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ,*” and this theme was repeated throughout his post-conciliar letters.

From the pope, Francis hears the call and realizes that *the Tau is the sign of conquerors*. Francis is marked with this sign throughout the remaining years of his life. He preaches the cross everywhere until at last he becomes likened to Christ bearing in his own flesh the stigmata.

Lenten Activities

■ **Reflect on Chapter 2, “Concerning Those Who Do Not Do Penance”, of our Rule.** Not in morbidity but as a guide to taking a good look at yourself, taking stock of how you’re living your profession and ways to improve. It is Francis who gives us this admonition, “in the charity that is God accept kindly and with divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... And may they keep them in their mind and carry them out, in a holy manner to the end, because they are ‘spirit and life’.” May God’s peace be with us all and our hearts opened.

■ **Reflect on a portion of the Gospel and our Rule.** We are people of the Gospel. Let us make special time each day and at our fraternity meetings to reflect on a portion of the Gospel and our Holy Rule of Life. Further, let us examine closely Francis’ life and way of living the *gospel* to the fullest with joy in every circumstance.

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Formation News

■ **Candidates' Retreat.** Registration forms have been sent to all local ministers and formation directors. Please copy this information and encourage your Candidates, Inquirers, formation teams, and newly-Professed to attend. I look forward to seeing you at the retreats as well as other Regional events through the year.

■ **Fraternity Visits.** It would be a great pleasure to visit your fraternities throughout the year and get to know you better. If you're interested, please email me at formation@ilsfo.org. Please also feel free to write what's happening in your fraternities and any special notes you'd like to have shared. I understand St. Bernardine of Siena Fraternity (Wayne) will be having the Rite of Welcoming this month. This is great news! I'm looking forward to being with you all then. ■

From My Corner of the World

by Anne Mulqueen, SFO, International Councilor, USA

Have you ever had so much to say that you didn't know where to begin? Well, I have. And so the Holy Spirit had to step in and lead me to an article that will set the tone and content of this column. Michele Canone, OFS, a 30-year-old Italian man, wrote it. His reflection refers to the recent International Chapter in Hungary. He confesses to finding it difficult to imagine *men and women aged 50 to 60 so full of light and charged with energy*.¹ He admits that his experience at the Chapter changed his perception, and that **light, if it is real, cannot fade**.

Michele's article speaks of *Communication*, one of the International Fraternity's priorities for the next 6 years. He says:

"Communication in the past meant to the Order little more than issuing a circular [letter], which informed everyone about important events. Today, communication is **action**, communicating means **living communion** and making this known so that others can live it. This is the greatest challenge. Training will be necessary in communication, which is the soul of sharing!"

And because the major part of my responsibilities in the SFO is to communicate, I will pay heed to Michele's insight and do my best not only to inform you about major events and the directives of the International Fraternity, but also share my impressions and perceptions—my very *self* with you in fraternal communion.

In addition to information and reports of activity, from time-to-time I will share with you how the International Fraternity functions. It will help you put the information into perspective. And so in the spirit of communication and communion, let us begin.

In my opinion, the most dramatic and the important assertion came from Minister General Encarnación del Pozo during the State of the Order address. She told us to take charge of our identity as an Order and act on the conviction that we are equal partners in the Franciscan Family, not just passive members. Encarnita (as our Minister General is affectionately known) exhorts us as follows:

"I beg of you—the SFO must not and cannot trail behind ... the other components of our family. The SFO has to reclaim ... its place in these family events ... I do believe that the First Order, the Second Order and the Third Order Regular at all levels need

the knowledge that we can offer, as people fully immersed in the ordinary circumstances and problems related to work, family, politics, education and science, including situations of extreme poverty and all kinds of misery."

If we are to assume our place at the table, we need to know our heritage. What more auspicious time than the 8th centenary of the birth of the Franciscan charism to reflect on our history. In 1209, Francis and his brothers presented themselves before Pope Innocent III and asked for recognition and approval of their gospel way of life. Although the penitential movement predated 1209, and St. Francis was a penitent, 1209 marks the official birth of our charism. It is with joy and gratitude that we join the rest of the Franciscan family in celebrating this anniversary. If you have access to a computer, search for a document called *Conference of the Franciscan Family, Living According to the Gospel*. It is an excellent formation resource.

Continuing with the State of the Order address, Encarnita reported that in the Western World, particularly Europe, vocations are declining while in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Slavic nations, there is an astonishing growth in vocations. We can only wonder why. The United States numbers have remained approximately the same over the last few years. In my last report to CIOFS, I reported 15,811 professed members, 1,208 candidates and 850 inquirers. It seems that during times of turmoil, people who gave little thought to spiritual matters in more secure times, turn to God for comfort. Perhaps, Saint Paul's assertion that, *All things work together for good for those who know and love the Lord*, will bear fruit in new vocations.

When group work is required at International Chapters, the Councilors are separated into language groups. There are five official languages, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. There are six working groups, two of which are English.

As you may remember, the theme of the General Chapter was Profession and a Sense of Belonging. Many of you helped me prepare for the Chapter by your responses to the circular letter that was distributed last year. During the Chapter there were

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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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major presentations on each of these topics. After each presentation, the language groups met to discuss them. Reflection questions were provided to stimulate discussion. At the bottom of this article I have included a few for your personal use. If you are interested in reading the presentations that were given, they are posted on the NAFRA website under *Meetings and Resources*.

Of the five priorities² established by the International Fraternity, formation was voted number one. **Great emphasis was placed on revitalizing the local fraternity where the life of the Order exists and vocations are developed.** The anniversary of the birth of the Franciscan movement challenges us to *consciously* recommit to the ideals of St. Francis and our Baptismal and Profession promises. After all, the risen Christ is in the midst of our fraternities and in the heart of each brother and sister. All of us know that every member of the fraternity is responsible for formation. It follows then that the challenge of formation is to remind each other that both gifts and responsibilities come with profession as a Secular Franciscan.

“Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should

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“The Third Order is of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, shared by clerics, laity, virgins, widows, and married couples. Their purpose is to live uprightly in their own homes, to devote their attention to works of piety, and to flee the world’s allurements.”

Often it’s difficult for us to flee the world’s allurements, because we need so many material things – things that are so very alluring, so appealing, so enticing. But part of our calling to a life of penance is to live simply, to avoid superfluity. Lent can be a time to divest ourselves of a lot of excess “stuff”. It can be a time to note the difference between “wants” and “needs”. And if we’re honest about it, we convince ourselves that our *wants* are really *needs*.

It’s also interesting to note that Bernard of Besse touches on the relationship between the Secular Franciscans and the friars in the

set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.” (Article 12 – The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order).

I will leave you by restating the opening line of this article. I have so much to say that I will have to save some topics for future articles.

For Reflection

■ **Profession.** Secularity represents the special mission brought forth by Profession into the SFO. Do you believe (understand) that you have been called, precisely by virtue of your own vocation, to work in the world for its sanctification? In general, does any resistance to acceptance of this way of *consecration* into the world still exist? How can we handle this resistance in a positive manner?

■ **Sense of Belonging.** Based on your experience, what are the symptoms of a fragile or missing sense of belonging to the SFO? In your opinion, what means can be implemented to improve or reinforce a sense of belonging for our brothers and sisters? ☒

¹ I think I saw some brothers and sisters with light and energy who were older than 50 to 60, but I suppose when you’re 30, it’s difficult to imagine life beyond 60.

² Formation, Communication, Franciscan Youth, Presence in the World, and Emerging National Fraternities.

same chapter:

“From the beginning a brother was assigned to them as a minister, but now, in each region, they are released to their ministers, but who, as confreres begotten by the same father, are still encouraged by the brothers with counsel and assistance.”

He sounds like he’s talking about us today, and how the Secular Franciscans were under the leadership of the friars, but then were released to their own ministers, but “are still encouraged by the brothers with counsel and assistance”. That sounds like what we are doing in our roles as local and regional spiritual assistants.

I encourage you, then, to follow your calling to live a life of penance, especially during this holy season of Lent – not in order to suffer or be sad, but to devote yourself to Christ, and to look forward to the joy of Easter. Have a Blessed Lent. ☒