

Minister's Message: Easter Blessings!

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May this wonderful season of new life, as we prepare and then celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, fill you with peace and everything good!

I'd also like to thank all of you for your promptness in returning annual reports, Fair Share (formerly per capita) and demographic information. Haven't heard from everyone yet, but we're close and I truly appreciate your working with me to complete these tasks. Only 8 more annual reports to be received and 16 demographics – that's really good!

It's been a very busy Lent for me! As I write this, I just returned from Washington, DC where I attended the Franciscan Action Network (FAN) Action Commission meeting, and then Ecumenical Advocacy Days, which culminated with meetings with

our representatives and senators in Congress. It was an excellent experience! Two weeks earlier, I was in Springfield for Catholics at the Capitol, sponsored by the Illinois Catholic Conference, also a wonderful experience. Sound too political for you? Well, it's not! How else do we take our Christian-Catholic-Franciscan values to public life? They won't get there on their own, believe me! We are all called to do this!

I want to speak especially about Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) which focused on climate change, and that was the message we took to the Hill to our Congressional representatives. We had a weekend of workshops that were simply outstanding, given by experts who could not only describe the problem and how we got to

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Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

OK, I would wish you a Happy Easter, but there are still 11 days of April left until Easter Sunday. So I'm going to choose to be stingy and hold off till next month.

Harrumph! Well, this is not meant to be mean-spirited. It's just that Lent is really a precious time, and we should look to it as a golden opportunity to begin again. As you probably know, the word comes from an Old English word: *lencten*, which means spring. It is derived from the same root as the adjective *long*, the connection being that in springtime the days are growing longer.

The Church developed the season of Lent as the time to prepare its catechumens for the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist. As such, it was a kind of 40 day retreat, made in

anxious anticipation of the day when these new members (now called the *elect*) would participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church.

For us, then, Lent is a time to journey with them. And in doing so, we dig deeply into the meaning and implications of our own baptismal calling. I dare say that outside of church we don't think a whole lot about our baptism. Most of us who were baptized as infants have no memory to hang on to, and so the whole event – as monumental as it was – is shrouded in the vault of history.

But we would do well to resurrect the importance, if not the memory, of our baptism. Through it we are committed to practicing our faith. The edifice of our Franciscan calling is built on the foundation

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Submission deadline is the 20th of each month.

Professions

- **Mimi Ferlita**, SFO of Northwest Franciscan Community of the IHM (Palatine) made her Profession on February 9.

Rest in Peace

- **Judy Smith**, SFO of St. Bernardine of Siena (Wayne) died March 17.

Events of Interest

April 16-18: A Used Religious Book Sale will be held at Marytown, 1600 W. Park Ave., Libertyville, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. in Founders Hall. For more information, call 847.367.7800.

April 19: The Marian Rosary Devotion is sponsoring a celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday from 2-5 p.m. at St. Theresa Parish, 455 N. Benton, Palatine. Confessions will be heard from 2-4 p.m. Events include exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and meditations on Divine Mercy at 2 p.m., and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at 3 p.m. Fr Dominic Lim, OFM CONV. of Marytown will celebrate Mass at 4 p.m., followed by veneration of the Divine Mercy image. For more information, call Diane at 847.934.1232 or Peter and Mary at 847.382.3105.

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.

Around the Region

■ **Northwest Franciscan Community of the IHM (Palatine).** At their March gathering, the fraternity's spiritual assistant, Fr. Kieran Kemner, OFM, spoke about "Franciscans and Lent", after which members shared and reflected on what Lent meant to them and forms of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving they practice during Lent.

■ **St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity (Oak Lawn).** In February, members held their annual "Baby Shower", in which they collected items and monetary donations for The COURAGE Program, a ministry based at St. Germaine Parish (Oak Lawn) that provides assistance to pregnant young women and those who are single-parenting by offering resources to help them make important life decisions on issues of

sexuality, self-esteem, parenting, and more.

■ **St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity (Fox Valley).** In February, members watched "Finding Your Center" from Fr. Robert Barron's DVD, *Untold Blessing: Three Paths to Holiness*. In March, members staffed a display table with promotional material about our Order at the "Here I am Lord National Vocational Conference" held at the St. Patrick Parish (St. Charles). The conference is the largest parish-based vocations conference in the U.S.

■ **St. Juliana Fraternity (Chicago).** During their March gathering, the fraternity's ongoing formation was an analysis of St. Francis' "Prayer Before the Crucifix". Members were organized into small groups with facilitators. ■

The Burning Love of the Crucified

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

How is our Lenten Season progressing thus far? Do we find we have progressed in our little sacrifices, in our striving to come into God? Each day we read something of our Lord's words; let's meditate on this passage from Hosea 6:1-6:

"Come, let us return to the LORD, For it is he who has rent, but he will heal us; he has struck us, but he will bind our wounds. He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up, to live in his presence. Let us know, let us strive to know the LORD; as certain as the dawn is his coming, and his judgment shines forth like the light of day! He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the earth."

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your piety is like a morning cloud, like the dew that early passes away. For this reason I smote them through the prophets, I slew them by the words of my mouth; For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than holocausts.

Are our Lenten activities bringing us closer to our Lord or are they little temporary sacrifices we make a great fuss over, like not eating candy? I remember when I was a

child, I was taught that on Sundays we didn't fast because it was the Sabbath, so I could have candy, but other than learning how to say "no" to myself once in a while, there was no progression closer to knowing or loving God.

What steps have we taken that *are* actually bringing us closer to God? Have we determined to set time aside to listen to Him in the quiet, or by reading a passage of Holy Scripture daily? Have we reflected on His Passion and how much He loves us? Have we experienced Him holding out His arms to us and drawing us into Himself even while we were often in pain ourselves? It is in being loved by God and in loving that we grow into God. It's through the hills and valleys of our lives with Him that we learn to trust, believe in, identify with, and know Him, recalling His works from the past even during difficult times.

St. Bonaventure speaks of the "uplifting illuminations through which the soul is prepared for wisdom" and says, "There is no other way but through the most burning love of the Crucified." It was that sort of

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Candidates' Retreat: "Following Christ with Francis, Today"

As we have done for the last several years, the 2009 Candidates' Retreat will be two full days, held one month apart. Candidates are *strongly* encouraged to attend **both days** if at all possible; however, attending one day is preferable to none.

- **Dates:** 1st Session: April 4 (Sat.)
2nd Session: May 2 (Sat.)
- **Location:** Mayslake Village
1801 W. 35th St., Oak Brook
- **Cost:** \$25 for one day, \$50 for both days; covers lunch, snacks, and materials.

Directions and a detailed schedule will be sent to each participant, along with a confirmation letter.

The Candidates' Retreat is a key component of our initial

formation program, so ministers and formation directors, please strongly encourage your Candidates to attend; if necessary, please assist them in obtaining transportation to Mayslake.

If a Candidate cannot afford the registration fee, the local fraternity is asked to share the cost with the Region. If this is needed, please email our Formation Director, Sandra Kisel, SFO, at formation@ilsfo.org.

Formation directors, mentors, and other formation team members are also welcome to attend so they can better assist in following up with the Candidates on the topics covered.

For more information, contact Mary Farrell, SFO. 📧

Crucified *continued from p. 2 ...*

love which lifted Paul into the *third heaven* and transformed him into Christ to such a degree that he could say: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross. It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me." (2 Cor 12:2; Gal 2:20)

This sort of love so absorbed the mind of Francis, writes Bonaventure, that his spirit became apparent in his flesh; and for two years prior to his death, he carried the holy marks of the passion in his body.

St. Bonaventure wrote (Prologue 3 & Chapter 7:1,2) that "The image of the six wings of the Seraph, is a symbol of six stages of illumination which begin with creatures and lead to God to whom no one has access except through the Crucified." "For anyone who does not enter by that door, but climbs up another way, is a thief and a robber. But anyone who enters by that door will go in and out, and will find pastures. (Jn 10:1; 10:9)

John writes: "Blessed are those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb for they are nourished at the tree of life and they may enter the city through the gates." (Rev 22:14) This means that no one can enter into the heavenly Jerusalem by means of contemplation without entering through the blood of the Lamb as through a door, and in this passage, Christ is the way and the door. Christ is the ladder and the vehicle, like the Mercy Seat placed above the ark of God and *the mystery that has been hidden from all eternity*. (Ex 25:20; Eph 3:9)

Anyone who turns fully to face this Mercy-Seat with faith, hope, and love, devotion, admiration, joy, appreciation, praise and rejoicing, will behold Christ

hanging on the Cross. Such a person celebrates the Pasch, that is, the Passover, with Christ.

So, using the rod of the Cross this person can pass over the Red Sea, moving from Egypt into the desert where the *hidden manna* will be tasted. This person may then rest with Christ in the tomb, as one dead to the outer world, yet experiencing, in as far as possible in this pilgrim state, what was said on the cross to the thief who was hanging there with Christ: *This day you will be with me in Paradise*.

May we all find ourselves in the peace and the joy of Christ, washed in His life-giving water flowing forth from His side and His precious Blood. May we know that peace and joy which nothing in this world can compare to.

Formation News

We've got a busy time ahead with our Candidates' Retreats on April 4 and May 2, followed by the Leadership Workshop on June 20, then "Franciscan Spirituality for Secular Franciscans" from June 25-28 in Pennsylvania. I can't wait!

■ **Candidates' Retreat.** I'm really pleased about our guest speakers: Regional Spiritual Assistant Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM, and local spiritual assistants Vickie Klick, SFO, Patrick Mendés, SFO, and Sr. Marilyn Renninger, OSF. In addition, Regional Vice-Minister Javier Orozco, SFO and myself.

■ **Fraternity Visits.** Thank you to **St. Bernardine of Siena Fraternity (Wayne)** for a wonderful afternoon of fraternity on March 1; the formation was excellent! While listening to Sister Madge sharing her missionary experiences in Africa, it occurred to me how much is never learned about those closest to us. 📧

Calendar	
<i>Unless otherwise indicated, all events are at Mayslake Village (Oak Brook).</i>	
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 (<i>location TBD</i>)
December	
12:	Regional Elections (<i>to be confirmed with NAFRA</i>)

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where we are today, but what *must* happen if our planet is to survive, at least as we know it. St. Francis was very much in evidence at EAD – he was included in all prayer services, including a special service commemorating the 800th Anniversary of the Franciscan Order, which we celebrate this year. All the prayer services were designed by Marc DelMonico, who is a staff member of FAN, and we were all so proud of him – he did a magnificent job! We are so blessed to have the people we do working in the FAN office – they are all very, very special!

I spoke about FAN at our Apostolic Action Workshop on March 21, but for those unable to attend, just a little update: As you know, FAN is made up of representatives of the entire Order – friars, sisters and seculars – to work for peace and justice in the U.S., especially in Washington. We are divided up into regions, with a friar, a sister, and a secular from each on the Action Commission. I am the SFO representative for our region, and the sister representative is Sr. Sheila Kinsey, OSF, of the Wheaton Franciscans. We don't have a friar representative right now but hope that will change soon – we're working on it!

FAN's plans for the year include a Climate

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of baptism. Being Franciscan is clearly not another religion, but our privilege of following the charism and example of St. Francis in living that baptismal commitment with greater zeal.

For us, then, Lent has a two-fold character: we pray with, and support and encourage our *Elect* as they prepare to receive the Easter sacraments, and secondly, we join them in prayer, fasting and acts of generosity, as a pledge to live our baptismal commitment. So we're all in this together – it's a communal thing.

We are always in need of conversion – of reforming our lives and admitting that we are far from perfect. Difficult as it may be, we need to admit our selfishness, our self-

Change Campaign which is just launching now, and will continue through May. An Immigration Campaign is planned for the fall. Meantime, we continue to work on growing our numbers, and I have to say, our Religious brothers and sisters far outshine the seculars in this regard. It is my primary goal, before I step down as minister, to increase substantially the individual memberships from our region with FAN.

For those who are not familiar with FAN and may have a negative impression about the organization, I encourage you to visit their web site (which is one of the best I've ever encountered) and learn more about the organization. I think you'll find there is nothing objectionable about them or the way they carry out their mission, and we should be proud to be a part of them. Remember, NAFRA joined FAN on behalf of all of us. The individual memberships cost nothing, but they allow you to be up-to-date on FAN's activities, and to participate in actions when called upon to do so. Their actions are in no way contrary to our Catholic beliefs or Franciscan charism; in fact, they are literally our faith in action. So, visit the web site – www.franciscanaction.org – and learn more about this wonderful organization, and sign up (as Fr. Chuck Faso would say, "show up!") – be a part of it! Happy Easter everyone!! ☒

centeredness, our need to forgive and be forgiven. If we have no need of these then Jesus must have died on the cross needlessly.

So in these last weeks of Lent, let's dig deeper, and if we've slacked off in our Lenten resolutions, give them another shot. This is not to be some self-punishing, negative exercise bent on lowering our self-esteem, but rather one of appreciating anew our calling, and the precious gift of being baptized into Christ and the community of the Church. It's all about *living* that commitment, the commitment of the baptized. And the more we do that, the more wondrous will be our celebration in a few more days of the glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, OK, I'll say it now: Have a Blessed and Happy Easter. ☒