

Minister's Message: Happy Feast Day, New Spiritual Assistant

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

First and foremost, many blessings to you all as we celebrate the Feast Day of our Holy Father St. Francis!

How blessed we are to have this opportunity of not only celebrating our founder (or really, co-founder as we now consider St. Clare a full partner of St. Francis in the formation of the Order), but to take this celebration as an opportunity to renew our own commitment as Secular Franciscans, to recognize how graced we are to be Secular Franciscans, and to creatively seek out new ways to live our commitment to the SFO in the best possible way.

I hope all of you are planning or will be participating in special celebrations of the Transitus on October 3, and the Feast Day on October 4. In the event that you don't

have a place to celebrate, St. Peter's Church in the Loop will be celebrating both—the Transitus at 7 p.m. on October 3, and the Feast Day Mass on October 4 at 12:30 p.m. They have lots of other activities as well—check out their web site at www.stpetersloop.org.

■ **New Regional Spiritual Assistant.** It is with great pleasure that I announce that our new Regional Spiritual Assistant is Br. Joe Middleton, OFM. Having previously served as Regional Spiritual Assistant for the St. Clare Regional Fraternity, Br. Joe has much experience in this role. Since his transfer four years ago to St. Peter's in Chicago, he has worked with several local fraternities in our Region (most recently St. Francis-St. Louis Fraternity in Chicago), and has been the friar who subbed most often for Fr. Don

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Spiritual Assistant's Message

by Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM

Editor's Note: Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM, had prepared this article for use in the September SFO News, before he was informed about his transfer. In the November SFO News, our new Regional Spiritual Assistant, Br. Joe Middleton, OFM, will share more about his life and his relationship with the Secular Franciscan Order.

God of love, God of all creation, we praise and thank you for your goodness. As our summer season is winding down, we thank you for the beauty, the wonder of your creative hand. Most of us have enjoyed a most delightful summer, without excessive heat, and have had the opportunity to play in the wonderland of nature that you have given us.

The truth is, Lord, that we could have used more rain in this Chicagoland area, and yet we also must admit that we always want it on our own terms, not wanting it to ruin our

plans for picnics, golf, or just taking a nice walk. It must be difficult for you to try to please some of us, knowing that at the same time you will displease others.

As followers of your amazing child, Francis of Assisi, we cannot help appreciating the endless gift of your ever-evolving world. Through the wonders of science, we are even more aware today, of the magnitude, the immensity and the power of your universe, while our tiny sphere, planet earth, whirls through space.

We can imagine a smile on your face as galaxies far beyond our eyes splash with vivid color, forming new worlds yet to unfold. And we can only wonder at all that has already evolved from your ever creative hand, but is still unknown to us.

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Council Members

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minister@ilsfo.org

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Sandra Kisel, SFO

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Councilor for Apostolates:

To be appointed

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Public Relations:

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Councilor for Fraternal Life:

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Norman Mosk, SFO

Spiritual Assistant

Br. Joe Middleton, OFM

Newsletter Editor

Lisa Wathen, SFO

Email: sfonews@ilsfo.org

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

Local Elections

Best wishes and prayers for the newly-elected officers of the **Northwest Franciscan Community of the IHM (Palatine):**

- *Minister:*
Lisa Wathen, SFO
- *Vice-Minister:*
Jackie Leo, SFO
- *Formation Director:*
Sue Gribbon, SFO
- *Secretary:*
Marc Golab, SFO
- *Treasurer:*
Mary Kay Potnick, SFO

Events of Interest

October 16-17: The 2009 Catholic Festival of Faith, an opportunity for Catholics to come together to dialog, exchange ideas, and strengthen their faith, will be held at the Stephens Convention Center, 9301 Bryn Mawr Ave., Rosemont. For more information or to register, call 312.534.3100 or email decw@archchicago.org. Also visit www.catholicfest.org.

October 24: Marytown is holding a day of recollection, "Happiness, Only in the Next?", from 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., 1600 W. Park Ave., Libertyville. Author and retreat leader David Paul Eich will challenge participants to answer the question, "What can you do in this world that may well determine what you will do in the next?" Cost is \$35 per person and includes continental breakfast, talks, and lunch. Register by Oct. 19. For more information or to register, call 847.367.7800 or email retreats@marytown.com.

November 3: The Diocese of Rockford will be holding a Pro-Life Liturgy at 6:40 p.m., St. Mary Catholic Church, 10307 Dundee Rd, Huntley. A Rosary for Life will be prayed at 6:40 p.m., followed by Mass at 7 p.m. For more information, call Laura Christianson at 815.399.4300 or email L.Christianson@rockforddiocese.org.

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Franciscan Action Network Update

by Stephanie Sormane, SFO

I wanted to tell you just a little bit about a recent Franciscan Action Network (FAN) meeting, which was held here in Chicago. You will remember that the Secular Franciscan Order of the U.S. is a member of FAN, whose mission is to transform the world in the spirit of Francis and Clare of Assisi. The Action Commission of FAN normally meets twice a year, in March and September, usually in Washington, D.C. The rest of the time we have monthly conference calls, which have recently also included presentations that we can access on our computers at the same time.

This fall, however, the meeting was held in Chicago at the Cenacle Retreat Center on Fullerton because FAN also sponsored a Conference on Immigration Action following the Commission meeting, which was well-attended and very informative. Real consideration of Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) will not take place until 2010, but this conference was preparatory to working on CIR next year. Here is a very brief summary of the platform for humane immigration reform which FAN advocates:

- Uphold family unity as a priority of all immigration policies;

- Create a process for undocumented immigrants to *earn* their legal status and eventual citizenship;
- Protect workers and provide efficient channels for entry for new migrant workers;
- Facilitate immigrant integration through language and civics education and citizenship application;
- Restore due process protections and reform detention policies;
- Align the enforcement of immigration laws with humanitarian values.

I hope you agree that these principles reflect Franciscan (and therefore Catholic) beliefs in how we treat our brothers and sisters. There will be more to come regarding immigration. In the meantime, see the FAN web site, www.franciscanaction.org, for up-to-date information on current issues they are addressing and upcoming events.

Local ministers, watch for a letter from me regarding information I need for our National Chapter in October and setting up cluster meetings to discuss the Apostolates and FAN. I'm determined to meet with all clusters before the end of 2009. 📧

"Francis, Build Up My Church ..."

by Sandra Kisel, SFO; Regional Formation Director

"I will walk in the presence of God in the land of the living." (Ps 116:9)

"You are my refuge, Lord; you are all that I desire in life." "The Lord has lifted us up and drawn us to his heart, for he has remembered his promise of mercy." (Antiphons, p. 703, 672; One-Volume Edition, *Christian Prayer: Liturgy of the Hours*)

Francis prayed for oneness with our Lord, night and day. Wherever he went he walked with our Lord. He saw Him in all creation, and in all the events of his life. Francis was always searching to find God anew; he became ever more attuned to God's every move within him, praying constantly for a deeper and more intimate understanding of the love God had for him and all His creation from the beginning of time. Francis wanted to know the excesses of

love that moved our God to care for us poor mortal creatures so much that He would send His only Son to take created flesh, become one with us, and die a humiliating death on the cross!

Francis prayed night and day even with hot tears searching to understand this mystery. Besides fervently and faithfully praying the Liturgy of Hours he prayed the Office of the Passion.

"Whoever thirsts will drink freely of life-giving water." (Easter Antiphon, p. 707, *ibid.*) "O God, you are my God—for you I long! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless, and without water. So I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory." (Ps 63:2-3).

Francis was attuned to the movement of God

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Feast of Saint Francis

by Fr. Richard Roemer, CFR; excerpted from 04-Oct-2007 "From the Friars" eLetter, www.franciscanfriars.com

As we celebrate the feast of Saint Francis we have a great deal of joy and gratitude. At the same time, I think all Franciscans feel a tinge of guilt because his life is certainly a tough act to follow! For example, Bl. Bernard of Corleone, a holy and colorful 17th Century Capuchin from Sicily, stated on his death bed, "I have no fear of death itself, but only of our father, Saint Francis!"

Saint Francis certainly has a universal appeal. ... His passionate personality has earned him the title of being "the most Italian of saints and most saintly of the Italians!" His natural generosity developed into a supernatural sign of the poor, humble, and totally self-emptying love of Christ. His joy and simplicity have captured a longing in the heart of Christians in every age and place. His response to the Holy Spirit bore fruit more than a hundredfold in renewing the face of the earth.

He has also been misrepresented frequently over the centuries. Particularly unfair are the claims made by the 19th Century Romantics and others in their own time that place him in a rebellious stance against the authority of the Church. His sense of solidarity (brotherhood) with all of God's creatures in no way diminished his sense of the Lord's abiding presence in His Church. He trusted that God's will for his order would be made clear through the Office of Peter. He had a great reverence for priests and encouraged his friars to be deferential to bishops. More

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within him and the strength that was his by his union with God. Francis longed to return love for Love; limited created love united with the Divine, as was present in each breath and movement, every thought, word, and deed; his will, whatever he had and all that he wanted or hoped for in the land of the living. God was all; Holy Scripture had already indicated God's desire to be at one with all His creation as indicated in Exodus, the burning bush, and by God taking mortal flesh. It was love that united the Divine nature with human flesh, and it was love that brought Christ to humble himself and die on the wood of the cross for us.

What do we mirror? When we look at ourselves, do we see Christ in our actions? In conflict, do we reflect the patience, peace, and love of Christ? In trials, do we reflect on the words of our Lord and embrace them, looking upon Him who loves us? In our thoughts, are these filled with envy, animosity, or vengeance? Are our words hasty and without thinking, or are they words said while gazing on Christ indwelling in our hearts?

God wants to take up all the room in us. If we are faithful to

than any other topic in his letters he urged everyone to have a greater reverence and care for the Body and Blood of the Lord in their churches.

This is why Pope Leo XII wrote confidently a century ago that "Saint Francis of Assisi was called to reform the Church not in the way other saints had done, nor only for his own time, but for all time to come. Whenever society strays from the right path, no other remedy is needed but to revive the spirit of the orders founded by Saint Francis." ❏

Collect for October 4, Solemnity of St. Francis

*From the Proper Offices of Franciscan Saints and Blesseds in the
Liturgy of the Hours*

Father,
you helped our seraphic father Francis
to reflect the image of Christ
through a life of poverty and humility.
May we follow your Son
by walking in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi
and by imitating his joyful love.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your
Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. ❏

God, He will never leave us. Do we faithfully keep company with God; adoring Him, while yet still fulfilling opportunities to love and serve Christ in souls around us, by our actions or prayers? Francis was a man for others; could anyone meditating or contemplating the Passion of Christ not enter into His agony; His suffering and thirst for souls?

So complete was Francis' longing and immolation for God that he finally asked, "O Lord, Jesus Christ, I entreat you to give me two graces before I die; first, that in my lifetime I may feel in body and soul as far as possible the pain You endured ... in the hour of your most bitter suffering; and second, that I may feel in my heart as far as possible that excess of love by which you, O Son of God, were inflamed to undertake so cruel a suffering for us sinners." (James Meyer, OFM, *The Words of St. Francis*)

Formation News

By the time most of you receive this newsletter, we will be on Retreat. Hope to see many of you there. October 4, we celebrate the feast of our Father Francis – Happy Feast Day to you all! ❏

Events of Interest

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November 22: The Archdiocese of Chicago's Respect Life Office is holding "Educating Minds, Inspiring Hearts", a Chastity Education Initiative benefit dinner, at Drury Lane, 100 Drury Ln., Oakbrook Terrace. Reception is at 4:30 p.m., dinner is at 5:30 p.m. The keynote speaker is His Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze, Former Prefect and current Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; Former President of the Vatican Council for Interreligious Dialogue; Former Archbishop of Onitsha, Nigeria. Special guest will be His Eminence Francis Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago. Cost is \$75 per person; register by Nov. 10. For more information or to register, call 312.534.5355 or email chastity@archchicago.org. Also visit www.respectlifechicago.org.

Calendar

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

October

- 09-11:** Regional Retreat, Marytown, Libertyville
- 17:** Council Meeting, 9:30 a.m.

November

- 15:** Mother Cabrini Feast Day Celebration, hosted by St. Bernardine of Siena Fraternity (Wayne)

December

- 12:** Regional Elections (*to be confirmed with NAFRA*)

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when he was unable to attend visitations or elections. I have truly enjoyed working with Br. Joe, and I look forward to continuing to work with him serving the Region. In the meantime, please keep Fr. Don Blaeser, OFM in your prayers.

Let me explain how his transfer took place: First, last year, the Sacred Heart Province of the OFM had their elections, and Fr. Mike Perry, OFM was elected Provincial. Then, in the fall of 2008, the Order of Friars Minor had their elections in Italy, and Fr. Mike was elected Vicar General of the entire Order of Friars Minor and could no longer serve Sacred Heart as Provincial.

So, Fr. Bill Spencer, OFM, the former pastor of St. Peter's in the Loop, became Provincial, and the former pastor of St. Francis Solanus Parish in Quincy, Fr. Kurt Hartrich, OFM, was chosen to take over St. Peter's as pastor. And who is taking Fr. Kurt's place as Pastor of St. Francis Solanus? Our own Fr. Don!

Fr. Don is taking on a great deal of responsibility, so let's keep him in our prayers for his happiness and success!

■ **Regional Retreat.** As you know (and I hope are registered for!), our Regional Retreat is October 9-11 at Marytown. It seems to me that our Retreat Master, Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, is reviewing for us all the

Assistant *continued from p. 1 ...*

This month of September also marks the celebration of Francis of Assisi receiving the sacred stigmata. Such suffering, pain, a living crucifixion—how different this is from reveling in the endless beauty of your creation. We confess that we are quite different from St. Francis in this regard.

While he asked for the cross, most all of us want to avoid it at all cost. Oh yes, we can relate to Francis' desire to experience the tremendous love that led Jesus to accept the cross. But as you surely know, we would rather know the love without the suffering, thank you.

Can you help us, God of love, to begin to deal with the cross? Would you please remind us that other people, as difficult as

tools at our disposal to keep our own spirituality on track, as well as being strong witnesses to the Franciscan charism, thus attracting others to our way of life. I can't think of a retreat more timely than this one! Hope to see you all there!

■ **Mother Cabrini Celebration.** The Mother Cabrini Celebration this year will be hosted by my fraternity, St. Bernardine of Siena (Wayne). We meet at Resurrection Catholic Community, 30W350 Army Trail Rd., Wayne; the church is located on north side of Army Trail Rd. just west of Rt. 59. Wayne is immediately south of Bartlett—these directions should make it easy for you to locate it on a map or find directions online.

We're looking forward to hosting this event this year, and more information will be forthcoming shortly!

■ **Regional Elections.** Remember, our Regional Elections are coming up in December. See the August *SFO News* (page 3) for full details, and if you have nominations or suggestions, email our 2009 Regional Nominating Committee Chair, Monica Marko, SFO, at elections@ilsfo.org.

If you're nominating someone else, it would be most helpful if you would check with that person to determine if they are willing to accept nomination. Many thanks! ☒

some may be, are not crosses but sisters and brothers? And will you give us the ability to carry all of our crosses with less complaining, with less avoidance, with greater awareness that we are never alone? Help us to be more conscious that you, together with Christ your Son and your loving Holy Spirit are with us, helping us carry our crosses.

Loving Creator, help us to know that as fall and winter approach, we can look forward to a new springtime, and carrying our crosses together with Christ, your Son, will lead us one day to the newness of risen life with you.

We praise you and thank you, God our Father, together with Christ, your Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for your creative goodness and generous love. Amen. ☒