



# The Joy of Francis

Together for the Gospel! Spring-Summer, 2009 - Vol. 16, No. 1

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Newly elected Regional Council and Spiritual Assistants during their blessing at the 2009 Ministers' Meeting. From left to right are Armando Lomeli, RSA; Anthony Hoang Van Le, RSA; Rock DeSpain, RSA; Robert Lopez, Councilor; Anthony Tuan Cao, Councilor; Carolyn Paxton, Treasurer; Judith Mussatto, Secretary; Bob Herbelin, Vice Minister; Sylvia Paoli, Regional Minister. See page 4

## Minister's Message

### Hearts on Fire for the Lord!

by Sylvia Paoli, Regional Minister



My brothers and sisters,

It is with great joy - and some trepidation - that I set out to serve you the next three years as your regional minister, and I share with you the theme that I hope, together, we can see fulfilled throughout our Region: *Hearts on Fire for the Lord!* That is what we have been called to, by three Popes, by our Minister General and the international council, and by our national council.

First, I want to call on all of you to participate in this wonderful Jubilee year celebrating our 800th year of

existence. We may be a little slow getting started, but we know, in this great Region, that we can make up for lost time. Elsewhere in this issue are articles on celebrating our Jubilee year. Please read them and implement the celebration in each of your fraternities and as individual Franciscans. We plan for the Regional Gathering in October to be a culmination of the year of celebrations, with a display by each district of how the district and fraternities in it celebrated the year.

*Hearts on Fire, continued page 2*



Second, we all are aware that we are in the season of preparation to celebrate our Lord's resurrection on Easter Sunday. Most of us are accustomed to the age-old penance habit of "giving up" something for Lent. But Lent is much more than that. The Second Vatican Council wrote: "The season of Lent has a twofold character: primarily by *recalling* or preparing for *baptism* and by penance, it disposes the faithful, who more *diligently* hear the word of God and devote themselves to *prayer*, to *celebrate* the *paschal mystery*." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 109) I've emphasized the active words in the bishops' statement, that we might stop and reflect on them for a moment and consider how, this Lent, we can better prepare ourselves for Easter. Pope John Paul II said that this preparation for Easter was "*a systematic call to . . . joy.*" (*The Light of Christ, 1970.*)

So here are some ideas to help in celebrating a joyful Lent:

- **Gestures of reconciliation**
- **Concern for the poor**
- **The exercise and defense of justice and right (see Amos 5:24; Isaiah 1:17)**
- **The admission of faults to one's brothers and sisters**
- **Fraternal correction**
- **Revision of life**
- **Examination of conscience**
- **Spiritual direction**
- **Acceptance of suffering**

- **Endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness**
- **Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus**
- **Reading scripture**
- **Praying the Liturgy of the Hours - regularly**
- **Other prayer**

You might make a list of activities to begin or increase during this Lent. Or you might make a list of things to give up or fast from this Lent - things like time at the computer, video games, television, shopping. Find a creative way to track your progress, such as a daily calendar, or a journal, perhaps using different colored pens or markers.

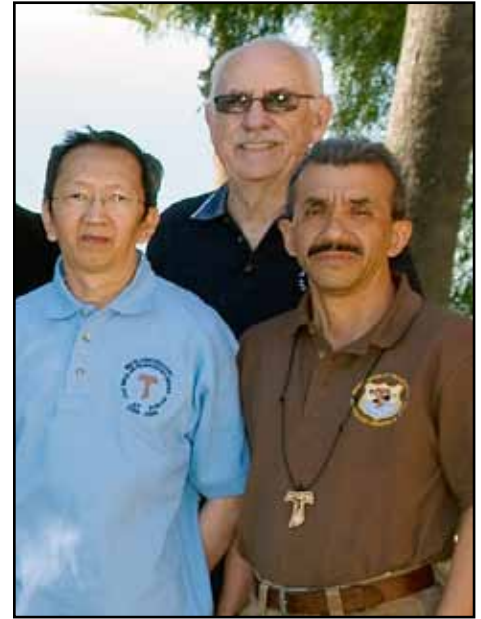
The most important thing is that we are daily aware of our need for conversion and of the needs of the world, including those within our own families - and do something about it. There is no plateau in the Christian life: we are either moving forward towards the ultimate goal of eternal life with Christ, or we are moving backwards. A more common term for "plateau" is "comfort zone." We need to get out of our comfort zones. Only by doing that will we once again relight the fire that was once in the heart of each one of us. With much prayer and much effort, we can be a region where all hearts are truly on fire for the Lord, as Francis' heart and those of the many saints most surely were.

Peace and blessings to all,

Sylvia Paoli, SFO



## Three New Regional Spiritual Assistants



From left, Anthony Hoang Van Le, SFO, Armando Lomeli, SFO and Rock DeSpain, SFO

After working very closely with the Provincial Ministers of the OFM, OFM Cap., and OFM Conv. in 2008, the St. Francis Regional Executive Council announces that the three provincials have each appointed 3 Secular Franciscans as Regional Spiritual Assistants to St. Francis Region. They are Armando Lomeli SFO, Anthony Hoang Van Le SFO, and Rock DeSpain SFO.

The three new Regional Spiritual Assistants are already at work and were formally installed at Mass on January 17, 2009, during the Regional Chapter of Elections at Marywood that weekend. With this installation Fr. Steve Gross OFM Conv., will become the Mentor to the three Regional Spiritual Assistants.



# The SFO in the 21st Century

Rock DeSpain, SFO, RSA

As we get ready to enter into the ninth century since the founding of the Franciscan movement, some of what is happening seems to be a surprise to some Seculars.

If we review the history of the Franciscan movement, changes have been happening from the beginning, and those of us living now should not be surprised. We were blessed with the visionaries that understood what was evolving in our Catholic Church when they created the Vatican II documents. They were "right-on" in their assessment of the dynamics of the Catholic Church and where it would be as we entered the 21st century. They predicted the decline of the number of Religious and Clergy that would

be available to minister to us. In the Vatican II document *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*, they not only told us what was going to happen, but they explained what to do about it. Vatican II and that document became the father of our Pauline Rule of 1978. I hope all of you have copies of these documents and that all fraternity councils are using the *Decree* in their Initial Formation program.

So here we are in St. Francis Region, taking a pro-active posture concerning the decline in the number of Religious and Clergy available as spiritual assistants. We listened very carefully to Mike Higgins, TOR, General Spiritual Assistant, speaking for all the

General Spiritual Assistants in Rome, told us in June of 2003, that it was our Order and that we needed to take ownership of our Order. Since that time, in our Region, Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv. as the mentor/teacher, with the permission of the 3 First Orders, has been training Seculars to step forward to take the responsibility as spiritual assistants. We completed our first set of classes and certified 12 Seculars as spiritual assistants in July of 2006 and some were appointed as spiritual assistants to local fraternities. The second set of classes is coming to an end and more will be ready to assist.

As a start, early last year, Fr. Steve, Sylvia and I, flew up to Oakland, to spend some time with Fr. Mel Jurisich, OFM, Minister Provincial, and discuss a plan for St. Francis Region to take ownership of our Order. After many months of exchanging thoughts and fine tuning things with all 3 Minister Provincials, they agreed to appoint 3 Seculars as Regional Spiritual Assistants, Anthony Hoang Van Le, SFO, Armando Lomeli, SFO, and Rock DeSpain, SFO. They are not bonded to one of the First Orders, but to all three. All three of us are part of history and the positive effect of Vatican II.

We ask for your prayers as we journey further into the 21st Century.

I love this job even more

Rock DeSpain, SFO

Regional Spiritual Assistant



## Stipend Consideration for Fraternities

"There is a matter of justice involved in the way in which fraternities at every level offer some form of support to Spiritual Assistants. We recommend that fraternities take into consideration the time which spiritual assistants invest in SFO matters as well as covering the costs of their transportation to functions of the Fraternity.

Spiritual assistants need some form of re-imbusement for their ministry to the SFO. Each fraternity will need to reflect on what seems just and reasonable in their situation. Please, take into account the changing costs of transportation as well as the time given as service. The spiritual assistant is not a person who is hired, but he/she is someone who deserves to be recompensed in a reasonable way for their service to the fraternity.

It is also encouraged that speakers and others who are invited to address the fraternity be given a stipend for their work and travel. If they choose not to take it, that is fine. But we need to be known as people who are aware that people who minister in our fraternities in various ways have a right to reasonable recompense."

— from the *Handbook For Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*.



# Chapter of Elections of 2009



*Assembled Ministers and the Regional Executive Council of the St. Francis Region at the Ministers' Meeting and Regional Election, January 16-18, 2009*

All of the ministers of St. Francis Region (or their delegate) gathered from January 16-18, 2009, at Marywood, for a Chapter of Elections (the annual ministers' meeting).

This year CIOFS [international] will be gathering demographic information as we all complete a survey this month. Minutes of the meeting in 2008 were read, discussed and approved. Treasurer's reports and the 2009 budget were presented with saving expenses in mind.

The most important aspect of our retreat weekend took place Saturday afternoon. The election process was a profound experience with much prayerful discernment, presided over by Clare McCluggage, a councilor on the National Executive Council, with Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv., as the Church witness.

The Presence of the Holy Spirit was felt in our midst as we prayed, elected, cast our votes - counted by 3 different people openly and publicly to ensure accuracy and honesty, with the final joyful announcement of the newly elected four offices of our regional council and 3 additional councilors. The new servant-leaders of our region are: Minister - Sylvia Paoli, Vice Minister - Robert Herbelin, Secretary - Judith Mussatto, Treasurer - Carolyn Paxton, and Councilors Bob Lopez, Tuan Cao, and John Kwon. The Region Formation Director is Norma Solario, appointed by the Regional Council. Our part now is to hold our regional council members in prayer for their healing, protection, guidance and wisdom in discerning God's will for our future.

A beautiful Mass concluded this special evening with the installation

of the regional Executive council and the 3 new regional Spiritual Assistants - Rock DeSpain, Armando Lomeli, and Anthony Van Le.

On Sunday morning, the regional budget was discussed further, and a final vote taken. As initially presented there would have been a \$10,000 shortfall. To close this gap the Fair Share would have to be set at \$50 per professed member. It was \$40. After much discussion, the delegates voted to raise the Fair Share to \$43. Region's Fair Share to NAFRA has gone up two dollars so most of the increase will go to cover this cost. To help bridge the gap, the ministers agreed to not have funds from the regional budget transferred to the regional scholarship fund this year and to ask their fraternities to make voluntary contributions to the general fund and to the scholarship program.



As you should be aware, the Fair Share is an assessment applied to a fraternity (local, regional or national) to enable the council at the next level to perform its mission. It is not “dues” in any form, and is NOT assessed to individual members. Rather, it is an assessment to each fraternity as a whole, just as bishops often have an assessment against each parish in their diocese. We are all called to contribute to our own fraternity’s Common Fund “according to our means”. Some of the ministers reported that they did not think that their fraternities could support \$43 per member at this time. The ministers, however, agreed to ask their fraternity members and councils to consider contributing \$45 or more per professed member where the fraternity is able, to help offset the shortage from fraternities which cannot afford the higher rate.

As part of the budget process, the



Scholarship Fund was discussed. The Region’s goal is to create a Scholarship Fund with enough assets so that the annual interest could be used to provide scholarships for members to attend various training programs. Originally, \$5,000 was going to be taken, this year, from the general fund to do this. Instead, the ministers agreed to go back to their fraternities and asked them to make up this money. One fraternity had a

couple of members who contributed a substantial amount to the fraternity’s Common Fund. As a result, that fraternity may be able to contribute \$1,000. Another fraternity gave \$400 to the fund. One fraternity, that benefited from a large bequest, gave the fund \$20,000.00. Also, the ministers agreed to have all funds raised by the sale of Franciscan “products” (e.g., shirts, wind breakers) go to the scholarship fund.



*Election of Region Officers, presided by Clare McCluggage, SFO, Nat. Executive Council (left), with Fr. Stephen Gross, OFM Conv. as Church Witness, (far right).*

Also on Sunday brief talks were given by our new regional spiritual assistants and Rock then turned over the keys to Sylvania. She spoke of her theme of “Hearts on Fire for the Lord” and passed out red hearts to each person present to remind them of who we need to be and what we, as secular Franciscans, need to be about. An “open forum” was held where every minister was invited to briefly speak of accomplishments, goals, problems, or other items of interest to the group. At the end of the morning, we bid our farewells to each other and headed for our respective homes, hopefully a little more inspired to live our secular Franciscan lives.

*Contributed by Veronica Kortz, SFO and Bill Mussatto, SFO*



# Celebrating the Jubilee Year 1209 - 2009

This is a landmark year for all Franciscans, as we celebrate our 800th year of existence. In planning celebrations of the jubilee, there are several points to remember and suggestions to help each fraternity. First, it is not a question of commemorating a figure, a Francis, Clare or any other person, but rather the calling to mind of the origins of the Franciscan Charism. Teresa Baker, SFO, the immediate past national formation director, suggested fraternities celebrate each month with a different topic:

**January** – *Gospel living as our way of life*

**February** – *Trinity and the love of God that sustains us*

**March** – *Conversion and the penitential life*

**April** – *Eucharist and our connectedness to the Church*

**May** – *Mary as our Mother and model*

**June** – *Prayer as the soul of all we are and do*

**July** – *Fraternity as our gifted place of growth*

**August** – *Love as total giving to the other*

**September** – *Creation as God's gift to us*

**October** – *Peace and Joy as hallmarks of our interior life*

**November** – *Simplicity in this world of consumerism*

**December** – *Humility and Poverty in imitation of Jesus, our way to the Father*

She suggested using these topics in the following ways: "Choose readings

or other focusing activities that are compatible with the given topic from the writings of Francis or from one of his biographies. Set up a small ritual service to take place at the beginning of your gathering. For example, in January when commemorating Gospel life, enthrone the Gospels in a prominent place throughout your meeting. Choose a way to reverence the Scriptures. For April, when you focus on the Eucharist and our connectedness to the Church, you might want to participate in a Holy Hour. Afford everyone in the fraternity an opportunity to participate in the planning. Keep in mind that the goal of this celebration is to share with each other how the particular aspects of the charism are lived out in the lives of the brothers and sisters."

There are three ways to prepare for the celebration: (1) make an Act of Thanksgiving for the gift God gave us and the world in calling Francis and his brothers and sisters and, through them, us to "accept the totality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through a new life;" (2) humbly recognize that throughout these 800 years we, and those in the past, have fallen far short of the Gospel life to which we have been called; and (3) face and accept the challenge of re-foundation, of the beginning again to which daily conversion calls us. Every SFO should be preparing him/herself daily with these three actions in order to have a memorable celebration monthly within each fraternity.

In addition, it would be a wonderful witness if fraternities could take their celebration into their parishes, inviting others to share in some way with one

or more of a fraternity's monthly celebration. We are late starting, but let us make up for it in the quality of our celebration these remaining months. Our Regional Gathering on October 17, 2009, will be a celebration of the year's Jubilee events by all the fraternities in our St. Francis Region. We will ask each district to prepare a display of the celebrations by the fraternities within that district. The Gathering will be climaxed by a Mass for the newest group of Lay Spiritual Assistants and Formators. So let's all go to work preparing our celebrations, and please share your plans with your regional council.



## Excerpt from the Letter of Convocation

*Conference of the Ministers General Of the First Order Franciscans and TOR*

*In the year 2009, we will celebrate the eighth centenary of our Origins, when our Seraphic Father received from Pope Innocent III, the "form of life" which initiated the journey of the fraternity of his first friars (1209-2009).*

*Every part of the Franciscan Family has developed their own way of acknowledging this centenary event during these years, with various initiatives intent on developing the figure of Francis and a more profound sense of the Gospel.*

*Let us now consider how these various ways might converge in listening once again to the voice of Francis together: "...the Most High Himself revealed to me that I must live a life according the form of the Holy Gospel...and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me" (FF. . Test 116).*



# The 800th Anniversary in 2009 What's it all about?

By Fr. Stephen Gross, OFM Conv., CNSA

Each of the 30 Regions of our country are at some stage of preparation for celebrating the 800th Anniversary of the Founding of the Franciscan Movement in 2009. The International Conference of the Franciscan Family published a letter to the Franciscan Family entitled, *LIVING ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL*. The leaders of our Franciscan Family make important observations. They say (in part):

- It is not a question of commemorating a figure, a Francis, Clare or any other person, but rather the calling to mind of the origins of the Franciscan Charism.
- The text presented by Francis to Pope Innocent III was a plan and a description of a life-style, rather than a regulation.
- Faced by a technological and computerized world, by its crisis of creeping wars, terrorism, poverty and globalization, the Christian faith is exposed to all the questions and challenges about God, about His entering into history in the Person of Jesus, about the diversity of religions and their relationships, about the nature of the human being and about the meaning to be given to life and death. This situation of crisis is, at the same time, a great challenge to the Church to live the new evangelization and for the

Franciscan Family to live its own identity, aware that its place and influence have become fragile and questioned.

- Our Franciscan Family has been weakened, particularly in the European world, because of its numerical reduction, of the uncertainty of our identity and through the temptation to turn-in on self and to become discouraged.

The same Franciscan identity, however, is still a challenge to the world! It is our reference of self to the Gospel, of which the Rule is like a summary, which alone can help us to respond with trust, imagination and courage to the many and multiple challenges.

- The Franciscan spiritual current, like a river, broadening and being enriched in the course of centuries through a variety of contributions, never ceases to irrigate us and the Church itself.
- For all this and more, we communally join together in a joyful Act of Thanksgiving. It is also necessary to add the humble recognition of the distance between the Gospel proposal of Francis and the way it was lived during the course of our long and tumultuous history.
- Despite the ongoing efforts at beginning again and of reforms,



Fr. Stephen Gross, OFM Conv.

our Franciscan Movement is not yet up to the demands of the Gospel. This dual moment, the act of thanksgiving for being called to live the Gospel and the purification of our memory, as recognition of the shadows present in our Family, should lead us all to face the challenge of re-foundation.

- We must find the roots, the foundations, i.e., discover in wonder the power of God, the Gospel, the Good News of the Love of God for us and of the communion with Him offered to us. Only on such a foundation can a solid structure be built, a true community in mission in the Church and in the world. This moment of grace, a kairós, which we are experiencing at the present, tests us by revealing weaknesses to us, but it also invites us to rely on the power of God.

*How will your region/local fraternity Celebrate the Anniversary?*



# From My Corner of the World

Anne Mulqueen, SFO  
International Councilor, USA  
2009-1

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. 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

*My Corner, continued page 13*





# Repenting for our Mitzvahs

by Rabbi Naftali Silberberg  
<http://www.askmoses.com/>

The story is told of a Chassid who poured out his heart to his colleague: “Will we ever truly repent for our sins?” he moaned. “Our sins?” his friend responded, “about them I’m not concerned; we’ll surely learn to regret our misdeeds. I’m worried about our mitzvahs. When will we repent for our mitzvahs?!”

The exchange between these two Chassidim sounds a bit strange—why is it necessary to do Teshuvah for good deeds? The following story will shed light on the subject.

Every year when the month of Elul arrived, the great Jewish philosopher and sage Saadia Gaon (882-942) would leave his hometown, his family, and his disciples, and would embark on a month-long trip. During this month he would wander the countryside incognito, spending most of the time in the local synagogues where he would study and seclude himself in prayer. The discomfort of traveling brings atonement, and self-imposed exile as a form of penance was fairly common in times past.

Saadia Gaon’s students were mystified by his behavior. “Rebbe,” they would ask, “you are a righteous man who does not sin, and you have surely repented many times over for any of your youthful indiscretions. Why, then, do you annually subject yourself to a rigorous month of exile? What are you repenting for?”

When we repent for our wrongdoings of the past year, we should also include the time when we prayed... but without the proper focus and concentration. The charity we gave to a poor person... but with a grimace... “I will answer your question,” said Saadia Gaon, “by relating an incident which occurred during one of my Elul exiles.

“On one of my trips I was hosted by a wonderful Jewish innkeeper. This kind person treated all his visitors like royalty, and I was no exception. He made sure that I had enough to eat and drink, that my room was tidy, and my bed was comfortable. I remained in this inn for several days, and just as I was about to depart the village, apparently someone recognized me and the word quickly spread that Saadia Gaon was in town. Thus, as I was leaving, a large crowd gathered to bid me farewell.

“Suddenly, I saw the innkeeper fighting his way through the throngs. When he reached me I saw that tears were pouring down his distraught face. ‘Rebbe,’ he sobbed, ‘please forgive me!’

“‘Forgive you?’ I incredulously asked. ‘For what? You couldn’t have been kinder to me!’

“‘But, Rebbe... If I had only known who you really were... I would have treated you so much better!’”

Saadia Gaon concluded by saying, “every day we study more Torah and we gain a new understanding and a new appreciation for the Creator. Every day we must repent for the way we treated G-d yesterday. Yes, we were kind to the A-mighty yesterday, but if

we would have known Him yesterday like we know Him today...”

When considering the bygone year, our sins against G-d and our fellow man are glaring, and beg for our attention. But when we repent for our wrongdoings of the past year, we should also include the time when we prayed... but without the proper focus and concentration. The charity we gave to a poor person... but with a grimace. The Shabbat we observed ... but without enthusiasm.

And as we commit ourselves to improving our good deeds, G-d will reciprocate and “improve” His good deeds towards us, and we will all be blessed with a wonderful year, and bountiful health, wealth and nachas from our children.



## *A Lenten Prayer*

*Stretched out on the Cross,  
deprived of all earthly possessions and  
human aid,*

*You cried out to Your Father that the  
end had come.*

*You accomplished the work given You,  
and You committed into His hands,  
as a perfect gift,  
the little life that remained to You.*

*Lord, teach me to accept all afflictions  
after the example You have given.*

*Let me place my death in Yours  
and my weakness in Your abandonment,*

*Take hold of me with Your love,  
that same foolish love that knew no  
limits,*

*and let me offer myself to the Father  
with You so that I may rise with You  
to eternal life.*

*Amen*



# Tumen River

By *Michaella Jungja Lee, SFO, Vice Minister of St. Francis Fraternity, LA (K); translated from the Korean language by Hyuck C. Lee, SFO, San Diego.*

It was an amazing experience, being hidden in a manhole on a bridge near the Tumen River with Fr. Francis Kim, OFM, and a group of starving North Korean people.

As a Franciscan I had long waited for the opportunity to visit Father Kim's Franciscan facility in Manchuria, China, located in the far north-east corner near the border with North Korea. I realized that whenever I visited my home town of Seoul, Korea, I felt a kind of shame from seemingly neglecting to visit Father Kim's facility, where starving, recently escaped North Koreans were being cared for.

But this time would be different, and this last fall, in October 2008, I journeyed to the place carrying two full suitcases of emergency food rations, medicines, first aid materials, and clothing.

Father Francis Kim's Tumen River Ranch is located just two miles north from the North Korean border alongside the Tumen River. The Chinese authorities have agreed to lease to him, for 50 years, 200 acres of rolling hills for raising cattle. But now his main occupation is running a charity on the Ranch to help the hundreds of North Korean refugees that flood the border region in search of help. They say that the number of defectors exceed a thousand per year.

Originally Fr. Kim started the missionary charity business in 1997,



*Tuman River, between North Korea on the left, and China on the right.*

when North Korea experienced a deadly famine after a heavy monsoon season and poor harvests, and their worse economy. At that time he delivered to the North Korean capital Pyongyang, and Anju, a coal mining town, more than 200 tons of flour, and a dozen containers of clothing, mostly donated by the Korean community in the United States. Also whenever he went to Pyongyang he conducted masses for hundreds of North Korean Catholics at the Changchun Church in Pyongyang.

This Catholic Church is one of only two Christian places of worship

allowed by the Communist Authority, the other one being for a Protestant church. I believe that these churches are there principally for the benefit of foreign visitors. There has been not a ordained priest ever there.

Later on Fr. Francis Kim witnessed the misery of refugees flooding in from the N. Korean border along the Tumen River, Father Kim moved his main business to its present location Tumen River Ranch on the eastern edge of Manchuria, China, a hundred miles apart from Siberian Russia. His facility has been run by the Franciscan Missionary Charities, Inc. (PO Box 1744, New York, NY 10037), to which Fr Francis Kim belongs.

It took two full days to get to the Ranch from Seoul, S. Korea, even though it is but 30 minutes away as the crow flies. I had to travel a circuitous route, first via PeiJing, transferring to ShenYang, then YanJi, and ending with a two hour drive to the property. When I arrived at the Ranch, hundreds of cows were



*Michaella Lee is shown on the left top corner, and frozen Tuman River is at left bottom, across the Tumen River it shows North Korean villages and mountains. Fr. Francis Kim, OFM, is surrounded by North Korean Catholic congregations (right) in Pyongyang Catholic Church, we called "Changchung Seungdang," dated a day in 1998.*



peacefully scattered around the hills. I saw few people other than blue-jean clad Fr. Kim and a couple of his cowboys and cowgirls. I immediately felt the coolness of the air as it was in the mid 30 F degrees, and the Siberian cold was already upon us.

Early the next morning, before dawn, Fr. Kim and I hurriedly packed several bundles of warm cloths and foods onto his old 'Jeep' to rescue recent defectors from North Korea. I am certain that someone had informed him the previous evening as to the whereabouts of the escapees. When the vehicle started moving, Fr. Kim whispered to me "You should know that we might get into very serious..."

I could not figure out where we were going as we passed a couple of small towns before sunrise. The narrow mountain road was very muddy and sinuous, and we traveled up and down steep roads for several hours, avoiding the Chinese security check points. I just felt my heart beating strongly and I repeated to myself, "Lord, give us Your Mercy! Give us Your Mercy!"

After awhile we saw the Tumen River, finally Fr. Kim located the seven North Korean escapees hiding in a good sized manhole down by a bridge crossing a small creek within a rugged mountain region. They already knew who we were, and we jumped into the manhole with the bundles of packages in our hands. We were speechless and simply hugged each other with tears in our eyes and LOVE in our hearts. It was already noontime.

The first thing we had to do was to give them food, as they had not eaten in the last three days of their life

threatening ordeal, traveling day and night without stopping. Upon our mission, the kitchen staff carefully prepared 'kimpap', 'drum stick' and 'kimchi' for those very hungry people. They exchanged their old clothes, under wear, slacks and shoes for the new and warm ones, which Fr. Kim had purchased at the local Chinese market. He handed over to each of the seven men and women prepared care packages that each contained first aid items, medicines, warm clothing, emergency food rations, and Chinese Yuan bills in cash worth \$500.

With one hundred dollars a family of four in North Korea can survive at least a year, or they can startup and manage a small business. They know how to hide the Yuan bills on their bodies during re-crossing the border to N. Korea.

At the end, we became aware that four of them wanted to return home, and three of the seven refused to back to North because of their terrible situation with their authority. Most of the time, Fr. Francis Kim recommends that the defectors return to their families with their gift packages. It was difficult for them to make their decisions, but they did.

After sunset, in the disappearing light, slowly, one by one, four of them crossed the freezing river with the water at their chests and their bags over their heads. They disappeared waving goodbye in the dark.

I spent four more days with the remaining three at the Tumen River Ranch, listening to the sad stories of each family, all beyond description.

-- God, bless our Earth! God bless our People! --



## Service of Wealth

By St. Thomas of Villanova  
(1488-1555)

How much good one powerful person can do if he is willing to spend his power and wealth fully in the service of the Lord? How many poor people he can feed! But the wealthy do not consider the riches of this world to be a gift they have received. They do not think of themselves as stewards but as lords.

Nor are they concerned about the account they will have to render to God. God will demand an account also from those who enjoy favor with the wealthy if they do not intercede for the poor.

### En el Servicio del Señor

Cuánto bien puede hacer una persona poderosa si está dispuesta a emplear su poder y riqueza totalmente en el servicio del Señor? Cuánta gente pobre puede alimentar! Pero los ricos no consideran que las riquezas de este mundo son un regalo que han recibido. Ellos no piensan que ellos son administradores sino amos.

Tampoco están ellos preocupados de las cuentas que tienen que rendirle a Dios. Dios demandará cuentas también a aquellos que disfrutaban favoritismo de los ricos si ellos no interceden por los pobres.

— San Tomás de Villanova.



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Council of the SFO

# Franciscan Spirituality for Secular Franciscans

Presenters:

Vinal Van Benthem, SFO, &  
Bob "Fitz" Fitzsimmons, SFO  
June 25, 2009 - June 28, 2009

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Regional Gathering at St. Gregory's Parish in Whittier, CA., October 5th, 2008.

## Regional Gathering

October 25th, 2009



Our Franciscan family gathered at our Annual Regional Gathering on Saturday, October 25th at St. Gregory's Parish Hall in Whittier. What joy to see so many Franciscans! The talks were informative and good. Sister Cata Tan (newly elected minister of St. Francis Fraternity in L.A., and former Regional Formation Director) gave the first presentation and she did a fine job.

Our current Regional Formation director had a family emergency and was not able to attend and present. Sister Sylvia Paoli and brother Robert Herbelin made a joint presentation about Spiritual Assistants and their role in our fraternities. The many presentations were greatly appreciated by all and a new-found respect for Spiritual Assistants was engendered in our hearts. The food was great, both for our breakfast coffee and for our lunch.



**My Corner, continued from page 8**

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 major presentations on each of these topics. After each presentation, the language groups met to discuss them. Reflections 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 priorities 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 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.

With fraternal affection and in peace,  
Your sister Anne

**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.



## Prayer before a Crucifix

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Your face I humbly kneel, and with burning soul pray and beseech You to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity, true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment;

While I contemplate with great love and tender pity Your five wounds, pondering over them within me, and calling to mind the words which, long ago, David the prophet spoke in Your own person concerning You, my Jesus:

“They have pierced My hands  
and My feet;  
they have numbered all My bones.”

Most high, glorious God,  
Enlighten the darkness of my heart.  
Give me true faith;  
certain hope;  
perfect love;  
a sense and knowledge, Lord  
that I may do Your holy and true  
command.

Amen.



## Vietnamese Notes

### Tân Hội Đồng Phục Vụ mới đặc cử là:

#### Trưởng phục vụ:

chị Sylvia Paoli, SFO

#### Phó phục vụ:

anh Bob Herbelin, SFO

#### Thư ký:

chị Judith Mussatto, SFO

#### Thủ quỹ:

chị Carolyn Paxton, SFO

#### Ủy viên:

anh Tuấn Cao, SFO

#### Ủy viên:

anh John Kwang, SFO

#### Ủy viên:

anh Bob Lopez, SFO

### Tâm tình của Chị Phục Vụ:

Phương châm sống cho nhiệm kỳ của mình trong 3 năm tới là: **“My Heart must always be burning for Christ the Lord”** = “Lòng

tôi luôn Khao Khát Chúa Kitô”, chị đề nghị chúng ta nên in hay ghi câu này vào tờ giấy màu đỏ và dán hay treo ở nơi dễ thấy để nhắc nhở chúng ta luôn biết khao khát Chúa Kitô; Và sau đó là lời mời gọi mọi người cộng tác với chị cho nhiệm kỳ 3 năm sắp tới. (Sylvia Paoli, SFO)

### Tâm tình của Cha Trợ Ủy Quốc Gia:

Xin cảm ơn quý anh chị đã cộng tác với tôi trong những năm qua; Nay tôi xin quý anh chị hãy đón nhận 3 Tân Trợ Ủy của Miền đã được đồng chuẩn nhận và đồng bổ nhiệm của 3 nhánh Dòng OFM, OFM Conv, và OFM Cap là các anh Rock DeSpain, SFO, Armando Lomeli SFO, và Anthony Hoàng Lê, SFO. (Rev. Stephen Gross OFM. Conv).

### Tâm tình của Anh Trợ Ủy:

Thưa quý anh chị, **“Chúng ta có nhiều khuôn mặt, nhưng chúng ta là một gia đình”**, nếu nói nguyên văn bằng tiếng Anh thì: **We have many faces but we are one family.** chữ F.A.C.E.S. có thể được ghép từ những chữ như: Franciscans Are Christ’s Examples dịch ra tiếng Việt thì: **Những người Phan Sinh là những mẫu gương của Chúa Kitô.** Và chữ F.A.M.I.L.Y. có thể được ghép từ các chữ: Friendship (Tình bằng hữu), Assistance (Sự giúp đỡ), Mercy (Sự khoan dung), Interconnection (Sự liên kết), Love (Sự yêu thương), và Young Generation (**Thế hệ trẻ**) là ý muốn nói chúng ta phải xây dựng giáo hội qua việc xây dựng lại gia đình Phan Sinh của chúng ta với những chủ điểm nói trên. (Anthony Hoàng Lê, SFO)

## SFO Retreat with the Beatitudes

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The kingdom of Heaven  
Belongs to them.” (Mt. 5:3)*

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[www.nafra-sfo.org](http://www.nafra-sfo.org)

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<http://ciofs.org/sfo.htm>



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## Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (CRSA)



St. FRANCIS REGION #52  
Secular Franciscan Order  
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## The Joy of Francis

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." - Matthew 25:31-40

Almighty God, by your grace your servant Elizabeth of Hungary recognized and honored Jesus in the poor of this world: Grant that we, following her example, may with love and gladness serve those in any need or trouble, in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

I promise to live all the days of my life the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order by observing the Rule of Life.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of the Virgin Mary and our holy father Francis, and the fraternal bonds of the community always be my help, so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian Love.