



The Franciscan Times

A NEWSLETTER HELPING MEMBERS OF THE THIRD ORDER OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. FRANCIS SHARE THEIR COMMON JOURNEY THROUGH NEWS FROM FELLOWSHIPS AND INDIVIDUALS, REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND TAPES, POETRY, STORIES, ESSAYS, REFLECTIONS, MEDITATIONS, GRAPHICS, AND WHATEVER THE HOLY SPIRIT MIGHT BLOW OUR WAY.

Summer 2009

Casa Franciscana is born in Rio de Janeiro

Barbara Baumgarten

During the summer of 2008, on the hillside above downtown Rio de Janeiro, in the barrio of Santa Teresa, Casa Franciscana was established. A Franciscan house has long been tertiary Bishop Celso Franco de Oliveira's dream, now realized with the help of the Third Order Franciscan community in Rio just weeks before his August 2008 retirement as diocesan bishop. Casa Franciscana will be the motherhouse of the diocese's social ministries to which Dom Celso can dedicate his time and energy. These ministries include hospitality for visiting Franciscans, worship, formation training for members of the growing TSSF fellowship, and other lay and clergy formation opportunities. The development of a community garden on the grounds is in the planning stage. Also prominent among the social ministries are Igreja na Rua (the street church), the chapel of Mary Magdalena in the favela of Rocinha, and pastoral care in the favela Cidade de Deus (City of God)

Igreja na Rua has been served by Bishop Celso consistently for the past three years. Dom Celso, along with an ecumenical Franciscan team, celebrates Eucharist every Saturday evening with street people. A core group of three to five journeys a few miles by foot each

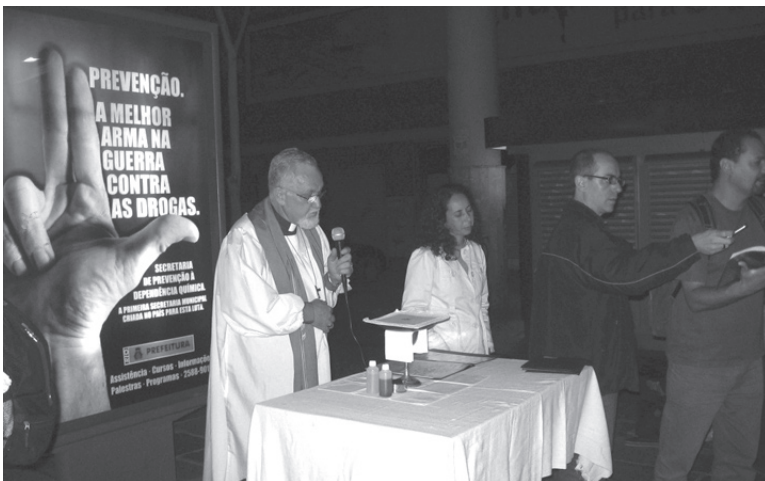
week from Casa Franciscana into the center of town, supplies in hand. A British Airways poster mounted on a wooden board serves first as a makeshift altar and, later, as a table from which to serve a light meal; a small roller-board suitcase carries vestments, altar cloth, and the Eucharistic elements; a zippered bag contains service booklets designed for this community; and plastic grocery bags bulge with a hundred-plus sandwiches, plastic cups, and liter-bottles of soda funded by rotation from congregations throughout the city, but purchased and prepared by the team earlier in the day. And, oh, yes, we now wheel on a handcart a portable sound system we finally bought to replace another that was stolen.

At our destination, the site where the homeless regularly bathe from mains under the sidewalk, we set up the altar a half hour early, and disperse along the street. We personally greet the homeless sitting on benches and curbs to converse and invite them to join our service of song, Word, and Eucharist. Each week we see regular faces and new. It is different celebrating liturgy where there is no "control"—a metro train passes below, someone walks by with boom box blaring, someone else starts yelling, all sorts of things go on, as does the liturgy. Afterwards, the numbers of people swell when the light meal is served.

The chapel of Mary Magdalena was re-opened by Bishop Celso on June 1, 2008. The chapel is in the largest favela (slum) in Latin America, Rocinha. Opened a number of years ago to serve the favela's community, it was closed due to the settlement of a group of disruptive people within its walls, which prevented the chapel's purpose of peaceful and meaningful gathering. The building was not abandoned, however, but used instead to offer health services to the poor. Physical therapy, dental, medical, and counseling offices were installed.

Celebrating Eucharist in the street.

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Dom Celso re-consecrating the chapel of Mary Magdalena, Rocinha.

but unfortunately the offices struggled and were eventually closed. Time passed, the community clamored for the facilities' re-establishment, and now the physical therapy and counseling offices continue their services alongside the recently re-inaugurated worship space. Services are held every Sunday afternoon, led by Dom Celso along with Franciscan (Order of St. Francis, a Brazilian order) Sidney Guedes and his wife, Luciana.

Cidade de Deus, another favela in Rio and made famous by the film so titled, has a vibrant Episcopal presence and good support from ERD (Episcopal Relief and Development). On site are a church, space for practical classes on life issues, English, craft-making, and a counseling office. Every Monday, Dom Celso, a practicing psychotherapist, can be found counseling people in desperate circumstances—and they do not know he is a priest, much less a bishop, because the psychological association forbids the mixture of mental health care and church.

The physical site of Casa Franciscana is at the Santa Teresa Project, a diocesan program associated with the Roman Catholic São Martinho fathers designed to help at-risk adolescents

qualify for and get their first job. The teens come from poor areas, and are bussed to Santa Teresa for training in areas such as history, language (both Portuguese and rudimentary English), business skills, religion, and the like. Each child is sponsored by a large company like Petrobras, the Brazilian state-owned oil company, or Pepsico, or Ypiranga (retail fuel sales). After six months of training here, they are awarded internships at these large companies, and, if they are successful, they graduate to full-time jobs.

The Santa Teresa property, situated on a steep hillside, was donated to the diocese through two Englishmen, Rupert Brazier and Ben Gilbert, and trains about 100 youth in two shifts, morning and afternoon, every six months. The basement of the main house has been converted to office space for the school, and the first floor to classrooms and a computer room with a dozen terminals, and the top, or attic floor is where Casa Franciscana is housed.

Two steep flights of stairs above, at the top of the property, sits the newly installed chapel to mark the birth of Casa Franciscana. Dedicated on June 2, 2008, the chapel, with its half-walls, overlooks the city of Rio de Janeiro. When Bishop Celso asked me to design the chapel, I made the most of its setting by leaving it visually open to the world and easy to enter. It is a place of welcome and it invites the worshipper to remember the world. Behind the granite altar, looms a large cross—a giant replica of the TSSF profession cross. We found an artist, Jorge Maria Simões, who crafted the five feet high by four feet wide iron cross. I am convinced God blesses the chapel and the ministry it represents: the evening after the outdoor crucifix was hung, we

Chapel of Casa Franciscana



went up to the chapel to pray. While sitting on the smooth, freshly painted floor, I looked up through the open-crucifix—the body shape of Jesus is a cut-out space through which the city of Rio and the sky can be seen—and there, right at the placement of Christ's heart, pulsed the red planet Mars. What a wonder!

I pray many Third Order members will journey to Rio to enjoy the hospitality of Casa Franciscana and to participate in its ministries.

The Yoke of Christ

Emmett Jarrett

A Sermon preached in St. James Church, Richmond, Virginia on the Feast of St. Anselm, 21 April 2009, for the Profession of Linda Powell Pruitt in the Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

"I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. . . Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (St. Matthew 11:25b,28-30)

This year I received Easter cards from two different Franciscan friends that depicted the harrowing of hell: one of the two iconographic themes of Easter in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, and the second depicting the myrrh-bearing women at the tomb. This second icon shows Christ standing on the cross, with which he has broken down the bars of the gates of Hell, and reaching out his hands to Adam and Eve, as the other saints of the Hebrew Scriptures gather to be freed by the power of the Resurrection. The text on the card is the Paschal Troparion, which is sung three times at the beginning of each liturgy during Eastertide:

Linda Powell Pruitt



*Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
And upon those in the tombs
bestowing life.*

What better way to begin a homily on St. Anselm's Day for the life profession of my friend Linda Powell Pruitt in the Third Order, Society of Saint Francis?

Religious orders, you recall, arose when the Church cut its Devil's Deal with the Emperor Constantine in 325. Those who thought Christian faith was about denying yourself, walking Jesus' way of the cross, and following him in a nonviolent community that held all things in common went not to Rome or Canterbury...or to Richmond!...but to the desert. Even today, we follow the advice of Abba Makarios: "If you want to live in peace, go to the interior desert, and there you will be at peace."

Even the Episcopal Church has religious orders. The orders suppressed by Henry VIII in the sixteenth century so he could confiscate their wealth were revived in the nineteenth. The Franciscan revival began with a multi-cultural community of men and women, married as well as single, in India, called Christa Seva Sangha, and all Anglican Franciscans follow the Rule they established at the turn of the last century.

Third Order Franciscans—unlike our First Order brothers and sisters and the Second Order of enclosed contemplative women, the Poor Clares—live in the world like ordinary Christians and strive to follow the evangelical principles of simplicity, chastity, and obedience to the Gospel in everyday life. Brother Alonzo Pruitt, Linda's husband, has been professed in this Order since 1982, a senior Franciscan! Today our sister Linda Powell Pruitt makes her life profession and vows "to serve our Lord Jesus Christ by Profession in the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis, in company with . . . brothers and sisters."

Every day she will read from *The Principles of the Third Order*, based on the Rule of Christa Seva Sangha. Today she reads:

*Day Twenty-One -- The Three Notes of the Order
Humility, love, and joy are the three notes which mark the lives of Tertiaries. When these characteristics are evident throughout the Order, its work will be fruitful. Without them, all that it attempts will be in vain.*

What is true for the Order as a whole is true for the individual Tertiary. Linda, your life must be marked by these characteristics: humility, love, and joy.

Humility is the character of Christ, who tells us in today's Gospel that he is "meek and humble of heart." On the last night of his life, he washed his disciples'

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feet. Humility is not passiveness. Christ our Lord was anything but passive! He was not crucified because he helped old people across the street. He was tortured and put to death by the united power of church and state because he challenged their claim to obedience. In all humility, you must live a way of life and witness that says "No" to Empire and "Yes" to the poor, the oppressed, the weak, the vulnerable, knowing that you serve a God "whose power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. 12:9). Francis did this in his time, and even shamed Pope Innocent III into obedience!

Love, as you already know, is not merely a sentiment, not even a noble sentiment. Love is the impossible *commandment* of Christ our Lord, that we must "love one another" as he loved us. Everyone will *know* that we are his disciples when we love that way (John 13:34-35). Our love for family and friends deepens as our love for Christ grows deeper. But you are commanded to love the loveless, the unlovely, the seemingly unlovable. For Francis, this was the leper. As a rich young man, he feared the leper, whose disease threatened his beauty, his society, the goodness of life itself. But when Francis got down from his horse and *embraced* the leper, he found that "what had been loathsome to [him] now filled him with joy and delight." Who are the lepers today? Who are the lepers for you? Perhaps, in our still deeply racist society, it is white people. Whoever they are, you will love them, "remembering that love is measured by sacrifice."

The third and final note is joy. This joy comes from Christ alone, and you have it within you already! That's why you already *are* a Franciscan; today's rite makes you part of a religious order—"an inner peace and joy which others . . . perceive, even if they do not know its source." This joy manifests itself in tears, as you face the struggles that come with the challenges of cancer. This joy is what enabled Francis, not only to embrace Christ Crucified, and bear in his own body the marks of the Lord's passion; it is what enabled him, at the end of his life, to call Death his sister. It is the joy that has sustained your life, my sister in Christ and Francis, for many years and that will sustain you always.

So we repeat the Paschal Troparion—Christ has broken down the gates of Hell and emptied it of prisoners:

*Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
And upon those in the tombs
bestowing life.*

Come now, Linda, stand before the altar of God, and claim what you desire with the deepest desire of our heart. Put on the yoke of Christ.

P.S. Fr. Emmett Jarrett, TSSF, had surgery on January 27 at Yale New Haven Hospital to remove a cancerous tumor from his bile duct. The cancer is stage 2-B, meaning some lymph node involvement, so he is having six cycles of chemotherapy in hope to eliminate any other cancer cells. The chemo hasn't been too bad so far (June '09), but Emmett and Anne are living most of the time in a little house by the water in Stonington. He tries to limit his work (with the homeless, peace actions, and the Voluntown Peace Trust, as well as St. Francis House) to one thing each day, and takes lots of time to rest and pray. The upcoming edition of the St. Francis House TROUBADOUR contains some pages from Emmett's journal, and tertiaries may have one for the asking. Keep him in your prayers."

Southern Region Chapter, African Province

David Bertram and Celia Wolfe

The Southern Region Chapter took place at St Raphael's Retreat Centre, Faure, near Somerset West in the Cape on the 4th and 5th October 2008. Twenty five of the sixty-five professed tertiaries in the Region were able to be present at the Chapter and a very blessed and joyful Chapter it was.

On the Friday evening, Nolan Tobias, Regional Chaplain, led us in sharing a little about ourselves and how we were feeling. This was followed by the Transitus. The following day was the Feast of St Francis. We assembled in the common room for the main work of Chapter. The Minister Provincial, David Bertram, gave a report on the worldwide activities of the Third Order and reminded us of the obligations of tertiaries. At the Eucharist Sandie Oakes, Cynthia O'Ehley and Margaret Woolcock were professed.

During the day was the election of a new Regional Guardian since John Shongwe had completed two three-year terms. Celia Wolfe was unanimously elected as the new Guardian and inducted into the post in a joyous Eucharist on the Sunday. The weekend was a time of good fellowship and good Christian business that was intended to advance the work of God's kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Margaret Woolcock, Sandie Oakes and Cynthia O'Ehley (left to right) after their profession



Sisters and Brothers Who Have Recently Died

Mary Kathryn Sayre Davenport Ineichen*(from the Monroe The News Star (Louisiana))*

Mary Kathryn was a member of Saint David's Episcopal Church in Rayville, and was a Third Order Franciscan for 45 years. She died in early February.

From Terry Rogers

I never met Mary Kathryn but had several phone conversations with her a few years ago. She was one of our real old-timers, having been professed in 1963, and was absolutely delightful, interesting, friendly, and down-to-earth. We were like family right away. I remember her telling me that upon the fairly recent death of her husband she had moved back to her original hometown in Mississippi and had married her childhood sweetheart—she kept saying, “Can you believe it? Isn't that something!” She sounded as happy as a young girl.

She also told me that she had been a good friend of our founder, Father Joseph, who used to come and stay with her. His health was poor for many years, and she talked of how she took care of him and felt so close to him. I wish now I had asked more about what she learned from him and what sort of person she found him to be.

She was truly a dear soul and I'm glad to remember her common sense and great warmth.

Pat Mahon

Pat Mahon, at the age of 76, ended her very long battle with poor health on Feb. 2nd. She met and later married Laurence Mahon at St. Stephens Episcopal Cathedral in Portland on July 2nd 1950. They lived in SW Portland and Ladd's Addition and raised two sons. There are now two granddaughters, two grandsons, two great granddaughters and two great grandsons.

Pat and Larry were founding members of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Hillsdale. Pat joined the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis and was the longest professed member of the Cascadia Fellowship having been life professed on Oct. 14th 1976. After moving to the Ashwood area, in 1984, she worked closely with St. Marks Episcopal Church in Madras and was licensed by Bishop Kimsey of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon to read and preach.

Pat had many pieces of her writing and poems published around the country. She belonged to the Willamette Writers and also was a professional member of the National Writers Club. She also wrote about her concerns regarding child abuse and joined the then new organization “Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty” Inc. (C.H.I.L.D.) This group has been working for many years to strengthen the laws, all around the country, to protect all of God's Children.

As her sons grew up, Pat even found a small amount of time for some needlework. She was very good at crocheting, needlepoint, and even latch-hooked several rugs.

William R. Pickels*(from the Hickory Daily Record (Virginia))*

The Rev. William R. Pickels, 78, died Feb. 6, 2009, at his home. He received his Master's in Divinity from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. He was a licensed professional counselor and did mental health work with Highlands Community Services for 25 years. He was a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Korean War. He loved big band music, was an avid Pittsburgh Steelers fan and a true lover of history. A memorial service was conducted at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Abingdon, with Bishop F. Neff Powell, Bishop Heath Light and Father Craig Wylie officiating.

India Medical Mission 2009

Kathryn Challoner

Taking a break from Ghana, Liberia and Ethiopia, I have just returned from India with our team.

India is such a beautiful country: so large and diverse. The people were very friendly and kind. The first morning I locked myself out of my room, and the neighbors next door (who didn't know who this crazy caffeine craving American was) invited me in for coffee and biscuits. Such hospitality!

In the rural areas we visited two rural hospitals, and



Mumbai Slums



Trench Latrines

the medical care and physicians working there impressed me. I saw a lot of snakebites; they have four rather unfriendly poisonous snakes in India. I made their acquaintance pickled in jars that was as close as I wanted to come. There are also a lot of pesticide poisonings. I hadn't realized how much organophosphate poisoning from agricultural use has contaminated the ground and water with heavy metals.

In Mumbai, India's industrial center, we taught at the King Edward Memorial hospital and were very warmly received. The medical students and faculty were so enthusiastic. Their Emergency area sees about 400 patients a day, but, during Monsoon season, that number can double because of "dirty water diseases"—typhoid, cholera, malaria.

As it was explained to me, two thirds of Mumbai's residents live in the slum areas without sanitation and clean water. The slum dwellers defecate in these huge trench latrines—if you look at the picture below you will see the small outhouses projecting right over the river of filth below. The slum areas are below sea level so do not flow well. Mosquitoes also breed in this stagnant water. In monsoon season all this mass of sewage overflows into the streets so the number of the sick patients doubles.

We got half a day to tour. I saw the Taj Mahal hotel undergoing repairs, the bullet holes left by the terrorists, and the fishing village where the terrorist boats had come ashore. This was a terrifying and traumatic event for India; we have our "9/11" and they now have their "11/26".

We also saw the huge Dhobi laundry Ghat where women stand in concrete tubs of water all day long hitting clothing against the concrete sides .

India is a land of great beauty and color but also great poverty and disease. I had to laugh to see President's Obama's book *Audacity to Hope* being sold by all the street vendors in Mumbai. He is very popular over



Dhobi Laundry Ghat there!

The people we met were wonderful. The Hindu religion permeates so much of their daily lives and other religious denominations are well tolerated and welcomed.

Namasté – "The light within me honors the light within you."

Jeremiah's Call - A Sermon for a Midweek Lenten Devotion

Leselve Davis (Jamaica)

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. 'Ah! Lord God!' I answered. 'I do not know how to speak. I am only a child.'

But God reassured Jeremiah and told him that he would protect him. Jeremiah lived in a time of war when Babylon was about to conquer Judah that was directly in line with the rich trade route between Babylon and Egypt. Jeremiah knew that the conquest could not be avoided and advised the King – Zedekiah – to surrender and not try to form an alliance with Egypt whom Babylon had already defeated in battle. Jeremiah felt that the surrender would not hurt Judah's religion because religious beliefs could continue to flourish without a king or a priestly party telling people how to worship God. He was one of the Old Testament prophets who was trying to make a change – a new covenant with God. This change meant that the old ways – the old covenant – where a great figure – a Moses, or David, or Solomon, and a set of dictatorial priests would give way in worship to the responsibility of each person to God for his religious life. No slaughtered animal backed up by an accommodating High Priest could determine how right a person was with his God, but each man and woman had to answer to God for his or her religious conduct.

So Jeremiah, full of zeal and confident that God was directing him went to the temple outskirts and fearlessly, like Jonah, proclaimed the coming conquest of Judah by the Babylonians. He tongue-lashed his countrymen, charging them with worshipping too many baals, told them that it was the will of Jehovah that they be conquered and learn to improve their religious attitude in captivity. To emphasize his words he held aloft a potter's vessel and smashed it into smithereens to show how God would break up the kingdom – so that it would have to be remade from the broken fragments. Who told Jeremiah to say this? The influential people and chief priests had him arrested and put in the stocks where he could not move, and people pelted him with rotten fruits and filth.

The king heard of this and got him out of prison into his private room for a talk and asked him for the scrolls on which he had written his prophecies. The king took a sharp knife and cut up the scrolls and threw the pieces into the fire burning by his side in the cold November weather. Then Jeremiah was set at liberty on condition that he stop his preaching. But Jeremiah got

a young man Baruch – to write down his prophecies and condemnation of the ways of worship in Judah. The king heard of it and sent the temple police to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch – but they had escaped out of the country. However the words of Jeremiah were still read in the country and little by little, very gradually, the new idea dawned that God had made a new covenant – a new agreement with his people.

In the church God's word still stands for each of us:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you for my own; before you were born I consecrated you.

None of us is a loose cannon. We came from God, we belong to God, and eventually will go to God. In the words of Jeremiah God says "I appointed you". Last Sunday the Preacher reassured us. She said "The Lord is not losing his grip on us" but we must respond positively to his grip. Sunday after Sunday the preachers in the church voice the Christian rejection of the old covenant. It is not enough – though it is laudable and even pleasant – to attend church, serving various ways, like choristers, servers, cross-bearers and so on, and at the end call it a day. Our day is just starting then. We have to take the new covenant – the Good News – to everyone. And it does not only mean going to street corners and other public places to recite in a loud voice the goodness of God, because people know of that method and the devil has helped them to shut their ears to any spiritual persuasion by that means. This is war – a war that becomes more subtle and varied in character as time goes on. We have to be subtle and harmless as doves, as we adopt, sometimes, the policy of "softly, softly ketch monkey". A principle of war is that we sometimes use the same method as that of the enemy.

It is a fact that humans, and other animals, respond positively to deeds of kindness and words of love. The chorister, the mothers' union member, the server, the Sunday school teacher, the women's fellowship member, is also a member of a church-recognized group. They go, like Jeremiah, to meet people where they can find them and do the good deeds that will help those people to view God more clearly as a loving Father to everyone. When they accept the message of good deeds, try an additional message – that of good thoughts. And when they have accepted this, try the message of the Good News. It can work. One misconception of many people – especially non-church goers – is that the devil is outside of us lurking in the shadows as it were – ready to pounce on us. The bad news is that the devil is in us, stealthily trying to influence our minds:

"Christian! Dost though feel them,

*How they work within;
Striving, tempting, luring,
Goading into sin?"*

Thoughts are things, says the poet (endowed with bodies, breath and wings) and we send them out to do good or ill. It is as if we are programmed to be thinking of good things even as other thoughts come about bad things – and so there is a conflict of thoughts. And this is why we must study our bible and get to understand how the grace of God works. It is a long study – really a lifelong study. But it helps us to fight off evil and strengthens us for our mission in life. Our opponents are strong, but our leader is stronger. People may say to us as they did to Jeremiah “Come, let us invent some charges against him; let us pay no attention to his message”. But,

*“Christian, dost thou hear them,
How they speak thee fair?
‘Always fast and vigil?
Always watch and prayer?’
Christian! Answer boldly: ‘
While I breathe I pray!’
Peace shall follow battle,
Night will end in day”.*

It is a truism that in a crowd of activists there is generally only a few who are doing the work while the others make a noise or sit quietly watching. But to all of us the charge is given “I appointed you a prophet to the nations” - We must make people feel that God is not sleeping but is very much awake and is making use of his servants – and the world will change for the better. People will sometimes laugh at us or question us critically regarding our intentions. This is where our preparation – our readiness for spiritual combat comes in. We need to be prepared by our prayers and our study of the Bible and other books to answer their questions. Sometimes other groups will say hostile things to us. We must welcome these groups as brothers and sisters in the fight, praising their persistence and their literature – instead of thinking of them as Jehovah’s wickedness. In this respect we call to mind Jesus’ words “Those who are not against us are for us”. But one complaint is that we are too few. The voice of God comes from his written word and when we read the book of Jeremiah we see it is almost a foretelling of what is happening in our land today. It is as if the prophet is voicing an alarm to which we must respond in a positive manner, or perish. We dare not sit back and say like Jeremiah at first “ Ah! Lord God. I do not know how to speak”. God has promised us his protection and he will guide us.

We are not satisfied with many things – with the lot of many of our brethren, especially if they live in the inner cities or even close to us. Maybe we are not happy with the tendency of some of our leaders to waste time in quarrelling over trivial matters but we can do something. Is there a neighbor who needs help that you can offer? How about the stranger in difficulty – the very hungry stranger? The good book tells us what to do. The war against evil is a combination of talk and deeds. A little talk, a good deed of doing, and an unbelieving public will see the face of God. But those who do this work must be careful of the devil’s traps – like self-satisfaction with your work or contempt for your fellowmen. The Christian graces of humility and a willingness to stay in the background while doing your good deeds must be a guide and check, on other thoughts that the devil might seek to implant in our minds. We can be very effective if we work as God’s secret service agents.

*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you for my own;
before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. ‘Ah! Lord God!’ I answered. ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’*

But the Lord said

Do not call yourself a child; for you shall go to whatever people I send you and say whatever I tell you to say. Fear none of them, for I am with you and will keep you safe.

This was the very word of the Lord.

Convocations

Western Convocation, August 7–9: Revisioning the Franciscan Journey: Don’t forget the Joy!

Convocation will be held at San Damiano Retreat, located 30 miles east of San Francisco in Danville, California. Our keynote speaker will be Susan Pitchford, TSSF, author of *Following Francis, The Franciscan Way for Everyone*. The cost for the weekend will be \$200 for a single room, \$170 per person for a double room; this includes the San Damiano charges, plus \$20 for copying, postage and the scholarship fund. The non-refundable deposit is \$50. San Damiano requires guaranteed numbers two weeks in advance. The deadline for registration will be July 17th. Contact Joan Kidd.

Northeast Convocation, August 21-3: The Wisdom of Francis and Clare in Economic Hard Times. Convocation will be held at the Xavier Center, Convent Station, New Jersey. Keynote Speaker Jeff Gollither is an Episcopal priest, cultural anthropologist, environmentalist and spiritual director. He serves a parish in the Diocese of NY and also works in the Office of the Anglican Observer to the United Nations serving as the environmental representative for the worldwide Anglican Communion. To register, contact Ed Schneider. Cost is \$185 payable by 8/8/09.

The Community of St. Francis now has its revised edition of the CSF Office Book available.

The suggested donation is \$60 (which includes postage). If you are interested or would like more information, please contact us at csfsfo@aol.com or 415-824-0288 or St. Francis House, 3743 Cesar Chavez St., San Francisco CA 94110.

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Minister Provincial
Ken Norian
Editor
R. John Brockmann

Editorial Staff
Anita Catron, & Terry Rogers
**Editorial contributions and all
correspondence should be sent to:**
R. John Brockmann
P.O. Box 277, Warwick, MD 21912
jbrockma@udel.edu

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For Name and address changes
For Convocation Dates
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Send Them To the Secretary of the Order:
Lynn Herne
7 Moseley Street
Whitesboro, NY 13492
lynnhern@juno.com

For chaplaincy matters contact:
Chaplain of the Province
Barbara Leonard 12860 177th Street N
Marine on St. Croix, MN 55047
leona001@umn.edu

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The Principles of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis for Daily Reading (\$2.50)

Order of Admission (\$1)

Spiritual Director Guide (\$2.50)

Statutes (\$1)

Devotional Companion (\$4.50)

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Stations of Creation

Colin Wilfred SSF (*from European Province's Winter 2008, Chronicle*)

We are familiar with the idea of the Stations of the Cross but this devotion, based on St. Francis's Canticle of the Creatures, can be used either by individuals or groups, inside (and may be accompanied by music or 'visual aids') or outside in the natural world. The text owes a lot to "Earthsongs" by Wayne Simsic, and was first used at Compton Durville for a conference on the Care of Creation.

Station 1

Most High, all powerful, good Lord to you be the praises, the glory and the honour, and all blessing. To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no-one is worthy to call upon your name.

Bible Reading

Psalm 36.5-10

Reflection

Help me to grow in a consciousness which embraces the vastness of interstellar space and the minuteness of a drop of water or a snowflake and to realise it is my joy and responsibility to meet you at the centre of this beautiful world you have created, moving beyond self-interest to a new set of values to protect the environment that all may share it in peace and justice.

Silence

Prayer:

Blessed are you, God of the universe; give us a vision that embraces earth and sky, constellations and galaxies, that we may know that the whole of creation is embraced in your enduring love made known to us in your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Station 2

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour, and bears a likeness to you, Most High One.

Bible Reading

Ecclesiasticus 43.2-5

Reflection

Face to face with Sir Brother Sun, we know the immensity of his power surpassing anything on earth and yet sustaining all that lives. Help me to delight in sunrise and sunset and be grateful in acknowledging the source of my own life.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe; open our hearts to the light that proclaims your glory day after day. The sky resounds with a song that rings in the hills, rises from the fields and enlivens the rivers and the seas. In your light may we see light through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Station 3

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them, clear and precious and beautiful.

Bible Reading

Ecclesiasticus 43.6 -10

Reflection

Holy God, thank you for the light in the darkness of Sister Moon and the stars. We thank you for the unfolding pattern of times and seasons. Help us to rediscover the natural rhythms of your creation that we may be more in tune with the universe both in the darkness and in the light of our human and earthly lives.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe; you are the light that opens our eyes to see the divine light that penetrates the world, revealing its endless possibilities. May my eyes be gentle and my heart expansive that I may know the radiance of your timeless and transcendent love made known to us in Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

Station 4

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Bible Reading

Ecclesiastes 11.4-5

Reflection

Brother Wind is invisible and yet so powerful in its effect: he makes the tall grass sway on a summer's day, he whips up the lake into a dangerous frenzy, he causes an autumn leaf to jump and dance. The weather is ever changing, ever full of possibilities for new life or terrible destruction. Give me a compassionate heart for those affected by natural disasters: storm or tsunami, drought or famine, and to work for a human community that protects both people and our environment.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe; your Spirit like the wind sweeps through me. Give me the strength to accept her gifts of freedom and change that I may be constantly transformed in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Station 5

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Bible Reading

John 4. 13-14

Reflection

Sister Water, you are so useful and yet you are so humble that I'm constantly tempted to ignore you and not treat you reverently as source of both life and beauty. Help me to delight in this sweet liquid that flows from the hills and springs out of the depths of the earth. May we all work together that your human children may share plentifully in this precious gift for our sustenance, cleansing and delight.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe; your gift of water refreshes our spirit and delights our imagination. In it you offer us both hope and rebirth and its gentle force is both our way and our life. Help us to share this gift generously in the spirit of him who is the living water, Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

Station 6

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, Through whom you light up the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Bible Reading

I Corinthians 3.13, 15

Reflection

Brother Fire, on a winter's night, with your dancing flames I see your beauty and your playfulness. Down the ages, men, women and children have gathered around you for warmth and comfort, to tell stories and to prepare for rest in the struggle for life. In places like the Australian bush we witness to your incredible power for destruction yet this is necessary to regenerate trees and shrubs and plants for the next season of life. Help us to treat you with love and respect.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe, for fire is a symbol of your life-giving and challenging Spirit - ever dancing in the light, destroying our deadness and bringing renewal to our lives in Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Station 7

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us.

Bible Reading

Job 38. 1, 4-7

Reflection

Creator God, "this fragile earth, our island home" is truly both our Sister and our Mother. Maternally, she is both the source and the sustainer of my life and the life of all animals and birds, insects and reptiles. She is the sister with whom all our human brothers and sisters are members of one family. Help us to delight in our life-giving earth which is alive and dynamic ever singing its praises to you. May we guard her life with love and tender care that we may always walk gently upon her.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe; teach me to see your earth not as property but as a bearer of your revelation of love. Deepen my sense of the interdependence of my life and that of our Sister Mother Earth. Help us all to sense the music of sky and sea, mountains and deserts which is the eternal song of the divine Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Station 8

Our Sister, Mother Earth, who produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs

Bible Reading

Deuteronomy 8.7-10

Reflection

You promised your people a fertile land, a land of promise that would flourish under your care-giving eye. We rejoice in the never-ending kaleidoscope of flowers and trees, the harvest of the fruits of the earth and the herbs which flavour our lives. Help us to grow in respect and appreciation of the land you have entrusted to us particularly by what we buy and what we consume, that all may be truly enriched.

Silence

(continued on page 12)

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe; you give us the seasons, the planting and the harvesting as we share in your work of creation. May we listen attentively to the earth's demands and love the land as we love ourselves, as we share its bounty in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Station 9

Praised be you, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you, and bear weakness and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by you, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Bible Reading

Psalms 103. 1,3,12,13,17

Reflection

We need the forgiveness of God for all the ways in which we have misused the creation: our selfishness and greed, our exploitation and money-grabbing, our use of power to destroy the weak and fragile, our thoughtlessness of the needs of others, the needs of our earth which is God's earth. In our weakness and tribulation help us not to lose heart but to endure in peace that our world and the whole human family may be crowned with all-embracing love and deep humility.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe, giver of harmony and interweaving love; help us to see and to live in interdependence with all your creatures, to appreciate them in their own right, to learn from them all that will help us to live in peace with your creation in the spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Station 10

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Bible Reading

Ecclesiasticus 41.1-4

Reflection

Everything in the world, including me, dies. If I stand on a hillside almost everything, if I look carefully, is in the process of dying, mostly before me. But without this marvel of nature which is constantly renewed we would be surrounded by stones and deserts. Help me to see the new life which is your gift each morning.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe, for you renew this lovely earth through the universal rhythm of life and death. Help us to trace all forms of life back to

you, the creator and source of all things. May we live in a harmony of hope with all that exists in Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

Station 11

Blessed are those whom death will find doing your most holy will, for the second death will do them no harm.

Bible Reading

Psalms 25.4,5,10 29

Reflection

Loving God, in my better moments I know that a heart which is open and full of love is the truest compass pointing the way to you. May your holy wisdom guide me to trust that path rather than the one paved only with my own interests and concerns. Give me the strength to follow that open road which leads to you beyond all forms of death.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe, you are our companion; help us to find the path which is humility, love and joy, in ways that are both rough and smooth, guides us to treasure the earth and each other so that we may know we are travelling to you with your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Station 12

Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks and serve him with great humility.

Bible Reading

Jude 24, 25

Reflection

I realise that the transformation of heaven and earth will not happen only at the end of time but that the universe, this earth and all things visible and invisible, are being drawn with cords of love to find their fulfilment in the Christ of the whole cosmos. Help us to serve you with humility that is profound and with love that is boundless.

Silence

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of the universe, maker of heaven and earth; you draw all of creation to yourself, according to your plan and purpose. Help us to uncover a vision of hope for the whole earth, when all things shall be made new in Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who is alive and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen! Alleluia!

St Peter's PCEA Ihindu, Kenya

Mary Wallace from the Borders Local Group has had a long relationship with a church in Kenya. (from European Province's Winter 2008, Chronicle)

In November I visited Kenya in the company of two Tertiary friends who joined with me at St Peter's on November 11th when the Foundation Stone of the new church was to be laid. Nothing could have prepared us for the welcome we received and we were led into the old church where the Moderator Rev Geoffrey Wati introduced members of the Presbytery. In bright sunshine we then processed into the roofless new church and took our seats on a platform under a tarpaulin awning.

The Clerk to the Presbytery introduced the congregation to the various members of the Presbytery and there followed a service of speeches, a sermon by the Moderator, and praise.

During this the *Nation Newspaper* representative arrived, and we were escorted to the porch area of the church to have our photos taken while pretending to lay the foundation stone. It reminded us of the cutting the cake before the event at a wedding. Later we did this for real and the Moderator and I slopped in very wet cement, and he read prayers before drawing a net curtain on a string that unveiled a plaque commemorating the day.

There followed more singing and then a number of people came to the front holding baskets; each basket was held by a member of a neighbouring church and members from that particular church placed money in for their church, then came the collection for the building of St Peter's. My contact, Sammy Karanja and I held a basket between us and each donation from various churches was announced including money given by the Moderator and the Presbytery. People who were too poor to give money brought vegetables, cabbages, potatoes and onions, to be auctioned, some being sold several times as their generous buyers put them back in the sacks. A total of £450 [about \$740] was collected which was a marvellous effort and the money has been used as a down payment for the windows and doors



of the new church. By the time the service ended it had lasted four and a half hours!

We then followed the Presbytery back into the old building, and we said prayers together. The previous day the Women's Guild had prepared food and had worked late and stayed overnight in the church so that it could be ready, and this was then distributed to all who attended the service, around 250 people including children, no sausage rolls or sandwiches but a meal of rice, carrots and corn.

At this point we were taken by Sammy Karanja to his house where his daughters had prepared a meal for us of chicken, beef stew, chapattis and rice followed by a gooey cake that had been prepared for me by our hotel. We played with six Karanja grandchildren and cooed over the youngest son of three weeks before returning to Naivasha and our hotel.

A tremendous day, joyful tears and much praising. At the time of writing the disturbing situation in Kenya is much in our thoughts. Let us pray that by the time you read this the difficulties have been resolved and peace in that beautiful country has been restored.

Worship at the Church was led by the Praise Band

The Devil's Beatitudes

(Australian Province Newsletter, Eastertide 2009)

Blessed are those who are too tired, busy or disorganised to meet with fellow Christians on Sundays each week. Their hearts are not in it.

Blessed are those who enjoy noticing the mannerisms of clergy and choir. Their hearts are not in it.

Blessed are those Christians who wait to be asked and expect to be thanked. I can use them.

Blessed are the touchy. With a bit of luck they may even stop going to Church. They are my missionaries.

Blessed are those who claim to love God at the same time as hating other people. They are mine forever.

Blessed are the trouble-makers. They shall be called my children.

Blessed are those who have no time to pray. They are easy prey for me.

Blessed are you when you read this and think it is about other people and not about yourself.

Franciscans and the Financial Crisis: What we can do to Help

David B. Couturier, OFM, Cap., is a Research Analyst for the Franciscan Action Network and author of The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics (www.thevictoriapress.com).

America is facing an unprecedented financial crisis. Credit is tightening, unemployment is rising and the cost of living is going up. Increasingly, Americans are afraid that they're going to lose their jobs and the vital medical benefits that go along with them. This recession is forecasted to be longer, deeper and harder than anything we have seen since the Great Depression. Franciscans are not immune to these global dynamics. Our institutions will feel the crunch. What can we do to weather this "perfect storm?" What can we do to help our brothers and sisters get through and make sense of this economic crisis? What in the Franciscan tradition can help us rebuild a legitimate economic security? This paper looks at the history of this crisis and outlines some principles and tools Franciscans can use to make sure that our next steps in the economic world are sure and just.

A Bit of History

In December 2008, the Bush administration admitted what most Americans already knew. We were in a recession and had been for some time, in fact for at least a year. Recession is technically difficult to define. Most economists describe it as a decrease of less than 10% in a country's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) over two consecutive quarters. The National Bureau of Economic Research defines it as a 'significant decline in economic activity lasting more than a few months.' Difficult to classify, a recession is not hard to feel, however. In a recession, living costs go up, as incomes get squeezed. It is a sustained period of economic stagnation as spending falls, business investment shrinks, and companies begin laying people off as sales across multiple sectors dry up. It is a time when financial fears go up and economic trust goes down.

We pretty well know the origins of this particular financial crisis. They're found in what are called subprime loans! Simply put, because of deregulation in the banking industry and a whole lot of greed, banks made housing loans available to a whole class of people whose credit worthiness and ability to pay back the loan were always shaky, at best. Unusually low introductory mortgage rates teased people into the real estate market who would never have qualified under ordinary circumstances and in normal times. With these low introductory rates in place, people bought homes they couldn't afford, over the long haul. Often

without so much as a down payment, people secured 100% adjustable (versus) fixed rate mortgages. With these adjustable rate mortgages, people bought new homes or re-mortgaged existing homes with fervor or, better, on a wing and a prayer. Everything was fine, at least at the beginning, because on the front end of an adjustable mortgage, payments are low, unusually so. It's when the adjustable rates kicked in, as they must, that large numbers of families found themselves in severe financial trouble. They could afford the teaser introductory rates, just not the larger adjustable ones that followed.

When the mortgage rates finally adjusted (upwards, of course), the amount people were required to pay for their mortgages on a monthly basis jumped dramatically; in some cases, doubling or tripling. Unfortunately for these sub-prime borrowers, their incomes were only calibrated to the initial teaser rates, not to the final adjustable ones. It wasn't long before these borrowers found themselves behind the proverbial eight ball. Some tried to stay afloat and make their monthly mortgage payments by borrowing from their credit cards. With interest rates running between 18 and 22% and a whole host of late payment fees, sub-prime families found themselves in a quicksand of debt, unable to pay their mortgages or their credit cards. For many, bankruptcy became the only option. The numbers of people across the country unable to make their mortgage and credit card payments skyrocketed. Banks found themselves with empty loans and dozens of foreclosed properties on their hands. They started to hemorrhage money uncontrollably. Some well known and highly esteemed banks started to fail. The government needed to step in to forestall rolling bank failures and a nationwide loss of confidence in banks. Because financing is no longer local and many of these loans had been parceled out across the world in our new globalized economic network, the trauma that once could have been cauterized at the local level quickly became an international disaster.

This whole venture sounds so irresponsible. Why would any reputable company engage in a loan sharking-type enterprise of giving mortgages to people who obviously did not have the means to sustain the life of the loan? The simple and most truthful answer is Greed. Consumers got greedy, bankers got greedy and the government, because of its deregulation policies, stopped watching out for and stopped protecting us from these greedy behaviors. No one was minding the store as these loans were sliced up and re-packaged ("bundled") and then sold to other banking partners (around the world) who ostensibly took legal and financial responsibility for their ever-smaller pieces of the loan. Unfortunately, many of these end-of-the-line

owners didn't know what they actually had or what was implied by having them. Their focus, like everyone else's, was on making (quick) cash and not on being the responsible agent of other people's money.

Why was all this attractive? Again, the simple truth is the best. People were making money every step along the way. Every time these loans were divvied up, sold off or handed on to some other party, someone was making money, quick money, easy money. At the end of the day, no one really knew who owned the loans and who was responsible for making good on their promises. It was at this point that banks finally closed their spigots and stopped lending money or making promises to one another. The banking system began to shut down. The economic system's most prized possession—trust—was in very short supply and, without it, the economy started to become paralyzed. Without trust, banks don't lend money to one another. Businesses can't get credit for supplies and companies start pulling back on production. When factories can't crank out products, people get laid off or start worrying about their jobs. In this climate, consumers stop spending money and the whole cycle of supply and demand grinds down to a point of deep stagnation. A recession can easily turn into a depression, since a depression is simply a longer, deeper, and more aggravated form of a recession.

Most Americans know things are bad. What they don't know or find hard to admit is that things have been bad for quite some time, at least for the middle and lower class in America. Before we turn our attention on what we can do, let's trace how life has been economically for the middle and lower-middle class in America.

Life inside the Bubble

If you asked most Americans to describe the economic climate of the 1990's and the early years of the 21st century, you would probably get a very positive assessment. The end of the twentieth century is remembered as "good times." The Cold War was over. Unemployment was low, and productivity was high. Americans went to college in record numbers. Gas prices were down, and so were food prices, relatively so, due to low energy and transportation costs rippling through the system. Americans spent like there was no tomorrow—literally. The personal savings rate dipped below 0 percent for the first time since the Great Depression, hitting a negative .5% in 2005. (This was down from a personal savings rate of 9% in 1985.) Even though Americans were spending more than they were earning, credit was plentiful and Americans became accustomed, for the first time in their history, to living their lives in debt and without shame. In 2004, the credit

card industry took in \$43 billion in late-payment, over-limit, and balance transfer fees. The average household credit card debt increased 167% between 1990 and 2004.¹

Just below the surface of these good times, trouble was brewing. Americans were accumulating huge debts, well beyond their means to repay in any systematic or coherent fashion. The average household consumer debt in 2004 is estimated to have been between \$9,000 and \$13,000. Between 1990 and 2004, America's total credit card debt increased from \$243 billion to \$735 billion.² It is clear that more and more people began using their credit cards to buy groceries, fill prescriptions and pay for their medical care.

Something more than personal lapses and individual moral failures is at work here. It is clear that Americans have been living beyond their means and on borrowed money and lots of it. But a closer look reveals that there are structural factors at play that make it necessary for families to go into debt. Below the radar of ordinary American spending are some very troubling social forces that make it difficult for more and more Americans to get by. A list helps us contextualize and understand this financial crisis better. Here's what's been happening while ordinary Americans have been trying to make a living.

- The average American worker is working longer and harder and for less money. The average worker now spends 200 more hours a year on the job than he or she did in the 1970's, an extra five weeks per year. The average middle-income family experienced an increase of ten additional weeks per year in annual paid household workload.³ You would think that more work would translate into more money and spending power. Just the opposite happened. Americans have been working harder but falling further behind.
- Why are Americans working so hard? It's not because they want to work longer hours and with less vacation time and fewer benefits than any of the other industrialized countries of the world. They have to do so. Driving the cycle of overwork is not the greed to have more, but simply the desire to maintain what families now have. The fact is that wages, adjusted for inflation, have remained distressingly stagnant, while the costs for food, housing, energy, college, day care and health care have soared well beyond the rate of inflation. The modern economy is not an escalator that carries people up and out of disadvantage. Today it is more like a treadmill whose settings are gradually increased. People have to run faster just to stay in place.

- Most people are afraid to complain about the increased demands for time at work because they are terrified of losing their health benefits. The rate of U.S. health care spending as a percentage of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) rose from 5% in 1960 to 16% in 2004. In 2005, 46.6 million people in America had no health care insurance at all; 15 million more people than just 10 years before. Although 80% of those who are uninsured actually work, full or part-time, the cost for securing and maintaining health insurance today remains largely out of reach for a good portion of our American workers. Without universal health care protection, they are forced to cobble together their out of pocket solution to higher fees and prescription costs, or simply go without health care.
- A popular saying is that “the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer.” It is not only popular; it is also true. The number of families and individuals in poverty and economic hardship has risen. The poverty rate for 2005 was 12.6 percent, up from 11.7 percent in 2001. There are 36 million Americans in poverty and the bulk of these (13 million) are children. One third of all African-American children in America lives in poverty; 23.9% of all African-American seniors live in poverty, compared to a national average of 9.8% of all elderly, 65 and over.⁴
- What is emerging is a frightening picture of growing economic inequality and financial disparity in America. Money made in the 1990’s and early part of the 21st century flowed upward; it didn’t trickle down as promised. More and more Americans are working harder and harder so that a smaller and smaller group of people at the top can do well, enormously well. (In the 1970s, the wealthiest 1% of the population owned 20% of all private wealth. Today, the top 1% owns over 34% of all private wealth.)⁵ This inequality shows itself in stark and subtle ways. An Oil Price Information Service study indicated that lower income Americans spend 8 times more of their disposable income on gasoline than their wealthier neighbors do.⁶ Fewer and fewer well-off Americans are relying on the public services, civic organizations, and community structures that everyone else must depend on. Living in gated communities, playing at private clubs, designing their own recreational venues, the well-off in America have simply “privatized” their family’s educational and security needs. Instead of relying on and sharing the burden of public education, community libraries, and public transportation, they have simply left the “public square,” withdrawn from community action, and become more and more isolated from the public parks,

public works, and common wealth we all depend on to make American democracy work well for all of us. No wonder they want further tax cuts! Power is shifting in America and ordinary voters, unionized workers and wage earners are losing ground to big money investors and campaign contributors who are more interested in corporate interests than in our common tasks and responsibilities.⁷

The crisis we face is deeper than any quick bailout can fix. Andree Zaleska of the Boston office of the Institute for Policy Studies said it succinctly: “We are not going back to some golden age of economic growth based on empire, unfettered capitalism, and cheap energy—nor do we want to! We have to prepare ourselves and our communities for transformation.”

A shift is what is demanded of us as Franciscans. Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, writing on the moral-theological foundations of the current economic crisis, says that we have to change from “autonomy to covenantal existence, from anxiety to divine abundance, and from acquisitive greed to neighborly generosity.”⁸

A Franciscan Perspective

In 2007 I published a text on a Franciscan approach to economics.⁹ The book originated in a challenge posed to the Capuchin Order by three African Capuchins at the Order’s General Chapter of 2000. The three friars were reviewing the state of the Order in Africa, trying to contextualize the political and ecclesial challenges facing Africans, when they humbly and pointedly accused the worldwide fraternity of “not hearing the cry of the poor in Africa.” The charge stung and confused the delegates listening to them. Hadn’t the Order sent legions of missionaries and developed hundreds of parishes, schools and clinics? Hadn’t the Order supplied financial resources for the establishment of the Order, along with churches and schools, in both Eastern and Western Africa? Hadn’t hundreds of European and North American priests and brothers labored intensively and for decades to make a positive difference in the lives of Africans? What had we not heard? What had we not seen? The three friars were clear. We had not understood the poverty of the poor of Africa. We did not understand its roots and its causes, its origins in a Western economic system and worldview that valued competition over compassion, individualism over the community, and materialism over the spirit. The friars asked us to listen more closely to their concerns and to work with them to develop solutions that would heal and mutually benefit both sides of the growing global economic divide.

This challenge accelerated the Capuchin Order's analysis of its own economic models, already in progress and led by then Minister General, now Bishop, John Corriveau, OFM. Cap. In a series of 20 circular letters to the Order, Corriveau had enunciated a vision for a new way of living our common life and sharing our resources in a more globalized world. Rejecting the underlying aggression and competition of late 20th century market fundamentalism, Corriveau called on Capuchins to rebuild our local, provincial and international economies on more solid and more secure principles of communion and compassion. Calling on friars to develop a "fraternal" economy, Corriveau suggested that we could build stronger economic ties and a more stable network of international relationships, if we were willing to forego the spasms of fear that classical capitalism's "scarcity thinking" (as opposed to classical Bonaventurian 'abundance thinking') promotes. My book traces the history of this line of thought and provides formators with some tools on how to begin training the next generation for this new economic paradigm.

The first thing we have to learn is that Franciscans have something vital to say about contemporary economics. This is not new. Franciscans have always been involved in the economic questions of the day. The early friars were intimately involved in the debates about currency and the proper use of resources and power in the 12th and 13th centuries. Francis's teaching on poverty was never meant to reject the world and jettison the friars into some parallel, disembodied universe without commerce or common good. Quite the contrary! Francis's intent was to have friars understand the troubled roots of the economy of his day and to have them face the violence and the greed that fueled the development of the rising feudal economy. Francis's penitential humanism was to be a stimulus to a new economic security among the brothers and in society, fueled not by greed but by a humble recognition of a common heritage as sisters and brothers under one good and loving God.

Capuchins believe it is time to take another look at the Franciscan tradition for help in developing a more relational economic paradigm for the 21st century. In my book, I outline five principles that we believe can help us construct a more relational experience of economic activity than is presently displayed in the "pick yourself up by your own bootstrap" idiom of aggressive capitalism. The five principles are:

- Transparency: Mutuality in all things. All the goods, economic activities, and ministerial decisions are at the service of the whole. There are no hidden schemes by leadership or membership.
- Equity: Individuals and communities get what they

need and contribute what they have for the common good and the building up of communion. Service replaces entitlement.

- Participation: Build mechanisms of cooperation and communion of persons without domination or deprivation.
- Solidarity: Those who have more give more to those deprived. All work to undo structures of sin that serve as obstacles to communion.
- Austerity: The minimum necessary, not the maximum allowed. Live and work simply, so that others can simply live and work.¹⁰

Think about the present financial crisis. Had any of these five principles been working in the financial system, we would not have gotten into the traumatic global situation we are in. These principles are derived from the wellspring of Franciscan theology, specifically meditations on the Trinity and our participation in God's inner life of communion.¹¹ Franciscans are asked to use these five principles when working through their economic decisions, both privately and communally.

Common Security Clubs

One of the greatest dangers of this current economic crisis is that people will try to face its challenges alone. Most Americans are too ashamed or embarrassed to share their economic troubles with others, so used are they to the paradigm of privacy that surrounds our most cherished economic myths. The fact is that more and more Americans feel isolated. A recent Duke University study found that 25% of Americans say they have no one with whom to share their personal troubles—more than double the number who felt this isolated in 1985.¹² What Franciscans can do is to bring our strong communal instincts to bear on a dangerously isolating experience and do so in specific ways.

The Boston-based Institute for Policy Studies is developing a model and methodology for small groups of people to come together to talk about the current economic crisis and how it is impacting them. Participants spend time in what are being called "Common Security Clubs," discussing the root causes of the economic crisis, using reading materials provided by the IPS for this purpose.¹³ Most of the group's discussion time is spent talking to one another about what they can do together to increase their own economic security and to work for policy changes that will benefit the common good.

The IPS is providing participants with a simple three-stage model for coming together. The recommended size of a group is between ten and twenty adults who commit to an initial five meetings with a facilitator.

The first step is to learn and reflect. Using videos, Bible study, and shared readings, participants are asked to focus on the larger economic forces that are shaping our lives. The group's goal is to come to a common understanding of why the economy is in distress, what are its historical factors, and what is a vision of a healthier, more sustainable economy? The bottom line question here is: why are we so economically insecure now and what can we do together to develop a more secure foundation for our economic lives in the future?

The second step for these "common security clubs" is to provide mutual aid and local action. The question the group is asked is a direct one, what can we do together to increase our economic security, right here and right now? Here is where questions become personal and call out for action. For one person, it may be: how can I get out of debt? For another, it might be: How can I keep my home and forestall foreclosure? And for yet another person, it may be: how can I exit the rat race of consumerism, downscale my consumption and live a more ecologically-friendly existence? The group focuses its attention on making concrete alternatives possible in one another's lives, at the point of one's deepest economic insecurity.

The third step is for these small groups to decide whether to engage in further social action, based on their experiences and mutual needs. Different groups will respond differently to the economic insecurity issues that are emerging. Some will begin to lobby members of Congress to reform the health care system; others will call on Congress to stop foreclosures or to press for living wage legislation. Each group decides for itself how it will engage the economy in a more relational, or fraternal, way.

One member of a Common Security Club summed up the goal of this practical, hands-on initiative, when she said, "Let us pray together that our private pain now becomes our shared concern, that together we find ways to overcome our fear and anxiety, and be present to one another. Let us not be afraid, but take action together."

Franciscans and the Financial Crisis

Franciscans have a long history of accompanying the poor through the most difficult of economic times. We have tended the leper, sheltered the homeless and given food to the hungry time and time again. And we are doing so today in our hospitals, clinics, soup kitchens and food pantries all across America and, indeed, around the world. But, this crisis demands something more from us. It calls on us to address the origins of this global financial meltdown. It begs us to name the spasms of fear that an ideology of scarcity requires and

replace them with a theological vision of a God-given abundance, as St. Bonaventure reminds us (*bonum diffusivum sui*). As Franciscans we believe in a God who is good, all good, supremely good, all the time and to everyone. We believe this God of ours is different from the stingy and distant God of Wall Street. Our God calls us into a relational economy that places a premium on compassion, not aggression, as the driving force of economic relations. As Franciscans we can use our tradition to develop a more reliable and common security that will build peace, eradicate the most severe forms of poverty and protect the environment. It's time for Franciscans to gather their friends and neighbors to talk about economic challenges and concerns and to find a faithful pathway out of anxiety and greed to a more relational economy.

(Endnotes)

¹ These statistics can be found in Chuck Collins and Mary Wright, *The Moral Measure of the Economy* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007), 42-43.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶ Steve Hargreaves, "Gas Prices Hit Working Class," accessed: www.cnn.com/2007/11/13/news/economy/gas_burden/index.htm

⁷ Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel, *Economic Apartheid in America: A Primer on Economic Inequality and Insecurity* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, "From Anxiety and Greed to Milk and Honey," *Sojourners* 38:2 (February 2009), 20-26.

⁹ David B. Couturier, *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics* (South Bend, IN: Cloverdale Books, 2007).

¹⁰ These five principles are also found in David B. Couturier, "Hope and Security: New Foundations," *Horizon* 32:1 (Fall, 2006), 11-16.

¹¹ Cf. *The Fraternal Economy*, 32-41.

¹² Reported in Chuck Collins, "We're in This Together," *Sojourners* 38:2 (February, 2009), 29.

¹³ You can find out more about these Common Security Clubs at www.commonsecurityclub.org.

Minister's Musings

Ken Norian, TSSF

The Principles, Day 29.... This joy... is still there even in times of darkness and difficulty, giving cheerful courage in the face of disappointment, and an inward serenity and confidence through sickness and suffering.

We've all had the experience of reading something, often for me a verse of scripture, that we've read scores of times before – and at some point it just jumps out at us as though we were reading it for the first time. I've been reading our Principles daily for what will be twenty years this October. A little over a month ago, this reading jumped out at me in a powerful way.

A blood test in an annual physical indicated an elevated PSA level. A subsequent biopsy confirmed prostate cancer. By God's grace, I got the news while attending an NAECC (National Association of Episcopal Christian Communities) meeting in Wisconsin.... surrounded by the leaders of the other Christian Communities in North America. The emotional and prayer support was such a gift, and helped get me started on this new journey surrounded by the presence of sisters and brothers in the Lord.

At 52 years old, I've not had any significant personal medical challenges. I've since discovered how much easier it is to talk and preach about trusting in God than actually doing it! Amidst this experience, and with much support from my spiritual director, I'm learning how challenges can be opportunities for growth and maturity. The Bible is filled with examples of this – but they always seemed more abstract than they do of late. During the Easter season I had much opportunity to reflect on the suffering of Jesus – and his victory over death. The evident fact that we're all only visiting this planet was brought home... with a sense of peace that clearly came from the Spirit. I want to grow into the place where Paul was when he wrote in Philippians:

For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. If I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So, I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between the two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

Well, I'm not St Paul, and I don't think that your lives would be any worse off if I were with Christ and someone else Minister Provincial. But, you get the idea!

For better or worse, the odds of me being around for a while are really good as far as my known medical issues go. The odds of significant side effects from surgery aren't that bad either. Still, I know that "God,

the source of hope, will fill us completely with joy and peace because we trust in him. Then we will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit". (Rom 15:13)

I'm sad that I'll not be able to represent TSSF at the bi-annual Minister's Provincial meeting in Perth, Australia in August. I'm thankful, however, that we will be well represented by a former MP, Anita Catron. I rejoice that I was able to represent TSSF at the NAECC gathering, at the First Order Chapter of the brothers of SSF, and at the Order of Ecumenical Franciscan's Chapter / Convocation in Indiana.

In Francis, we have an incredible example of how to approach suffering: Despite his increased suffering, Francis' inner joy continued, and found particular expression in his Cantic of the Sun:

Most High Almighty Good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessings

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,

And no man is worthy to mention You.

My prayer for all of us is mostly comprised of bits of scripture that I have been praying over:

God of love, our place of safety when we are in distress.

You know our cares, fears, worries and anxieties. Be our fortress and our refuge. Deliver us from all our fears.

Grant us hope and confidence that you will be with us forever. Help us not to worry about the future but joyfully trust in you completely, and fill us with perfect peace that transcends understanding.

Amen

From the Bursar:



This is my final report for the Times. Last year I reached the decision that I should not offer to stand for another term as Bursar. A bitter sweet decision that came from prayer and meditating about the Order and my place in the community.

Over the last thirty years I have been given the opportunity to serve my brothers and sisters in my ways within the order; as fellowship convener, formation counselor to many wonderful postulants and novices, on Chapter as provincial secretary and formation

director. In these positions I have traveled around the country to regional convocations meeting many of you and sharing true Franciscan joy. I thought perhaps that was it but after ten years I was asked to serve as Bursar. It has been a great four years this time. I have enjoyed the challenge and all the heartfelt notes that people enclose with their pledges. It makes the community feel very close.

So why stop now? Because we are a community and it came to me that I had been given these opportunities to help to build the community and now it is time to encourage others to step forward. If we are to grow as community then I believe that we need to share opportunities for leadership within our fellowships and within our Order. One of the questions that comes up frequently is "What does Chapter do exactly?" One way to find out is to read the Franciscan Times, but as the Chinese proverb says:

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

Perhaps the best way to find out about Chapter is to encourage our brothers and sisters to take their turn to serve in one of the many positions that make the Third Order a thriving community. So I am going to do that and will be cheering on my successor. Have

you thought about offering your services to the Order? Don't wait to be asked!

Our financial news is very good. Pledges have been honored even in these tough economic times. Remember that you can always change your pledge as your circumstances change and whether up or down our prayers go with you. For my last report to Chapter I will be asking that we look at the funds we are holding and the possibility of increasing our financing for programs the Order already supports, and maybe take on some new Franciscan projects. This is truly a reason for joy!

If you have any questions or concerns about your pledge please contact me. Peace and joy to all my sisters and brothers!

Bursar for US	Bursar for Canada
Ann Harris	Gordon Arthur
3681 East Curtis Drive	405-5100 Capitol Drive
Sacramento CA 95818	Burnaby, BC V5B 4S7 Canada
anntssf@gmail.com	Gordon@ecumenist.org

Send in your contributions for the Fall issue by October 1

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