

OFS-USA ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE HAS BEEN BORN!

by Janice Benton, OFS, and Susan Tabor, OFS

It all started when Susan Tabor, OFS, and Janice Benton, OFS, shared a dream with each other. That dream, based on their shared vision of fully accessible events and materials, such as Braille and large print, and inspired by our call to value the inherent dignity of every person, led to an idea of how we might help others in this area.

Susan and Janice met at a book study led by Carolyn Townes, chair of the national JPIC Commission. They were on the phone discussing an inquiry they were working on concerning accessible materials for someone in formation. As they talked, their shared vision was born. The vision was offered to our National Minister, Jan Parker, who shared it with the National Executive Council (NEC), which immediately voted to make the OFS-USA Accessibility Committee a standing committee.

In the meantime, Mark Banschbach, OFS, was busy working on developing resources for the Five Franciscan Martyrs Regional website in different languages, and in Braille, in response to a new inquirer who was blind. He reached out to Multicultural Councilor Willie Guadalupe, and then to Connie Wild, OFS, Janice, and then Susan. Calls were made and fellowship soared.

A virtual Meet and Greet for the new committee was held on Friday evening, August 20, 2021, so the NEC could officially welcome and talk with the members. The response of the NEC to the formation of this committee has been very warm and enthusiastic.

Janice and Susan are co-chairs of this newly-formed committee. The other committee members are: Consuelo Wild, OFS, of St. Margaret of Cortona Region; Mark Banschbach, OFS, of the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region; and Mike Freeman, OFS, of the St. Joan of Arc Region.

Janice, Susan, Connie, and Mike have had many years of experience working in the disability access field: Janice as a long-time director of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, retiring in 2019; Susan as a social worker; Connie working with the deaf community; and Mike as a special education teacher and special education program specialist. Mike served

as Minister of St. Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity in Houston for six years, is a member of the local Council, and also serves as the JPIC animator for his region. Susan lives with blindness due to a congenital condition; namely retinopathy on prematurity. She is a member of the National JPIC Commission and serves as JPIC animator for the Juan De Padilla Region. Mark is relatively new to the field of accessibility but brings experience in areas of technology and in software development. He serves as Minister of St. John Capistrano Fraternity, as Area/Family Councilor in the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region, Spiritual Assistant for The Encounter Fraternity in Lake Wales, Florida, and Regional Webmaster. His enthusiasm is inspiring and contagious! Connie lives with profound deafness and serves as Minister of her local fraternity, St. Francis of Assisi Deaf Fraternity in the St. Margaret of Cortona Region. It is the only known all-deaf OFS fraternity in the world. Connie is also a former director of the National Catholic Office for the Deaf. Janice serves as Minister of the St. Francis Fraternity in Washington, DC, and is an area councilor for the St. Margaret of Cortona Region.

As local and regional fraternities encounter access issues and questions pertaining to any disability, we want to hear from you! We will help you find resources and provide guidance concerning any other accessibility-related questions you may have.

In time, we will be reaching out to each region, to help develop resources at the regional level, including an accessibility contact person who can work with your region to ensure that your websites, forms, documents, and events are accessible for all our brothers and sisters throughout the entire NAFRA area.

As one of the first projects, this committee will be working with the 2022 Quinquennial (Q) Committee, to ensure that the Q is accessible to all participants.

We would like to hear from you!

The email addresses for the co-chairs are:

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We are here to serve you!

Note from the National Executive Council: We recognize that for many years local and Regional fraternities have made efforts to assist those who have accessibility challenges. What a joy and blessing to now have a national committee to serve as an umbrella and a source for all such efforts. We warmly welcome the OFS-USA Accessibility Committee members and look forward to the many ways they will serve our national OFS family.