

CNSA News and Views

Franciscan life in the 21st Century

Lester Bach OFM Cap

COLLABORATION

Craig Miller (OEF - Order of Ecumenical Franciscans) and Rev. Deacon Joan Verett (TOSSF - Third Order of the Society of St Francis {Anglican}) were welcome visitors at our NAFRA meeting in Denver in October, 2012. Francis' influence extends beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church. People of other faith traditions are among our brothers and sisters.



Craig Miller

People of other faith traditions are attracted to Francis. Franciscans normally establish and maintain loving relationships with one another. We reach beyond the walls of our churches to join with other Franciscans.

We share our Franciscan spirit, bringing that spirit to the world. Working together we create a path to peace and understanding where relationships and dialogue have a chance to grow among people. We embrace our common goal *to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.* (OFS Rule #14)



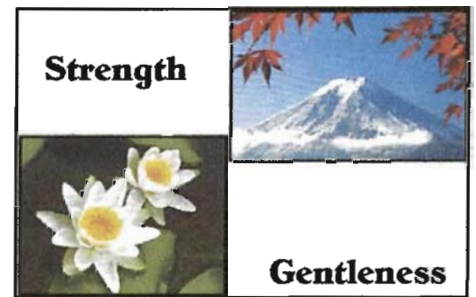
Deacon Joan

The words of Vatican II in the 1960's, Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975, and church leaders in our present century give guidance to our work for peace, ecumenism and evangelization. Vatican II offers these insights about peace.

Peace is a harmony built into human society by God, the divine Founder of all life, and it is a direct outcome of justice. Such a peace is not attained once and for all but is constantly built up as people control their passions and governments remain vigilant. But even this is not enough. For peace is the fruit of love as well. It cannot be obtained and safeguarded unless men and women freely and trustingly share with one another their inner spirits and talents. It is based on a firm determination to respect others, and to live lives of sisterhood and brotherhood. Without such love, peace absolutely cannot prevail in our time. For all of this flows from the peace of Christ, who first loved us and dedicated himself for us. We urge Christians therefore to join with all peacemakers in the world to plead for peace and bring it about. We praise those who renounce violence and find other ways to settle disputes where fairness for all is assured. We dream of the day when we will say with Isaiah (2:4): "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, one nation shall not raise the sword against another nor shall they train for war again."

Gaudium et Spes - Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 183

*While it is important for Catholics to be concerned about their sisters and brothers in other Churches and to invite them to know the Catholic Church, our primary responsibility is to **make sure that our own household is in order.** Only when we confront our own shortcomings and make the necessary reforms will we truly be able*



The pictures above portray two elements of Franciscan life - gentleness and strength. The mountain impresses us with its strength. Even when it is changed by rains, snow, sun, wind, and all sorts of weather, it remains a symbol of strength, not easily moved. When we reach its peak we get a whole new perspective of the earth below. Strength deals with reality as it really is!

Flowers gently offer color and wonder and beauty that is enjoyed for a brief moment. They change as the seasons change. In a fresh beginning they give us joy and support quiet reflection as we absorb their beauty. It is a gift that comes, gives its gift, and then leaves only to return again.

Franciscans need both gentleness and strength. Strength comes from the Trinity, whose love strengthens our Franciscan life. The Holy Spirit gives us courage and persistence to be faithful to our profession. In a world filled with violence, anger, hatred, and destructive arguments, we receive the strength to create peaceful hearts, forgiving hearts, hearts that show compassion, hearts that keep learning fresh ways to love. *It is what we are and do.*

We are bridges leading to peace, understanding, dialogue, forgiveness, compassion, and reconciliation, together with a love that brings people together in relationships. The gifts of strength and gentleness come to us at profession. We learn ways of gentleness and strength as we deal with the tough work of being peacemakers, serving one another, and growing in our contemplative spirit.

BE STRONG AND GENTLE!

to discern the will of Christ and bear witness to Christ's teaching. Yes, through the grace of God, the Catholic Church has maintained the truth that was first given to us. But through shortcomings, stubbornness, and sin, the Catholic Church as a whole and the individual members within it have often failed to live by it.

Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 3 - Page 51-52

A first step in spreading the faith is to make certain that we have our own house in order. If we speak with a forked tongue, saying nice things while we neglect the poor and those in need, or proclaim as doctrine what is simply a personal opinion, we do no service to evangelization. Neither can we bridge gaps between ourselves and people of other faith traditions or beliefs. The example of our lives is a powerful evangelization tool. But if our actions do not match our words, then we appear to be hypocrites rather than Christians who love the people in our lives - even enemies. Each of us needs to be honest in our personal examination. We choose to change whatever hinders our ability to share the faith and to love God, neighbor and self at all times.

We should also have respect and love for those who think differently than we do in social, political or even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we understand others, the more we can dialogue with them, seeking understanding.

Gaudium et Spes - Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 3 - Page 146

We often find that the magisterial teaching of Vatican II invites us to change some of our perspectives that we assumed were unchangeable. Our faith is not narrow. There are varying degrees of teachings in the Church. Therefore it is normal to have different responses within the *community of love*. Liturgical changes, for example, are not enough to proclaim the entire value of the Eucharist. A true *community of love* involved in loving actions day in and day out are part of the vibrancy of the Eucharist. Without loving inter-action among the People of God, or when there is an absence of community love-in-action, the rich, interior meaning of Eucharist does not find its complete fulfillment.

Eucharistic devotions that prompt no loving activity on the part of the People of God diminish some of the power of the Eucharist. Eucharist is a community-in-action, both during the Eucharist and in the time between the gatherings for Eucharist. The Scriptures guide us on how to treat one another. Scriptural stories and reflections require that we give visible witness to Scripture, never satisfied to only gain insight into the biblical words. It is a both/and situation. Intellectual scriptural understanding is a partial element of community activity. It needs to find expression in everyday living. We need both qualities in order to be a Eucharistic people. Eucharistic adoration should open the door to a multiplicity of ways to love one another in more effective and consistent ways. St. Paul speaks to this issue:

Then have done with falsehood and speak the truth to each other, for we belong to one another as parts of one body. If you are angry, do not be led into sin; do not let sunset find you nursing your anger, and give no foothold to the devil.

The thief must give up stealing, and work hard with his hands to earn an honest living, so that he may have something to share with the needy.

Let no offensive talk pass your lips, only what is good and helpful to the occasion, so that it brings a blessing to those who hear it. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, for that Spirit is the seal with which you were marked for the day of final liberation. Have done with all spite and bad temper, with rage, insults, and slander, with evil of any kind. Be generous to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

In a word, as God's dear children, you must be like him. Live in love as Christ loved you and gave himself up on your behalf, an offering and sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God.

Ephesians 4:25-37; 5:1-2 (REB)



A NEW BOOK

2. The fraternity has the duty to **give special attention** to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.

GC - Article 44.2



Continuing on-going formation is important for the newly professed. **What it Takes** to be an OFS Franciscan - by Lester Bach OFM Cap is focused on the newly

professed and approved by the National formation chair. The book has seven chapters plus a "Potpourri" chapter explaining issues in our OFS life. It should be available from *Smoky Valley Printing* sometime in Spring, 2013.

SA TRAINING

Several OFS regions are developing training programs for spiritual assistants. We encourage such programs. We ask that the regions dialogue with CNSA. They may also share brief ideas about their programs on CNSA or NAFRA websites.

NAFRA - <http://www.nafra-sfo.org>
CNSA - <http://www.nafra-sfo.org/cnsa.html>

If your program has a history, share what was most effective and what didn't work.

A Franciscan community need not begin a program from scratch. Sharing experiences in developing the SA program is one way for us to help one another. Each region is different. Your assistance can help.

Franciscan spirituality does not blossom in isolation. It is at its best in vibrant communities.