



OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA



NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker OFS

"What are the servants of God if not His minstrels, who must lift people's hearts and move them up to spiritual joy?"

The Assisi Compilation from Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, vol. 2, pg. 186

It seems every article I have read lately begins with the phrase, "In these unprecedented times..." So true. We have seen too much sickness and death. Too much injustice. Too much division. We hear voices of righteous anger, and cries for help. Many on the front lines are stretched beyond their abilities as the stress of this pandemic takes its toll, not to mention the social unrest and the political strife that surrounds us. Many are weary, many are frightened, and many are in need of hope.

I am among the weary, but far from losing hope. One reason for that is you, my Franciscan brothers and sisters. Throughout the long and challenging months of this past summer, my spirits have been uplifted by your words and witness.

A few weeks ago, our General Minister, Tibor Kauser, sent us a video message of encouragement. I hope you all had a chance to view it.¹ Tibor shared a quote from our Constitutions which is so applicable at this time: ***"Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future."*** (GC 26.1)

I have seen this lived out by you in a great variety of ways these past months, and I have never felt more confident in the vitality of the Order. The pandemic is not squelching our desire for

fraternity—it is strengthening it. We are moving forward in new ways, responding in faith to the signs of the times. As Donna Hollis recently said, *"Just as Clare lived in an historic time and made a way for women to follow their calling; we are making a way to live through this pandemic, which is also a very historic time."*

In this issue of the *TAU-USA* are contributions from OFS members across the country. These words and stories give witness to the many ways Franciscans are living the Gospel, making visible the living and active presence of Christ, witnessing to the good yet to come, and calling all to believe in the transforming power of love and pardon.² We journey together in love and compassion. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

I will share a little story with you. It was the end of a long day. I was tired and stressed. All I could think of were all the things I had hoped to do that day but had not yet accomplished. I turned on my computer to answer some emails and clicked on one from LaVerna Region. It was the latest edition of *La Verna Vision*. I took some time and scrolled through the pages of this newsletter, noticing all the news and happenings. I suddenly stopped when, right in the middle of my screen appeared a photo of Regional Minister Jeff Gumz holding out a slice of homemade cherry pie. Right there, in the mix of all the news, announcements and formation articles was an invitation to enjoy some cherry pie!

¹ See "Message from OFS Presidency: Hope and Joy" on the CIOFS website <https://ciofs.info/>

² OFS Rule, Articles 5, 12 and 19, along with the rest of the OFS Rule

It's hard to describe what happened at that moment. It was as if St. Francis himself had come into my room carrying a steaming bowl of porridge and, with a grin on his face and a twinkle in his eyes, he was holding it out for me to take and enjoy. All I know is that a big smile came to my face, and my worries just disappeared.

The words to a song come to mind as I think of it: *"In the love come from God, I now entreat you, put away all your cares, and be free from every possession, coming freely to love, and to serve and to honor the Lord."* I had been visited by Sister Simplicity. Perfect joy filled my heart. It just goes to show how simple

pleasures and the joy of good food are such a part of our charism—and how in the midst of all we are called to do we must sometimes just stop, put aside our to-do lists, pick up our fiddle sticks, dance a bit, and then enjoy some cherry pie!

Yes, in many ways our world has been turned upside-down, and the struggles are real, but so is the grace we have been given to live our Franciscan vocation. May the stories in these pages be a source of inspiration and fraternal encouragement, and may spiritual joy fill your hearts! Peace and all good.

Your sister, Jan



Jeff Gumz, OFS with his homemade cherry pie with vanilla ice cream topping

From the La Verna Vision:

"Jeff is always busy with something: family, high school teacher, working with Secular Franciscans, Lambeau Field Stadium tour guide. Now, his busy schedule also includes baking a cherry pie! Jeff says that one of his joys of living in Northeastern Wisconsin during late July is cherry picking, and Door County, Wisconsin, is famous for their cherries. So now is your opportunity to join in and enjoy a piece of cherry pie. But first you have to prepare it."



Door County, fresh picked cherries

2018-2021 National Priority: Fraternity Life

BUILDING FRATERNITY: ADVICE FROM SCRIPTURE AND ST. FRANCIS

by Mary Bittner, OFS

"Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and *the witness of building fraternity sincerely and openly* are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love" (OFS General Constitutions Art. 100).

Given that building fraternity is intrinsic to Secular Franciscan life and forms one of our principal services to the Church, how do we go about it? St. Francis in his *Earlier Rule* and the words of Scripture give us much practical advice about fostering fraternity spirit and growth. Take some time to ponder each quotation. As followers of Christ in the footsteps of Francis, how might we put his words into practice?

Love is the basis of fraternity. "And they should love one another, as the Lord says: *This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved*

you (Jn 15:12). And let them express the love which they have for one another by their deeds (cf. Jas 2:18), as the Apostle says *Let us not love in word or in speech, but in deed and in truth* (1Jn 3:18)" *ER XI 5-6*. "In brotherly love let your feelings of deep affection for one another come to expression" (Rm 12:10). This may seem so obvious as to be not worth mentioning, yet Francis stresses that a genuine love of the brothers and sisters is of primary importance in fraternity life. He reminds us that it is easy to assume that we love someone until we're called upon to do it.

Make building fraternity a priority. "And wherever the brothers are and in whatever place they meet other brothers, they must greet one another wholeheartedly and lovingly, and *honor one another without complaining* (1 Pt 4:9)" *ER VII 15*.