

ST. PADRE PIO SECULAR FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY GUAM, U.S. TERRITORY

by Sharon Winzeler OFS

(with contributions by Joann San Nicolas, Ben Diaz, Therese Babauta, and Birdena Toves)



With the canonical establishment of the St. Padre Pio Fraternity on Jan. 4, 2020, in Guam, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order USA now reaches to the westernmost part of the United States. “The Holy Spirit has found a welcome home in the hearts of the brothers and sisters of St. Padre Pio Fraternity, and these are not just pretty words. These Secular Franciscan have opened their hearts; they have each said: “yes, let it be done,” and “yes” to their vocation and all it entails,” National Minister Jan Parker, OFS, said at the establishment ceremony.



A festive Mass celebrating the new fraternity was held at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Agana Heights. The celebration included the distribution of 1,200 homemade almond cookies to all attendees.

(Almond cookies, baked by Lady Jacoba, were such a favorite of St. Francis that he asked her to bring him some when he lay on his deathbed.) Afterwards, all gathered for a grand ocean-side reception, which included brunch, the singing of Christmas carols honoring Christ’s birth, and a splendid cake on which was written, “Let us begin, for up to now we have done little or nothing,” (a famous quote from St. Francis of Assisi). All 28 members of the newly established fraternity, along with their families and six friars from St. Fidelis Friary in Agana Heights gathered for the reception. The patio was filled with laughter and joy.

Guam, an organized U.S. territory in Micronesia in the western Pacific Ocean, is a 12-hour plane ride from San Francisco and eight hours from Hawaii. Seventy-five percent of its population of 160,000 is Catholic. The island is 30 miles long and 12 miles wide at its widest point.

Violeta Manibusan, OFS, is minister of the fraternity, with 23 professed members, four inquirers and one in orientation. They began their journey toward establishing a fraternity on Guam in 2011.

In the beginning, professed members were formed by Fr. Patrick Castro, OFM Cap., who was appointed Spiritual Assistant by the Vice Provincial Fr. Joseph English, OFM Cap.

Fr. Castro presided at the Mass celebrating the establishment of St. Pio. “It took nine years with the Lord’s guidance and the guidance of the National Executive Council. Let us thank God,” he said. Fr. Castro challenged fraternity members, “This is a time of blessing and joy. It is also a time of admonition. Are you willing to continue to die to yourself and live for Christ? We die with the Lord, so we can live with the Lord.”

He also praised the members for the solidarity they express as fraternity. “We are called, like Francis, in humility, service and love, to be Christ’s

light in the world. This fraternity carries the light of Christ. They are always communicating with each other – 24/7 – always encouraging each other,” Fr. Castro said in his homily.

The Capuchin friars have a strong influence in Guam, according to Manibusan. “The first Capuchins arrived on Guam on August 12, 1901. Until the 1990s, the majority of the parishes were staffed by Capuchins. Today, five parishes are headed by Capuchin friars. The majority of our members are current parishioners of, or have been in, Capuchin parishes,” she said.

Fraternity members represent a variety of backgrounds. “Our members come from all walks of life and represent 10 out of the 26 parishes island-wide. Our member’s ages range from 35 to 73. Our professions varies in the local and federal government, specifically as educators, administrators, finance, civil service, engineering, warehousing, and the judicial branch. In the private sector, we have banking, airlines, finance, baker, and a few domestic engineers,” Manibusan said.

The fraternity meets twice a month at St. Fidelis Friary in Agana Heights. “We meet on the second Saturday of each month for prayer and initial formation class and on fourth Saturday for our monthly fraternity meeting, prayer, ongoing formation and fellowship,” Manibusan said. Members participate in a number of pro-life activities and serve in apostolates that help feed, clothe, and visit the sick, poor, and elderly on the island. Several members are members of the St. Joseph of Arimathea Society, a group that arranges a Christian burial for unclaimed bodies. St. Pio Fraternity hosts a long list of annual events, including Transitus, service retreats, Advent and Lenten Days of Recollection, Padre Pio Monthly Novena, and Mass devotion, as well as a May crowning of the Blessed Mother.

Plans for the fraternity meant years of collaboration between the members and the National Executive Council (NEC), which sponsored St. Pio. “We sought guidance from National Executive Council and traveled to Denver, Colo. in October 2012 for the NAFRA

Chapter. This was our first physical interaction with the NEC. We were invited by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS, who at the time was part of the National Formation Team, to a formation training in Hawaii in the latter part of 2012, where we were introduced to the *For Up to Now (FUN) Manual*. We used the *FUN Manual* from 2012-2015. In 2016, Mary Frances Charsky, OFS, was assigned as our NEC point of contact and introduced us to the *Franciscan Journey* book, which we continue to use. On February 20-23, 2017, Tim and Kathy Taormina, OFS, from the Queen of Peace Region, Minn., volunteered their time and talent and came to Guam to conduct a formation workshop. In October 2018, the National Formation Commission, under the guidance of Diane Menditto, OFS, provided supplemental resources to enhance our formation,” Manibusan said.

Support from the NEC is continuing. “Diane continues to support us in our formation. In 2019, Francine Gikow, OFS, established communication with our local Formation Director, Therese Babauta, OFS, to offer additional assistance as needed. Our current NEC point of contact is Joshua Molidor, OFS, who witnessed our canonical establishment on January 04, 2020, along with Jan Parker, OFS, and Elizabeth Ishimitsu, OFS,” Manibusan said. Elizabeth Ishimitsu is the Minister of Ohan ’O Ke Anuenue Region in Hawaii, of which St. Padre Pio Fraternity is now part.

Jan Parker noted the significance of the new fraternity, as well as all the other local fraternities. “The local fraternity is the most important part of our worldwide Order. It is here in this fraternity that the brothers and sisters will find the help they need to go forth as witnesses and instruments of our common mission – to proclaim Christ, to see Christ, to be Christ in the world. In this way, all Franciscans do their part to rebuild the Church,” Parker said.

Other members of the St. Pio Fraternity Council are Vice-Minister, Teresita Flores; Secretary, Joann San Nicolas; Treasurer, Ben Diaz; Formation Director, Therese Babauta; and Councilor Birdena Toves and Deborah Tenorio.