

# FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 146

Easteride 2023



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## ORDER OF ECUMENICAL FRANCISCANS: FORTY YEARS – A JOURNEY OF FAITH

In the gospel of Luke 11:9, Jesus tells the disciples, “Ask, and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” The Holy Spirit got some people to seek and knock in the early 1980s, about the same time that Kathleen Norris came to western Dakota. She wrote the popular book, Dakota, a Spiritual Geography. Three souls were brought together who were looking for a disciplined spiritual path as well as spiritual community. These three were active Christians in main-line churches and had spouses and children. Since their denomination had little history of ordered spirituality, and with the celebration of the 800<sup>th</sup> birthday of Francis of Assisi, they became aware of Francis and came to believe that they could follow a Franciscan path. Yet, they were not Episcopalian or Roman Catholic, where most of the Franciscan Orders were active. With much asking, seeking and knocking, they found guidance and support to form a Franciscan order, which from the beginning had ecumenical and inclusive ideals.

Over the course of more than a year, with research and writing sessions ending with a retreat at the Annunciation Priory near Bismarck, ND, an ecumenical and inclusive General Rule took shape. Rev. Robert Hugh T.S.S.F., advised by phone and edited by red pen in postal letters. The Rule of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans stems from the wisdom and inspiration of the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Third Order Rules, especially the work of Fr. James Myer, O.F.M. (The Words of St. Francis, Franciscan Herald Press, 1952), which is based upon the so-called Venice version of The Rule. We aspire to fulfill the spirit, if not the letter, of The Original Rule.

On the evening of November 22, 1983, in a Worship Service named “Celebrating Birth;” faithful people who were United Church of Christ, Lutherans, Benedictine Sisters, Episcopalians, Shinto and spiritual Nones; sang and prayed us into reality. Rev. George Metcalf T.S.S.F., from Minnesota, and Rev. Marwood Rettig from the U.C.C. Conference, officiated.

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## Forty Years, continued...

One of our first small publications, the 'blue book' (eight pages), was called The Way Of Saint Francis – Third Order of St. Francis, United Church of Christ (which soon became Order of Ecumenical Franciscans), and contained a one-page bio of Francis of Assisi. The General rule as adopted, November 22, 1983, has a prelude explaining Franciscan 'kinship' and our inclusion of clergy and laity. There were seventeen Principles listed. The 'General Rule of The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans' and 'Principles' are synonymous and are used interchangeably. Included in the 'blue book' are source references and The Rule of 1221. Lastly, was a page on our Personal Rule of Life reports, divided into eight areas of commitment.

Through the years, the Holy Spirit continues to whisper and changes have been made. Procedures have been formed and Principles have been revised and set to music! The Providence of experience dramatically shifted leadership from a hierarchical form (Minister General, Treasurer, Scribe, Chaplain, etc.) to an active discernment led by the Holy Spirit, including consensus in decision making, with guidance by five co-equal elected Council members, and various servant members dedicated to specific tasks.

Our legal incorporation papers answer the question, "What is the purpose of this organization?" with a brief answer: "For spiritual growth of its members." Wow! Have we grown spiritually! Early on, Afi Binta-Lloyd (Professed 1998, died April 22, 2011), Baptized Church of Jesus Christ of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, U.S.A., showed us experiences of the Holy Spirit that had been unknown to many of us. Ron Kennedy (Professed 1991, died October 14, 2000), United Church of Canada, (at maybe 80 pounds with his wheelchair) led us dancing into the humor of Francis of Assisi.

Led by the grace of God, we grew spiritually into acceptance--of location, ability, lifestyle, as well as religious affiliation. There was acceptance of diversity in worship; genuflection and sometimes prostration, arms

raised in praise and Quaker silence, chanting and dancing. We welcomed to the journey of faith people of all sexual orientations and even people who ate *lutefisk* and *kalyadez*.

More recently there has been interest from persons of older established traditions. There have been people of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communities asking for entrance to O.E.F. formation, or a request for transfer. Each always comes for complex reasons. Each always comes with a certain blessing, mystery, and challenge.

Current community conversations include how best to anathematize white supremacism, especially that entwined with Christian nationalism; and "open table" Eucharist, embracing the Real Presence as Jesus always with us. Our principles make us concerned for social justice and teach us to practice spiritual contemplation and mysticism. Francis of Assisi was and is "all of the above."

What is our purpose now? What is our future direction? Our purpose is above all else 'Spiritual Growth.' The diversity in this Order might cause angels to drop their jaws and cross their eyes with apprehension. Can this radically inclusive, bottom of the heap, group of Franciscans be good for anything? God is the primal jester, and we are God's fools for Christ. God makes us as good, strong, and wise as needed in order to serve the suffering in a world on the brink, as Francis and Clare did.

Bless we our Savior. We bless a great and beautiful mystery.

Thanks be to God!

Ron Nuss-Warren, O.E.F.

Dale Carmen, O.E.F.





## OEF Bids Br. Rat A Fond Farewell



Brother Rat met his demise in the Summer of 2022, after one too many plane trips in a suitcase. From minutes of exhaustive research comes the tale of a Rat who tried his best to be a good Franciscan, but failed at every turn, just by virtue of being a Rat.

Br. Rat was born in a hole in the wall in Sib. Nancy Menning's childhood home. (Not that the Mennings had rats!!! Mama Rat was a dear family friend who the Mennings took in and cared for when she was pregnant.) Br. Rat was trouble from day one! He couldn't be good, no matter how hard he tried. When he finally grew up, Sib. Nancy encouraged him to join OEF in hopes this would straighten him out. No such luck



Br. Rat's first Chapter

It seems Br. Rat first appeared at Chapter/Convocation with Sib. Nancy in 2009. He already had a habit, which was made by Sib. Francis Leo in an effort to cover his shame and encourage him in his Franciscan endeavor. He immediately began traveling the world! He had many adventures, staying with various OEF siblings who were willing to tolerate him. He wasn't very good about

reporting back, so the next mention of him was in a song written by Sib. Ed Shirley at Francistide, 2010 called, "Brother Rat and Sister Fly," sung to the tune of "Brother Sun and Sister Moon." (with Ed's apologies to both St. Francis and Donovan.) Br. Rat went home with Sib. Elisa the following year, and Sib. David D in 2012.

We didn't hear much from Br. Rat for a few years. He made trips around the country, ending up at my place after Chapter 2014 (my reward for coining the phrase, "A song, a song, we have to write a song!!!")

Br. Rat finally wrote his Rule with the help of Sib. Kiwi in 2015:



Christmas in New Zealand, 2015

### Worship

I refrain from attending Sunday services. My excuse is that my physical appearance will frighten younger worshippers.

### Prayer

I only attend Morning Prayer when it is said in the room I am in and I cannot find a way to escape.

### Penitence

Having strongly considered penitence, I have decided I would rather not.

### Work

I do as little work as possible.

### Lifestyle

I am not eating meat. This is solely because I am living in a vegetarian household. However a nice tasty Kiwi bird would go down well.

### Mission

Ostensibly, my mission is to keep the house pestfree. However, either because there are no pests to banish from the house or they have all run away at the sight of me, I am relieved of the need to do mission.

### Obedience

I give every appearance of being obedient and of being accountable while secretly and slyly doing what I want to do anyway.

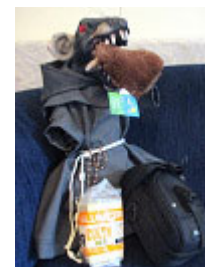
### Community

I willingly engage in community as long as everyone else does what I want to do.

Brother Rat

(his paw print)

July 2015



Snacking on a kiwi



Indecent exposure, skinny dipping in the creek

(Continued on page 4)

Farewell, Br. Rat... continued

Here is Br. Rat's first Rule Report:

### October 2015

O woe is me! My trials continue. Helen's mother came to stay and she took exception to my good looks. So I was banished to Helen's bedroom. The down side of that was that I was present at Morning Prayer for a whole week. No way of escape!

Not long after Helen's mother left, a grandson came to stay, the seven year old I had met in Carterton.

He and Helen visited an exhibition about Gallipoli - a battle in World War 1 which the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps lost to the Turks. When they got home, Elias set up the battle scene on the lounge floor. Good, I thought, some fun at last! But then he put me in charge of the ANZAC force and Big Bear in charge of the Turks. Putting **ME** on the losing side, whatever next?



In battle against the Turks

I am so not suited to community living. Has anyone got a nice quiet closet for me for next year?

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...And a few more:

### March 2016

Living in a vegetarian household is really getting me down. No meat for months, I almost forgot what it tasted like! So late one night I quietly tip toed outside and trapped a hedgehog. I put it in a pot of water and cooked it up.

Helen caught me at it. "Well," she said. "If you are going to eat meat, a hedgehog is as good as anything. They are a pest animal in New Zealand. By the way, the proper way to cook it is encase it in clay and bake it in the embers of a fire."

She talked some more about pest animals and I discovered, much to my dismay, that rats are



Hedgehog supper

considered pest animals and many people set traps to kill us. Whatever next? I should never have stowed away in Helen's bag. Just as well, Chapter is not too far away. I don't think bribing the judges will be enough. Maybe I'll kidnap them and hold them to ransom - I just have to have a nice, dry, warm, dark American closet for next year in which to recover from living with Helen.

### April 2016

I let Helen share my rule and rule reports with her good friend from the TSSF and I got my very own email in reply. Oh such excitement!

*Dear Brother Rat,*

*I should be shocked at your Rule, but have to admit that I see some rather startling similarities to the true state of my own heart. However, I manage the subterfuge really well, so no one guesses.*

*I wish you a wonderful trip overseas. Keep an eye on Helen.*

*With a loud squeak*

*M.....*

This subterfuge thing sounds really good. Maybe I could try it and get myself noviced or even professed. But what is subterfuge? What does it mean? How does it work? Does bribing or kidnapping judges count as subterfuge? I asked Helen and she said, "Just go and look it up in the dictionary." But what is a dictionary? Never mind, next month I will be finding an American closet to hibernate in. It needs to be warm, dark, dry, quiet and full of subterfuge.



Br. Rat gets an email



(Continued on page 5)



Farewell, Br. Rat... continued

### May 2016

In six days, we set off for Convocation, so I thought I had better start packing a bag. Well, I found one I thought might do, and I was sitting on the couch with the bag busy deciding whether to pack a tasty Kiwi or some cheese or both when Helen found me.

"What are you doing?" She said.

"Packing my bag of course," I replied.

"But you're travelling baggage class and don't get a luggage allowance."

What! No luggage allowance? How can airlines be so mean, especially when baggage class also means no meals? I have to have some food with me or I shall starve on the Auckland – Los Angeles flight. How will I get food on the aircraft? Smuggle it under my habit and hope all those airport sniffer dogs don't detect it?

Next year, or rather, later this month I am definitely going home with someone who can provide me with a quiet, warm, dry, dark closet which is full of subterfuge, and I am going to stay in it all year. Maybe longer if I can prevent you from taking me to Convocation 2017. Any offers? Or will I have to kidnap the judges and decide the second place winner in the Juniper Cup myself???

These are just a few examples of Br. Rat's "original" way of looking at Franciscan life. It just went downhill from there, as you can see from some of the pictures. He has made his way to

Vermont with Sib. John Michael, Seattle with Sib. Stephan, back to New Zealand with Sib. Reg., To PA with Sib. Fred, to Ireland with Sib. Neal, and finally to TX with Sib. Denise. Poor Br. Rat! He will be missed!



Br. Rat's final trip to TX

## Some GOOD NEWS!!!

### Congratulations to our Sister Magdalena!!!

One week ago today, (Saturday, February 11) Magdalena's Ordination at St Paul's/San Pablo Episcopal Church in Houston TX (See picture below).

For any viewer who doesn't know or recognize her, she's to the right of the smiling Bishop. And look down there, first row, 2nd from the right: representing the OEF, our own, Kathy Lawler.

'Twas a joy-filled event! - michael v.



Magdalena responds: Thank you all! I was so shocked to see Kathy there that I was literally speechless. Thank you for being part of my joy!



Congratulations, Dear Sister!!!



## Words from The Servant Council



The Servant Council is really excited to offer to the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans an important Chapter/Convocation for 2023.

In this past year, several truly important concerns have either continued to ferment from the past or arisen out of the current basket of issues of the day. Some of these will be addressed at our meeting this summer at the Pallotine Center in Florissant, suburb of St. Louis, MO, June 21-25.

First of all there is a true concern for vulnerable participants regarding various aspects of travel to and in the State of Missouri. These concerns will be addressed specifically with individuals as each day's revelations come to light. Most importantly we believe there is some safety in numbers. In the case of health emergencies, it has been and will be our practice regarding Chapter/Convocation to make sure no one uses a health facility alone. Our suggestion is that travel also not be done alone, especially going through checkpoints, i.e., TSA, while in Missouri. Many anxieties these days come from divisive politics. Information and response will be provided as best possible.

The Chapter/Convocation will be focused on Kinship. To help our meditation and discussion in this area we have engaged Susan Pitchford. She will provide thoughts and lead discussions about our search for moving from a society of dominance to kinship. She is a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Washington and a professed member of the Third Order, Society of St. Francis. She is the author of God in the Dark: Suffering and Desire in the Spiritual Life [Liturgical Press], Following Francis: The Franciscan Way for Everyone, Identity Tourism: Imaging and Imagining the Nation [Emerald 2008], The Sacred Gaze: Contemplation and the Healing of the Self [Liturgical Press]. Susan lives in Seattle with her husband, Bob Crutchfield.

The call for her leadership at this year's meeting is a result of the deep discussions we had last year around the issues of white supremacy, Christian nationalism, racism, patriarchy, colonialism and other forms of oppression. It is the desire of the OEF to include in our Principles some clarity about our need to provide healing in our troubled and anxious time. The Servant Council will bring forward items in our business session regarding these issues.

Also up for discernment is the matter of

pastoral care among our membership. Michael Vosler has been considering designs for how this might be better accomplished. Concerns have been raised about how to deal with emergent issues, especially regarding health of members and their loved ones. This ties into concerns about formation of postulants, novices, and lifelong formation of professed members. We need to improve ways in which we care for each other and how we understand that.

There will be complete Zoom coverage on Friday and Saturday. There will be Zoom on part of Thursday (business reports and worship) and Sunday (worship). We have engaged the services of a technology company to assist with the streaming of Chapter on Friday and Saturday. We plan to engage all Chapter business in a hybrid manner, with those on Zoom able to participate in our discernment. It is our hope that having technicians running the stream on Friday and Saturday will assist us to well engage with one another across the miles. There was some additional Chapter expense for this trial run of using outside experts to help us stream Chapter. Donations to help defray the additional cost are certainly welcome, and there is still no registration fee for Chapter.

Check in for early arrivals will begin at 2 pm on Wednesday, June 22 and the last departures will be no later than 2 pm on Sunday. Chapter officially begins with check-in on Thursday, Jun 23 at 3 pm.

We look forward to gathering together soon!

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This year's **Juniper Cup** Contest is a group activity. When C/C begins on Thurs. evening, you will be told the theme and you will also be placed into groups. Your group of 4 will have until 1pm Sat., right after lunch, to prepare. There will be some props you can use. Plan to have fun, to laugh and be thoughtful all at the same time. From Katie, Kelly and Markie





## Another Sad Farewell



**Kimberly Schmidt-Abrams**  
**June 9th, 1960 - February 16th, 2023**

Kim worked as an editor and journalist for local news outlets in the San Juan Islands for nearly 30 years. Forced to retire due to severe medical issues, Kim continued to be an advocate for local journalism and concluded her years on earth in service to Park Rose UCC as both an editor and a companion to the homebound in her congregation.

One of Kim's greatest joys aside from writing, was spending time with her rescue dog Buddy who preceded her in death last year.

With respect to Kim's life as a Franciscan, she would tell you that it's a constant practice of simplicity, humility, humanity, authenticity, compassion, warmth, resourcefulness, a willingness to serve the community at large with a social conscience.

Where implementing the gospel was concerned, Kim lived by the words:  
 "I was hungry and you fed me,  
 I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,  
 I was homeless and you gave me a room,  
 I was shivering and you gave me clothes,  
 I was sick and you stopped to visit,  
 I was in prison and you came to me."  
 And all the while she asked nothing for herself.

I offer these words respectfully on Kim's behalf exactly as she has written them.

**Br. Stephan**



### OEF History Project



For those who haven't heard, we (Sr. Dale, Br. Ron, Sr. Markie, and I) are working on a history of The Order. As we move forward, it would be helpful to me to receive copies of pictures, notes, meeting records, and the like to help fill out the content of the book, especially anything that reflects not only "business" decisions but personal takes on The Order at any given moment in time.

Thanks,  
 Betty Lou







## Fellowship News



I was blessed this beloved Sibling— JM— took time away from a conference in San Francisco to worship with me this morning (Feb. 19, 2023) at Herchurch



L.-R. Sib. John Michael, Sib. Lilith Beorning

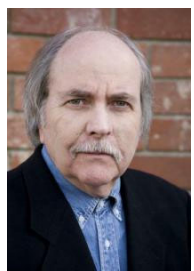


L.-R. Sib. John Michael, Sib. Lilith Beorning with mural

Re: the mural

It is the first part of the mural that will eventually be on that side of the church building, and each panel will depict an aspect of the Goddess/Sacred Feminine. The panel you see behind us depicts the Christ Sophia; others will depict Mother Earth, the Black Madonna, and an androgynous Kali-Kundalini figure whose chakras merge with the phases of the moon and the universe.

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I had a long phone conversation with Gerry Straub this week. Old-timers among us will remember him as the author of The Sun and Moon over Assisi: A Personal Encounter with Francis and Clare. He was our resource

person at Chapter/Convocation once, shortly after he published that book. And he returned to be with us a couple other years, sharing with us his films. And his laughter. Gerry is still writing, but not making films. For the last eight years, his major effort has

been running an orphanage in Haiti.

Oh, Haiti. If you haven't been tracking the woes of that nation, I'll just say: Christ, have mercy. Gerry is as well as any of us mortal humans are well. And he still has that delightful laugh. It was a real joy to spend an hour on the phone with him. A nice write up of Gerry is available here:

<https://magazine.nd.edu/stories/a-life-unscripted/>

Pace e bene,  
Nancy Menning, OEF



Santa Chiara  
Children's Center,  
Haiti

### Introducing: OEF Trans Fellowship

Dear siblings, we'd like to announce that we are forming a Trans Fellowship within the OEF. We have been talking during recent events and find that our common experience, and common discoveries about finding ourselves in the Bible, Gospel, Christ, Spirit, etc. as Trans followers of Christ, are creating really valuable exchanges of understanding and living into our faiths. If you'd like to be part of this fellowship, please contact:

Petra, Jacoba, Stephan, or Mir.





# OEF Chapter 2023 Registration

Required\*

1. Name\* \_\_\_\_\_

2. Pronouns\* \_\_\_\_\_

3. Street Address\* \_\_\_\_\_

4. Town/City\* \_\_\_\_\_

5. State\* \_\_\_\_\_

6. Zip Code\* \_\_\_\_\_

7. Country\* \_\_\_\_\_

8. Email\* \_\_\_\_\_

9. Phone Number\* \_\_\_\_\_

10. Phone Number Used While Traveling\* \_\_\_\_\_

11. Relationship to OEF

- ☐ Inquirer
- ☐ Postulant
- ☐ Novice
- ☐ Professed
- ☐ Other

12. Transportation

- ☐ Car
- ☐ Bus
- ☐ Train
- ☐ Air

13. Day of Arrival\* \_\_\_\_\_

14. Day of Departure\* \_\_\_\_\_

15. If arriving by car, are you able to make at least one (1) shuttle run to pick up and/or return a sibling/guest from/to the airport, train or bus station? Please send your arrival info by Wed. June 14th - time, flight number and airlines, etc to: [markie.f.oliver@gmail.com](mailto:markie.f.oliver@gmail.com)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. Food allergies and other(s) (smells, ivy, etc.) and other diet information \_\_\_\_\_

17. Circle one of these: Are you a carnivore, vegetarian or vegan?

18. Do you need Gluten Free foods? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

19. Are you lactose intolerant or dairy free? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

20. Overnight accommodations

- ☐ Private room (Twin bed)
- ☐ Room for couple (1 Queen bed)

21. Would you be willing to share a room?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

22. If so, roommate request: \_\_\_\_\_

23. Other necessary room accommodations

24. For our table services (Communion) do you prefer

- ☐ Grape Juice
- ☐ Gluten free bread
- ☐ Wine
- ☐ Bread with gluten

**If you prefer the online form:**

1. Scan the QR code at right -or-
2. Go to <https://forms.office.com/r/Xh4bDzjCYU> -or-
3. Google "OEF" and "Chapter 2023 Registration" will come up.

On our website, there is a tab marked "Chapter Info." The password is: **Francis2023!!**

Those who prefer may scan this QR code to register online

OEF Chapter 2023 Registration



## Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity

The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity has had tremendous success with our Zoom mini-conferences on The Elements of Franciscan Unity! Below is just a history of what has been shared, and what to look for next. Invitations/registrations are posted in our OEFchat and via emails.

9-10-22: Baptism

1-21-23: Vocation

4-22-23: Charism

### Coming up. Mark your calendars!

7-22-23: Christ Centered (Zoom)

11-10-23: Prophetic Voice with review of all 5 Elements; Prayer; Fellowship; Discussions

Capuchin Retreat Center, Washington, MI

This is such a rich and Spirit filled opportunity to build bridges and to grow relationships!

Your current OEF JCFU representatives-

Ron Nuss-Warren

Debra-Snider Scott



## PRACTISING PRAYERS

by Joan Schroeder

It is 4a.m. mostly, and dark, quiet outside and quiet in the house. God-time. I go downstairs. Take a sip of water. I light a candle and savour the moment. When I pray, my voice often sounds as though it's not ready to comply with my request. I take another sip of water. Reading the texts from my laptop means that I can't close my eyes. Never mind. I can close them when I say my personal prayers. Do you think God minds that I'm still in my pyjamas? It would look strange to wear a stole over my pyjamas. Besides, I don't have one. They're expensive. I prefer to put that money in my donation account and give it to someone else rather than wear it on my shoulders. It's my heart you're after, isn't it, Father? It's yours. Chip away at me now. Am I stone or am I clay? I'm pretty stubborn... Ok, start chipping. Do you know what just crossed my mind? This intimate moment with you is a bit like going to the hairdresser's. All I do, in a sense, is show up willingly: here I am! You are the one (your Spirit) who does the work and I always feel better afterwards. The warm water. Your hands working gently on me. When I get up, I am in some way changed. Morning and evening prayers are said without interruption. It's a blessing to enjoy so much calm. Lunchtime isn't always ideal. When I'm in the clinic, there are nurses coming in and out of the ward, sirens going off to alert staff to any dysfunction of the machines, other people's telephones ringing. I'm in a ward of four, so I hear everything. On a good day, when I get to the clinic early, I can go to the chapel, light a candle (mostly several) and read my noon texts in peace and quiet. And it is not unusual for me to break into song with my croaky voice and no one to laugh at me. Yesterday was such a day.







# My Holy Saturday Vigil



As is my custom, I kept vigil on Holy Saturday waiting for the dawn and the proclamation that Jesus was risen. I used to be much more serious in this practice, but as I age it is no longer as easy to give up sleep as when I was younger. And I find myself becoming more in line with the disciples, my spirit remains willing but frankly the old flesh is not as good as it once was. But vigil remains important for me because it is one thing that I can do to remember and honor this long night. I would like to say that the vigil held revelation and spiritual insight for me, but there were only three things that the night offered me as I sat on my deck.

First, it gave me darkness, the darkness that comes just before the dawn when only a few stars, and a couple of street lights, gave any light. My eyes instinctively were drawn to what little light there was, but it was not enough to see any of the features in my yard or the mountains in the background. But as I strained toward those points of light embracing whatever they offered, I noticed that the night slowly gave way to the encroaching light until what was once darkness without content, now became shadows with form and structure.

From the east the dawn came as it always does, into my personal darkness, Jesus comes as He always does.



Second, the night gave me cold, not bone-chilling cold, but the frost-is-on-the-pumpkin type of cold that happens so often at the transition from winter to spring. But it reminded me of recent times that my love had grown tepid and reserved, my faith so limited that it could hardly move me much less a mountain. But then the Son rose, and with His rising the heart of stone within me melted because I remembered just how much I am loved.

And third, the night gave me silence, no whisper of wind, no bird song in the night...a silence like the grave in which there were no distractions, no background chatter, just the night and me. I wish that I could say that I heard that small still voice of God in the silence, but I did not no matter how much my senses strained. But in those moments I resolved to continue to watch, wait, and listen carefully knowing that it would be infinitely more difficult to hear the voice of my Lord once the clatter of the world rises all around me.

Resurrection Sunday, well that was another thing altogether, but it would not have been mine in fullness had I not kept vigil, watching for an hour and praying that I would not fall when temptation came.

*-Russell Rohloff  
(OEF Postulant)*

## NEXT "FIDDLESTICKS" DEADLINE

Submissions for the  
**Post-Chapter/Claretide 2023** issue of  
"Fiddlesticks" will be accepted immediately.

**Deadline for submissions is July 15, 2023.**

Send submissions to Sister Chris at  
[capoef@solarus.biz](mailto:capoef@solarus.biz)

or snail-mail to:

Christine Petersen, OEF  
934 Round Oak Ct.  
Nekoosa, WI 54457

**Thank you!**

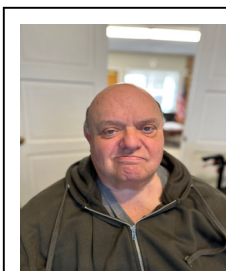


## Formation Station



### Introducing:

Hi to my future OEF "siblings." My name is **Dave De Genito**. I have been many things in my 65-year life. My email address says what I am: [awcmsmtfranciscan@gmail.com](mailto:awcmsmtfranciscan@gmail.com). In the future, I will be happy to divulge the meaning of this description of my "True Self," which God, and the US Army, made of me. I am currently semi-retired, and live Burbank, CA. I have lived in my sister Pauline's (an RN) house for the past 20 years. I am a lay Franciscan of 20+ years who resigned from the OFS in good standing. I hope that I can join your OEF, partake in stimulating fellowship and serve all of you with gusto.



### Br. Opus:

Opus comes to us in much the same way as Br. Rat. He has been living with Sr. Chris for many years, and his background is somewhat of a mystery. Before coming to Sr. Chris, he says he was living in Bloom County, somewhere in the middle US. He's not sure which state it was in. He says it was "possibly one of those 'I' states with a lot of corn, like Iowa, Illinois or Indiana. Or it could have been Missouri, Minnesota or Nebraska." You may wonder how a penguin, most likely hatched in Antarctica, made it to the cornfields of America. The only answer he gives is, "I was adopted."

He heard about OEF through Br. Rat, who was a friend of his. He envied Br. Rat with all of his travels. Opus thought, "I could do that!" Before Br. Rat passed from this life, he bequeathed his habit to Br. Opus. It almost fits! (Opus is a bit shorter and pudgier than Br. Rat, and had a little trouble getting the habit on over his enormous proboscis!) He says he sees himself as another Friar Tuck, which is only fitting as both are fictional! He looks forward to meeting everyone at Chapter this year!



## OEF Online Bible Study

The weekly OEF Bible Study has moved to Thursday, at 8:00 pm EST. ***Note the Time change in New Zealand and Ireland***  
You can join the study on Zoom:

Topic: OEF Bible Study Time:

This is a recurring meeting.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89760718708?pwd=N2ROTHcrWUpWSzlyM2N3eEdGdEF0QT09>

Meeting ID: 897 6071 8708 - password - oef  
7:30-8:30 PM EDT,  
6:30-7:30 PM CDT,  
5:30-6:30 PM MDT  
4:30-5:30 PM MST (Arizona),  
4:30-5:30 PM PDT  
6:30-7:30 PM Ecuador  
8:30-9:30 AM Friday in Japan.  
***11:30 AM -12:30 PM Friday in New Zealand***  
***12:30 AM -1:30 AM Friday in Ireland***

We study the Gospel for the coming Sunday as listed on the Revised Common Lectionary. We use the "African Method" Bible Study: Read the passage, everyone picks the word or phrase that stands out for them. Read the passage again (in a different translation), everyone identifies how this impacts them as a person. Read the passage a third time (in a third translation) and everyone identifies how this impacts us as a community. Then time for general sharing on the passage.

You are most welcome to join!  
Br. Juniper, OEF





# Lifelong Formation Station



OEF Zoom Lenten Service March 4, 2023

A HUGE THANK YOU to all of you who were able to attend and participate in our annual OEF Zoom Lenten Service. We were blessed to have that time together for Scripture, prayer, meditative song (Taize style) and Agape Meal. We began with a tribute to one of our own who crossed over to her heavenly home, Kimberly Schmidt-Abrams. A special thanks to our brother James Schwarzlose for his message and for leading our Agape Meal. From James we read:

**“When we celebrated the Agape Meal it was a love feast...** that is not romantic, Valentine’s Day love but rather the Radical Love of God known in Jesus the Christ... and followed by Francis and Clare (among many others.)

Brian McLaren describes how Jesus centers that radical love as the path for us to follow:

“Of the many radical things said and done by Jesus, his unflinching emphasis on love was most radical of all. Love was the greatest commandment, ...love for God, for self, for neighbor, for stranger, for alien, for outsider, for outcast, and even for enemy, as he himself modeled. The new commandment of love meant that neither beliefs or words, (including right beliefs and social language)... neither taboos, systems, structures nor the labels that enshrined them mattered most. Love decentered everything else; love relativized everything else; love took priority over everything else-- (thus lifting up everyone, everyone, everyone). (1)

John 14 tells us Jesus taught, “I am the Way, the truth, the life,” It is not an easy

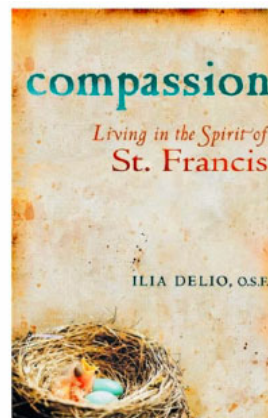
way but it is the Way of Agape love; and we kept the feast.

(1) Brian D. McLaren, The Great Spiritual Migration: How the World’s Largest Religion is Seeking a Better Way to Be Christian (New York: Convergent Books, 2016,) 42. (Alt. with additions in brackets)

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Come join us for a book study on Illia Delio’s book What is Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St. Francis. We will meet via zoom on Sundays or Tuesdays at 5:00pm Central time following the Feast of St. Francis in October. Please email Sr. Debra Snider-Scott (deblos@me.com) or Br. Stephan Gerhardt (gerhardt\_stephan@yahoo.com) with your preferred time based on the choices offered. The book study will last approximately 11 weeks. We look forward to sharing this time with you next Fall.

Peace and Blessings,  
The Lifelong Formation Team  
Sr. Debra Snider-Scott, Sr. Francesca Clare Slomski, Sr. Dale Carmen, and  
Br. Stephan Scott-Gerhardt







## A Reflection: A Lenten Quiet Day in Dublin

by Jason Melia-O'Brien, n/OEF



Saturday 25th February. Franciscans from all over the Island of Ireland, and one from Scotland, descended on the church of St. John the Baptist, Drumcondra. A motley crew of big hearted people, we came together to begin Lent together. TSSF and OEF: together as one family.

We began our quiet day with lunch – sandwiches, tea, and coffee... and a bit of catch-up chat! From the lunch table, we moved to the Eucharistic table: from breaking bread, to breaking the bread together.

Br. Neal, OEF was the speaker for the day. 'Franciscan mysticism'... we don't do things by half in Ireland! Neal gave us brief definitions of 'ineffability', 'cataphatic' and 'apophatic' prayer. Big words that convey simple ideas. 'Ineffability': that which is beyond words; 'cataphatic': image-full, imaginative prayer; 'apophatic': imageless, non-dualistic prayer. For Rahner, Christians of the future will of necessity need to be mystics if Christianity is to survive.

Franciscanism, Neal pointed out, does not have a written manual of mysticism like the Ignatian or Benedictine traditions of spirituality. Or do we? Maybe the written manual is not so much in a book, but embodied in a person: Clare, the plant, the light, the one whom Francis formed as his perfect expression of Franciscan mysticism. Bonaventure tried to capture the mysticism of Francis through words, in his major life of Francis. But Bonaventure, if looked closely, keeps on using phraseology that echoes Clare like a peal of bells, a symphony sounding from many churches on a sunlit Sunday morning in Assisi. In his 'Tree of Life,' a form of retreat similar in structure to Ignatian exercises, Bonaventure reminds

his retreatants to embody through imagination, to gaze, consider, contemplate, and imitate the life of Christ symbolised as a life-giving tree.

As Jesuits acknowledge, Ignatius of Loyola compiled his spiritual exercises from what had been passed down, especially from the Franciscan tradition. Neal led us in a time of prayer using the Imaginative Gospel Prayer method of Ignatius. This too has strong Franciscan roots, or should I say Clarian roots! The story of Elijah was the basis of this imaginative contemplation – a form of image-full prayer. Neal invited us to dive into the scene, smell the smells, see the sights, listen, and converse with the people we encountered. It is a mental form of what Francis accomplished in Greccio – the real life nativity scene that became the basis for our Christmas crib traditions.

Then we let go; let go of the images and entered the silence. Emptying ourselves, we allowed the sound of silence to envelop us, and just be. This imageless prayer, this experience of the groundlessness of all being – 'interbeing' as Buddhists call it – was an immersion into that where God and reality intra-penetrates, a circular dance wherein the Divine and the cosmos share in a deeply dynamic relational encounter with one another. This is the prayer that is beyond all images, all words, and concepts.

(Continued on page 16)



## A Reflection, continued...

We gazed: we became aware of ourselves, the place where we were inhabiting. We considered: the story, entering its nooks and crannies. We contemplated: we emptied, allowing the sound of silence to relate, dance with, and penetrate us. And it is out of this that we were empowered to imitate: to be persons of prayer, to embody justice for others and the integrity of all God's creation.

We came back to ourselves; we did what the Irish are fabulous for: we had a cup of tea!

Franciscan mysticism is something we are all called to be formed in. It is our way of encountering God, self, the other, and the cosmos. Look to Clare. She is the perfect embodiment of this mysticism. Go gaze, consider, contemplate, and imitate. Look into the mirror of eternity, be reflections of Christ in the world around you. As Buddhists say, it is a practice... do it and allow yourself to be transformed – converted if you will – in the mind of Christ who loves and serves all without prejudice.

It was a peaceful and beautiful time that we had together. And Neal gave us a wonderful experience of Franciscan mysticism, something that will give us food for thought for a long time to come.

Jason Melia-O'Brien, n/OEF

OEF Europe.

Lost and Found Disappeared

I had to ponder on this one a little bit and wait the extra day to know for sure.

So many memories of my youth has disappeared. So many memories of my children's youth have faded and disappeared. As of late, I have experienced, it seemed to me, a loss of words mid sentence, a loss of focus, a loss of joy; Difficulty keeping track of my keys, my phone and other assorted items. I don't know much about my birth parents and health histories, but I do know Dewey ended up with Alzheimer's; Thelma suffered with COPD which also led to a dementia of sorts. My wild imagination and ability to obsess led me down a rabbit hole of concern that, I too, am heading into the abyss of mindlessness, a disappearance act that no one wants to experience!

Yesterday, I anxiously awaited my virtual doctor appointment with the Neuro-Behavioral Specialist who administered a full day of testing a few weeks back to either confirm or dispel my biggest fear I've carried with me for quite some time now.

Dr. Amy is so wonderful and such an incredible person to talk with. She instantly put me at ease yesterday. I'm sure she saw the fear that was smeared all over my face. "Debra, we have good news..."

I still have a very vital, intact brain! No signs of disease! I could have reached through the phone and kissed her. My "hard wiring" is good! I actually scored high on the language portion of the testing. The other tests I scored quite normal and average for my age group. Then we got into what she called "malware/software" issues. She explained that our brains are energy hogs! If we are not taking proper care of our overall health, our brain suffers, just like any other organ that may suffer from neglect or unhealthy choices.

For the part of the prompt that asked what we may have lost sight of... lost sight of my physical and emotional health! I've lost sight of the fact that we are indeed the physical tabernacles of our Lord! My "house" is in ill repair; run down; neglected; forgotten!

I have a lot of work to do to "rebuild the church" in which Christ dwells! But, at least I know now, my brain and I are still active partners and have a full understanding of team work! We are still equally yoked as we enter "aging gracefully!"

Praise God!  
Deb Snider-Scott, OEF



*\*From a reflection in the 40 Days/40 Writes Lenten Practice*



## A Few Good Reads: Watch This Space!



This 2021 book by Danièle Cybulskie caught my eye at my public library, and I found it an enjoyable read:

<https://www.abbeville.com/products/how-to-live-like-a-monk>

Here's a blurb from the back cover:

"This book shows how medieval monastic practices — with their emphasis on a healthy soul, mind, and body — can inspire us to lead more purposeful and balanced lives. Each chapter explores a different aspect of monks' daily lives, from their schedule of work and prayer to the gardens they kept, and reveals its lessons for the present. Featuring both original illustrations and colorful miniatures from medieval manuscripts, *How to Live Like a Monk* will satisfy wellness seekers and history lovers alike."

This is a short, smart (but not academic) little book. It is not specifically Franciscan but, if you can find it at your public library, some of you might enjoy reading it (and may find it helpful to see your personal Rule of Life in a new light).

Nancy Menning, OEF

### David Rensberger's pen strikes again!

David has written an excellent article in the December '22 newsletter from Contemplative Outreach titled "Being before Doing" on his journey with centering prayer. You can find it here: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/newsletter/>

Click on the December issue to find the article within it. I'm wondering who else may be practicing centering prayer? It might be nice to do a Zoom prayer session if we can find a slot that works for us all.

David Delacroix, OEF

### Jesus Outside the Lines – Scott Sauls

Our society is quick to draw lines in the sand on a variety of issues: women's reproductive rights, marriage equality, gender identity, to name a few. In this book, Sauls approaches the things that drive us and presents the reality that the Community of Christ is called to live beyond the limits of us verses them. This book inspires the reader to erase the lines of division and work to be a people who unite the world through the love and compassion of Christ. This is truly a fitting selection to read in the current social and political climate.

### Here Are Your Gods – Christopher J. H. Wright

Western society is quick to cling to various modern idols: money, power, and personality. These modern gods prevent us from doing the mission that God has called each of us to do; but what if we turned away from these things that detour and distract, and instead followed the call of the Holy Spirit. Wright, in this selection admonishes the reader to do just that. This selection refocuses the reader on true, faithful discipleship in an era filled with overwhelming idolatry.

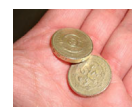
Chip Wilson,  
OEF Postulant



## An Important Reminder

**Reminder! Nancy Menning is the OEF Treasurer. Contributions can be made by sending a check (made out to "Order of Ecumenical Franciscans") to Nancy at:**

**Order of Ecumenical Franciscans  
c/o Nancy Menning, Treasurer  
3175 Duke Snider Ave  
Eugene, OR 97402**







*Fiddlesticks*  
*c/o Christine Petersen, OEF*  
*934 Round Oak Ct.*  
*Nekoosa, WI 54457*  
*U.S.A.*

*\*Articles for the Post -Chapter/Claretide Issue are being accepted immediately.  
 The deadline is July 15, 2023*



## Reflections on The Cross of San Damiano

by Patrick McNamara, OFM, Cap.



I look to the Cross, I gaze upon its figure, I wait, I listen,  
 I hope.

Will you speak, will you move, will I be moved?

Will you once again touch the heart of one who seeks?  
 Of one who questions, of one who seems so lost?

Will you embrace the soul, as you did that of Francis?  
 Will you take it to Yourself?

Will you give it peace, give it comfort, give it love?

This soul waits, listens, prays for such grace. This soul  
 seeks the Love from the Lover.

It wavers. It stumbles. It falls.

Your gaze looks down, embraces all. Takes all, Loves all.  
 Your Grace heals, accepts.

Again you respond. Again you love. Again you speak to a  
 searching and troubled heart. I turn. I continue the  
 journey. I continue in Hope. I too have heard you Speak.

