

FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 147

Post-Chapter 2023



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CHAPTER/CONVOCATION 2023 IS IN THE BOOKS!

In Convocation this year, we welcomed Susan Pitchford, TSSF who presented on and reflected with us on “A Kinship Way of Life” particularly around racism, white supremacy, and how it affects our kinship. Jacoba served as Scribe for the Chapter sessions.

Thursday, June 23

1. *Presentation of Reports*

Reports were submitted in writing and posted to our website before Chapter.

Representatives of each team offered highlights of these reports, with time for the gathered body to ask questions and offer comments and gratitude. Kathy presented the Treasurer's Report and Budget on behalf of Nancy.

2. *Proposed OEF Formation Revisions*

Louis presented a recommendation for **Proposed OEF Formation Revisions** (an Addendum to the Formation Team Report included in full at the end):

The new model does not have “chapter” assignments, so Postulants will not wait until they have completed a chapter assignment to report to their Formation Companions. Rather, they will report monthly, with a reflection on their journey through the formation process.

“Unlike the current model, the new Postulancy model emphasizes structured opportunities for Postulants to build relationships of mutual support and accountability among themselves and with novice and Professed members of the OEF.

After a time of questions and prayerful discernment, the gathered body affirmed the Formation Team's vision and our own participation in supporting this exploration.

(Continued on page 2)

Chapter/Convocation 2023...continued

Friday, June 24

For our times of reflection and decisions, Shoshanah and John Michael served as Listeners.

3. Reflection on Resolution 2: Modifying the General Rule to name our call to address issues of white supremacy, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression

After an extended time of prayerful discernment, Shoshanah (as Listener) summarized our “deep listening with deep care for one another. As an order, we are at a better place, even though it is also a beginning. There is an appreciation and need for grace to continue to grow among us. There is deep gratitude for the work done in the crafting of these words, and they come close to what is needed. We are moving steadily towards resolution with a lot of careful listening, great love, hope, and desire to be faithful.” The language that we now have can be taken further in our personal rules.

4. Chapter Safety 2025 Discussion

Petra summarized concerns siblings have expressed about safety related to gathering in Missouri, especially for our transgender siblings and participants currently facing increased discrimination and risks of violence. Our discernment included listening to our transgender siblings’ experiences; learning some of the history of how locations have been chosen; reflecting on our mutual relationship with Pallotine Renewal Center; the multiple and diverse needs of our Order (e.g., accessibility, financial costs, inclusion, etc.). Shoshanah (as Listener) shared that she heard: fear, sadness about that fear, the complicated nature of the logistics related to this conversation, and the need for continued discernment.

Masud (visitor from the TSSF) then shared that he is deeply moved by the work our Order is doing and the conversations we are having. He shared that “we are not alone in these

discussions.” His role with TSSF’s external relations gives him the opportunity to see changes unfolding. He shared his personal experiences and asked: “Are we courageous enough to be who we are in Christ?”

Saturday, June 25

5. Receiving reports (all but Treasurer’s Report): The Chapter Body gratefully affirmed and received the reports as submitted.

6. Receiving the Treasurer’s report and approving the new budget: The Chapter Body gratefully affirmed and received the Treasurer’s report and approved the proposed budget.

7. Resolution 1 - Affirming Chapter 2022 changes: The Chapter Body affirmed the changes made to the Statutes during Chapter 2022 (Principle 17 and the ‘Novice-by-Transfer’ process), as required by our statutes to adopt the changes.

8. Resolution 2 - Principles changes: After continuing with our earlier discernment, John Michael (as Listener) offered that “there is enough spaciousness in the language that the council has brought to the Chapter to apply these words” in our own lives and settings. We can move forward with affirming and trying them in the next year, returning to them in the future to discern this further affirmation and ongoing work. The Chapter Body affirmed this sense of the meeting and kept silence, prayerfully and gratefully acknowledging the guidance of the Spirit.

9. Resolution 3 - Explore updating language of Principles: The chapter body affirmed the resolution. John Michael (as Listener) offered the sense of the meeting to form a committee that will review the principles with “curiosity, care, and compassion in the mode of prayerful discernment that is our mode of listening to God.”

10. Resolution 4 - Explore Technologies to support our bonds of community: After much prayerful discernment, the gathered body is in unity with the resolution as presented.

Chapter/Convocation 2023...continued

11. Resolution 5 – David Delacroix’s request to be released from his vows: After much prayerful discernment, we affirmed that we will extend to David an invitation to walk together for a year, to the degree that he is willing to participate.

12. Resolution 6 – Fred Jaxheimer’s request to transfer to the Community of Francis and Clare: After prayerful discernment, John Michael (as Listener) shared a sense of the meeting to affirm Fred’s request for transfer.

Sunday, June 26

10:45 AM Parking Lot Conversation

Many of the siblings were not able to attend the Parking Lot Conversation due to travel or conflicting commitments. Those present in the Chapter Room via Zoom or in person had an informal conversation on the following topics. The session was led by Ron. Kathy took notes.

Clarification about the Seeker Process:

This is the new version in our Statutes for the prior “Novice by Transfer” process.

Novice connection post-formation chapters:

The discussion centered around how to continue growth when a Novice has completed all the formation chapters well in advance of Chapter. Several suggestions were raised.

House of Prayer/Intentional Community (Raised by Louis and Markie)

Louis, Markie and others are exploring the possibility of having a house of prayer where some members of the OEF would live together in community. There was a lot of energy in the room and support for the exploration. Further exploration will continue. An article describing the idea will be presented in Fiddlesticks.

Affinity Fellowships and further discussion about the Chapter 2025 Location: Time did not permit further discussion about these two items.



And while all good OEF-ers were dutifully attending meetings, their spouses were off sight-seeing!!!



L-r: Ken Trana, Carolyn Nuss-Warren, Karen Booth, Eleanor Trawick



The gang’s all here!!!



THE HABIT OF A HABIT

Once again, a discussion has popped up on the chat-list about OEF's policy on habits, beginning with Br. Ysidro's offer to help others obtain a habit:

Seeing Sid's emails offering habits got me wonder, for those that wear them where did you get them?

Steve Jerbi

Over the years, I have flirted with the idea of adopting a habit. There once was a Franciscan Order that wore denim habits, and that appeals to me since I am still engaged with Night Ministry here in San Francisco.

However, I feel called to make a shawl for myself in either brown or gray, as it is more reflective of who I am.

-Bx Lilith

What about embroidered baseball caps with an image of St. Francis (see attached pic).? The caps could even have the words "Franciscan by God's Design - (OEF)." If anybody is interested, let me know and I will tell you how to get the baseball caps from Amazon.



Dave DG n/OEF

I have thought that I would like a habit when I finally take final vows. But I really can't see an occasion that I would wear it often. So, that would be a waste of resources... not very Franciscan. (If I preached regularly, I would wear it then. But as a lay person, I preach only occasionally.) I would wear it if I were to go to a protest or action for social justice. And I would wear it at my burial. I'm not sure that's sufficient cause to purchase one.

I don't love baseball caps, but perhaps David's baseball cap is a good option in my case. I do wear my Tau cross daily, but I want something that makes a statement if I am at some sort of action for social justice and I'm afraid that few people would recognize that it is more than just a piece of jewelry.

Crystal, n/OEF

Good morning Sibs!

I want to share with you some thoughts on my experience of the Franciscan habit in the OEF and elsewhere.

There is something distinctively joyful when we see someone wearing the Franciscan habit. I experienced that first hand at my first C/C in Richmond in 2019 when I took my Novice vows. On the day when sibs were professed and we placed our Rule of Life on the altar and renewed our vows, it was wonderful for me to see Sibs wearing the Franciscan habit. It made me feel even more joyful, in a way, and I noticed a lightness in the steps of those who wore them! The Franciscan habit speaks more than words alone can convey. It brings joy and hope. I think it is one of the graces we receive in our C/C gatherings. It is a sign of Franciscan joy.

We have a unique approach to the wearing of the habit and I think it is guided and blest by the Holy One.

As we are exploring bringing our actions as Franciscans more in tune with the urgent needs/ concerns of our times, it may seem contrary to hold on to a garment worn by the first Franciscans. I think balance is key, and the benefits of having a very visual reminder of the simplicity and single-minded devotion of Francis and Clare to follow Jesus is a very good thing.

Pace e bene!
Satya, OEF

I was surprised (a little bit) that the habit was an historical issue in OEF, but we all are humans with thoughtful perspectives. I love wearing a habit because it symbolically connects me to Francis, but for me it is also a prophetic sign act. I go to a church which has a traditional dress up church, and a Rock n Roll (shorts and flip flops if warm outside) services. I wore my habit as a sign act promoting contemplative activism, and the monastic tradition as an alternative to reformed or Constantinian, imperial, and colonial Christianity. Not all monastic traditions completely resisted the heresies of Constantinian Christianity (Cornel West's insights), but Francis and OEF reconnect me to the early Jesus Movements of the 1960s and 70s before the religious right domesticated the movement.

The Habit of A Habit... continued

Wearing a habit for me (at this time) is an act of symbolic prophetic love towards Jesus, and like the woman who used expensive oil on Jesus' feet, I agreed that the money I spent on my habit could have been given to the poor, so both perspectives have merit as long as both are done with loving devotion to Christ, and that is my witness.

Thanks Siblings.
Andrew

Thank you, Andrew, for your insights and perspective. There are so many ways to look at the issue of wearing a garment to either find identity or to reject identity. Wearing of traditional garments can certainly do that, especially in places where the garment is not expected. What we do not know is what goes through the mind of the other when we appear in the sight of another. Certainly it evokes a certain response to people who have experience of the garment.

I will provide a "but" in this discussion. It relates to a hymn workshop that I am aware of. The hymn "Breathe on Me Breath of God." was up for discussion. The language and intent of the hymn is fairly masculine. One of the female participants said she could never sing that hymn or feel comfortable when hearing it because she would have a PTSD reaction from when she was a child and she would feel and smell the drunken breath of her father while he raped her.

What I am trying to say is that the evocative content of a symbol always varies from person to person. We never know with certainty what any word, action, or object may mean to another. I know plenty of people who are turned off by religious garb. I have had plenty of occasions where wearing a collar to an emergency room gave me immediate access to distressed individuals, and later found out there was resentment by either staff, family, or patients.

We simply need to be caring of others as often as we can. And we need to remember there is a time for everything, as stated in Ecclesiastes 3: a time to love and a time to hate. Love and prophecy go hand in hand.

So, wear a garment that says, "I am a Franciscan." Claim its identity in your ministry. Be loving and caring

as you do it. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead others to your positive love of Jesus. Also know that in the official eyes of OEF it is not a habit of our Order. It is a garment and tool we may use lovingly.

Ron

I second what Ron Nuss-Warren wrote. Good questions to ask about a garment habit are: Why do I want one? Does it do anything to support the 'leper'/marginal/oppressed?

What needs of mine are being satisfied by a habit/garment? Is the San Damiano Cross at Profession 'enough' to have a sense of identity as Franciscan? All these questions and more I have asked myself over the years of OEF Profession life. Some were asked of me by TSSF mentors and others. I fear, in some situations, religious habits are another sign of a Consumerist culture; 'gotta have it' thinking. So I ask, do I 'need' this, or 'want' it; and what does God want? Peace, Justice and a humble heart.

Peace and Joy, Dale Carmen

Hi, Sibs!

I'd like to share a bit more than I did - because my "why" for wearing a habit and where/how I wear it changed at the C/C in 2022.

I'd been professed in a Franciscan Order that dissipated. I was used to using our habits to be visible to help, and learned that it was a communication to/within myself. I do use the hood up to deeply contemplate, the slap of my cincture and sandals and feel of my robe to remind me whose steps I follow. But at that C/C I was part of a conversation about how habits are received as a more gentle presence, not a judgmental presence. I took that conversation back to my congregation and asked them what THEY wanted to see me preside at table as - in clergy shirt and cassock/alb or my Franciscan habit, or cassock. There was a rich discussion, and they chose my habit. Thus for the last year, I've been vesting in my habit to show what they love about our community and my ministry to it - the gentle humor and simple humility we seek to follow in Francis.

p&b
Mir





Words from The Servant Council



The Servant Council's Reflections on 2023's Chapter and Convocation

The years leading up to this year's Chapter and Convocation have been hard and debilitating on all of us. During and after the difficult years of pandemic, changes in climate, the continuing tension, turmoil, and violence of white supremacy, America's gun culture, the persistence of extreme right-wing political movements and its effect on our families and communities, the stresses of social media, and the difficulty of travel, we have suffered collectively and personally. We looked forward to coming together for Chapter and Convocation with both joy and concern.

We looked forward to seeing each other, speaking with one another, seeing new faces, being with each other, and sharing our dreams of following in the footsteps of Francis and Clare, but after years of tension and misunderstanding, struggling with our desire for personal connection and the difficulty of connecting online, members also leave our order, and the struggles we bring from our individual and household lives, we were not sure whether this year's gathering would bring us relief and satisfaction, and possibly, blessing. We could only bring our five loaves and two fish, but we longed for the blessing of the Holy Spirit to multiply our well-intended but fragmented human efforts.

As a new Council, with no returnees, one can imagine that even with abundant prayer and preparation, and Sister Markie's steadfast and much appreciated contributions—your Council approached this Chapter/Convocation with a little trepidation. Would things go smoothly? Would those present online and in person feel more connected to each other, the Order, and most importantly, to our Lord Jesus, through the witness of Clare and Francis? How would our guest speaker be received? How about the new tech crew? Would our hosts at Pallottine be as hospitable as ever? Would we get the schedule right? These were some of the questions that we carried with us to Florissant.

Unfounded or no, our concerns were allayed on several occasions.

We risked spending more money on technology and hiring a professional team to manage it for us, freeing our Brother Salachar and others to join us for the work of

our gathering. We saw for ourselves how the experience was much better, both visually and audibly, for those of us who were not able to be physically present and for those who were present. People recognized how important this was and how it made it more possible for us to be the inclusive Order that is our unique charism. Brother Sam specifically mentioned how he was going to increase his giving to the Order to make this possible in the future. It is costly, but the feedback we received encourages us to continue in this direction in the future. Brother Sam was right, though, that if we are to continue to do this in the future and improve our experience more, we will need to increase our donations to the Order. Hiring an outside team to help us also meant that there was an opportunity to engage in conversation with them personally and share our witness.

We also risked hiring a presenter. Susan Pitchford, TSSF did an amazing job. We believe the Holy Spirit led us to seek her out and her to accept this task. The Holy Spirit did not stop there, either, but also worked through her and with us. Her interest in and presence with us and our sessions with her set the tone for the rest of Chapter, and enabled us to accomplish the things we did. We believe a tension in the OEF had a breakthrough, and there was joy as a result. When Brother Louis Canter preached on Saturday evening, we believe he expressed something in the hearts of many.

We are grateful for everyone who participated, including another TSSF guest, our longtime friend, Masud Ibn Syedullah.

The Chapter and Convocation came together from the labor of many people. The Servant Council had its part, but it also had help from the former Council, especially the unwavering efforts of Sister Markie, from the Servant Teams in the Order, from the staff at Pallottine, and from the technology crew, and from our guest speaker, Susan Pitchford.

Owusu, Petra, Ron, Kathy, and Magdalena





Farewell to An Old Friend

John Frederick Ball II
January 22, 1960 – July 14, 2023

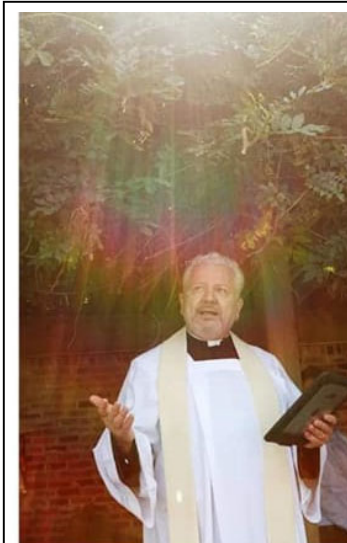
John Frederick Ball II (always Fred, or Fr. Fred, and sometimes “Padre,” to the many who knew him as Franciscan priest in the Ecumenical Catholic Community) was born on January 22, 1960 and died on July 14, 2023 in his hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas. In his 63 years he lived a life of passionate advocacy for peace and justice, for authenticity and community. Fred was exuberant and genuine with a quick wit and a ready enthusiasm for an eclectic range of interests. He was a lifelong hobbyist since childhood when he could be found tumbling rocks, cutting glass, working with leather, or teasing his little sister, another favorite hobby.

Fred was a lifelong learner, seeker of truth, and worker for peace. Fred was an Eagle Scout and member of the Order of The Arrow. After graduating Hall High School ('78), Fred earned his B.A. at Ouachita Baptist University ('82) where he was a member of Beta Beta Men's Social Club, Blue Key National Fraternity, and the Ouachita Student Foundation. Following this, he earned an M.Div. ('86) and Ph.D. ('93) from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, and was a pastor in this tradition for nearly 20 years, in both Arkansas and Kentucky. He was active in mission work in Guatemala and Honduras, where he engaged with the culture, the language, and the people. His spirituality always dynamic and his mind always inquisitive, during the latter part of this time, he found himself drawn to the Franciscan Order. This tradition founded by St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi provided an element of “depth and drama” to his faith with a focus on reconciliation, care for creation, and care for the marginalized and oppressed. During this time, he also studied Old Catholic Theology at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, and overlapping with these years of spiritual exploration he continued to work as Research Associate at the University for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. He founded San Damiano Church in Little Rock, AR in 2006, where he served as priest until 2021 and was able to live out his vocation as an instrument of peace and an advocate for unity.

It would be equally unsurprising to find Fred

blessing animals at the dog park on St. Francis Day, decked out in full Medieval garb at the Renaissance Faire, or entertaining friends in the comfort of his home, egging them on to try the spiciest gourmet hot sauce or perfecting a cup of espresso. Fred was funny, intuitive, and engaging, never missing the opportunity to make a corny pun or share a quirky anecdote or piece of trivia. He was a lover of words and etymologies, with a memory like a steel trap. Fred was both intellectual and down-to-earth, and in the same conversation could talk aesthetics, history, theology, Razorbacks, the Yankees, motorcycles, and barbecue. He respected, appreciated, and welcomed people of any and all backgrounds. He was “ecumenical” in every sense of the word.

Fred leaves behind his children, Wesley (fiancée Caitlin Dempsey) Ball, Mary Clare Ball, Katie Walker (Mykolas) Sakevicius, and Hannah Walker (Connor) McGuinness; his sister, Becky Ball, her daughter, Kelsey (Justin) Pelham and their three children, and her daughter Laney Treusdell; and his beloved dog, Tilly.



He is preceded in death by his parents, Carroll and Barbara Ball of Little Rock.

A funeral mass [was] held in honor of Fred on Saturday, July 22, 2023 at 11 am at Saint Michael's Episcopal Church in Little Rock.

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”- St. Francis of Assisi (Seen on Facebook)



Siblings Remember Br. Fred Ball



It is with deep sorrow that the Servant Council received the news about our former Minister General, Fred Ball, passing this morning. We are still absorbing this news ourselves but offer these words of St. Francis as a prayer for his transition and healing for his family. Perhaps we can use this thread to post memories of Fred, if one feels led to do so.

"Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing your most holy will. The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve God with great humility."

Oh God, Lover of all, we pray to you for those we love, but see no longer: Grant them your peace; let light perpetual shine upon them; and, in your loving wisdom and almighty power, work in them the good purpose of your perfect will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Magdalena, Kathy, Petra, Owusu, and Ron

Prayers for Fred's family. I am glad he was not alone.

Br. Stephan

Blessings on his passing. Loving thoughts to Sarah. I remember them both so well from when I could be more active in the Order.

Your little sister,
Sharon

I am very sorry to read these words. Fred is a good man. He will be missed in many circles. Rest well brother.

Br. Louis Canter

Rest in peace, beautiful and flawed and beloved servant. Surely an era of OEF has passed.

Sr. Nancy Menning

And may the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God, rest in PEACE. AMEN.

Sr. Kiara Mychal

I'm so saddened to hear of Bro. Fred's passing. I've known Fred since the OEF chapter at which he was installed as our Minister General. While he was still with our little order, I had the privilege of working with him in a few capacities. A committed Christian first, and a devoted Franciscan. May he not only rest in peace, but may he rest in the presence of the souls of Francis and Clare whom he loved dearly, and all who have sought to follow the poor Christ in their footsteps and are now resting in glory. Pax et bonus, dear Brother.

Br. Craig Robert

It took time for me to absorb the news. I thank all y'all for your words above.

The song that came to mind was "Will The Circle Be Unbroken?" Yes, by and by, Lord, by and by!

James

I am not quite sure, but Fred may have been the Minister General when I inquired in Belton, Texas in 2010. That being said, Br. Fred and I had our agreements and our disagreements. On a couple of issues, this Nordic brother can be very stubborn and can on occasion lock horns. Brother Fred and I locked horns on a couple of those issues, but at the end of our private conversation, the fact remained that we were still brothers and deeply respect each other. I will always love Br. Fred's zest for life. And his passion for all those around him and the issues that were important to him. I will miss him dearly.

John Son-of-Syvert

Siblings Remember... continued

Yes. Fred served as our Minister General for several years, through most of my formation. I always felt the Order was in good hands. He seemed to bring us some stability, and made great contributions to our growth in those years. Rest in peace, Br. Fred!

Sister Chris

Amen! Many years ago, Br. Fred was a prime representation of the Order to me, and gave me very helpful and meaningful counsel when I was hoping to become a Professed member, and when, for reasons beyond the control of me or the Order, those hopes broke down. He had a very particular vein of spiritual gold to work--fool's gold it might have seemed sometimes, but for Franciscans it can be said that our folly is our treasure. It's very sad to think that he is gone from this world. But imagine the liturgies he is dreaming up for the angels! Requiescat in pace, in luce, in jubilatione!

Pax & bonum,

David Rensberger
Associate of the OEF

Dear Sibs,

I had no idea who Br Fred was so used WWW and found a blog (with photos) in which he was interviewed about his spiritual journey.

The blog moves along nicely. I could hear Br. Fred's Franciscan charism flowing throughout as he shared his life and ministry. I am grateful for this opportunity of getting a small glimpse of our OEF Sib. Rest in peace, Br. Fred!

This is the link to this blog, it is on YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/9OAlvQOOEJk>

Sr. Satya, OEF

I am so saddened to hear about the death of Fred Ball. He, Jimmie Reese and David Delecroix were some of my greatest mentors when I joined the Order in 1996.
Rev. brotherjohn, OEF

Satya, thank you so much for sharing this YouTube link to the interview with Fred. It was so good to hear his voice and be reminded of how much energy and theological insight, liturgical passion and Franciscan grounding he brought to the OEF during the time he journeyed with us.

Sr. Nancy Menning

Thank you, Sibling Satya (from my beloved Brazos County), Thank you siblings from our corner of the U. S., and Brother David (for summing it up so well and thank you Brothers Craig Robert and John G. for making our long relationship clear. The video really reminds us of who Fred was -- and is... for the circle will be unbroken. We granted Brother Fred the freedom to follow the Holy Spirit's bidding and move on... but the memories here say that he never left the real Order (for the Spirit has little room for Institutional divisions.) he just expanded it.-- I find it a Franciscan thing to move on and still be with us.

Undertaker! Undertaker! Please drive slow... because, Lord, we hate to see him go.

Pace e bene... peace and all good, our eternal Sibling Fred

Br. James

Hello--

This news is so sad. I could just cut and paste what many of you have said, especially Sister Chris and David R. And I think it was Nancy who said this is the end of an era in the OEF. To me Fred felt like the anchor of the Order when I first came into this family, and that was a very reassuring thing. We had several liturgical disagreements (as many of you witnessed), but we could talk about it and waggle our eyebrows at each other, and still know there was mutual love. That, to me, is authentic Siblingship.

Peace and good,

Sr. Katie



MEAN STREETS A BROTHER'S MINISTRY



I begin this reflection by telling you, my dear Siblings, how much I miss you. Having professed back in 1999, I am aware of how many have joined the Order. Over the last 6 years, I have had six back surgeries which have left me able to walk, but traveling by air is way too complicated and draining. And driving from Colorado is out of the question in my 25 year old Ford Taurus. But enough of this. Sister Chris was most kind in inviting me to share my experiences with Mean Streets Ministry.

My reflection...

I first encountered the founder of **Mean Streets**, James Fry, when I was hosting a prayer class at Rockland Community Church UCC back in 2003. We made a mission trip to a Lutheran Church in Arusha, Tanzania in that same year to help the community build an expansion to the existing church whose membership and ministry were confronting a serious spatial problem. The Maasai were filling the two morning services to capacity in their small gathering space. The food bank and clothing donations took place out on the dirt grounds in the courtyard.

Prior to this mission trip, James operated a neon glass shop which created not only retail commercial fine art, but science lab glass as well. Over the course of the two week mission, James shared that within the extremely poor Maasai villages we visited, he experienced a spiritual rebirth. What he saw among the poor in Arusha and the surrounding villages filled him with compassion and joy at the possibility of what he might create back in Denver. To quote him, "I moved from living in my head to living in my heart."

Upon our return, he initiated the sale of his company and founded this ministry. James spoke to the membership of our church, the outreach committee and the ministry quickly took shape. In the beginning, the focus was directed to the motels on ease and West Colfax Avenue. Here, many singles and families

resided only surviving from week to week before eviction. Here I joined the street ministry for 2 ½ years, one night per week through all seasons.

I witnessed profound gratitude from those who had almost little or nothing. Teams of around 30 volunteers would knock on doors asking if the residents would want sandwiches, water and or treats; and so many desired prayer. We began building relationships with those living there and I still recall some of my conversations from all of those years long ago.

Well, from 2005 until my surgeries commenced in 2017, I was very busy with my pastoral ministry in three churches I served, but my focus was always upon pastoral care and chaplaincy for the sick, hospitalized and the dying. When Gaye Gilliland Malo (many of you remember Gaye) first invited me to Chapter with Richard Rohr in 1996, I realized that caring for the wounded is where Christ wanted me to be. During my formation, I was transformed by the unwavering compassion and love that Fr. Francis gave to the broken and the poor and I was committed to following however I could.

As I fast forward the September of 2022, I reunited with my dear Brother James Fry and asked if I could return to the ministry of Mean Streets. I was pleasantly startled when he informed me that the ministry not only continued to serve the motels in Denver's busiest street, but now it has over 150 dedicated volunteers who serve the homeless with showers, dental care, morning meals, clothing supply and a thriving food bank. The spaces we utilize are part of a neighborhood church in west Denver. Depending upon the day/ weather, within the gymnasium we care for some days up to 150 souls. We're open 4 days a week from 8:30 am till noon. This is where I serve every day, meeting new visitors and those who are faithful returnees.



Mean Streets... continued

Now, some experiences...

Many of the volunteers who serve in the morning see as one of their roles to “save souls.” As I overhear some of these conversations, I witness the question of, “Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?” **I can’t go there.** Yes, I am Christian, but I have never forgotten the words of someone who gave a retreat in my final year of seminary. She said, “Religion is for those afraid of going to hell and spirituality is for those who’ve been there.” Raised in Roman Catholicism, I always had a problem with proclaimed exclusivity. When I entered seminary I was a member of The United Church of Christ, and was enthralled with its position on LGBT rights, ecumenism and racial issues. So I never had a evangelical focus in my ministry just trying to fulfill my understanding of care.

We serve the broken in body, mind and spirit. We open our doors to the men and women in our community whose only home is the street and the possessions upon their backs or in the grocery carts they ferry. Some are veterans, many have drug and alcohol issues, and thus many no longer have relationships with their families and their stories are profoundly tragic... **but they all deserve to be loved!**

One quick story of the many I could share, during a first time visit with one of our clients in early December 2022 who had his backpack and bedroll with him. I asked where he had spent the previous very cold night. He responded that he had a tent behind a dumpster a few blocks east. I was just hoping that this shelter would still be



there after his morning meal with us.

As he slung his pack upon the table I heard this loud thud. When I asked what was in there, he pulled out his bible about 6” by 9” and 3” thick; it had to weigh 4 pounds. This was a treasure for him, and the only book he owned. This was a well used Bible, and the cover was becoming unhinged.

I listened to him relate how grateful he was for his waking up that morning and what he has received from our ministry. Again, looking at the load he was carrying, I remarked, “I can lighten your load in that pack. He responded, “How so Brotherjohn?” I said, for me, it all comes down to these eight words of Christ, “Love one another as I have loved you.” His retort, “Yeah that’s true but I’ll keep carrying this load cause it brightens my day and warms my heart.” Just one of the many lessons I still learn from the friends we serve!

So, I have committed to this ministry as long as I have life, and can still get around. After 32 years of parish ministry and chaplaincy, I have concluded that this is where God wants me to be. For me, at this stage in my life, Mean Streets is truly the community where I can “Preach the gospel at all times, and only use words when necessary.” I just listen and love as Christ continues to love me.

-Brotherjohn Valiant Gaudreau, OEF





Formation Station

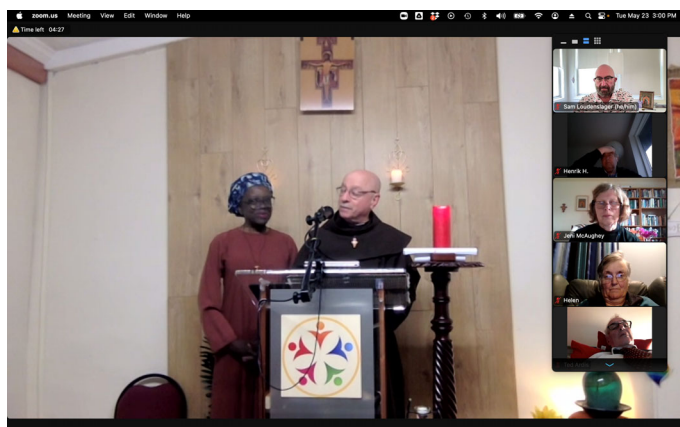


Lots & Lots of Novices!!!

My first trip in nearly a decade was to visit my dear friend, Sibling and godfather, Brother Neal. Here we are, on our way to my Noviciate Ceremony, stopping for a photo with the Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomás Mac Curtain, (20 March 1884 – 20 March 1920), an Irish Sinn Féin politician who served as the Lord Mayor of Cork until he was assassinated by the Royal Irish Constabulary shortly after his election.

My Noviciate Ceremony was lovingly prepared by Brother Neal, who sang and danced with me at the end. Great fun! Thanks to everyone who was able to attend. Thanks for the best wishes.

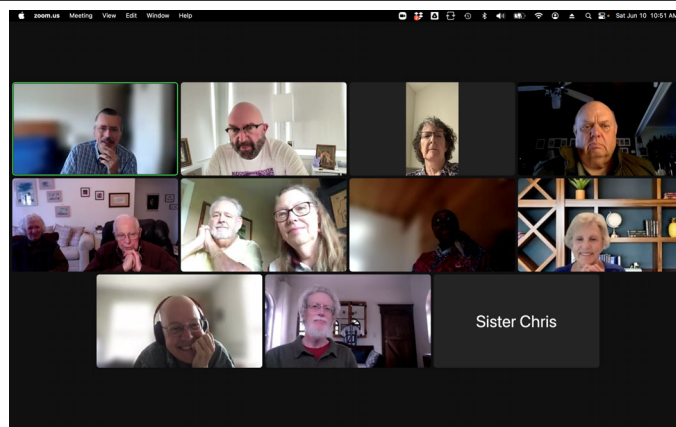
Peace, Joan (pronounced Jo-an)



Center: Joan & Br. Neal; Right, top - bottom: Br. Sam, Henrik (another new novice), Sr. Jeni McAughey, TSSF, Sr. Kiwi, and Br Ted Ardis, TSSF



Virtual Novicing Ceremony for Seaghan Murphy, currently in Costa Rica. (Below)



Top, l-r: Br Juniper, Br. Sam, Sr. Carol, David Di Genito. Center, l-r: Sr Anne Nancy & Br. Michael, Br. Mark & Sr. Deb, Joan, Sr. Caritas. Bottom, l-r: Sr. Nancy, Seaghan & a shy Sr. Chris

Virtual Novicing Ceremony for Henrik Kohlben of Denmark, held at Kilcrea Abbey in Cork, Ireland (Below)



Top, l-r: Henrik & Br Neal, Br. Sam, Sr. Kiwi.
Bottom, l-r: Sr. Carol, David DiGenito,
Joan Schroeder

And joining these folks, five new Novices were welcomed at Chapter: Darryl Glass, Rick Kruska, Darian Banks, David Chasteen and Angie Hartman.

Congratulations to All!!!

Formation Station... continued

Introducing...

Michael Asbury

When I was a "good little boy" in Roman Catholic grammar school during the 1950's, an inconsistent designation to be sure, I would have never considered doing anything that the Religious Sisters of Mercy ever connected with "Protestantism." Well at least for me, and so many others in my lot, even the word ecumenical was only a concept just beginning to be conjured up by the church fathers. So much water has gone over the Catholic bridge, and under the Catholic dam since then, and yes, it has all been, oh, so good to see, hear and feel it flow.

In my own life, the crazy 1960s pushed my boundaries about God, not just religion. Until... I hit that wall, you know, the one that reads with this simple question: "Hey, come on, do you really think you can go on anymore without God?" or as Francis put it in his prayer: "Who are you O God, and who am I?"

In the case of either question, each has found its answer in my heart numerous times in these past 74 years. So now, after a few changes in my Protestant denominations (oh, bless those Religious Sisters of Mercy!), and after decades of continued sobriety, retirements from 30 years of government service, and 8 years as a parish pastor and then a chaplain with homeless...here I am again. This time, I found the guidance of Richard Rohr, OFM to nudge me into that same question, followed by my decision to apply as a Postulant in the OEF.

Francis puts it so simply when he asks: "Who are you O God, and who am I?" This was the question of my younger life and is now the question of my later life. I hope I never stop asking. I hope you all never stop asking with me. The answers keep getting more wondrous, more awe-inspiring! I look forward to sharing the journey with you.

Mike Asbury
Albany, NY
Micahel.f.asbury@gmail.com



(Continued on page 14)

OEF Online Bible Study

The weekly OEF Bible Study has moved to Thursday, at 7:30 pm EDT. ***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=N2ROTHcrWUpWSzlyM2N3eEdG-dEF0QT09>.

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



Formation Station... continued

St. Sharkus

St. Sharkus was born in 7JW that is the 7th year following the passing of Jonah the Whale.

St. Sharkus's initial gift to the world came through his ability to compose water music. In fact, it was his *Water Spout for Whales Suite* that inspired Handel's *Water Music* and ultimately *The Messiah*. But that was only the beginning. Sharkus's greatest contribution to the world was ability to bring order out of chaos even if it was his initial appearance that caused the chaos in the first place.

Unlike most sharks, St. Sharkus was not known for the size of his appetite or some wild desire to chomp on things indiscriminately. Instead, he was known as the shark with a big heart. A shark whose only desire was to enable all creatures great and small to swim no matter how stormy the seas might become that their lives might be transformed from the chaos of a capsized boat to the serene calm of an island cove.

St. Sharkus' first call to compassionate action came when he befriended a pod of plankton eaters. With the help of his newfound spiritual companions, St. Sharkus took a vow to be a vegetarian and remained so until God called him to the great ocean in the sky.

If you would like more information on the history of St. Sharkus might I suggest a beach or a boat; some place where you can see the clouds clearly since that is where most of these facts come from.

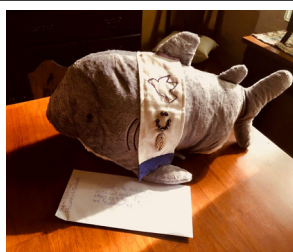
And now I will conclude with the prayer of St. Sharkus:

Lord, let me swim peacefully in your ocean ever careful to insure that my neighbor does not suffer in my wake.

Let me rejoice in the abundance of vegetation that you have provided for me that I might not eat my little friends and neighbors.

And last but not least Lord, make me mindful of the posted speed limit when swimming in harbors and marine sanctuaries so that I don't destroy or displace the animals and plants you have placed there. AMEN.

By. Br. Stephan Gerhardt OEF and Muriel Saunders, CEO of Saintly Stoles for Whimsical Creatures



Lifelong Formation Station



After a short summer hiatus the Lifelong Formation Team is proud to announce a new member to our team, Reg Weeks, OEF. We look forward to his professional expertise and his Spiritual insights as we venture forward with our online services and opportunities for gathering and growing on our Franciscan journeys, as individuals and as a family. We know that formation does not end when we take our profession vows, it's just beginning!

Please mark your calendars for the following events:

- **October 7th** - Feast of St. Francis Service; 3:00pm CENTRAL
- **October 9th** - An 11 week Book Study and Discussion of Ilia Delio's Compassion, Living in the Spirit of St. Francis. (This small paperback can be found on Amazon as new, but has used options available. These short chapters have reflection/discussion questions after each chapter.) Time: 6:30pm CENTRAL. Details on registration and Zoom links will be shared as time draws near.

These are great opportunities for us to spend time together as a family, growing, praying, and building relationships! We are always open for suggestions for ways to grow our family bonds and spiritually.

Your Lifelong Formation Team:

Dale Carmen, OEF
 Stephan Scott-Gerhardt, OEF
 Francesca Clare, OEF
 Reg Weeks, OEF
 Deb Snider-Scott, OEF



Fellowship News



Sibling Sighting!

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, Indianapolis, IN. Thanks, Ron and Carolyn for making a pit stop in Indy and joining Angie, Worth, Mark & me for an evening event on *The Chosen Series*! Good company! Warming up for Chapter!



Front l-r: Br, Mark, Sr. Deb, Carolyn Nuss-Warren
Rear l-r: Angie and Worth Hartman, Br. Ron

Good and Blessed Day dear Franciscan siblings in Christ! Our Crossroads Fellowship will be meeting by Zoom on Saturday, August 19th at 10:00am EASTERN time. You already know that it's an open door for all of our siblings! I'll post the Zoom link when we get closer to the date! Have a Blessed start to your August!

Greetings--

Now that I'm back on the U.S. mainland and had a little sleep, I have the mental bandwidth to send y'all this photo as a Franciscan sibling-sighting. The friar in the photo, Fra. Gabriel, was our main host at the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North

America's Summer Conference (aka Peace Camp) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Capuchins there, and their many volunteers, were wonderful hosts!

My friend and I also visited a 19th century Franciscan church in Old San Juan and had a nice visit with the friar who was closing up (we forgot to ask him his name). Apparently, there is a good number of lay Franciscans in the area. I visited with several, in spite of the language barrier. I think there really is a universal Franciscan language. .



Peace and good,
Katie Cook, OEF

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.





A Few Good Reads



"Christian Supremacy demonstrates how theological and legal frameworks created by the church centuries ago laid the seeds of anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism, and reveals why Christian identity lies at the heart of the world's violent white supremacy movements."

This book (was) published Tuesday, May 16, 2023. Some of us will be interested in reading it.

<https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691242583/christian-supremacy>

- Nancy Menning, OEF

Along this same line I offer two books of interest: Racism and Structural Sin By Conor M. Kelly and Racial Justice and the Catholic Church by Bryan N. Massingale. Both very challenging and excellent reads. I look forward to this one you recommend Nancy. Thanks for sharing.

- Louis Canter, OEF

This new book looks like a great formation study!

We are so pleased to announce that on June 20 we will launch Saint Francis and the Power of Possessions, the second book in our Saint Francis of Assisi Spiritual Practices series.

Saint Francis and the Power of Possessions offers a four-week format designed for both individual and group use. There are six readings for each week, followed by prayers of intention and spiritual practice suggestions to guide you as you follow Christ in the Way of Saint Francis. Each week, or chapter, focuses on a Possessions theme:

- Week 1: The Problem with Stuff
- Week 2: The Problem with Money
- Week 3: Reimagining a Vow of Poverty
- Week 4: Living Poor for Others

The Saint Francis of Assisi Spiritual Practices series utilizes the texts and translations of New City's groundbreaking and now complete Francis of Assisi: Early Documents Series to offer readers of all backgrounds inspiring, encouraging, and challenging entry points to the essential issues of a Christian life in the twenty-first century. The series is edited by Jon M. Sweeney, the author of many books about Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, and early Franciscan spirituality.

- Brendan Shaeffer, OEF

Below are a couple of book reviews on books I've recently been reading that may be useful to some in our order.

Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza

"This leading feminist theologian offers an exciting introduction to a most creative field of biblical interpretation which the author says is best understood as the search for Divine Wisdom. She offers a review of the art that is not merely informative, but liberating. Challenging mainstream hermeneutic strategies she empowers us to think critically and enter creatively into a life-transforming journey."

Review by Orbis Books.

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande

Atul Gawande explores the marvels of modern medicine and how those same marvels can sometimes hinder the ultimate goal which is "not a good death, but a good life – all the way to the end." It's a new way of looking at this one life we are given, and how we must question the way we relate to our aging family and community members as we ourselves move toward death.

Review by Kyra Blank

- Stephan Gerhardt, OEF

Habitually Speaking: A Few More Words on Habits

What do you wear habitually? What do you wear habitually as a Franciscan?

My answer has been, when the two questions are joined:

My San Damiano Cross which I received at Profession 23 years ago. I wear it whenever I go into the world. It was what I was told was THE basic habit of the Order – although that began to change not long after that.

Being an Ecumenical Order, we certainly need to make room for Individual expression based upon our varying liturgical experience. But what emerged for some – as good and as true as it is – has not been a reflection of what I understand St. Francis chose (or was given?): a simple tunic of unbleached, undyed wool.

For me, blue jeans and a simple cotton shirt fit in with those I served as a pastor. In fact that garb fits in with those with whom I now worship. But what does stand out is my San Damiano Cross which sometimes still elicits questions and comments (mostly from new folks), often giving me a chance to tell the story.

What we wear habitually – our habit – makes sense to either blend in with the people we serve and/or set us apart (as my SD cross does in a small way) giving us a chance to tell our story – our good news. Brown robes, which evolved over the centuries for many Franciscans, are certainly great ways to do this. It was what set apart the Franciscans I knew while at seminary in St. Louis.

But even among some, there is variety. The Franciscan Sisters of Baltimore have a retreat house in exurban Maryland called Aesling. My beloved Spiritual Director there, Sr. Cecilia O' Brien, and the others there wore a habit consisting of a white blouse and a (Irish!) green skirt.

Habits? Yes. But true to our ecumenical charism, I celebrate the variety of habits which we as the OEF wear from brown robes to blue jeans (and beyond).

-James Schwarzlose, OEF

The Sacraments

Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi

I once spoke to my friend, an old squirrel, about the Sacraments—he got so excited.

And ran into a hollow in his tree and came back holding some acorns, an owl feather, and a ribbon he found.



And I just smiled and said, "Yes, dear, you understand:"

Everything imparts His grace."



**Shared by Crystal Minugh-Brutscher, n/OEF*

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 Thanksgiving/Advent Issue are being accepted immediately.
 The deadline is October 15, 2023*



Nothing is More Practical



Nothing is more practical than
 finding God, than
 falling in Love
 in a quite absolute, final way.
 What you are in love with,
 what seizes your imagination, will affect
 everything.
 It will decide
 what will get you out of bed in the
 morning,
 what you do with your evenings,
 how you spend your weekends,
 what you read, whom you know,

what breaks your heart,
 and what amazes you with joy and
 gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love,
 and it will decide everything.

Amen.



*By Joseph Whelan, S.J., former provincial of the
 Maryland Province and American assistant to the
 Superior General (sometimes mistakenly attributed
 to Pedro Arrupe, S.J.)*

Submitted by Br. Juniper, OEF