

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

What do you think of when you hear the word "**fraternity**?" Many of us immediately think of the Franciscan group we meet with once or twice a month. We think of the group where we were professed; the group that nourishes our vocation; the group that prays together and prays for us and our intentions.

Of course, fraternity exists on more than the local level, and during the months of July and August, I was especially privileged to experience fraternity on all levels.

At the beginning of July, 680 Secular Franciscans gathered in St. Louis, Missouri, for the **19th Quinquennial Congress**. This event was an example of **fraternity at every level**. We had four (International) Presidency Councilors in attendance, including General Minister Tibor Kauser. Naturally, our National Executive Council, many regional Ministers and local fraternity members from all over the United States were also present.

One of the most beautiful examples of **fraternity at the Q** came as many of us joined in the preparation of the "**blessing bags**" that were later given out to the poor. Many of you participated in contributing some of the thousands of items that went into those bags. Whether you were there or not, *you formed part of the Q fraternity!*

During the Q we shared wonderful talks by our keynoter, Fr. Dan Horan, OFM, and many other speakers. There were also breakout sessions presented by different members of local fraternities. We were able to choose two sessions to attend, one on Friday and one on Saturday. This was an opportunity to meet other Secular Franciscans who have similar interests or **experience ideas** we had never known would be of interest to us. Each day we also met in "**small fraternities**" for discussion. Good communication and sharing were encouraged, just as we try to accomplish in our own local fraternities. The Holy Spirit was definitely present during the Q, and we were reminded that **the Franciscan spirit is alive all over this country and beyond!**

An excellent example of **fraternity at the regional level** was our **Regional retreat**. At the end of July, many of us gathered at Mt. Alvernia. The spirit of fraternity was on fire! The theme for this year's retreat was the **Year of Mercy** and the planning was truly collaborative. The team **listened to suggestions** made by last year's retreatants. We experienced talks, prayer, quiet time, Lectio Divina, and "holy yoga." We **lifted our hearts** and **laid down our "burdens"** as we prayed for God's mercy at a special Holy Hour. The enthusiasm and feeling of fraternity was palpable throughout the weekend.

Retreatants also shared "**Did you know**" items about their local fraternities. These are included in this issue and we hope that they help you to feel a part of what is going on throughout our region.

However, the bedrock of the Secular Franciscan Order is found in our **Local fraternities**. My experience of local fraternity is always uplifting both at my own local gatherings and at the gatherings of fraternities where I have made visitations and presided at elections this summer and all year long.

As I travel around our region, read reports submitted by local Ministers and talk to local fraternity members, I have found that most fraternities follow the **four pillars of fraternity life** at each gathering:

- **We pray together** using a form of **liturgical prayer**, either the Mass or the Liturgy of the Hours. Here we are united with one another and with the **whole Church** in praise, thanksgiving and petition. **Franciscans always reach out to embrace others**. This is why praying with the whole church is so important to us.
- **Ongoing formation**: The **focus** of ongoing formation usually has to do with our **Franciscan charism**. The **purpose** of ongoing formation is to **strengthen our vocation** through learning, discussion and collaboration
- **Announcements**: Business is conducted by the fraternity council, leaving the general membership free to bond, pray and learn; thereby making the most of our time together.
- **Social time**: What better way to spend time bonding with family than by having good conversation, coffee and a nice piece of cake!

As your Regional Executive council members and I visit various local fraternities around the region for **elections and visitations**, we are always touched by the **wonderful hospitality** offered by each group. The spirit we find in these groups strengthens and animates us. Local fraternities are anxious to meet the challenges they face and the special challenges we put before them.

Lastly, in August, I was invited, as your Regional Minister, by the **National Ecumenical Interfaith Committee** to attend the Gathering of **Ecumenical Franciscans** held in Aston, PA. Were you aware that our Franciscan family is not only a Roman Catholic Family? **The Society of St. Francis** is the organization of lay Franciscans in the **Anglican/Episcopal** church. The **Organization of Ecumenical Franciscans** is made up of those from **many Christian religions** who wish to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis. In the 24 hours we were together, we found how much alike we are through our **common charism**.

Each day I am learning more about what it is to be a Franciscan, and that **fraternity** makes us who we are. At every level, fraternity life helps us to **open our hearts** to the Holy Spirit; **empty ourselves** of our own pride, attachments, biases and agendas; **listen to one another**; **collaborate** and work as a team; and **trust in God and each other**. Although **living in fraternity** means that **we don't always get our own way**, we can be **joyful Franciscans** because our brothers and sisters strengthen us so that we are **free to love God and bring Jesus to others**.

Please continue to pray for your Regional Executive Council. We are praying for you!

Many Blessings,



Diane F. Menditto, OFS
Minister of Our Lady of the Angels Region

P.S. Ministers and interested observers: Please mark your calendars. A very special moment in Fraternity Life is coming up in November. On Saturday, November 11th, our region will have our **Pastoral and Fraternal Visitation**. We are already preparing to welcome our visitors, Mary Stronach, OFS, and Fr. Christopher Panagopolous, TOR. Many more details will follow.