

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Last week as our region hosted the National Elective Chapter, you were all very much on my mind. I want to thank each and every one of you for your prayers and good wishes for the success of the Chapter and our efforts to welcome the National Fraternity to the New Jersey-New York area.

Those of you who were instrumental in helping everything to run smoothly during the ten days we were in Clinton have a good idea of what went on in the planning and execution of our task. However, since there are many who could not be with us, I would like to give you an idea of why I am so grateful for what was accomplished with God's help.

As you probably know, Ron Pihokker was the chair of the **Host Committee** which met a number of times throughout the last year. He also handled two huge jobs: site selection and registration. Ron has a gift with an Excel spread sheet, believe me! Representatives from most of our fraternities attended the planning meetings and were kind enough to volunteer for various important assignments.

The main committees were: **Transportation/Airport Welcome** (Chair-Frank Catalano – with Maddi Romaine); **Welcome/Hotel Greeters**-(Chair-Pat Franz); **Half-Day Away**-(Chair-Kate Asselin); **Liturgy**-(Chair-Joe Wilson); **Welcome Bags**-(Chairs-Italia Testa & Rosanna Ayers); **Entertainment**-(Chair-Joe Lee); **Financial**: Richard Spana; **Notes and lists**: Kate Asselin.

However, telling you the names of the committees cannot begin to describe the team effort, personal sacrifice and generosity that went into this week-long event. Our brothers and sisters of the **Transportation Committee/Airport Welcome Committee** spent hours at the airport holding beautiful signs provided by the Manhattan Cluster. They greeted, gathered and guided those who arrived at the various terminals, either to the curb to be picked up by our drivers who made many trips from the airport to Clinton, or to the van pick-up point. This was not just one day—people were coming and going all week and at all hours! Flights have a way of getting delayed, schedules have to be changed—our crew responded with Franciscan generosity, and everyone arrived safely at the hotel. Later in the week the travelers were whisked off to the airport in time to check in for their departing flights. Some of the nicest comments I heard during the week were about the Transportation/Greeter Committee. All the regional ministers and National Executive Council were very appreciative of the caring and concern shown for their well-being.

Then there were the **On-site Welcome/Hotel Greeters**. Those smiling faces from many different fraternities all around the region made our guests feel right at home. They were waiting in the lobby to smooth the way so that when people arrived they knew exactly what to do. A number of those on this committee spent many hours all week sitting at the registration tables giving out folders and welcome bags. And, when that part of the job was done, they remained there to answer questions and even to get in their cars to go to the store for folks who needed something important or to Staples to make copies. What would we have done without them? Oh, and by the way, our treasurer, Richard Spana, was also present for the entire week, many days he was stationed at that same table to take care of any of the financial transactions that had to be carried out.

Oh, the **Welcome Bags**! At 9:30 AM on the morning before the National Executive Council arrived, this committee appeared at the hotel, their cars filled with the snacks, notebooks, pens (VERY popular), water bottles, hand sanitizer and the beautiful welcome bags—all provided by

St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity and the Central Jersey Cluster. Within an hour and a half, the bags were filled and lined up in the meeting room like soldiers waiting to be deployed. Everyone loved those bags; I kept hearing it all week.

If you got to go to Clinton, you saw that we had a **Chapel** set up in a small ballroom. Thanks to the **Liturgy Committee**, we had everything we needed to make it a REAL chapel—even a tabernacle (thanks, Sam!) with the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Just imagine hauling vestments, altar linens, altar vessels, a monstrance, wine, hosts, crosses, a full-size keyboard and amplifier, icons of Francis and Clare, plants, flowers, vases, pumpkins and missalettes. An SUV and a pick-up truck were involved in that two-day operation! The Chapel décor was topped off by the banner designed and quilted by Mary-Frances Reavey which served as the logo of the entire Chapter. The musicians and the music were wonderful too. At the opening Mass we were blessed to have as main celebrant Msgr. William Benwell who is Vicar of the Diocese of Metuchen and Spiritual Assistant to St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity.

Then there was the **Half-day Away**. I am sure that the National Fraternity is still talking about it. First of all, our prayers were answered, and we were given the gift of a perfect autumn day. The plan was to take everyone to Liberty State Park, then to the Cathedral Basilica in Newark for Mass with Bishop Manuel Cruz and then back to Clinton for dinner at a wonderful restaurant. Imagining the planning and logistics that went into this trip still boggles my mind. Fifty-four on the bus (plus a few in cars) had to be organized and kept together on a schedule so that they could visit Ellis Island, take the Ferry around the Statue of Liberty and be back at the bus in two hours so we could be at the Cathedral on time for Mass. Some of our members served as “shepherds” so that no one got lost. Some even went on the boat with our guests. Everyone was given a sheet with committee cell phone numbers “just in case.” Result: everyone was back at the bus on time, and we arrived at the Cathedral for a beautiful Mass. Some of you joined us there—it was wonderful to see our region so well represented.

On the last evening, everyone was treated to a wonderful surprise. Joe Lee from Korean Martyrs Fraternity in Manhattan arranged for us to be entertained by Korean dancers and drummers. What a beautiful presentation that was. Everyone appreciated the costumes and the culture. That was followed by an excellent jazz duo and some excellent snacks.

My heart is very full as I write about all the effort that was put into making the National Elective Chapter a huge success. I have purposely not mentioned individual names except for the committee chairs because so many of you helped us that I was sure I would leave someone out. Just know that you have my gratitude and prayers. You really outdid yourselves!

This year’s Chapter theme was “**Be the Joyful Face of Christ to All.**” By working as one family in Francis, we accomplished what might have seemed to some to be impossible, and we certainly brought joy to everyone. All I can say is thank you and God bless every one of you!

Blessings,

Diane

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Regional Minister