

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

The Lord is Risen! Alleluia!

I am very happy to report that our Convivenza 2011 celebrating our 15th anniversary of establishment as Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity was a wonderful success. Our speakers, Mr. Richard Morton, SFO, former National Minister and Chairman of the Regionalization Committee of NAFRA which steered the process of the development of the Regional Fraternities in our country and Mary Stronach, SFO, National co-chair of Public Relations for NAFRA and Regional Formation Director of the Kateri Tekakwitha Regional Fraternity both did outstanding jobs in reflecting on the background and the hopes of Regionalization and on planning for the future of the Secular Franciscan Order. Files containing the powerpoint presentations and handouts of both speakers have been posted on our website for your reflection and use. We are very grateful for the wonderful welcome extended to us by Sacred Heart Fraternity in Yonkers under the leadership of Regional Councilor and Fraternity Minister Sheila Touhy, SFO. The beautiful facility and the marvelous refreshments prepared for us made the day very special indeed. Fr. Andrew Nowak, OFM Cap., Sacred Heart Fraternity Spiritual Assistant, celebrated a wonderful Mass for us in the beautiful Sacred Heart Church making the day a rich and prayerful experience. The sharing and dialogue among the participants was lively and the day left us with a better understanding of our roots as a region and challenged us to think seriously about where we are going as a Regional Fraternity, something all of us need to continue to consider as individual fraternities that make up our Regional Fraternity. I am deeply grateful to all who had a hand in making the day a success and to all who participated.

And this leads me to my next point, which is more difficult to raise. I was disappointed that more of our brothers and sisters from our Regional Fraternity were not with us for this once a year “Family Reunion.” The annual Convivenza has been our yearly “Chapter of Mats”—not a business meeting or meeting of the regional council but intended as a gathering of all the members of our Regional Fraternity for fellowship, prayer and on-going formation. Each year, your Regional Executive Council has gone to great effort to bring you stimulating and interesting speakers and worked to make all participants welcome and have a good and worthwhile experience. Although, as we learned from the presentations at the Convivenza, we are the smallest Region by geographic area, we are one of the largest in number of fraternities and number of professed members. Having over forty fraternities and over 1000 professed members literally squeezed into our metropolitan area in a geographic region which is only 60 miles by 70 miles, it is very frustrating to your Regional Executive Council that so few attend. Other Regions have overnight gatherings and go to great expense to be together both in terms of overnight accommodations as well as the cost of travel—some for hundreds of miles and hours of driving in order to be with their brothers and sisters in community. We learned, for example, that the Queen of Peace Regional Fraternity in Minnesota of which Richard Morton, SFO is a part, extends some 365,500 square miles which is larger than the combined areas of Germany and Spain (at 333,247 square miles) while we here in New York and northern New Jersey cover only 4,500 square miles! Yet,

Queen of Peace Region has only 29 fraternities and 557 members in that vast area while we have over 40 fraternities and over 1,000 members. Sadly, of that 1,000 strong membership jammed into this small geographic area served by excellent public transportation and excellent highways, less than 70 of our brothers and sisters were able to be present for our recent Convivenza--our family reunion. We need to do better. We need to have every fraternity represented at an event such as this and represented by the **majority** of each fraternity's membership. We should not have 70 but 700 people present for such an event and I know we can do better. But we all need to value our fraternity more and being present with one another in community needs to become a priority. Oh, I am sure that in any particular instance, there will be valid reasons for some people not to be able to attend any given event. People all have necessary family or work commitments or may be infirm and not able to travel and I am not speaking to those folks. But to have so few people and fraternities represented from so large a potential of members is a sign of apathy and a lack of commitment to our Regional Fraternity and to our larger Franciscan family. Supporting our regional fraternity is **every** professed member's responsibility. We can not be content to live in the comfortable cocoon of our own local fraternity and not participate in the larger Franciscan family. We need each and every member to consider their personal commitment and responsibility to their brothers and sisters and to their own on-going formation. Please, let's make a real effort to do better in the future. It is your responsibility and part of your promise as a professed Secular Franciscan to participate in the life of the greater fraternity. I know you will be glad for the experience of sharing with your sisters and brothers from throughout the region if you do participate. I look forward to seeing you all at Convivenza 2012.

May God bless you and your families and fraternities with Easter joy.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Pihokker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "P".

Ron Pihokker, SFO
Regional Minister