

Communio

That All May Be One

Newsletter of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region
Secular Franciscan Order

Winter 2020

Opening Ourselves to Wherever God Wants to Take Us



Sculpture, St. Francis of Assisi, at the Eremo (Hermitage) Santa Maria di Val di Sasso, above the village of Valleremita, Marches Region, Italy.
(Photo by Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS)

“We see in Francis that we are looking for God too high up and too far away. God is inside creation. ...

“Francis becomes one with God through the difficult process of becoming one with himself and all of creation, and he does it the only way he knows how: through following in the footsteps of Jesus and saying yes to everything the Lord has already effected.

“And Francis does not set out on his own initiative; the initiative is God’s. It is God who leads him among lepers, God who speaks to him through God’s Word. And Francis goes where God leads, which is where and when we begin to get nervous, to hold back, to rationalize and question.

“The tension of our lives derives mainly from holding back the movement of our hearts, from restraining our spontaneous inclination to go all the way and to follow the Lord wherever he leads us.”

Murray Bodo, OFM,

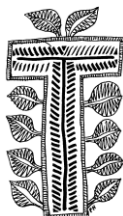
The Way of St. Francis: The Challenge of Franciscan Spirituality for Everyone, pp. 89–90

The Four Pillars of Secular Franciscan Life

Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate



Editor's Journal: Extracting Guidance for the New Year



If your fraternity does the Extraction of St. Francis's Spirit each year, I hope you've found it as amazing as I have.

In case some of you haven't participated in this, let me explain. The extraction can be done any way the fraternity likes. I'll use my fraternity as an example. Prior to the extraction, I make a small folder (it can fit in a breviary) for each member of the fraternity. Each folder has the name of a Franciscan saint or blessed, his or her feast day, and the name of a member of the fraternity. Inside, each folder is the name of a deceased member and room to write or paste the other things we draw.

At the extraction, the cards are set out on a table (but so that we can't see who's on each folder). Baskets or some other containers are prepared: one each for virtues such as patience, generosity, joy, and so on; sayings of St. Francis; and Scripture passages.

At the conclusion of our Epiphany Extraction Service, we each draw a folder and one item from each basket. Now we have a saint or blessed as a patron and example, a fraternity member (and deceased member) to pray for, and a virtue, words of Francis and Scripture to internalize and practice throughout the year.

The word "extraction" means "to draw out," and we believe that the Holy Spirit guides us to draw exactly what we need, even if we don't at first understand why we need it.

My fraternity does this on the Saturday closest to the feast of the Epiphany. As one of our members, Diane Salkewicz, OFS, pointed out one year, the Magi, warned in dream not to return to Herod, "departed for their country by another way" (Mt 2:12). Likewise, what we draw in the extraction can help us to go through the new year differently from in the old year.

This year, I drew St. John Joseph of the Cross, an Italian friar who exemplified obedience. And guess what: The virtue I drew was the Spirit of Obedience. This is not about submission, which is being forced to do something. Obedience is a choice. Yes, sometimes I have to grow into that choice.

Francis's words to me are: "Blessed are those who die in penance, for they shall be in the kingdom of heaven" ("The Earlier Rule," XXI:7, *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume I, The Saint*, p. 78). Penance, of course is metanoia, which is change, and I am making some changes in my life.

And then there are the words of Scripture that I drew: "That you should put away the old self of your former life, ... and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

I pray that all of us, this year and every year, find inspiration for new life and growth.

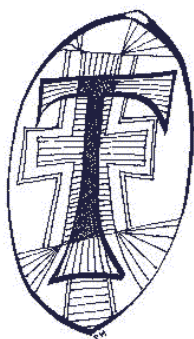
Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS, is Communio editor. She is a member of St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity in Hendersonville, N.C., and spiritual assistant to Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg Fraternity in Blairsville, Ga.

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Communio

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the United States.**



Minister's Message

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the Lord give you peace in this new year of 2020!

Lately, I have been meditating on the "Peace Prayer," attributed to St. Francis, and have been paying special attention to the first line: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

How do I go about being that instrument, so that the other actions in the prayer come naturally?

For me, it's to stay in the here and the now, not worrying about the future or regretting the past. A constant learning and reminding of God's holy will for me and knowing that he's in charge. My Franciscan vocation and you, my sisters and brothers, have assisted me with accepting this. Thank you.

As each of you go about your daily lives, may you reflect God's love and care in all aspects of his kingdom.

Let us remember in prayer the Holy Father, Pope Francis's, intention for January: "We pray that Christians, followers of other religions, and all people of good will may promote peace and justice in the world. Amen."

Peace and all good,
DorothyAnn

DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS, Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region's minister, is a member of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Fraternity, Hilton Head Island, S.C.

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation: Franciscan Peace and our Unconscious Bias — Part Two

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

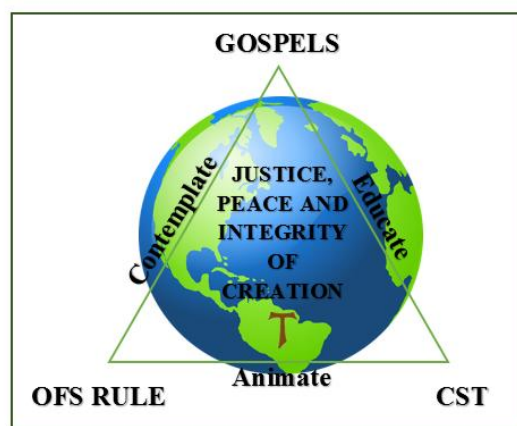
Just to refresh our memories: **A bias is a preference for or against an individual or group that interferes with or influences fair judgment.** Bias can be positive or negative, conscious or unconscious.

Unconscious biases are the assumptions, stereotypes, and unintentional actions (positive or negative) we make toward others, based on identity labels like skin color, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, or ability. Because our unconscious associations are stored in our subconscious, we may act on our biases without even realizing it.

One thing I have noticed in my many years of working on peace and social justice issues is that people who work for the cause of justice and peace tend to think they have it all together and do not have biases or prejudices. This is the "I have a friend who is ..." syndrome: You can't be biased about color because you have a friend who is a different color. Or, you can't be biased

SPIRITUALITY

FORMATION



FRATERNITY

APOSTOLATE

about age because you have friends who are at the other end of your age spectrum.

You get the point. Just because we are aware of many of the social justice issues in the world, we may be blind to the biases inside ourselves.

I know I need to constantly check in with myself to make sure I am not making decisions based on my biases. Yes, I have biases; everyone has biases. If you are human and breathing, then you qualify. Part of the “checking in” process is asking ourselves some tough questions: Am I overlooking certain information in favor of only the information that supports my point of view? Do I tend to socialize with certain people over others because it’s comfortable or convenient? Or, because I don’t want to be challenged in any way?

Yes, it is more comfortable and more convenient to do what you have always done because you know the lay of the land. There is no risk. But, there is also no growth. One of the things I love about Jesus’s encounters is that he challenged people to change and grow, never allowing them to remain the same, stuck in their negative biases.

For example, the man sitting at the pool of Bethesda for 38 years (Jn 5:1–7). When Jesus confronted him about getting well, the man had nothing but excuses: there is no one to help him into the pool; or, other people get there ahead of him. Jesus challenged his negativity bias by asking him a simple question: “Do you really want to get well?”

Then there was the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:7). Again, Jesus began the encounter with a simple request: “Give me a drink.” Because Jesus broke protocol, it began a whole conversation that challenged and changed the woman.

When we are confronted with, or questioned about, our biases, we need to stop and consider what we have been thinking: that subconscious image that has been in our head for so long.

Unconscious biases are difficult — not impossible — to change. They are not permanent. We can engage in specific behaviors that disrupt those unconscious biases.

First and foremost, as Franciscans we are called to pray — pray for right judgment and right action. Before you make a judgment or a decision based on that subconscious image in your head, take a Franciscan pause and ask yourself a few questions:

- Am I making this decision based on fact or on a preconceived idea I have in my mind?
- Have I truly thought this decision through based on prayer and wise counsel?
- Am I judging this person or circumstance based on fact or trait?

Taking a mindful pause to think about what you are really thinking about can help make your judgments and decisions more just and Gospel-focused.

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, a member of St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity in Aiken, S.C., is the JPIC Animator for the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region, the National JPIC Animator, and a member of the International Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.



Regional Formation Director

Dear Brothers and Sisters

I hope you are experiencing a new Franciscan Beginning, with the past Advent season and the start of 2020.

I know we are all saddened at losing the friars who have been spiritual assistants to some of our fraternities.

I ask you to take the challenge of exploring the calling to be a spiritual assistant. Why? Because, as Father Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, president-in-turn, Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, has reminded us: “We are responsible for our own Order.”

Please contact our regional spiritual assistant, Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS, at

tshaverofs@gmail.com for information on our spiritual assistant training program.

Spring Formation Workshops have been scheduled (see box at right). The presenters will be myself and Joanita Nellenbach, OFS.

Remember, you can attend any of the workshops. You do not have to attend the one for your area. Workshops are open to Regional Executive Council members, formation directors and teams, fraternity council members, spiritual assistants, or any professed member representing you fraternity. It would be wonderful if we could have representation from all fraternities in the region.

The Formation Zoom Rooms have restarted. Carolyn Townes, OFS, regional Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation animator, is finishing up our series on Catholic Social Teaching.

The next meeting will be Tuesday, Feb 18, at 7:00 p.m. EST.

In March, we will change to the third Wednesday of the month. The few responses I received have stated that Wednesday is a better night. This is not written in stone. If a majority prefer a different night or week of the month, please contact me.

I ask your assistance: I need to know, as your regional formation director, how I can be more helpful to you and your fraternities. Please call, text, or email with your ideas for topics you'd like to see covered in Zoom Rooms and other ways you would like me to provide information or assistance. My job is to be a servant leader to ALL of you in the region. Any professed member can contact me with ideas.

In addition, using "The 'Nuts and Bolts' of Being a Council" for newly elected fraternity councils as a base, I have developed a program to meet with local council members, even if they have been on councils before, on Zoom to assist you in your servant leadership. This is not just for new councils; it's also for councils who need a refresher.

I like to make a few book recommendations for ongoing formation and for personal growth. A book that could be a good companion during Lent is *Let Go: Seven Stumbling Blocks to Christian Discipleship* by Father Casey Cole, OFM, a newly ordained priest, whose first post has been here at the University of Georgia's Catholic Center. The book can be ordered from Franciscan Media.

Father Casey is also doing a book tour of parishes, which would be a great call to attract young professionals to your fraternity. If you're interested in him coming to your parish, contact him at caseofm@ccatuga.org. He's also very active on YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. He will be doing a Lenten retreat using his new book through Instagram. Twitter Handle: @caseyofm;

2020 Formation Workshops

Area 1

May 2

Hosted by Immaculate Conception
Fraternity, Jonesboro Ga.

Area 2

May 16

Hosted by St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity,
Aiken, S.C.

Area 3

April 18

Hosted by Padre Pio Fraternity,
Raleigh, N.C.

Location Addresses: In the
Registration Materials

All Workshop Times

8:30 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Registration/Continental Breakfast

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Presentations & Lunch Break

Topics

St. Clare for Our Times

Tools for Planning Ongoing Formation
Lesson Plans

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

YouTube Channel; Breaking In the Habit; Instagram: #breakinginthehabit.

For this year's Annual Regional Gathering, Aug. 7–9, our guest speaker will be Father Daniel P. Horan, OFM. You may want to start using one or more of his books for ongoing formation. Here are some suggestions: *Spirit and Life: A Franciscan Guide for Spiritual Reflection*; *Dating God: Live and Love in the way of St. Francis*; *God is Not Fair, and Other Reasons for Gratitude*; *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton: A New Look at the Spiritual Inspiration of His Life, Thought, and Writing*; and *The Last Words of Jesus*.

The last book mentioned was used at the 2019 Lenten Retreat in Anderson, S.C., hosted by Mother Cabrini, Emerging Community, with support from Our Lady of Good Counsel Fraternity.

Looking forward to hearing from you. I welcome your input and terrific ideas. I always learn so much from my brothers and sister.

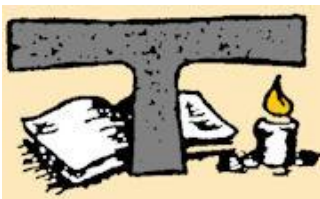
Phone call or text 706-338-2402

Email ambrosedianne6@gmail.com

Peace and Love

Dianne

Dianne Ambrose, OFS, is the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis regional formation director. She is a member of San Damiano Fraternity in Athens, Ga.



Regional Spiritual Assistant: A Reflection on the Feast of the Epiphany

By Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS

I recently had the opportunity to give the homily for the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. As I prepared the homily, I found myself reflecting on the message of “light” and illumination.

I share below what I wrote; it wasn't exactly what was given at the three Masses at which I preached. Early in my formation as a deacon one of my mentors told me, “Spontaneity is no excuse for lack of preparation.” Thus, I always write a homily, but often deviate from what is written, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide me.

Epiphany. How often do we hear the use of this word or phrase, “He had an epiphany!”? Many times we have seen in the comics or cartoons where one of the characters has a thought and the image of a light bulb is shown above their head. These are just secular images of an epiphany.

But today we celebrate *the* Epiphany, when the light of a star led the Wise Men to the crib of the true light, Jesus Christ. While the Epiphany of the Lord is included as a celebration during Christmastime, perhaps each of us needs to look at it more regularly than once a year and ask ourselves: How recently have I had an Epiphany of the Lord, a moment of enlightenment of just how God works through Jesus Christ in my life.

In our first reading, we hear the prophet's message from God, a promise of enlightenment and fulfillment:

“Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth,
and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you the LORD shines,

and over you appears his glory” (Is 60:1–2)
“Then you shall be radiant at what you see,
your heart shall throb and overflow,” (Is 60:5)

While God, through the prophet Isaiah, is speaking to the people of Israel held in captivity in Assyria, this message is for us as well. We have been blessed by God to experience his holy Son, Jesus Christ, as our savior and redeemer.

We too have received the Light of Christ! At baptism we were given a lit candle whose flame was taken from the Easter Paschal candle, which represents Jesus Christ. As the candle was passed from the minister or godparent to the parent, the words in the rite were spoken, “...this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (or she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May they keep the flame of faith burning brightly in their heart.”

We parents are called to help our children keep this flame of faith, which was given to us to keep burning brightly. That was our responsibility until they reached maturity, at which point it becomes their responsibility to keep that flame burning brightly.

As we reflect then on the sacrament of baptism and today’s feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, certainly the concept of light is shared but also an expectation that the light will lead us to the Christ.

While the Wise Men followed the light, their journey took a detour to get information from Herod about where the child was. Unfortunately, Herod had different plans than giving homage to the Christ Child. His intent was diabolical and would have used the Wise Men to carry out his evil jealousy. Had the Wise Men followed Herod’s instructions what evil might have befallen the Child? But God, through a dream, counseled the Wise Men to avoid Herod on their journey home.

I think of that often, as I follow the light of Christ, people and “things” come into my life and try to divert my attention or “tempt” me to let my light dim to a flicker or a smolder. Sin enters my life and it can cause me to do something that might not be in concert with the Gospel. Those moments of temptation are when I most need the light of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes I see the light and succeed; sometimes I don’t see it and I fail. Perhaps those moments are like the virgins who went out to greet the bridegroom and didn’t fill their lamps with sufficient fuel to keep the flames alive (Mt 25:1–13).

We keep our lamps that hold the flame of faith lit by the great gift of grace. We replenish the “lamp oil” with the reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist, supplemented by reading and reflecting on the Scriptures and by prayer. Recently I challenged my Facebook friends to read the Scriptures:

“2020 Challenge — Pick any book in the New Testament and start reading one chapter a day listening to the words being spoken to you in your mind and heart as you read. Continue this throughout the year and if you started in the middle of the New Testament, like Romans 1, when you get to the end of Revelation, go back to the Gospel of Matthew (which would actually be a good starting point since this is the liturgical year of Matthew) and continue to where you started. God bless you and may the Holy Spirit enlighten you.”

In their “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” the Second Vatican Council fathers quoted St. Jerome: “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (Diatessaron, 1,18).

When I dismiss you from Mass, I use the words, “Go announce the Gospel of the Lord.” That means to proclaim the Gospel by our actions and lives. Anything less is unacceptable. To live it, we need to know it.

Let this be our year of enlightenment.

My brothers and sisters of St. Francis, we are called to live the Gospel, “going from gospel to

life and life to the gospel” (OFS Rule, Art. 4).

I challenge you as well.

Deacon Thomas Shaver, OFS, Brother and Sisters of St. Francis Region’s spiritual assistant, is a member of Stigmata of St. Francis Fraternity in Johns Creek, Ga. He serves at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Marietta, Ga.

Newly Professed — Congratulations!

St. Thomas More Fraternity, Wilmington, N.C., joyfully celebrated the profession of Janet Monica Glatt, OFS, and Bud Greg Tascone, OFS, on Jan. 4 at the 5 p.m. Mass at St. Mark Catholic Church in Wilmington.

Father Greg Spencer, pastor, presided. After Mass, the fraternity and guests gathered in the parish hall for a delicious catered dinner. In the tradition of Cana the best was served last: two Tau-shaped cakes, beautifully decorated and personalized, one for each newly professed, from the kitchen of master baker Doreen Tascone. It was a true love feast made possible by all the efforts of our dedicated Mary Hellmann, OFS, formation director.



St. Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity, Charlotte, N.C., had a wonderful day, Jan. 11, with the Profession of David Papandrea, OFS. From left: Father Stephen Hoyt, pastor, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Lenoir, N.C.; David Papandrea, OFS; Kathleen Zuckerman, OFS, formation director; and Earl Glenn, OFS, minister.

Secular Franciscan Websites

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region: www.bssfsfo.org

National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States (NAFRA)

www.SecularFranciscansUSA.org

Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (CIOFS)

International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order: www.ciofs.org

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS REGION CALENDAR
SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS (V) AND ELECTIONS (E)
February through December 2020**

* confirmed V+ follow-up visit (observers in parentheses)

Date	Fraternity/Group & Location	V Fraternal/Pastoral Visitors E Presider/Ecclesial Witness
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Feb. 15	Bl. John Duns Scotus, Garden City, SC	E DorothyAnn Rowland/ Joanita Nellenbach
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Feb. 21–22: Regional Executive Council Meeting, Spartanburg, S.C.

March 7	Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Hilton Head Island, SC	E Betti Longinotti/Ken Wessling
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March 8	Channel of Peace, Chattanooga, TN	E Sharon Loiselle/Faye Martin
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March 8	Franciscan Family of Greensboro, Greensboro, NC	E Ellen Ferrone/Dcn. Tom Shaver
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April 18: Area 3 Formation Workshop, Raleigh, N.C.

May 2: Area 1 Formation Workshop, Jonesboro, Ga.

May 11–12	Fraternity of St. Clare, Winston-Salem, NC	V /Dcn. Tom Shaver
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May 16: Area 2 Formation Workshop, Aiken, S.C.

June 19–20	Fraternity of Brother Francis, Newton, NC	V
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June 27	St. Michael the Archangel, Spartanburg, SC	E /Joanita Nellenbach
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June 28	St. Joseph Cupertino, Bessemer, AL	E /Willie Guadalupe
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Aug. 7–9, Annual Regional Gathering, Ridgecrest, N.C.

Guest Speaker: Father Daniel Horan, OFM

Sept. 8–9	St. Anthony of Padua, Fayetteville, NC	V
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Sept. 11–12	Franciscan Martyrs of Siroki Brijeg, Blairsville, GA	V /Willie Guadalupe
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Sept. 12	Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, Burlington, NC	E
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Sept. 12	St. Clare of Assisi, Aiken, SC	E
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Nov. 15	St. Thomas More, Wilmington, NC	E
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Dec. 10*	Five Georgia Martyrs, St. Simons Island, GA	E
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Francis's Encounters with Muslims in the Holy Land

By Bret Thoman, OFS

I recently went to Israel on a pilgrimage, and I was set to return later January. My



St. John Church above Acre, Israel's southern sea wall.

experiences in the Holy Land have led me to consider Francis and reflect on his experience there, how he related to people of different faiths.

2019 marked the eighth centenary of the legendary encounter between St. Francis and the leader of the Muslim army, Sultan Malek al-Kamil. It took place sometime between spring and summer in 1219.

He arrived in Acre, the port city on the Mediterranean coast. This was the same city where St. Paul landed after departing from Tyre (Acts 21:7). In the 13th century, it served as the capital of the Latin Crusader Kingdom. To this day, tourists in the old

city can still visit the quarters of the Franks, Venetians, Pisans, and Genoans, recalling their past military and trading presence.

Today the city is referred to as Akko by both Jews and Muslims. It is mostly Jewish, as it lies just to the north of Israel's third largest city, Haifa. But it is only 12 miles to the southern border of Lebanon, and is roughly one-third Arabic.

There is only one Catholic church in Akko today. Dedicated to St. John and under the Custody of the Franciscans of the Holy Land, it serves the small Latin Christian community that still survives. This is quite common throughout the Holy Land. The very land where Christ was conceived, born, lived, taught, worked miracles, died, and was resurrected has a very tiny Christian presence.

As such, it is a strange place for pilgrims to visit. On the one hand, it is the most powerful pilgrimage a Christian can undertake: there is no similar experience than walking in the very footsteps of our Lord. On the other hand, it is unusual in that there are very few Christians who live near these places.

St. Francis experienced something similar.

Many people (and all Franciscans) are aware of Francis's encounter with the sultan. While the Crusades were raging, Francis set out calmly with Brother Illuminato into Saracen (Muslim) territory under the blazing desert sun. Armed with nothing but his tunic, cross, and the word of



Bret (second from right) with his family, and a Franciscan friar and nuns, as they and the Muslim proprietors of the restaurant share a meal.

God, Francis, perhaps miraculously, was received by the sultan.

Though modern interpretations sometimes refer to this encounter as an early example of dialogue, the 13th century sources indicate that Francis hoped to convert the sultan to Christianity. If the sultan would accept baptism, Francis hoped, it would bring about peace between Christians and Muslims. He knew the alternative would be his martyrdom. But he desired that, too.

This event is captured in Giotto's 13th century fresco cycle in the Upper Basilica of St. Francis. Francis challenged the Islamic scholars and priests of the sultan's court to a trial by fire. They, together with Francis and Illuminato, would walk across the hot coals and, according to Francis, the adherents of the true religion would be unharmed.

Instead, according to the ancient account, before they put themselves to the test, the scholars and priests recoiled and fled.

Though this account may appear to present Francis harshly, how could he, in fact, react in any other way? His life was so fully formed by his faith in the Incarnation and cross of Christ that Francis knew of no other way to relate to the sultan, or anyone else for that matter. He could only relate as a Christian.

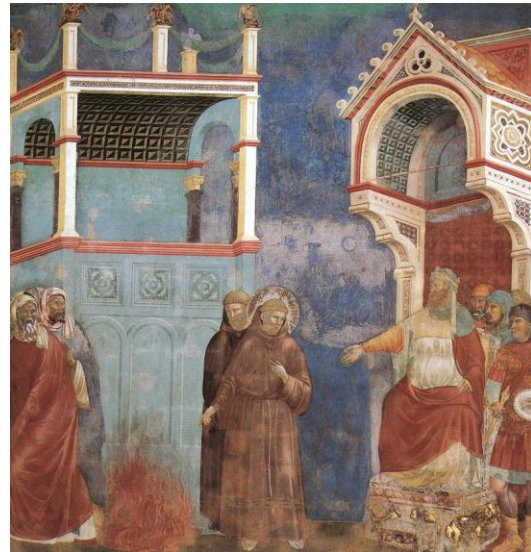
Yet, neither of his longings was fulfilled: The sultan did not convert, and Francis was not martyred. Instead, something completely unexpected, miraculous even, transpired. The leader of the Muslim religion responded by turning over administration of the Christian sites in his territory to Francis. This was extraordinary, in that safe passage for Christians on pilgrimage in the Holy Land was one of the primary reasons the Crusades had been begun in the first place.

(To this day, most Christian churches in the Holy Land are still administered by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. The roles of the friars are threefold: to maintain the sanctuaries, offer hospitality to pilgrims, and serve the local Christian community.)

The following year, 1220, a centenary we commemorate this year, Francis's followers were met with martyrdom. Known as the Protomartyrs, and led by Father Berard of Carbio, these young friars denounced Islam and preached staunchly in Muslim lands in Spain and Morocco. After being imprisoned and exiled three times, they returned once again. This time, however, they were beheaded by the exasperated king himself. We celebrated their feast day on Jan. 16.

Surely both events were on Francis's mind when he wrote the Earlier Rule in 1221. Perhaps his encounter with the sultan, plus the ordeal of the protomartyrs led to him soften his outlook:

"As for the brothers who go [to the Province of the Holy Land], they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all, the Son, the Redeemer and Savior, and be baptized and become Christians; because no one can enter the kingdom of God without being reborn of



"St. Francis Before the Sultan" (Trial by Fire). Giotto fresco cycle in Upper Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, Italy.

water and the Holy Spirit” (“The Earlier Rule,” 1209/10–1221, Chapter XVI: 5–8. *Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume I, The Saint*, p. 74).

**Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis
Regional Executive Council Roster**

Minister: DorothyAnn Rowland, OFS

Vice Minister: Carmen Madero, OFS

Secretary: Nora Wessling, OFS

Treasurer: Ken Brooke, OFS

Formation Director: Dianne Ambrose, OFS

Spiritual Assistant:
Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS

Area Councilors

Area 1

David Cruz-Urbe, OFS; Sharon Loiselle, OFS

AL: Bessemer;

GA: Athens, Blairsville, Conyers, Duluth, Jonesboro;

TN: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

Area 2

Betti Pettinati-Longinotti, OFS; Christine Lukesh, OFS

GA: Augusta, St. Simons Island;

NC: Asheville, Charlotte, Hendersonville, Newton;

SC: Aiken, Charleston, Columbia, Greenville,
Hilton Head Island, Spartanburg

Area 3

Ellen Ferrone, OFS; Martha Roman, OFS

NC: Burlington, Elizabeth City, Fayetteville, Greensboro,
Morehead City, Raleigh, Wilmington, Winston Salem;

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Area 3: Bob Sabisch, OFS

Fraternity prayer coordinators submit prayer requests.

In this brief text, we see a sort of compromise. The friars are to allow themselves to be “subject” to the Saracens, or, in other words, humble and meek. Nonetheless, they are to proclaim the word of God when appropriate. This appears to be prudent middle ground, and a wise approach for establishing and maintaining long term relations. In this, we see Scripture: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pt 3:15–16).

In my brief sojourns in Israel, I did have some interactions with Muslims and Jews, on the airplane, taxicab, hotel reception desk, or dinner table. And I can say that — in the spirit of Francis and Scripture — I did not engage in “arguments” or “disputes” with anyone.

Yet, I did have some opportunities to talk about being a Franciscan. I showed my Tau cross and talked about being a Secular Franciscan. And, in turn, I listened to the way they live their faith.

Somehow this seems the most appropriate way to interact with non-Christians today. And Francis’s reflections, though at a distance of eight centuries, still prove relevant.

Bret Thoman, OFS, is director of St. Francis Pilgrimages and author of St. Francis of Assisi: Passion, Poverty, and the Man who transformed the Catholic Church and St. Clare of Assisi: Light from the Cloister. He and his wife, Katia, OFS, and their three children, live in Loreto, Italy.