



Minister's Message

"What's in your cart?"

by Hazel Martin, OFS, Regional Minister

Years ago, when I was working for a Catholic Parish as a Faith Formation Director, I was preparing a 'talk' for an RCIA Holy Week Retreat. My topic was Palm Sunday. As I was forming my presentation, I came across an interesting insight. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey that no one else had ridden on before. It's important to recognize that the animal was a donkey rather than a horse. In Jesus' time, and before, horses were considered to be symbols of wealth and power. On the other hand, donkeys were considered to be symbols of peace and humility.

I believe the owner of that donkey had no idea that this animal in his stable would have a prominent place in Christian history. It can be said that any stable tends to hold content of value. This owner, though he likely did not know who the disciples were, gave the donkey to the disciples when they asked him for it. Jesus knew what was needed and told the disciples to select that particular donkey. The owner was willing to help out and give up the animal. Turns out, the donkey was a valuable gift, that is a gift that became a means for Jesus' message to be carried to the people in Jerusalem.

In this 21st century, we frequently utilize computers. Using our

imagination, we could make a connection between our "computer cart" and the "stable" in the Palm Sunday story. Both can be viewed to hold content of value. Things in our "cart" are there to be retrieved in order for us to use, or to convey an idea/point, or provide a service. Things in our "cart" generally reflect what we hold as worthwhile within ourselves; our values, our ideas, our talents and our attitudes.

"What is in your cart" that Jesus wants you to select for use in building up the kingdom of God and for serving our Region? Jesus knows our gifts, our God-given talents, and I feel that he wants us to be willing to put them to use.

Lord Jesus, our brother, help us to have 20/20 vision.

Inspire us to open our eyes, our minds and our hearts to the needs of others.

As Franciscan servant leaders, help us to be steadfast in giving loving service to our

neighbor in our day and age as Jesus was in his day and age.
Amen.

Spring 2020, Issue 30
May 2020

In This Issue

Ministers Message	P.1
Spiritual Assistant	P.2
Formation	P.4
JPIC	p.5

Francis and Social Distancing

by Fr. David Couturier OFM Cap.

Fr. David Couturier is executive director of the Franciscan Institute at Saint Bonaventure University. The following is excerpted from a longer article he is drafting.

One of the most challenging disciplines being imposed upon us across the globe because of this pandemic is the practice of “social distancing.”

This goes against so much of our culture and psyche. We want to be close. We want to touch. We want to embrace and hug one another. Being in someone’s embrace when life is frightening holds us together. It contains our anxiety and controls our fears. Social distancing thrusts us back into a world of uncertainty, where we must depend on the ambiguity of trust.

Distance reminds us of the void of loneliness and the dangers of being solitary. The challenge we face in this time of pandemic is how to deal creatively, contemplatively, and constructively with distance. How do we turn distance into “an ardent absence,” as the late Franciscan theologian Thadee Matura might call it, rather than an “ambiguous void?”

In his youth, distance was a tool of fear, anxiety, and disdain for Francis of Assisi. It was a weapon of social categorization, a way to designate those who were worthy and unworthy and those who were included and excluded. He could not go within two

miles of a leper hospice without demonstrating his disgust and disdain for bodies disabled by leprosy. To make progress in the spiritual life, Francis had to undergo a wholesale revision of the meaning of distance itself.

Francis learned to refashion the spiritual meaning of distance not by plunging into incessant activity, as we might do in our frenetic modern world, but by going away for a time into contemplation. It was away in silence, in the caves near Assisi, that Francis began to understand the political and social mechanisms of distancing and came to understand how a true and “ardent absence” brings peace to the soul that yearns well and deeply.

Psychology and spirituality, at their best, provide alternative pathways for the fear and insecurity erupting in this time of social distancing. As Franciscans, we look to our primary value propositions to guide our thinking and our feeling. I would name the following as healthy provocations:

- The goodness of God. Central to the Franciscan worldview is the proposition that God is good, all good, supremely good, all the time and to everyone. God has created a lush and abundant world that, despite its occasional spasms of virulence and illness, manages to survive and thrive. God’s original assessment of the world at the beginning of creation must remain our standard view of how the world operates, “it is good.”

- The fraternity of all creation. One of the most beautiful beliefs in our Franciscan intellectual tradition is the appreciation for the interdependence of all creatures in one global family under the goodness and graciousness of God. A pandemic brings this global unity into a stark and sudden relief for many, as this virus circulates the globe at an accelerated rate. We recognize how truly united we are and how dependent we are on one another across every artificial boundary we have created. We must strengthen the ties that bind us and appreciate the insights, discoveries, good will and compassion that circulate the globe even more profoundly than any virus can.

- Solidarity. For several years now, Pope Francis has cautioned us against a “global indifference,” a lack of caring and compassion for those far away or distant geographically or culturally from us. A pandemic stretches our compassion and reminds us of the need we have to care for those who are most vulnerable, wherever they may be. Viruses know no borders. Neither should Christian and Franciscan love.

We must do whatever we can, whenever we can, to see that medical and financial aid reaches those who are most desperate for relief. It is natural in a time of immediate social distancing to think only of one’s own. However, Christian love has never been “tribal.” It has never been solely familial or cultural in level or range.

I remember Bishop John Coriveau, former minister general of the Capuchin Order, saying often at international gatherings that “baptismal water is thicker than blood,” meaning that what binds us by faith should be even stronger, more durable and enduring than what holds us together as biological families or even as civic societies.

- The universal dignity of all and its charity. There is an ever-present danger in times of social fear and anxiety to scapegoat or discriminate against others who are different from us. Our physical forms of isolation can easily devolve into moral forms of isolation. The dignity of each and every person as image and likeness of God should translate into a universal respect that extends to concrete forms of charity, care and compassion. We should accelerate our support for organizations that provide international relief. One thinks of the World Health Organization, Caritas International, and, in our own Franciscan context, the efforts of Franciscans International, our NGO at the United Nations.

Our social distancing offers us opportunities to go deeper with one another to express our yearning to be closer and to hold and comfort one another. This moment provides us a chance to express sentiments and feelings that are suppressed in our ordinarily rushed and crowded lives. Now is the time to be physically apart but spiritually connected, appreciative of the deepest bonds we have, in touch with

the integral peace we have with God, with creation, and with one another. It is time to become ever more aware that Jesus is the God of all nearness and He is the Lord of every distance and in Him we live, move, and have our being.

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Worthy to teach others

Let's imagine we are the Scribes and Pharisees in the gospel of St. Mathew, "Do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example." Those who encourage others into new patterns of growth must be examples

We encourage others into new patterns of growth. Jesus was aware that the teachers were teaching correctly, the practices that needed to be observed and lived (the rule) so there can be gospel to life and life to gospel living, the new growth pattern. His concern was this: Were they themselves practicing what they were teaching? Did their words match their actions? Good questions to ask ourselves.

Let's make an honest effort to take to heart the things we are expecting of others. Lets' begin by practicing one of the most important of skills LISTENING. Listen to your own words and practice what you are preaching. Listen to what others say and don't say. Focus on developing the skill of listening. It is as important as speaking. Start by focusing on the intent to understand rather than to respond. By doing that, you'll build trust, earn respect and help to develop others.

You will be worthy to teach others



Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Animation Fraternity Apostolate Highlights

Jesus teaches us the works of mercy and compassion: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and imprisoned, give to the poor and bury the dead. Today, we are called by God to be actively engaged in our communities, commit ourselves to non-violent living and peace-filled interactions, join others in support and advocate for just laws and care for God's creation.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Fraternity in Grand Forks, ND with the assistance of their JPIC Animator, Barbara Langer, OFS, have been animating JPIC in their Fraternity, which is very important to the Franciscan family and the people we serve.

Barbara shares the Franciscan Action Network (FAN) weekly newsletters and other resources and encourages Fraternity members to think and pray about what services to bring to those in most need. The Fraternity has a few charitable works they do on an annual basis to help bring justice and peace to those who are elderly, homeless, and in need of love.

The Saturday before Valentine's Day, the Fraternity makes Valentines with the elderly in a nursing home. They get all the supplies ready (cutting the paper into cards, get stickers that say, "Happy Valentine's Day" and "From Your Friends at St. Anne's"). On the appointed day, Fraternity members gather at the nursing home and help the residents decorate their Valentine cards for St.

Michael's Grade School students and staff and enjoy home-made cookies. Fraternity members also bring Valentine cards for the residents of St. Anne's. During Christmas, students and staff from St. Michael's School make Christmas cards for the residents of St. Anne's. This gives the residents something to give back to those who give to them, is an activity of fun for all of them and contributes to their well-being.

Another activity the Fraternity does at Christmas time is collect gifts for the homeless at their local shelter bringing items suggested by the Director of the Mission. In the summer, they provide home-made cookies and ice cream for the homeless at an evening meal. The Fraternity also helps serve the meals. They receive comments like, "Hey this is great, we don't get ice cream, except when you come" are frequently heard. With the abundance of cookies, they bring to share, they usually have enough left over for another meal. The Fraternity also collects prayer items and meditation books for use at the Mission throughout the year. All their efforts seem to be really appreciated as they try to connect with the homeless.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Fraternity is primarily of elderly people that can't do a whole lot of big physical activities, but they do pray a lot for different needs and make an effort to do what they can for the environment such as recycling and encouraging good use of ways to take care

of God's creation.

In this time of chaos and uncertainty, members are praying for the end of the Coronavirus, healing for those who have contracted it, eternal rest for those who have died from it and consolation for their families. They are doing what they can for others by phoning and contacting their Fraternity members and encouraging them. They are praying too, that God will change the hearts of all people to look to Him and believe and trust in Him just as in the Old Testament, when He chastised the people with plagues, etc. when they wouldn't listen to Him.

In living and sharing the Franciscan life, we rely on the inspiration from the Holy Spirit, through the gifts bestowed in fraternity to be Christ healing, Christ consoling, and Christ always aware of the needs of people, life and creation. Through prayer, advocacy, education, reaching out to those in need and those oppressed we are being obedient to the One who calls us to these good deeds. Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity. ("Gaudium et Spes," #78)



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TRACINGS

Regional Newsletter ISSUE 30 | Spring May 2020

If you have anything to put in the Tracings. Please send it to Alan at alanweierofs@gmail.com
Thank you.