



NetworkNews

Spring 2008

Published by Franciscans *Network*

Volume 1

IN THIS ISSUE:

PAGE 1

A networking parish

PAGE 2

Climate change and the poor, by John Quigley, OFM

PAGE 3

Murray Bodo, OFM, reflects on the spirituality of St. Francis

PAGE 4

An update on our Muslim-Christian dialogue

In the spirit of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, Franciscans Network supports Franciscans and other men and women who work to promote and protect human rights throughout the world.

St. Monica-St. George Parish: Networking in the Spirit of Francis

Pat Brockman, OSU

To step into a network is to step into a relationship. In the worldwide Franciscan family, bonds of love, commitment, and possibility interweave as we pursue the gospel together.

The parishioners of Saint Monica-Saint George Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, participate very actively in *Franciscans Network*. The parish, staffed by the Franciscan Friars of St. John the Baptist Province, has a history of welcoming people and taking on new challenges. Each year the whole parish enters into a tithing process, suggesting which local and international needs to support with a percentage of the parish's income. Last year, the parish included *Franciscans Network* as a major recipient of its assistance. This year the Pastoral Council has chosen Brother Rodrigo Péret, OFM, of Brazil, long-time friend and board member of *Franciscans Network*, to receive a portion of the tithe.

Brother Rodrigo has ministered for years among the landless poor. As a consequence of Brazil's colonial heritage, vast tracts of unused land are owned by the wealthy, while the majority of the people struggle to survive. Due to recent changes in the law, landless people may receive grants of a small portion of such unused land for a period of time, but the system provides little hope of their establishing the permanent settlements needed for long term economic support. Brother Rodrigo helps empower the people in their quest for justice by training lawyers, who in turn provide legal help for these people. Because of their work with Brother Rodrigo, the lawyers represent the landless with greater sensitivity to their spiritual needs, as well as

with a deeper understanding of their human rights.

Teacher Shirley Bihr, a member of St. Monica-Saint George parish, has been part of this story for over ten years now. She introduced Brother Rodrigo and the plight of Brazil's landless poor to her junior high students at St. John the Baptist school in Harrison, Ohio, as a way to make the reality of the Church's social justice mission come alive. Her students have responded enthusiastically.



Peg Niehaus

Beau Ingle forged a strong bond with young Weverton and with many others from the settlement of Flávia Nunes during *Franciscans Network's* pilgrimage to Brazil in 2005. Beau is a former student of Shirley Bihr, a member of St. Monica-St. George Parish.

Over the years, they have built a strong relationship with their counterparts in several settlements in Brazil, through sharing letters and photos, and even undertaking a remarkable pilgrimage to visit their camps in Brazil. They have involved their parents and other parishioners at their church as well.

That's what networks do: they connect people who are reaching out to learn and to receive, as well as to give! *Franciscans Network* continues to

(continued on page three)

“The impacts of climate change are being felt in developing countries, and even more so in the most vulnerable areas. Before we were winning, now we are losing—because the rains have changed.”

—Stephen Waweru, acting director of Caritas Nyeri, Kenya

The Cry of the Poor Calls Us to Care for the Earth

John Quigley, OFM

In January 2008, Caritas Internationalis established a new “Climate Change” desk within the CI Delegation in Geneva, Switzerland to actively participate in ongoing discussions—with in the United Nations and other international organizations—about the risks posed by climate changes, especially in regard to the poorest and most vulnerable. As an example, the ongoing conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan, driven by food shortages caused by increased drought, can be attributed to changes in climate.

Changing climates, now agreed upon by most scientists, governments, and institutions worldwide as a proven fact, are immediately affecting the poorest of the poor, who happen to live in some of the regions that are most susceptible to flash floods, tsunamis, drought, torrential rain, and other hydro-meteorological disasters that directly result from the warming of our planet. Two years ago only half of the international disasters were connected to climate change. In 2007, all but one of the emergency appeals run by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs were climate-related.

Caritas Internationalis, responding to a call from various member organizations, established a taskforce in 2003, led by Caritas Oceania, to address issues of environmental justice as it relates to Caritas’ humanitarian work. In 2005, Caritas Oceania produced a discussion paper as a springboard for debate within the CI network, stressing the importance of good governance, global cooperation, and transparency and accountability at all levels. The paper was published under the title *Guidelines on Environmental Justice* and it led to the resolution of the CI General Assembly in June 2007 to identify climate change as a priority for Caritas Internationalis’ future work plan.

As their international advocacy coordinator, I now work with Caritas to increase climate change awareness, focusing on the suffering of the poor who are the first to be



touched by its random violence. I shall be working closely with our partners in Brazil, especially with Brother Rodrigo Péret who has been my guide in this matter for years.

Although I am no longer working with

Franciscans International, I wish them well. I am very grateful for the training and experience that has helped me to take on this significant job with Caritas International, the Church’s largest humanitarian agency in the world.

We and other humanitarian organizations are hearing from the poorest people with whom we work that something is seriously changing around them. The rains do not come as they did in the past; when they do come they are stronger than ever before. They last too

long sometimes, too long to plant and harvest a crop. People are migrating, which is the way humanity has adapted for millennia to the normal climate changes that are an integral part of nature’s rhythms. But now the migration causes greater problems

What is Caritas?

Caritas Internationalis is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organizations working to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed, in over 200 countries and territories. Caritas works without regard to creed, race, gender, or ethnicity, and is one of the world’s largest humanitarian networks.

Caritas provides a beacon of hope for tens of millions of women, men and children in times of hardship and contributes to the development of social justice in times of peace. Caritas’ mandate includes integral development, emergency relief, advocacy, peace building, respect for human rights and support for proper stewardship of the planet’s environment and resources.

Caritas believes that the weak and oppressed are not objects of pity, but agents of change leading the struggle to eradicate dehumanizing poverty, unacceptable living and working conditions, and unjust social, political, economic and cultural structures.

What makes Caritas unique is its ongoing presence in communities, before, during and after crisis situations. Important, too, is that being part of civil society and incorporating the perspective of the poor, Caritas can continuously adapt its strategies to an ever changing environment.

Caritas fights poverty, exclusion, intolerance and discrimination. More importantly, it empowers people to participate fully in all matters affecting their lives, and it advocates on their behalf at national and international forums.

Caritas promotes partnership: local autonomy is paramount in ensuring effective teamwork for the good of all. By pooling expertise and resources, Caritas is able to identify issues at the grassroots, analyze them at national and international levels, and then take action locally, regionally and globally.

—www.caritas.org

because people are confronted by national borders that were not there thousands of years ago during climate-related migrations. There are new and more resilient diseases: a new strain of the dengue fever surfaced two years ago in the Ravenna area of Italy because its new climate is perfect for this mosquito's adapted living pattern. Around the world many stories have surfaced that seem isolated as one time disasters, like hurricane Katrina in the USA, but we are seeing a pattern of magnitude and frequency that did not exist twenty-five years ago. Nature can and does adjust, but scientists now tell us that we are quickly approaching a tipping point beyond which nature can not repair the damage done. The planet will undoubtedly survive, but it will be a different planet. Human life may very well be seriously compromised or even extinguished.

Again, the poor are our teachers. They are telling us that something is wrong. They are being hit by the disaster before we are awake. ■



Jenny Kroner

John Quigley is a Franciscan friar—an artist, preacher and justice advocate who is known in Cincinnati for his work in the 1970's with the New Jerusalem Community and then as justice

and peace coordinator with the Franciscan friars of St. John Baptist province (1981-88). He currently lives in Geneva Switzerland and is the International Advocacy Coordinator of Caritas Internationalis.

St. Monica-St. George

(continued from page one)

offer new opportunities to its members. In 2007, St. Monica-St. George served as one of the host sites for a dialogue series for Muslims and Christians learning about one another's traditions. On one memorable evening at the parish, Fr. Murray Bodo, OFM, writer and poet, drew those gathered into the very heart of Francis as he met with the Sultan of Egypt in 1219, during the Fifth Crusade. Both Francis and the Sultan were struggling to overcome the horrors brought on by the Crusades and to bring peace between Christians and Muslims. What a networking meeting that must have been! ■

Pat Brockman is an Ursuline sister who ministers in areas of dreams, retreats and community spirituality. She has been associated with the Franciscans through a lifetime of her Ursuline connections, New Jerusalem Community, and Franciscans Network.

The Mystical St. Francis

Murray Bodo, OFM

There is something archetypal about St. Francis, something that rises from deep within us when we meet him, something we find in Assisi itself. It walks the streets unseen, it comes invisibly around corners wearing a fiery cloak that fans the air like the wings of seraphs hot with God.

What is this something, and why do so many feel it rising within them as they pass through the gates of a medieval mountain town whose very name is a variation of the old Italian word "ascesi," which means, "I have risen"? Dante says it is Francis himself, who, like the sun, rose upon the earth and was still a mere dawn when we began to feel the warmth and light his rising brought us:

Therefore, whoever seeks to name
this place
should not say, "Assisi." That would not
do it.

Rather say, "The Rising," to name what
happened there.

For the sun wasn't long in its rising
when he began to warm and lighten
the earth
with the comfort of his great power.

(*Paradiso, Canto XI*)

St. Bonaventure develops this theme of light and says that what really rises in us is the realization that

God's grace has been revealed
in his servant Francis
to all who are truly humble,
truly friends of holy poverty...

He was a little poor one, contrite of heart
but God looked kindly upon him...
and raised him up as a light for believers
so that by bearing witness to the light
he might prepare in the hearts of the
faithful
a way of light and peace for the Lord.

(*Major Life of St. Francis, Prologue*)

This is mystical, symbolic language, and yet we glimpse its truth, we feel its pull upon the heart, even if we don't fully understand all that is being said. Dante and St.

Bonaventure are both writing in the power of medieval mystical theology, which may seem far removed from us moderns in our post-Freudian, atomic age, us moderns who have split the atom and the psyche and don't

know how to put them back together. Is there, then, a way of saying what Dante and Bonaventure say so profoundly that will define more clearly for us what it is that rises in us when we come face to face with the mystical, be it in a place or a person?

Perhaps we can begin with that very word, "mystical," which has its roots in the word "mystery," whose oldest Greek root means to close the lips or eyes. What is it that we see or hear when we do close our lips or eyes? In that profound gesture is contained the beginning of an understanding (modern or ancient, or medieval), of that seemingly dark center out of which we experience that rising in the soul which we cannot name. And, yes, I've used another word here, "soul," that some moderns shudder at, preferring "psyche," which incidentally means soul in Greek, but which in English has a rather cold, clinical sound to it with all kinds of dark, frightening overtones. Is not "soul" a better word for that mystery within, which we keep running from by refusing it anything other than a clinical, scientifically analyzable reality? Carl Jung says:

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, in order to avoid facing their own souls. They will practice Indian yoga and all its exercises, observe a strict regimen of diet, learn theosophy by heart, or mechanically repeat mystic texts from the literature of the whole world—all because they cannot get on with themselves and have not the slightest faith that anything useful could ever come out of their own souls. Thus the soul has gradually been turned into a Nazareth from which nothing good can come.

But something good does come from Nazareth, and so I close my eyes and lips and pray in that secret place called soul, waiting for him to come who is Son, and

(continued on page four)

Bringing Muslims and Christians Together

Bill Lonneman

"The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims..."

Thus begins the section in *Nostra Aetate* that deals with Islam. This seminal document from Vatican II changed the way the Church viewed other world religions. However, in our post-9-11 world, many challenges remain to understanding and "esteeming" Muslims. For Christians, and especially followers of Francis, the current times also present many opportunities. Franciscans *Network* is committed to do its part in this important work.

In 2007 our network organized a speaking series featuring Elias D. Mallon, SA. Father Elias spoke to more than a thousand persons over the course of a week in the Cincinnati area. The FN Board decided to initiate an ongoing dialogue as a follow-up to this visit, and so we began to build relations with the Muslim community. That fall, our first dialogue series was organized, hosted by St. Monica-St. George Church and the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati. Sixty people, Muslim and Christian, participated and gave the series high marks for both its content and process. Many new relationships were formed and, indeed, mutual esteem did increase.

Before the fall series ended, I had already teamed up with two of the participants, Roula Allouch and Faith Kemper, to look toward 2008. They both live in Northern Kentucky, where I was raised, and we all wanted to see a Muslim-Christian dialogue begin there. It so happened that the Education Commission at Mother of God Church in Covington had hosted an introductory talk on Islam during the fall and was open to seeing something more happen on the subject. We proposed an idea for a spring dialogue series in Northern Kentucky and they accepted. The five-part series will happen in April. (See box.)

Throughout this process, I've learned that many Christians are genuinely interested in gaining a better appreciation of Islam and that Muslims are equally interested in learning more about Christians. I've seen the amazement on faces as Muslims learned about Francis of Assisi from Fr. Murray Bodo and Christians heard of the reverence that Muslims have for Jesus and Mary. I've witnessed the gratitude of a young Muslim man who shook my hand and expressed his thanks for the dialogue, which he said was the best thing he'd been a part of since coming to this country nine years ago. I've heard the quiet, emotion-laden voice of an older Christian woman who shared with our dialogue group that she'd been waiting many years for something like this to happen in the Church.

I'll close for now with these words from Pope John Paul II spoken in an address to Muslims in Morocco on August 19, 1985: "We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to perfection.... God asks that we should listen to His voice." ■

Bill Lonneman is an assistant professor of nursing at the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, Ohio, and serves as advancement coordinator for Franciscans Network.

The Mystical St. Francis

(continued from page three)

for him to raise me up who is Father. And therein begins all mystical experience: in waiting for God, in the freedom of his love, to come and love me, instead of doing frantically all sorts of things to "make" him love me. I keep trying to prove I'm good by doing, giving, thereby preempting God, not letting him come to me first, not receiving. And I do this because I am afraid he really does not love me as the beautiful work of his own loins, but only if I win his love.

The so-called Peace Prayer of St. Francis has the line, "It is in giving that we receive," but that can only be prayed well by one who knows that it is only "in receiving that we give." For God has first loved us, and given himself to us, and that is what we learn from the mystics like St. Francis, who are brave enough to close their eyes and lips and listen. Then what begins to rise in us is that which has been lifted up by him who comes in love, and what he lifts up is the heart itself, rising from within to meet the Love descending to embrace it.

This is what I've learned in Assisi, in the unhurried land of Umbria, from St. Francis, who in summer gave of himself in compassion to others on the road, but in winter returned to the mountaintop and entered the cave of the closed eyes and lips, and waited. Had he remained on the road, his giving would only have been to prove to himself that he was as good as his good works proclaimed he was. Had he remained always in the cave, blind and silent, he would only have proved his own self-absorption instead of that meeting with him who raises up and draws out the heart to follow him down the mountain where he summers in those his embrace has led us to embrace. ■

Murray Bodo continues to write full time and spends three months of the year working in Rome and Assisi for Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs. His latest books are *Mystics: Ten Who Show Us the Ways of God* and *Song of the Sparrow: New Poems and Meditations*.

Please join us for

Islam and Christianity: A dialogue series in 5 parts

■ Introduction to Islam

Sunday April 6
2 pm

■ Dialogue series

Tuesdays April 8, 15, 22, 29
7 pm

Mother of God Church
119 W. 6th Street, Covington KY

www.franciscansnetwork.org



Franciscans Network

4820 Glenway Avenue
Cincinnati OH 45238
Tel/Fax 513.541.7740
franciscansnetwork@cinci.rr.com

Board of Trustees:

Murray Bodo, OFM
Alan J. Hartman, SFO
Rodrigo Péret, OFM
John Quigley, OFM

Executive Officers:

President: Alan J. Hartman, SFO
Vice President: Joseph Cistone
Secretary: Peg H. Niehaus
Treasurer: Diane H. Laake

Advancement Coordinators:

Bill and Julie Lonneman

Graphic design and illustration:

Julie Lonneman
jlonneman@cinci.rr.com