



Conventual Franciscan Life

A publication of the Province of Our Lady of Consolation

Issue #2 2018

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Friars talk about the value of listening

How can we turn down the noise in our lives and listen more effectively to others, and to God? (Symposium begins on page 4)

What makes a parish Franciscan?

How the friars in India took St. Francis' words to heart in their response to the devastating floods in Kerala

Prayer, consolation, and encouragement



Peace & All Good Things

A Note From From Fr. John

Dear Friends,

“Go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed...” In the abandoned, nearly ruined Church of San Damiano, Francis of Assisi listened as the image of Christ crucified spoke to him. As he absorbed the message, he felt a mysterious change in himself.



As Conventual Franciscans, we try to follow the example of the *Little Poor Man* in the work of rebuilding, especially in service to the poor and those on the margins of society. But also we work to imitate St. Francis in listening to God’s voice — in prayer, in the liturgy, in our communities, and in the words of all those we meet.

In these pages you will see how we strive to do both. We thank you for supporting the work of our Friars here and in other countries. And we invite you to listen closely for God’s voice speaking to your heart, and continue to do your part in the work of rebuilding.

May God grant you peace and all good things.

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FranciscanS.org

Please keep our men in formation and all those discerning a Franciscan vocation in prayer.



On July 12th, five men were invested with the Conventual Franciscan habit. Eight men entered the postulancy program on July 9th.

**Do you know
someone
who make a
great Friar?
Interested in
learning about
a Conventual
Franciscan
Vocation?**

Check out **FranciscanS.org**



Poverty. Chastity. Obedience.

And the rain kept falling...

August 16, 2018. It was another rainy morning at Kolbe Ashram in Kerala, India. For weeks the Conventual Friars of the St. Maximilian Kolbe Province watched torrential rainfall pound the area and tried to help their neighbors as the rising water destroyed homes and lives all around them.

Mass had ended and the Friars who teach or study at the Major Seminary located at the Ashram left the Chapel to begin their day. At that moment, a truck drove up with nearly 30 people crammed inside, the driver thinking the Ashram might be a relief camp.

Young women with babies in their arms and holding children by their hands; elderly women clutching a few possessions – all of them soaked and shivering, with the same look of anguish on their faces. The Friars invited them in and gladly shared their breakfast with them.

But they weren't prepared for what happened next. The lorries kept coming, bringing more and more people. Over the following 48 hours, nearly 800 people filled the Ashram. Guest rooms were converted into hospital rooms for those who needed special care – the sick, the elderly, and pregnant



The flood was no ordinary monsoon. By the time it began to subside much of the state of Kerala, stretching along the southwest coast of India, was destroyed. As seen above, students from the Minor Seminary worked tirelessly to assist families clean what was left of their homes.

women. Everyone else shared whatever space they could find in the Friars' rooms, classrooms, the auditorium, recreation areas, and hallways.

The rain kept falling and the flood waters continued to rise, and the Ashram became an island, the entire surroundings now submerged. The roads were impassable, so the food supply became a concern. Even so, the Friars continued to cook for their guests. To bolster their confidence in handling the perilous conditions, the Friars lifted their eyes to the top of the Ashram and the statue of Jesus with His hands extended.

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What Makes a Parish Franciscan? *Fr. Martin Day OFM Conv.*



Fr. Martin is the pastor at St. Benedict Parish in Terre Haute, Indiana. Above he greets parishioners after Mass.

Recently St. Benedict Parish in Terre Haute, Indiana, went through a process of updating its mission statement. In it we committed ourselves to pursuing a Franciscan Spirituality in the context of our parish life. We are still discovering what that entails—the spirituality is so rich!—but a number of things have been identified as resonating with that basic commitment. Because St. Ben's has been staffed by friars of the Conventual Franciscan Order, so many of these efforts have been around for a while, but maybe never brought into focus as flowing out of our parish's Franciscan character.

The first thing mentioned when the parish council was presented with the question, "What makes a parish Franciscan?" was care for the poor. That's embodied in a

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With all the distractions of today's world, sometimes we don't listen to one another. We 'listen' to money or 'listen' to technology. We get lost in FaceBook or other internet pursuits. We asked our Friars: How do you take time to listen? What advice would you give on how to turn down the noise and listen more effectively to others, and more importantly, to God? Here are some of their replies. For the complete symposium, please visit www.franciscansUSA.org

Br. Bob Roddy OFM Conv.



"Wage peace by listening."
Fr. Greg Boyle SJ

Many years ago, National Public Radio produced a compilation of the stories that they had collected over the years for their "StoryCorps" project; the book was titled, *Listening As An Act of Love*. The title of that book revealed a profound truth, a truth that I see as one of the foundation stones of my life as a Friar in ministry.

When people share their stories in spiritual direction, or even in an informal conversation, there is a sacredness to that moment. Some of those stories reveal deep scars, painful, and sometimes even shameful moments for the person sharing. Yet, I can feel the profound sense of relief and unburdening as their narrative comes forth. I hope and I pray that I can convey to them my genuine desire to hear their story, because I consider it a privilege to serve as a listener in this moment. The grace

of being heard by another in an open and non-judgmental fashion hopefully mirrors to that person that they are precious and treasured in God's eyes. The physical differences that I see in the person as their story unfolds resembles the relief that one feels when finishing an arduous physical task. They sit a little taller, their faces seem more relaxed than before, and their spirits are definitely lifted.

Listening, truly is an act of love.

Fr. Wayne Hellmann OFM Conv.

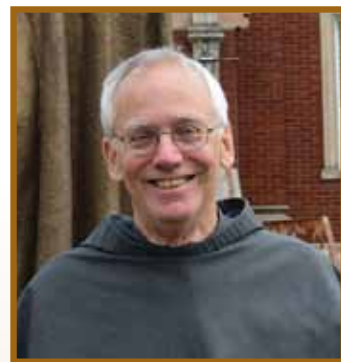
Listen to Beauty

The starting point for a Franciscan spiritual journey is experience of beauty of the world around us. Every stone along the beach and the chirping of a morning bird are the work of the Great Artist. Each created mortal being, from the worm on the ground, together with the sun in the heavens, and new glimpses of the cosmos beyond "speaks itself." In each of them God speaks. His first **Word** spoken in creation invites each of us into their chorus proclaiming beauty, even unto and into Beauty Itself.

The Franciscan spirit understands the deep and immediate connection between God who creates and the uniqueness of each individual created – just the way we are, in our particularity, in each and every uniqueness and difference. This

means each created reality (and we ourselves) is grounded in the freedom of God's unique love for each one of us. Thereby we receive the gift of God's freedom to love us immediately and totally, so that we in turn may love God fully and completely, a freedom to be completed in the great purpose of our life when in God's good time, his love for us and our love for God will be perfected in an intimacy so far beyond us, in an intimacy we yet can not know: "ear has not heard." (Paul in I Corinthians 2:9)

Yet beauty is all around us. When we are present and attentive – when we listen – "*our heart takes wings,*" writes



the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. A heart can fly only when it is silent. A heart filled with noise or torn apart with distraction is deaf to the divine harmony surrounding us. If we cannot hear beauty within and about our own hearts, how can we make our own lives and all our relationships with others something so beautiful that Beauty Itself may speak.

St. Maximilian Kolbe understood this. Even in the horror of a starvation

Listen to One Another and to God

bunker he saw the beauty of his companions around him. He rejoiced to hear the harmony of their voices in song, even unto their last breath. St. Francis of Assisi understood this when, already blind and in his last agony, he composed the Canticle of the Creatures, which he had heard in his heart throughout his life: "Praised be you my Lord, with all your creatures..."

Friar Calin Vidaurri OFM Conv.



It's obvious that our communication with others is quite powerful. We have the power to use it constructively or destructively. Certain words can carry either beautiful thoughts or painful blows. But in our busy lives how does one find time to communicate with God? It seems common to hear that someone is a great speaker; but we don't often hear that someone is a great listener. Has the art of listening been forgotten?

In the world of technology and social media we are confronted with endless distractions. We can lose sight of time, even time we could have spent talking to God. How does listening factor in this communication with God? There

should be a focus on our duty to listen to God's communication to us, as we communicate to him. Although any communication can be powerful, with God the power of communication is greater. And with more powerful communication at stake, more effort in listening is required.

A good way to listen to God is in the silence of our heart. This could be done simply in quiet time with the Lord. Sometimes we are so busy that we can forget to sit somewhere and be attentive to the Lord. Another way we can listen to the Lord is to talk to Him as you would a friend. Don't be afraid of being emotional in prayer. Bring anything and everything to Him, including your brokenness, and see how you feel about these certain matters later in the week. Stay in dialogue with the Lord about them. Maybe you are not used to spending time in silence for a prolonged period of time. If so, try 5-10 minutes each day to talk to God. Don't let yourself feel overwhelmed, and take your time with God.

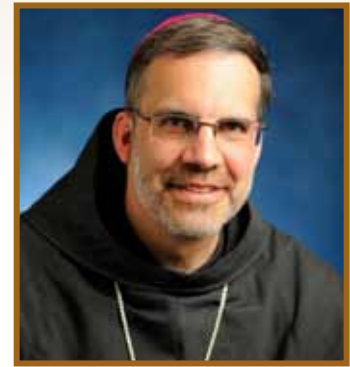
God is always there ready to listen to us. Are we ready to listen to Him too?

Bishop John Stowe OFM Conv. Bishop of Lexington

From the first days of his pontificate, Pope Francis has spoken of a "synodal" Church. His ecumenical interests towards reconciliation with the Eastern Churches were evident. He invoked the model of discernment and decision-making that has been the norm in the east and was once again institutionalized at the Second

Vatican Council. Bringing such an ecclesiastical term into everyday language, the pope very simply said, "a synodal Church is a listening Church."

Indeed, at the beginning of the synod of bishops addressing



marriage and family life, Pope Francis instructed the bishops to "speak boldly, and listen charitably." That is not easy to do simultaneously! I have often wondered, as I view the talking heads on television shouting past each other and lament the total lack of civility in public discourse, what communication might be like if we all heeded that synodal instruction of Pope Francis. We are called to speak vigorously and boldly for the truth as we perceive it, while having the humility to recognize that others—even those with whom I disagree—have something true to contribute.

During a retreat, the leader asked the Friars a very good question: "to whom do you listen?" I think it is good for each of us to periodically do an examination of our sources. By whom are we informed? To whom do we listen? And the harder question, whose voices are we blocking out?

The gospels tell the story of the blind Bartimaeus crying out as Jesus passes by, desperate to be noticed

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Franciscan Parish Life

continued from page 3 pre-eminent way at St. Ben's by the soup kitchen we run 5 days a week. It serves on average 150 meals each day and provides a welcoming atmosphere for the hungry of our area to enjoy a noonday meal. It's a lot of work, but after over 25 years of operation it's still going strong. The parish's commitment to it is firm.

The parish council struggled to find words to describe a second element of a "Franciscan" parish. "Homey" was one suggestion. "Like an old pair of shoes" was another. Relations between the friars and the parishioners are family-like, and relations among parishioners tend that direction too. The fact that the friars live in community gives their ministry a "brotherly" flavor that translates into how parish life is organized. There's a sense of continuity from one friar's ministry to that of his successor, which leads people to feel like they know what to expect when someone new comes to St. Ben's to do ministry.

Because St. Francis is known to be a lover of creation, a Franciscan parish can readily accommodate initiatives on behalf of our brother creatures. A "Blessing of the Animals" takes place around the Feast of St. Francis in many of our parishes. At St. Ben's we have developed a "Creation Care Team" in response to Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si*." The Creation Care Team advocates for reducing our carbon footprint in whatever ways possible—replacing light bulbs, organizing recycling efforts, promoting the use of more environmentally-friendly products—and is the point of contact with larger efforts such as the Catholic Climate Covenant.



St. Benedict Parish celebrated 150 years of parish life in 2015. The parish came under the care of Franciscans in 1872.

One element of Franciscan spirituality that seems to me to be ripe for adoption by a "Franciscan" parish is the element of "repairing my church." Those words were spoken to Francis from the cross at the church of San Damiano early on in his life of conversion. I think that can be used in considering

Francis' last words to his brothers as he lay dying were, "Brothers, let us begin for up to now we have done little."

how a parish might respond to the current clergy sex abuse crisis. Some Catholics really struggle with continuing in the church in the light of the most recent revelations. But there is always that possibility that we can take upon ourselves the task of reform. Rather than walking away and looking for a home elsewhere, we can choose to stay put and commit ourselves to the reform we know the Church will always need. For Franciscans, the Church should be known less as a "perfect society," which was a way of looking at the Church prevalent in the 19th century, and more as "*semper reformanda*," always in the process of reforming itself in the light of the Gospel.

We're just starting to consciously organize ourselves as a Franciscan parish! But then, Francis's last words to his brothers as he lay dying were, "Brothers, let us begin for up to now we have done little." We think we're on to something and trust that the Spirit is at work among us. God knows where it will take us next, but we know it will be good.

Symposium

continued from page 5 and to be healed, but people tried to keep him quiet. Jesus noticed! In our present circumstances, we are learning (too late) the importance of listening to the victims of abuse and harassment, the voices of children separated from their parents, the voices of the impoverished majority of the earth's inhabitants, and hopefully to the voice of the earth itself protesting her exploitation.

Right now, there is a synod on youth and vocations occurring in Rome. Pope Francis was deliberate in insisting that he hear not only from those youth enthused and actively living their faith, but from those who find the Church irrelevant, or who challenge our teachings. True encounters, with Christ and with each other, involve listening. What might we learn by turning down our own volume and truly listening to what an "other" is telling me?

Flood in Kerala



continued from page 3 After several days, the water began to recede and food and other essential supplies reached the Ashram. There was now more food to share. Used, but clean, clothing arrived. Medicine was available for the sick. A generator supplied electricity and the Friars collected rainwater for drinking.

As the waters receded farther, those who had found shelter were able to begin returning to see what was left of their homes. A farewell meeting was held on August 24. Each person left with a relief kit filled with necessary supplies and words of encouragement from the Friars.



Ongoing efforts include providing clean water. The friars have been working with Water with Blessings to obtain up to 1000 water filtration systems (about \$60 each). Jet Airways has agreed to cargo it at only 10% of the usual fees.

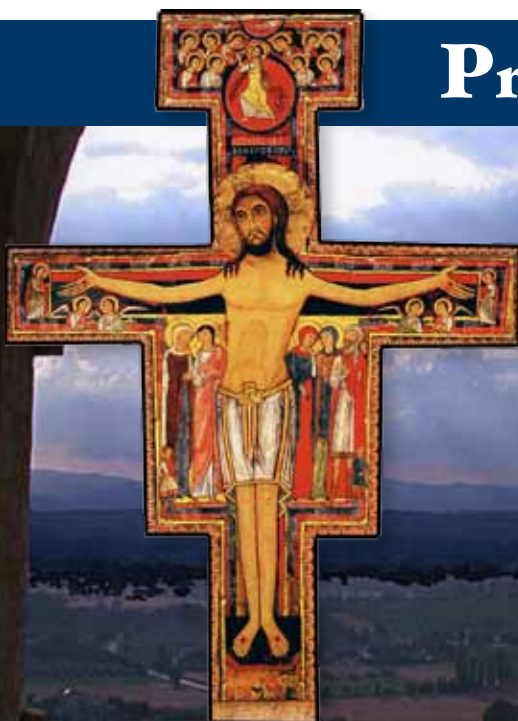
The Friars lifted their eyes to the top of the Ashram and the statue of Jesus with His hands extended to bolster their confidence. After several days, helicopters arrived with some essential supplies.

The same thing happened all across Kerala. Each Province Friary opened its doors to the displaced people. The Friars cut their food rations in half to share with those in need. Any extra clothing was passed on to those with nothing else to wear.

Muslims, Hindus, and Christians shared one roof, ate meals together, and consoled one another. In these days of crisis, all experienced the universal brotherhood and shared the peace St. Francis of Assisi asked his followers to work towards.

Following the instructions of both Pope Francis and their Order's Father, St. Francis of Assisi, the Friars gave their space to the poor, shared what they had, and tried to be instruments of God's compassion. They continue doing their best to restore those they serve to their previous existence, giving freely to others whatever has been given to them.

Prayer before the Crucifix



St. Francis of Assisi
(1205/06)

**Most High,
glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me true faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge,
Lord,
that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.**

May you know the joy of your generosity in helping others!

Donating Stocks or mutual funds to the Conventual Franciscan Friars is a smart and simple way to help our Friars continue their ministries.

You can make a gift of appreciated securities (publicly traded stocks, bonds, or mutual fund shares) to the Province of Our Lady of Consolation.

As we approach Christmas we think about the year just ending, giving thanks and praise to God for His gifts, the people and good things in our lives.

This is also the perfect time to review your financial plans, making sure you have the resources to care for your family now and in the future.

As the stock market has risen, many of our friends have contacted us about making gifts of appreciated securities (publicly traded stocks, bonds, or mutual fund shares). This is easy to do. Just follow the simple directions on the right to get started

We thank you for your generous support, which helps us continue our ministries and service to God's people.

**Questions? Please contact Becki Romans
Executive Director, Mission Advancement
812-923-5250, b.romans@franciscansusa.org**

HOW IT WORKS

1. You transfer appreciated securities to PNC accounts of The Province of Our Lady of Consolation.
2. The Province of Our Lady of Consolation sells the securities and uses the proceeds to fund their ministries.
3. When you donate appreciated securities, you are able to deduct AND avoid capital gains taxation. This dual benefit allows you to leverage a larger donation by using appreciated securities rather than cash to make your gift.

Looking for a Gift? *How about a Retreat?*

A gift certificate for a retreat is a great idea for that person who is difficult to 'shop' for. It's also a great idea for yourself!

Each of our retreat centers offers comfortable accommodations in beautiful surroundings. There are many guided retreat opportunities available, or you might wish to get away for an individual retreat. While on retreat, there are no worries about cleaning, cooking, or other jobs - it's time alone to renew a relationship with God and recharge the spirit.

What better gift could you give to someone you love?

For more information and links to our four retreat centers, please visit www.FranciscansUSA.org



This year Holy Cross Retreat Center in Mesilla Park, New Mexico added a hermitage for individual retreats.

