

*St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity
Cornwall, P.E.I.*

**ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI FRATERNITY NEWSLETTER
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A Christmas message - St. Anthony and Christmas

Christmas is an especially important feast within the Franciscan Family, given that much of our way of life relates to the Incarnation and the Birth of Christ in the manger at Bethlehem.

We know that St. Francis often meditated on the birth of Jesus and that this love of the incarnation and birth led him to create the first live Nativity tableau at Greccio. Today, Christians continue to honour this tradition as we assemble Christmas cribs in our homes, in our churches and, where possible, in our communities.

One of Francis's close followers was St. Anthony of Padua. He was a brilliant Augustinian monk who joined the Friars Minor and became known as the first Franciscan theologian. Francis and Anthony were closely bound in spirit, devotion and mission.



One day, not long before his death in May 1231, Anthony, while meditating on the famous passage of St. John's Gospel: "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*", suddenly saw a great light and felt the actual presence of the baby Jesus in his arms. We can only imagine the joy that he must have experienced! This is the reason that in every picture, or statue that we see in homes, churches and in other locations, St. Anthony is portrayed as holding the infant Jesus. As we celebrate the feast of Christmas this year, let us each pray and meditate on this passage of the Gospel. Our wish is that, we too, might all experience that intimacy, joy and peace of the Infant Jesus in our own lives and that of our family, as did Francis and Anthony.

(Submitted by Tom Wilkinson)

Ongoing Formation – December 2020

Towards Embracing the Mystery of the Incarnation



The focus of the December fraternity meeting will be on the Incarnation. Intellectually (in our heads), we are familiar with this event: God-becoming-man. The challenge lies in embracing it spiritually (in our hearts). This is not easy, for the Incarnation is a mystery, indeed a very sacred mystery.

This upcoming formation session will invite us to enter into and embrace the mystery of the Incarnation. Recently, in our review of the charisms of the OFS Rule, we were reminded that first and foremost our spirituality is Christo-centric. Accordingly, the hope is that by embracing the mystery of the Incarnation, we will get more in touch with the Christo-centricity of our Rule.

As we enter the Season of Advent, it is most appropriate to reflect on Jesus' Incarnation. By way of Luke's Gospel, we have inherited vivid details of this God-event. The birth narrative is full of drama, simplicity, majesty, humbleness, grandeur. Clearly, it is a beautiful story, one that touched St. Francis' heart. Is it any wonder that Francis referred to Christmas as the "feast of all feasts"? May your celebration of Christ's Incarnation be blessed in 2020!

(Submitted by Gerry Gabriel)

A Prayer For Obedience by Sr. Gemma Dunn, CSM

May God bless each one of us with a healthy spirit and practice of obedience ...

- an obedience of choosing to be in harmony with God's
Will for me and for us as a community;
- an obedience with a lifestyle rooted in a strong foundation
in faith, in hope and in love;
- an obedience which makes us one with all of creation.

May God bless us with peace.

Amen.

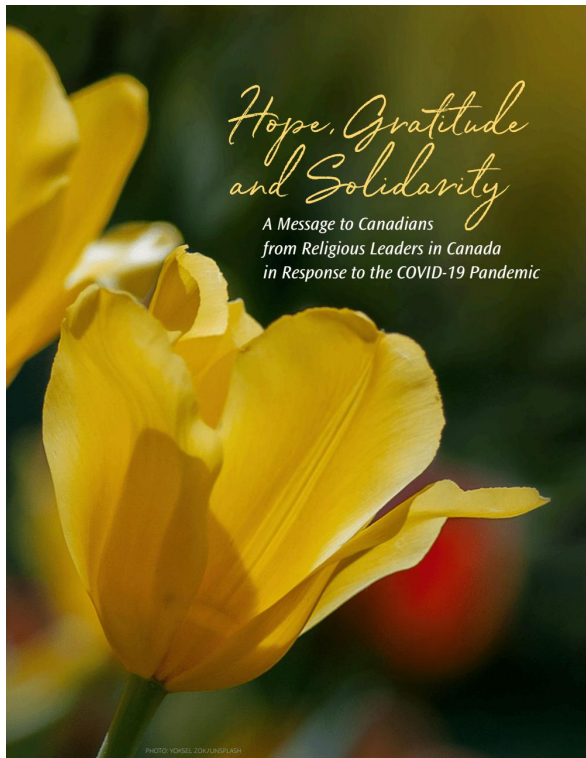


Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation



Please refer to Attachment 1 for an article entitled "*Take a Mindful Franciscan Pause to Thwart Bias*". The article is written by Sharon Winzeller, ofs and summarizes a presentation by Carolyn Townes, ofs at the 2020 USA National Chapter.

Hope, Gratitude and Solidarity



On March 30, 2020, more than 80 religious leaders from across Canada issued a common message to all who call Canada home, expressing the need for hope, gratitude and solidarity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This ecumenical and interfaith message is a response by religious leaders from across Canada which was initiated by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and The Canadian Rabbinic Caucus with the support and coordination of The Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Interfaith Conversation.

The message reflects a unity of thought and concern among Canada's diverse religious communities in the face of the uncertainty, fear and anxiety surrounding COVID-19. Acknowledging the significant impact of COVID-19, the message reminds Canadians of the hope we share, the reasons we have to give thanks, and the ways we can act together for the good of one another.

“In spite of present sufferings, which can seem overwhelming at times, the flames of hope cannot be extinguished,” the statement reads. “Love, which gives life its fullest meaning, continues to seek out the common good in spite of individual difficulties.”

It goes on to “urge all people in Canada to listen and follow attentively the directions of our Public Health officials and government leaders. We, as religious leaders, pledge to lead by example. We all must act together in confronting this virus. While everyone is vulnerable during this crisis, let us not forget those in our society who, prior to COVID-19, were already vulnerable to health and social ailments. As religious leaders, we raise our collective voices to highlight the necessity for greater attention to the needs of the homeless, the incarcerated, the elderly and those already suffering from social isolation. We remember too those people, especially women and children who face abuse and violence, who are not safe at home and may suffer additional abuse and violence as stress increases.”

Looking to the future, the statement reminds us to “pray for healing, for the continued efforts to relieve human suffering, and for perseverance throughout these challenging times. As history records these moments for our country's future, let us pray that, in the face of COVID-19, we respond with an abundance of hope, gratitude and solidarity, trusting in the loving and ever merciful God, the source of all hope.”

The full text of the message is available online at www.councilofchurches.ca/news/hope-gratitude-and-solidarity/.

Remembering Our Deceased Fraternity Members

On November 29th, Secular Franciscans gathered via Zoom to remember the deceased members of St. Francis of Assisi fraternity (Cornwall, PE) and Blessed Father Frederick fraternity (Moncton, NB). This service of remembrance, organized by Martha and Gerry Gabriel, was an opportunity to celebrate our Franciscan brothers and sisters who have been welcomed into eternal life by Sister Death.

May their souls rest in peace.



Support to Refugee Family

A Note of Appreciation and Gratitude:

At the November 8th, 2020 monthly fraternity meeting, a number of fraternity members purchased tickets on the fund-raising draw in support of the refugee family being sponsored by the Good Shepherd Pastoral Unit. Together with the fraternity's earlier donation, sufficient funds have been raised to support the family for approximately an entire month in Thailand. I extend a hearty thank you to one and all!

(Gerry Gabriel, on behalf of the Good Shepherd Pastoral Unit Refugee Committee).

December Birthdays

December 20	Carol MacNeill-Longaphie
December 27	Martha Gabriel

Happy Birthday Carol and Martha. Blessings on you and your family!

Newsletter

Newsletter items are always welcome. You may send them before the last Wednesday of the month to Doug Clorey at jdclcorey@gmail.com.

Upcoming Events

Fraternity Meeting - **Sunday, December 13th at 2:00PM at St. Francis of Assisi Church hall (basement).** Meeting setup will respect social distancing. **Everyone is expected to wear a mask.** There will be no food at this meeting.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

From the St. Francis of Assisi JPIC Team,
December, 2020

Take a Mindful Franciscan Pause to Thwart Bias

By SHARON WINZELER, OFS

Matthew (13:54-58) recounts how, when Jesus came to his hometown and began to teach in the synagogue, people were astounded, and even took offense. They knew him as the carpenter's son; not this new Jesus.

"This image of him in the synagogue did not fit the Jesus they had in their heads," Carolyn Townes, OFS, told National Chapter attendees. They couldn't reconcile the image of the Jesus they knew with the one standing before them, said Townes, national animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation and a member of the International Commission for JPIC.

It reminded her of a quote by George Bernard Shaw: "The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor. He takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them."

A person in the latter case preserves an image as a way of keeping his thoughts in harmony. The harm in this selective perception is that it becomes the basis of bias; that is, a preference for or against a group or individual, Townes said.

It can be positive or negative. Conscious or unconscious. Assumptions and stereotypes. It can be based on what we identify as labels — skin color, ability, age or gender preference.

"**Unconscious bias** is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and is often incompatible with one's conscious values," she noted. This makes bias in oneself harder to identify, especially when working under time pressure or in a perceived threatening situation, Townsend said. In those cases, we react automatically with what we already know. As a result, we use shortcuts based on prior knowledge to process the 11 million pieces of information coming at us at any one time.

For example, Townes used some sentence starters that members of the audience automatically answered:

"An eye for an..."

"What goes around..."

"Fight fire with..."

"Better late than..."

"An apple a day..."

"Birds of a feather..."

"Let sleeping dogs..."

Responses to these are part of the millions of bits of information that are stored in our subconscious mind. "We have heard them so many times, we don't even need to think about the answer," Townes said.

This type of thinking can lead to snap judgments while making important decisions.

"This leads to hiring someone based on our personal preference and not on the candidate's skill. It also causes us to cross the street when we see someone as threatening."

Our minds formulate shortcuts to make it easier and faster to make decisions. If these are based on biases, preferences against groups or individuals, they need to be changed.

"Two things I want you to know about biases. Number one, everyone has them. Number two, they can be disrupted or changed," Townes said.

How do we reverse our biases?

"Ask yourself: Why am I so dead set on maligning this person? What if I took an opposite view?"

First, pause. "As Franciscans, we are called to pray for right judgment and right decision. Before you make a judgment based on that subconscious judgment in your head, take a Franciscan pause. We form our impression of a person in that first millisecond. Remind yourself that you are aware of your first impression."

Second, when you know you already have an image in your mind, make yourself come up with two pieces of opposite information about that image."

Third, define your inner focus. Once you become aware of your bias, do your counter activity until it become habitual. Do it mindfully, with prudence, caution and right judgment."

Fourth, be curious and cultivate conversations. Conversations help us find what we have in common," Townes said.

Townes cited Article 19 of the Rule as a way of changing our bias. She calls it "taking a Franciscan pause."

"Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon..."

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