

Chapter 7: Alden Whitney, Minister Provincial (1990-1996) and First Minister General from the Province of the Americas (1993-1999)

Speedy Rise in the Order

Alden's journey through the Order was the most expeditious of any Minister Provincial (and probably any Minister General):

- 1981, in December, Alden was professed.
- 1982, in November, he was recruited to be the Men's Formation Director upon the death of the incumbent, Ken Cox.
- 1983, Alden was ordained as a deacon.
- 1984, Alden was ordained as a priest.
- 1988, when Jack Stapleton resigned as Chaplain after one week, Alden became Acting Chaplain as well as continuing his work as Formation Director for Men.
- 1990, he was elected Minister Provincial.
- 1993, he was re-elected Minister Provincial and, later that same year, Minister General of the Third Order.

Ministers General in TSSF

Robert Pope (European Province)	1987-1993
Brian Hamilton (New Zealand Province)	1993-1996
Alden Whitney (Province of the Americas)	1996-1999
Keith Slater (Australian Province)	1999-2005
Dorothy Brooker (New Zealand Province)	2005-2011
Ken Norian (Province of the Americas)	2011-

In his first election in 1990, Kale King, Robert Goode, and Glen-Ann Jicha were also nominated and stood for election. In his re-election in 1993, Douglas Scott of Philadelphia was the only one who stood along with Alden for election.

The Big Topics Return

The 1980s and the era of Dee Dobson yielded few "big" topics over which TSSF had to wrestle. John Scott's era had women's ordination and gay ordination. Now with the turn of the decade, new "big" topics appeared for TSSF's discernment. This time it was primarily affirmation and respect for gay rights.

At the 1990 Chapter in which Alden, an openly gay man, was elected Minister Provincial, Chapter passed the following resolution with one abstention:

Whereas there has been growing concern about the prejudice and discrimination that have existed in the Episcopal/Anglican Church toward lesbians and gay men,

Whereas we, as a religious order, have pledged to fight against all ignorance, pride and prejudice that breed injustice or partiality,

Therefore, be it resolved that we, the Chapter of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis, American Province, affirm that Christ indwells all persons regardless of sexual orientation; we affirm that we welcome to our services of worship and to all occasions for fellowship all persons; and we affirm that we welcome and encourage full membership in this Order for persons of all sexual orientations.

Further, we encourage those of us who would do so, to educate ourselves and others in the Church about the current pressing issue of lesbians and gay men in a society that is frequently hostile to them; and we commit ourselves to action to end ignorance about, prejudice toward, and discrimination against lesbians and gay men in the Episcopal/Anglican Church and in society at large. (Information Sheet October/November 1990)



Anita Catron Miner and Alden Whitney on the steps at Little Portion

During the following Chapter (1991), Ken Norian spoke for many in saying that he was troubled by the disunity in the Province and in the Episcopal Church and wanted Chapter to create some bridge between those with traditional beliefs in regards to sexuality and those who support same-sex sexuality. Alden as Minister Provincial and Marie Webner as Provincial Chaplain produced the following letter that was then sent out to all members in March 1992:

Dear Sisters & Brothers of the Third Order,

At its annual meeting in October 1991, Chapter was asked by a professed tertiary to affirm a resolution stating that Chapter will surely accommodate differences of opinion concerning moral and theological issues held by various Third Order members in a way that strengthens our fellowship and affirms each member of the Order. All the members of Chapter were in profound agreement with the spirit of the resolution and requested that the Minister Provincial and the Chaplain address the issues in a letter to all tertiaries.

The Rule of the Third Order defines our way of life. It not only supplies the aims of our community, but also provides the ways in which we can serve Christ and the world in the manner of Francis of Assisi. It declares that humility, love and joy are the three notes that mark the lives of tertiaries; without them all efforts are in vain. "Where charity and love prevail, there our God is found."

When we are admitted by profession to the Order, each of us pledges to serve Jesus Christ for the rest of our lives, seeking to spread the knowledge and love of Christ, to promote the spirit of love and unity within the family of God, and to live joyfully a life

of simplicity and humble service. Therefore, the life of every tertiary must reflect obedience to the principles we have espoused, and the vows that we have made. In these tenets that make up the Franciscan focus, we affirm that the center of our faith is always Jesus Christ, our Lord & Savior. Our preoccupation with Jesus encourages us to live joyfully a life of love leading to sacrifice, and thus, God's purposes are served.

The concerns of Third Order members reflect the concerns of the greater Episcopal Church. We need not rehearse here the details of the issues involving ordination, inclusive language, committed relationships, marriage, and sexuality—to name most of them. In deliberations about the questions, the role of tradition is sometimes measured against the evolution of society (or the dissolution of society, depending on one's point of view). The tried-and-true tripartite approach to solving theological and moral problems by using Scripture, Tradition and Reason seems to have led not to consensus but, instead, to diverse points of view often accompanied by fear and acrimony. In some instances, what one person views as a matter of much needed justice, another sees as a betrayal of moral tradition or of Scriptural theology. Neither "conservatives" nor "liberals" have sole claim to feeling pain, outrage and sadness. There are people of all persuasions who consider leaving the Episcopal Church (and The Society of Saint Francis) in order to maintain integrity of conscience.

How can we respond to divisiveness in our Church and Third Order community? How can we accommodate differences of opinion concerning moral and theological issues? Some say that the Church is in the process of defining the boundaries of the faith. Perhaps the danger in focusing on the boundaries is that of turning attention away from the interior of the faith. Shouldn't we focus much more attention on the essence, the interior center of our faith? The peril of failing to accommodate our differences is of losing the faith altogether.

We are Franciscans who have promised to follow Christ. As the Rule states: "Love is the distinguishing feature of all true disciples of Christ who wish to dedicate themselves to Him as his servants.... Tertiaries seek to love all those to whom they are bound by ties of family or friendship. Their love for them increases, as their love for Christ grows deeper.... Tertiaries have a special love and affection for members of the Third Order, praying for each other individually and seeking to grow in that love." As Christians, we promise to put love first by seeking and serving Christ in all persons, and by respecting the dignity of all persons.

Let each of us commit ourselves again to respecting the views of every brother and sister tertiary. Let each of us love the other so that we are truly "bound into a living whole through [God's] supernatural love.... This unity of those who believe in him will become, as our Lord intended, a special witness to the world of his divine mission."

With this letter you will find a copy of "The Rule of the Third Order of The Society of Saint Francis (for daily reading)". It is commended to all tertiaries by all the Ministers Provincial and is being circulated in all five provinces of The Third Order. We pray it will be helpful in your prayer and study, and will promote unity among all tertiaries.

Within eight months of receipt of this letter 31 people asked for release from their vows or withdrew from Formation. The following year, in 1993, 43 people asked for release from their vows or withdrew from Formation. Such numbers were double the average (1989 to 1998 Withdrawn/Released/Lapsed as listed in the issues of the *Information Sheet*). Possibly in response to such a large number leaving the Order, a survey was carried out by Provincial Chaplain Marie Webner in 1993 and reported to Chapter and published in the *Franciscan Times* Advent 1993 issue.

TSSF Questionnaire Results

Marie Webner (Franciscan Times Advent 1983)

The results of questionnaires sent to professed tertiaries of the Society of St. Francis, Third Order, American Province, are as follows. Of approximately 400 members in profession, 182 returned their questionnaires. Two were blank, one because the tertiary was requesting release from vows, and the other because the tertiary was hospitalized and not capable of completing the form.

Each question is listed, with the variety and percentage of responses, and a brief commentary as appropriate.

Q 1. Do you feel connected with community?

Yes	140	(77%)
Maybe	13	(8%)
No	27	(15%)

Commentary: Letters and comments indicate a variety of ways of feeling connected, but it is heartening that we had so many undiluted positive responses.

Q 2. What is your personal level of satisfaction with Third Order Life? (on a scale of I to 5, with 5 being the highest)

Level 5	81	(46.9%)
Level 4	55	(31.8)
Level 3	27	(15.6)
Level 2	7	(4.0%)
Level 1	3	(1.7%)

Commentary: By combining levels 4 and 5, we arrive at 136 tertiaries, or 78.7% of respondents, with a high level of personal satisfaction. At the other end, levels 1 and 2 produce only 10 tertiaries (5.7%) with a low level of personal satisfaction.

Q 3. What is your community level of satisfaction with Third Order life? (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest).

Level 5	49	(28.5%)
Level 4	43	(25.0%)
Level 3	39	(22.7%)
Level 2	21	(12.2%)
Level 1	20	(11.6%)

Commentary: By combining levels 4 and 5, we arrive at 92 tertiaries, or 53.5% of respondees, with a high level of community satisfaction. At the other end, levels 1 and 2 produce 41 tertiaries (23.8%) with a low level of community satisfaction.

Q 4. Would you attend a Provincial gathering?

Yes	85	(47%)
Maybe	71	(13.5%)
No	24	(39.5%)

Commentary: Factors mentioned most often as critical to a decision were as follows:

- 1. Cost of transportation and accommodations.*
- 2. Location (usually mentioned with cost factor).*
- 3. Time (especially for parish priests, school teachers, and others limited in vacation schedules).*
- 4. Program (especially speakers, opportunities for fellowship, goals).*

Other concerns were availability of private rooms and financial aid, while many "no" answers cited health and family obligations.

Q 5. How often would you prefer to report?

Annually	87	(50%)	Twice yearly	39	(22%)
Three times yearly	2	(1%)	Four times yearly	36	(20%)
Six times yearly	2	(1%)	Less than yearly	14	(8%)

Commentary: Although half the tertiaries preferred annual reporting, it should be noted that those who preferred more frequent reporting were often vehement in their preferences.

As one can see from Questions 4 and 5, Chaplain Webner was after information other than just levels of satisfaction with the Third Order. Moreover, one confounding fact of the survey with the numbers reported in the *Information Sheets* as Withdrawn/Released/Lapsed is that such numbers included those in Formation (Withdrawals) whereas Webner's survey only queried the Professed. Moreover, the large numbers who left the Order about this time would not have registered their satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

However, as the Commentaries for Q2 and Q3 point out, those Professed who remained in the Order after the dust-up over gay issues were satisfied with their life in the Order.

Yet there is also another interesting fact that can be drawn from this Survey and which Chaplain Webner wrote about earlier in May 1993. Compare the Personal Satisfaction Level in Q2 with the Community Satisfaction Level in Q3; there's a 25% difference. Could this be that many in the Order at this point were still living in it as a *Pious Guild* rather than as a *Religious Community*?

From Pious Guild to Religious Order: Late 1940s and Early 50s to the 1990s

Letter of May 1993 from Chaplain Webner to a Tertiary Professed 46 Years

I recently talked to the South-Central Convocation meeting in Dallas about the history of the Third Order, SSF, from my very personal experience of it. It is not unlike your history except that I had the good fortune to have been in the right places at the right times, so that I knew what was going on and was a part of the changes that took place after 1967. I've been steadily on Chapter from the beginning, and so I can certainly share the blame for whatever went wrong and whatever went right. The retreat I conducted after Easter was in Hawaii, where I renewed friendship ties with Gooch (Fr. Robert Goode), who was the first tertiary to serve as chaplain of the Third Order. Prior to that time we had had friars as chaplains. And, of course, I remember the time when the only response to a report (which was a checklist of omissions) was a penance—for women, from the Poor Clares. Anyway—Gooch commented to other tertiaries present that “Marie has been professed in the Third Order since the time it was a pious guild.” I thought about that remark and decided Gooch was right. When I was professed in 1953, the Third Order was a pious guild. A guild is, by definition, an association of persons with like interests, and, although members of the Third Order rarely were acquainted with one another, we presumably had a rule of

life and an attraction to a Franciscan lifestyle in common. We were required to keep in touch with First or Second Order, but we were not a community. As you well know, all that has changed. When the House of Bishops recognized the Third Order SSF as a Religious Community of the Episcopal Church, it accepted what had been born in the more than 20 years since 1967 (the year of the amalgamation of American and British Franciscan Orders).

So what's good about our having become a community? One of the things I pointed out in my talk in Dallas is that we now have a community network which serves to sound alarms. Part of my experience as a tertiary in 1960 was being in the most extraordinary isolation when my husband was having a breakdown and our marriage was breaking wide open as a result...I knew no other Episcopal clergy, and had no avenue to find support. The bishop who ended up deposing my husband did not strike me as a likely candidate. It is my sincere hope that such a situation will never again occur in the life of a Third Order member. If the Area Chaplain is not a person a member wants to turn to, there are other local members, the Minister Provincial, the Chaplain—or perhaps simply a kindred spirit met and enjoyed at a Third Order convocation. Certainly, I got through my particular hell with a vivid realization of and thanksgiving for the presence of God through it all, but I believe firmly that God normally works through community. Almighty God expects normally to work through members of Christ's Body the Church. I believe we are failing in our vocation as Christians and as Franciscans when we fail to be there for fellow Christians in their need. I believe, in other words, very firmly in the need for community. A pious guild is not a bad thing at all, but to be an organic, dynamic, creative community in touch with the will of God and the need of our brothers and sisters is a far better thing. My particular need was critical and traumatic; I cite it only to make a point. There are other needs, greater and smaller, that a community can and should be supplying one for another. There are other cases where the parish is not the appropriate community, or the informed community. In our very mobile population, the Third Order is often a point of stability in an otherwise formless chaos.

So what's bad about being a community? It's the same thing that's bad about the Church in general. We are corrupted by the sins of the society we live in, and we fail to become what God intends us to be. We fail, in other words. But it's not only sin and failure. With all the best intentions in the world, we simply make mistakes....In line with your definition of obedience ("to listen earnestly"), I would surmise that we failed in that fundamental obedience. We did not listen earnestly to you and to the rest of the local fellowship. In all honesty, I have to say that my recollection is that the formation team (backed up by Chapter) proceeded on the best information available, and I cannot say dogmatically that a mistake was made. But I also feel that members in profession, our brothers and sisters, need to be listened to. They need to feel that we have taken time to listen earnestly. They have every right to be part of the process. Being part of the process may or may not affect the ultimate action, which, after all, cannot be made on the basis of a vote! I do not figure that this is comforting input from me. But, after all, I've been around for donkey's years, and I know we make mistakes. I also know that these decisions are extraordinarily painful and are never lightly made. It's a terrible thing, this business of having to say Yes or No to people who are sure they have a Franciscan vocation. If we say Yes to the wrong people, it will hurt their lives and the community; if we say No to the wrong people, it will do the same. The responsibility is awesome, and decisions are not made without prayer, thought, and consultation.

I hope you will forgive us for making mistakes. Chapter is an elected body, and democratic process confers the right to question. Whoever had the nerve to question in Father Joseph's day? His No was No and his Yes was Yes. If you didn't like his answers, you either shut up or got out. If I had received a message from on high that a friend of mine was "unsuitable for life in the Third Order," I would have considered it a matter of obedience to accept without question.

Factoids of the Alden Whitney Era

1990—With Alden's election, he leaves the Formation Program, and Ann Harris is elected as the first person to head a combined Men's and Women's Formation Program.

1991—Robert Durand and Rik Fitch take over as editors of the *Franciscan Times* and move it beyond physical cut-and-paste into digital Desktop Publishing with an improved and unified layout.

1993—Having just been re-elected for a second term as Minister Provincial, Whitney hosted the Inter-Provincial Third Order Chapter (IPTOC)—the highest level of legislative authority in the world-wide Third Order—at Little Portion Friary, and was elected Minister General for a term of three years. (Only currently serving Minister Provincials can be candidates for Minister General. Moreover, at this time, one could serve simultaneously as both Minister Provincial and Minister General. However, this kind of situation is less than optimal, and the Order's Statutes were subsequently rewritten so that upon election as a Minister General, one must resign as a Minister Provincial. Thus only Alden Whitney has ever had a three-year coterminous term as both Minister Provincial and Minister General.)

1995—Chapter decides to hold the first Provincial Convocation in over a decade in New Orleans in 1997 and makes Fellowship Coordinator, Anita Catron, leader of this effort. At this point, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu TSSF has agreed to be the keynote speaker. (He ultimately had to decline because he had just been appointed the Chair of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.)

The Province Goes Into Debt—1994

It looks from the survey done in 1993 that a majority was happy and supportive of the work of the Third Order in this Province. However, very often it is in pledges and annual reports that one finds out truly how supportive the membership is of the work of the Province and its leaders. In 1994, the Province was looking at a significant financial shortfall. The result was the draft letter to the right presented to Chapter in October 1994.

Attention: Tertiary Sisters and Brothers: For the first time in many years the Third Order is in debt!

"I have \$250 in my Third Order checking account. \$1,200 is still owed on the new Devotional Companion, \$250 is owed for international postage for the last two issues of the Times, and approx. \$450 will be needed for the Chapter issue of the Information Sheet. Approx. \$1,800 to \$2,000 is needed to pay existing bills and publish the Information Sheet." - Provincial Secretary's Annual Report 1994

The Provincial Secretary's expenses are not the only area of the budget in arrears. Unless our income increases by the end of the year, Chapter expects that it will be necessary to put off our 1994 disbursement to Franciscan Aid and our outreach funding or perhaps forego them altogether this year.

Our present financial crisis can and will be solved if everyone of us pitches in.

Chapter appreciates those members who, over the years, have faithfully pledged and maintained their pledges. However, the following are suggestions for all of us to consider in our current endeavor to get out of debt:

- * Prompt payment of outstanding current pledges.
- * An additional end-of-the-year donation (especially for those who may not have made a pledge in this current year).
- * An increase in your annual pledge of 10 to 20 % for 1994.
- * A donation of \$5.00 to cover the printing and mailing costs for the new Devotional Companion.

Please give this letter your immediate and prayerful consideration. Thank you!

Each dollar contributed will make a difference!

The Membership Responds Positively—1995 Finances

(from the Minister Provincial Report to Chapter, October 1995)
1995 has brought an excellent recovery of our financial position. We were able to pay all our debts for 1994, and to enter the 4th quarter of 1995 with a bank balance of over \$16,000. The membership of the Order responded to our appeal for help with great generosity—\$6,000 plus \$1,500 found in Hawaii, project money which had never been spent. Our economic measures regarding travel have helped as well.

From Alden's Last MP Report to Chapter, October 1996

The last item on my report is this: to say that for me it is indeed "time" to become (along with Dee and others) a former Minister Provincial. This month, I believe, signals the beginning of my 15th year of continuous ministry as an unelected member of Chapter (Formation Director, and for a year Chaplain & Formation Director, and then Minister Provincial). That's enough. The time and all that has gone with these roles have been an immense blessing in my life—and every day has been one with an SSF flavor, most often, a Third Order flavor—sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter or sour—yet always nourishing for me. I'm grateful for the trust you have put in me, and the loving support from you and all the SSF family that made it possible for me to do what I've been able to do.

As I've said to you before, the Society of Saint Francis is my dwelling place in this amazing Episcopal Church, and the Third Order my own room in our more amazing Franciscan home.

Homily delivered by The Rev. Alden Whitney, retiring Minister General, on 26 September 1999 in St. Lucia, Queensland, Australia at the final Inter-Provincial Third Order Chapter (IPTOC) Evening Prayer Service

The text I've chosen for this afternoon is taken from Luke's Gospel, Chapter 24, verse 23:

...they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he [Jesus] was alive.

This service of prayer, renewal of vows, and the installation of Keith Francis Slater to be the fourth Minister General of The Third Order comes at the end of a wonderful week of collaboration and fellowship amongst all the Orders of The Society of Saint Francis. I daresay, our being here together is the actualization of a dream, a vision (if you will) received by many of us quite a long time ago.

Dreams and visions and voices from God have been integral in the Franciscan story. Furthermore, we were reminded earlier this week that all humans possess the divine capacity to dream dreams and to actualize them.

Bonaventure tells us that as "Francis left town to meditate out-of-doors....and as he was passing by the Church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse with age, he felt urged to go in and pray. There, as he knelt in prayer before the painted image of the Crucified, he felt greatly comforted in spirit and his eyes were full of tears as he gazed at the cross. Then all of a sudden he heard a voice coming from the cross, and telling him three times, 'Francis go and repair my house. You see it is falling down.' Francis [says Bonaventure] was terrified at the sound of the voice, but the power of its message penetrated his heart and he went into ecstasy."

We know of course that Francis took the urging literally for some time until Holy Spirit clarified for him the intention of the voice that he had heard.

In a similar vein, Pope Innocent III received messages from God and one of them occurred in a dream whilst he was asleep. There is that image of the Pontiff lying in bed asleep with his head propped on his hand—as if he had dropped off into slumber as he was reading—and he dreams that the Church is falling over, so that it lies tilted and useless. And we know that after that, the Pope legitimized the ways of and the mission of Francis' growing band of Little Brothers. Their Rule and the Principles were affirmed, and the Order grew and became effective in its aim to spread the Gospel. And in spreading the Gospel, Francis and his brothers sought to emulate Jesus by embracing poverty.

We all have dreams which may convey pertinent messages for us. There is one dream I recall which I dreamed twenty-five years ago. In it, I was lying in hospital in bed, having had a serious chest operation. The surgeon stood at my bedside and told me: "I regret to tell you, Dr. Whitney, but we opened your chest and examined your lungs. Unfortunately, it was too late, for we saw that your chest is riddled with lung cancer, so we just closed you up."

The dream had a powerful effect upon me. I woke up at once, aghast at the message of the dream, but grateful that it was indeed a dream. I had been a smoker for 24 years, and was still smoking at least 30 cigarettes a day. But somehow that dream had the power to kill the denial that had kept me smoking. And later that day, as I was driving somewhere in the car, I opened the window and threw an almost whole pack of cigarettes out the window. And that (by the grace of God) marked the first day that I began to think of myself as a non-smoker. And my life was changed. I had smoked my last tobacco.

In Luke's story about "The Walk to Emmaus" there are some women who had told Cleopas and his companion that they had been that morning to the tomb where the body of Jesus had been lain—that the body of Jesus was gone but that they had encountered angels in a vision who delivered to them a message that Jesus was alive. And of course we know how the story goes on from that point.

The Interprovincial Chapter of The Third Order has a story to tell this week. It's a story inspired in part at least by the vision we gleaned from studying a passage from William Countryman's book, *The Good News of Jesus*. This is what it says:

"The GOOD NEWS offers only one principle for interaction among human beings. That principle is the equal love of self and neighbor. Every action is good insofar as it conforms to it and bad insofar as it doesn't. It is the principle that must guide both our private, and wherever possible, our public lives if we wish to be people who live out of THE GOOD NEWS To move toward a world in which the principle of love is taken seriously will still be a long and difficult process, but it should be possible now in ways that it has not been in the past. We have had ample evidence in this century of the terrible wrongs worked by ethnic and racial hatreds, by the contempt of one class for another, or by sexual arrogance. The world will not be safe for any of us until it is safe for us all. However difficult the principle of love, and however demanding and hard at times to define, love is the only moral principle that opens a door to the future. When I truly believe that I am as human as you and you are as human as I, that God loves us indistinguishably, I shall begin building a different kind of world."

IPTOC has seen a vision of angels who say that Jesus is alive. Tertiaries in all the five provinces have talked about our Third Order as a people knit together in prayer and community, open and ready to include all people.

I daresay we have been flexing and stretching this week, as we explored the themes, and formulated concrete proposals which are meant to encourage provinces as a whole, and fellowships and individuals as the parts thereof. We have celebrated our diversity, and asked each Tertiary to be risky in embracing and effecting in their lives particularly the 7th, 8th and 9th days of our Principles.

I think its worthwhile to rehearse them again. And some of you may hear some slight but important changes in the wording of them.

Day Seven—The Second Aim To spread the spirit of love and harmony. The Order sets out, in the name of Christ, to break down barriers between people and to seek equality for all. Tertiaries accept as their second aim the spreading of a spirit of love and harmony among all people. They are pledged to fight against the ignorance, pride, and prejudice that breed injustice or partiality because of distinctions of race, gender, sexual orientation, color, class, creed, status, or education.

Day Eight—(The Second Aim cont'd) Tertiaries fight against all such injustice in the name of Christ, in whom there can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for in him all are one. Their chief object is to reflect that openness to all which was characteristic of Jesus. This can only be achieved in a spirit of chastity which sees others as belonging to God and not as a means of self-fulfillment.

Day Nine—(The Second Aim cont'd) Tertiaries are prepared not only to speak out for social justice and international peace, but to put these principles into practice in their own lives, cheerfully facing any scorn or persecution to which this may lead.

So, we have dreamed dreams this week and seen visions and heard voices and dreamed visions; voices and visions declaring again that Jesus is alive. And in doing so, I think that our vocations have been renewed once again, and that we have been empowered to carry away from this beautiful place the fruits of our work to the more than 30 countries where Tertiaries live. Pray with us, please, that the renewal we have begun here is in fact just a beginning. AMEN

Marie Webner, Long-time Servant in the Order

Marie was professed in 1953, and the part of her life prior to the late 60s and the merger of OSF and SSF is told by her in Chapter 1. In 1971, at the time when members of the Third Order themselves took over the leadership of the Order, Marie became involved in most everything from the beginning. As she wrote: “We were privileged to be in on all the ‘firsts’ in terms of statutes, formation program, and fellowship guidelines. Much has changed for the better over the years—but oh! it was exhilarating to lay the first bricks in the Third Order structure.”

In 1971 she was appointed Assistant Novice Mistress for Women under Peter Funk's direction. In 1974, she was elected to Chapter, which she served for two terms until 1980. As managing editor of the University of Arizona Press, she used her wordsmithing and publishing experience to work on multiple editions of the *Devotional Companion* beginning in 1981. I joined her efforts for the third edition that came out in 1994.

Although there were people who worked with Fellowships prior to Marie's appointment as Fellowship Coordinator in 1982, it was really Marie's efforts, conjoined with Dee Dobson's focus on the local and regional, that changed the face of the Order in the 80s. Directly arising from her work as Fellowship Coordinator, Chaplain Masud Ibn Syedullah appointed her as his Assistant Chaplain to focus on the work of the Area Chaplains.

In 1989, she was elected Provincial Chaplain. As Fellowship Coordinator and Provincial Chaplain, Marie wrote more articles for the *Franciscan Times* than any other member of the Order. None were just fluff pieces announcing meetings or reporting on Area Conventions; hers were substantive: “Fellowship as Partnership” (1977); “Gift: A Poem On The Death of My Father” (1981); “Community in Fellowship” (1982); “Community Events for Fellowships: Professions and Novice Admissions” (1983); and then her “Chaplain's Journal” that appeared in each issue of the *Franciscan Times* from 1991 to 1994. In 1994 Minister Provincial Alden Whitney proposed her third term re-appointment as Provincial Chaplain, but this re-appointment was not sustained by the vote of Chapter.

Chapter Does Not Approve Webner's Third Term Appointment

From the *Admonitions of St. Francis: Number 4. Let no one appropriate to himself the role of being over others.*

“He did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister,” says the Lord. Let those, who are set up over others, glory as much on account of that office of superior, as if they were appointed to the duty of washing the feet of the brothers. And in as much as they are so greatly disturbed on account of the loss of their office of superior than the duty regarding feet, they assemble purses for themselves to the danger of their souls.

(The footwashing was not the Holy Thursday ritual, but the duty of cleaning the bare feet that had trod roads along with horses and other animals. The reference to the “purse” was to the “purse” in the keeping of Judas from which he was supposed to have stolen.)

John Brockmann from an interview with a Chapter member present at the time

Marie Webner had always wanted to be Provincial Chaplain. She had been so much a part of the Province for so long that everyone just assumed that her appointment as Provincial Chaplain would be a great solution to a big problem—Provincial Chaplains are hard to find. Gooch retired after 12 years, and Masud was elected as the next Provincial Chaplain but served for only one term, three years. The next Provincial Chaplain to be appointed was Jack Stapleton, and he had to be replaced within a week by Alden, who only agreed to serve on an interim basis.

When Marie was appointed as Provincial Chaplain to succeed Alden's interim term, for a time it worked beautifully, but then there started to be “problems.” In essence, she began making decisions without consulting with others in the leadership of the Province. For example, when the third edition of the *Devotional Companion* came back from the printer with the pages disarranged, without consultation, she authorized the expenditure of a large amount of money to have them reprinted.

We all arrived at Chapter that year in 1994 with an unspoken consensus that we could not support her as Chaplain for another term in the fashion she had thus exhibited. None of us had talked to each other about it; it was just a consensus we all arrived at separately by observing her actions.

Alden attempted to help her understand and prepare her for what he intuited was going to happen, but she could not receive his message. He tried to get her to withdraw before the vote, but she would not. Through the entire Chapter vote, flocks of crows were flying around Little Portion, cawing and carrying on.

Webner's Freedom

From a 1997 letter three years later in the archives from Marie Webner to Anita Catron

I feel a wonderful freedom to express my opinion these days.

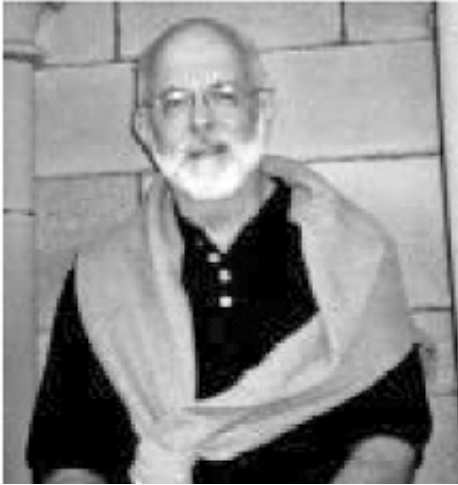
I do not want an office or influence. I want to be free to be the person I want to be, pursuing the interests that I have not been free to pursue while working for money or for TSSF....

I have sent a finished piece of writing off to a publisher. I think it would be a miracle if I did not get rejections before acceptance, but I feel really good about being embarked on this third career of my lifetime.

Joy, peace, and all love to you.

Marie Webner died in February 2015.





The Rev. Alden Whitney, Feb 19, 1934-May 20, 2000.

Minister General, Provincial Minister of the American Province, Priest, Doctor, Psychotherapist, Sheep Farmer, Friend, A Beloved Child of God

by Muriel Adey

I was not privileged to know Brother Alden as well as many of you; he came onto Chapter after I stepped down in '81, and was only present for half a day at the most recent Chapter where once again I was a member.

However, that is not to say that Alden did not greatly influence my life!

In the late 80s and early 90s, I was feeling very ambivalent about continuing to renew my vow and pledge in the North American branch of TSSF. Only my Spiritual Director knew how agonized I was. Out of the blue I got a phone call from Alden to say he would be in Vancouver for a conference - could I hitch a ferry and meet him for lunch? I did. I was able to freely share my conflicted feelings and feel understood; better yet, we found a quiet corner in the nearby Cathedral and Alden accepted my renewal. That was a major

turning point!

Moreover, soon after that, I read in the *Franciscan Times* that the Community Obedience, which is now printed on the inside front cover of the *Principles and Rule*, had been accepted by all the branches of the TO present at IPTOC, including the North American branch, as something to do that would help all the branches feel part of the worldwide TSSF family. As I understand it, this was very dear to Alden's heart and a major contribution bringing all of us on the N. American continent closer to our European, African, Australasian brothers and sisters.

For me personally, my heart rejoiced to read once more the very familiar words of the Community Obedience, which had nurtured my own formation before I crossed to this side of the Atlantic. As a direct result, I felt at home enough, once more, to stand for election to Chapter. Brother Alden saved me from becoming a lapsed tertiary.

by MaryAnn Jackman

He was my brother in every sense of the word and I loved him enormously. If anybody out there has a doubt about how good and wonderful and full of integrity and holiness a gay person can be, here is your gloriously shining example, our former Minister General.

If anybody comes back at me for mentioning the G word this time, you're in for it, believe me. The shameless brazen dyke in me will come after you with a vengeance. I once told Alden over breakfast in an airport hotel in Chicago if everyone who was gay would come out, things would change enormously for the better. I didn't include myself in that number at the time, though the minute I spoke the words, God revealed to me for a fact that I should have. I confessed that to Alden recently. OK, Aldy, I've put my words where my heart is at last. You were out to all the world, in all your hopeful innocence & wonder. Me, too, darling one, after your shining example.

He had great wit and a sense of wonderful fun. We enjoyed each other so much. He said in his note he wished he could see me. I was thinking about flying east for a quick visit & my friend Jo said don't wait too long. I did. (I'm sorry about that, dear Alden.) The last time I saw him was in San Francisco a year or so ago, and we knew when we said a lingering goodbye then, I think, that we wouldn't see each other again. We kept up a lively daily email correspondence until he got so ill. I have missed that terribly. I could tell you so many wonderful Alden stories, but I won't. They are mine and I'm going to jealously hold on to them for a while. At least until the pain is less.

by Cheryl Holmes

Yes, devastating news. Such a dear person. I have warm memories of Alden in several instances. One I will always smile about is the day Sue Heinsohn and I arrived at the registration table at the Provincial Convocation held in New Orleans. We were breathless and SO excited to be there. Alden, with that wonderful sense of humor, and fun-loving brother that he was, came up to us and said, "Well, I see you two haven't taken your medication!" It was the perfect thing to say! You see, Alden knew that Sue & I are dear friends as well as being Franciscan sisters and that we are always excited and thrilled to be with those like us.

Later on during the Convocation, I attended the small group discussion Alden led with the subject being homosexuality (can't remember the exact title.) After Alden's presentation, there was some discussion. Terrified, but not daunted by the number of people (our Bishop Protector, Jerry Lamb, being among them), I spoke up about an experience I had in trying to defend the position of gays in the military for about 30 minutes. I was hoping to get information or the name of a book that would give me better ammunition for the next time. The other person to whom I was directing the defense happened to be my employer, an attorney. A day or so later, Alden hunted me down and gave me a little book entitled *Letters from the Closet*. I will treasure it because the gift said so much about Alden and his spirit. We will miss him so much.