



The Franciscan Connection

An Occasional Publication of
The Third Order, Society of St. Francis,
Province of the Americas
Spring 2018



Welcome To The Franciscan Connection

The Franciscan Connection is a new periodical within the Third Order, Society of St. Francis, Province of the Americas. The TFC will be administered through the Chaplain's Office and will be sent out via snail mail and email. It will be assembled on an "as needed" basis with an expected minimum of quarterly per year. Included will be articles relating to chaplaincy work, pastoral interests, and ministry endeavors. Enjoy!

*Richard Simpson, Provincial Chaplain, TSSF,
Province of the Americas*

The Saints Wisdom Project [SWP] and The Emmaus Travelers Program [ETP]

We all have heard the terms and phrases isolates, isolated tertiaries, shut-ins, and aging out. These words are not new. The desire to deal with these real issues is not new either. There have been conscientious efforts by some of our fellowships to help keep our senior members connected - gallant efforts. All agree that this is an important issue for us and wish it to be addressed. Though some have even done a great job for a long time, the truth is that as an Order we have not successfully come up with a method to fix the problem. Until now.

How?

The answer? Simple. Keep everyone connected, period. Make every effort to not let tertiaries fall through cracks and flounder in isolation. But how? We did not know what to do. We just knew that something *had* to be done. What began as an idea similar to thoughts which others in the Order have expressed over the years, has grown beyond our wildest expectations and is truly healing this former trend of disconnection. An additional unplanned full blown ministry has developed which promises to provide us with all of the tools we need to put in place a plan to prevent people from "getting lost" in the Order merely because of advancing age and/or geographical separation.

Genesis Of A Ministry

Here is how it all has been unfolding before our very eyes: In late November, 2017 about eighty snail mail letters were sent out describing The Saints Wisdom Project [SWP], which was initially intended to be an outreach to those in the Order who have had to contend with and navigate the aging process. We asked that the recipients write an article and give some biographical information about themselves and the ministry work that they have been engaged in throughout their lives. In particular, we explained that we intend to highlight the portion of their narratives which reveals any modification, altering, or termination of their ministries. And more importantly, to describe how the Lord has replaced those ministries with newer ones?

The Importance Of Prayer

Sometimes seniors feel that the less active ministries they are doing are somehow "less" important. This is simply not true. What we hope the Saints Wisdom Project will do is help all the members of our Order realize how vital these ministries are, especially the prayer ministries. We have shared with tertiaries across the country the importance of their prayer ministries and that we need them to keep praying! The fact is, that all the active ministries in TSSF are under-girded by the prayers of the faithful! Other steadfast saints facilitate Bible study, counseling, and listening ministries wherever they happen to be living.

First Steps

Two days after those initial letters went out, an email version was sent out to our entire membership, followed by a second email about a week later. Three days after the snail mail effort, seventy-three tertiaries were called via telephone, and something amazing happened. Every single phone call that got through resulted in a "Yes" to writing an article! And it was not just the seniors responding. People had ideas and suggestions for writing the articles from all different angles and perspectives. Some work with

older saints and some had experience from nursing their loved ones during major illnesses and end of life care. All agreed that this conversation is long overdue, and indeed pressing. The Emmaus Travelers Team felt that all articles should be welcomed providing they somehow connect to the aging process.

Amazing!

So off like a shot! We currently have in hand over thirty-eight articles. Approximately one hundred and fifty more are pending during the month of May. And we have not even finished calling everyone. At this point, we would like to ask you to please consider writing your story, because it matters. They *all* matter. Because of the size of the response we will be printing a small book for TSSF members. If the project finished with the printing of the book it would be considered an outstanding success, but . . .

The Unexpected Effect

It is what happened next that has really surpassed our imagination and fixed the disconnect problem hopefully once and for all! After the first twenty calls a pattern emerged. Notes were being taken to understand member needs, thoughts, insights, and suggestions. People were saying outright that they wished they could feel and somehow become more connected with other tertiaries. Interesting. This request was not just from people without a fellowship, nor was it only from people living far from other tertiaries. It was from everyone. Not some, but *everyone*. We responded with typical questions like, “Don't you have a fellowship? Have you been able to attend convocations, etc?” Even those who said yes felt that it was not enough. Next, twenty more calls. After approximately forty calls a decision was made to call some tertiaries back and encourage them to make a connection with another tertiary. Just like that! “Hi again, we thought about what you said. Why don't you give this sister a call or that brother a call? We bet there is a wonderful connection there waiting to happen!” Well, this instantly was working and it got to be so popular so fast that we felt the need to ask our minister provincial what to do next, since there existed no precedent or mechanism to facilitate such a thing. And there it was. . . The green light. “Obviously God the Holy Spirit is doing something in our midst so let us be pliable and trust what is happening!”

We Need A Name

After about four weeks we realized that we needed a name for what we were doing because we were asking people to be a part of a ministry which was still being formed. After a mental wrestling match as well as several interesting names offered up, we decided to just pray and wait. A few days later “Emmaus Travelers” bubbled up and The Emmaus Travelers Program [ETP] was officially born. Nearly two thirds of our members have been contacted so far, and those remaining will soon be. Please take the call. As of this week [twelve weeks since we launched] over one hundred and ten of you are now Emmaus Travelers. It is PHENOMENAL!

Spirit Led

What is happening is a “God Thing.” We wanted the problem fixed and so it shall be. And here is how and why we believe this to be true. Imagine TSSF as a large ship. As new members profess, they are launched on little dinghy boats with a tiny sail [with a tau cross, of course] and sent encouragingly forth to captain their vessels solo. The formation team then moves on to the next candidate to repeat the magnificent job it just completed in preparing individuals for profession. All along, tertiaries are encouraged to join a good fellowship if possible, to think about continued Franciscan education, to stay with spiritual direction, and to keep up with their reporting and renewals. [Your pledge – don't forget your pledge!] Even well equipped new tertiaries [at least most of them, based on our findings] may still have a bit of a mild panic, inherently feeling, “Where did everybody go?” Even though they *knew* it was coming!

The Rest Of The Story

Back to the dinghies. Certain people rise to the occasion and begin to sail with seemingly little difficulty. Others do not and have a hard time catching the wind, using the rudder, or reading the maps. Some have even capsized and are floating in the water, either clinging to the boat or just floating aimlessly in their life jackets, dazed. As a starting point, we applied this analogy to our membership and viewed those who are not connected as those floating in the water. As we threw out lifelines [reaching out via telephone and reestablishing the connections], we reeled them in and dried them off and asked, “What happened?” The answer was always the same. “I can't do this alone.”

How Does It Work?

So how does the Emmaus Travelers Program “fix” the problem? First, strong connections are made with our seniors and others who simply do not have easy access to the rest of the body. We provide them with at least one Emmaus Traveler [ET], not to merely call now and again to say hello, but to really build community with them. Learn *about* them. Learn *from* them. Love them. These brothers and sisters are our gems and such great resources! By implementing the ETP for all tertiaries, the Emmaus Travelers will not only get to know other members of TSSF, but also be in a position to ascertain the needs of their counterparts. This knowledge can then be passed along to our community prayer list, for instance. The program is already working and is drawing us closer together like never before! Perhaps our desire for *new* members, and yes even *younger* members, will be realized as we learn to truly love, nurture, and build deep and enduring community with the members we *currently* have!

Reaching Out/Reaching In

Second, once the “search and rescue mission” is complete and we have connected and reconnected our membership as much as humanly possible, the program will turn inward and newly professed members will be offered [through the chaplaincy arm of the Order] Emmaus Travelers [ETs] too! By doing so we will immediately strengthen the ranks and diminish the potential for any of our family members to feel alone. If we make connection a priority, a mission, we *will* succeed. No one is suggesting that community can be “legislated,” but it is important for us to acknowledge that fact that we are already a community. We worked hard to join this community and there is a built-in expectation for us to make every effort to stay connected.

*The Saints Wisdom Project and
The Emmaus Travelers Program Team*

[Note: Though both of these ministries grew from ideas brought forth from the Long Island Fellowship, the fact is that the inspiration behind them comes from the Holy Spirit, where all credit belongs, for as God's children, we are just vessels, indeed, reflectors of the Light]. TFC

“The Brothers and
Sisters of Penance”
TSSF
~ The Story Continues ~



The TSSF RPBS

The TSSF Rosary and Prayer Bead Society

A Faithful Ministry Re-Envisioned!

During the early 1970s one of our members, Darlene Sipes of Arizona [a postulant at the time] had a vision of Our Lady while on retreat. Soon after she was professed she started the *Franciscan Crown Rosary Group* with the help of another TSSF friend, Don Carlson. Her full story will be told in her article for the Saints Wisdom Project [SWP]. The original rosary group has been praying together since then and eight longtime members are still in the group. In fact, one participant, Rafael Shower, has been in the group since he was professed over twenty years ago! Darlene was professed in 1974 and is in her forty-third year of her Franciscan journey. She has been the faithful leader of this rosary prayer group since its inception and will now pass the baton of leadership to two of the group's current members, Judith Gillette and Joy Bidlack. She will remain with the group as “*Pray-er Emeritus*,” and will still manage the yearly “Christmastide Thank You Effort” to the membership.

A New Name

The name of the group has been changed to *The TSSF Rosary and Prayer Bead Society* [The TSSF RPBS] to accommodate any Third Order members who currently use other forms of the rosary and indeed other types of prayer beads. A surprising number of tertiaries have shown interest in learning more about praying with this prayer tool. Many more of you admitted to already doing so! In fact, seventy-six tertiaries so far have asked to join!

In Our Own Way

Under Darlene's leadership the group prayed the Franciscan Crown Rosary in the traditional way. They did this separately, but in unison. Each day a specific decade was prayed and there were monthly intentions. While this method will still be an option, members will be encouraged to “*Pray any rosary, any day, any way*.” This new mantra of the Society allows for a greater number of people to participate. There will be various rosaries highlighted each day with specific intentions, but one only needs to commit to praying the rosary once per week [any rosary] to be a member of the group!

Communication With Members [Our Newsletter]

There is a Society logo which will be used in the newsletter heading with each edition. [See below.] Judith and Joy are intending to craft a simple informative newsletter quarterly which will include testimonials from members describing their experiences of and with the rosary. Interesting tidbits and facts will be shared, as well. There will be histories of various rosaries and prayer beads made available to members, along with descriptions on how to use them. Some types that will be discussed are the Franciscan Crown Rosary, the Dominican Rosary, the Anglican Rosary, Orthodox Prayer Ropes, Finger Rosaries and more. Instructions on how to make rosaries will be at the ready for those so inclined. Moreover, members will be encouraged to be open to allowing the Holy Spirit to move them in prayer, *“That we, with the Blessed Virgin, Saints Francis and Clare, Saints Louis and Elizabeth, our patrons, who have served God in the past, may be gathered into His unending Dominion.”*



This logo will be on the TSSF RPBS newsletter which will be published quarterly. It will include testimonials from members about their experiences with praying the rosary and the ways they discovered how to incorporate this valuable tool into their prayer lives.

How To Join

An introductory packet is being prepared for members, and this article serves as the official offer for people to join *The TSSF Rosary and Prayer Bead Society!* You may join now by contacting either Judith Gillette at serg1us@aol.com or Joy Bidlack at joymazzola@me.com. You may also phone in your request to join by calling 631-928-1895 and leaving a message for *Brother Michael*, or by sending a snail mail letter to *St. Mark's Episcopal Church @ 754 Montauk Highway, Islip, NY 11751 [Attention: The TSSF Rosary & Prayer Bead Society]*

Feedback

Your input regarding the following questions will be helpful to us in determining the future content of our newsletter. Let us know: [1] Is the rosary a regular part of your prayer life? [2] If so, which

rosary do you use the most? [3] Do you use the rosary with a traditional format or have you developed your own format? [4] Would you like to share about your experience with the rosary in an upcoming edition of the newsletter? Please include your responses with your request to become a member.

Thank You!

Finally, we wish to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for our sister Darlene for her commitment and endurance with this important ministry. Her faithfulness over the past four and a half decades is an inspiration to us all. It is with great excitement that The TSSF Rosary and Prayer Bead Society moves forward to embrace all who wish to be a part of this prayer work of the Holy Spirit.

Pax et bonum, The TSSF Rosary and Prayer Bead Society Team

Barnabas Ministry!

Encouragement ~ Just Because An Age Old Ministry Gets A Name!

Have you ever been prompted to reach out to encourage someone - Even someone you do not know? Did you ever make a call, send a card, or letter to someone “just because.” Or what about doing any number of mundane and ordinary tasks to assist others? Do you roll up your sleeves and lend a hand without being asked? Do you arrive early and stay late at functions or events of any kind? If you do any of these things you can refer to your actions as “Barnabas Ministry!” The interesting thing about this work is that it is done by faithful people wishing to serve God and to share heavenly love with their brothers and sisters. These efforts are fulfilled without any expectation of credit, acknowledgment, praise, or even thanks. Glory is given to God, and the laborers are satisfied knowing that they there are carrying out the scriptural mandate to “Love one another.” John 15:17

Why Barnabas?

In Acts Chapter 11, we read about Barnabas being sent from the church which was at Jerusalem to Antioch for the sole purpose of exhorting believers there to serve God wholeheartedly. He was a good person filled with the Holy Spirit and faith. Together with St. Paul, Barnabas stayed at Antioch for a year teaching and building up the church. It was here that believers were first called “Christians.” Their endeavors included help with disaster relief.

Render Honor To Whom Honor Is Due

It is entirely possible to recognize this type of ministry work without diminishing the heavenly reward of the doers. It is imperative that we do all that we do unto the Lord. That being said, there is no doubt that hearing the words, "Thank you" from time to time goes a long way in bolstering our efforts to carry out good works [Romans 13:7]. With this in mind, it is perfectly acceptable for anyone involved with "toiling in the fields" to think of his or her efforts as "Barnabas Ministry" and to be thanked and appreciated for it! In this edition of The Franciscan Connection one such ministry will be highlighted, and readers are invited to submit articles about their efforts to encourage the body of Christ. Send your submissions to saintswisdom@yahoo.com or *St. Mark's Episcopal Church @ 754 Montauk Highway, Islip, NY 11751 [Attention: Barnabas Ministry]* **TFC**



I've Got Mail

It has become a "holy habit!" "Snail mail," that is! Snail mail is a vital tool of my ministry of encouragement. Right now, I'm in the midst of a Lenten discipline of sending a letter a day for the forty days of Lent, encouraging my "recipients" to give TO one of three ministries at my parish, Grace Church, in Alabama, instead of giving UP something.

And it can be for you too, without limitation – even just once a day, a prayer arrow if you will, moving though the postal service, in service to the Lord. And I'm not talking mass mailings – But personal "God-speak," one-on-one (grace in motion), a daily postal prayer. By sharing an article of spiritual reading that spoke to your heart, you might give a boost or an insight or a prayer prompt to a tertiary across town or across the country. Mail is a great mechanism to practice and be in community, with our TSSF family, and beyond. The mail as I see it (not at all of a digital kind!) can serve the Lord in a variety of ways – Here are some of them:

1. To beg alms for your church outreach efforts, such as a food pantry ministry (which is one outreach of which I am a part). This ministry has been totally supported and enabled for fourteen years now by dollars and other donations from outside the church, because unfortunately it has not been a line item in the church's budget. So it takes many individuals

and a few area churches to keep it alive. Of course, thank you notes are an integral part of my postal tools of ministry!

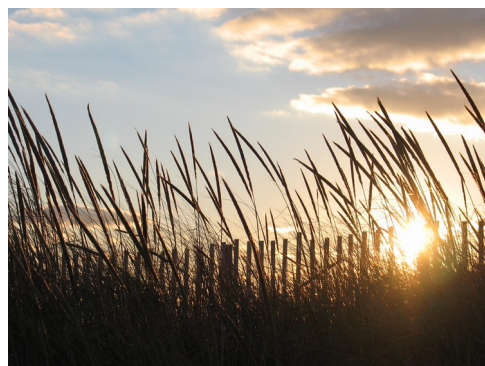
2. As an exercise in faith and encouragement, day in and day out, perhaps simply being a bridge to offer a hand to some soul in a troubling crisis; a way to live out an aspect of Matthew 25:31-46, and the corporal works of mercy (google that!), and our own individual Baptismal covenants, renewable annually just like our Rules.

3. As an affirmation of the dignity of every human being, and in seeing Christ in all persons, as we live it out through our respective calls to ministry, or in giving thanks for gifts given, kind words, life or career milestones, bridges crossed, blessed results, good news, or of insights you've gained from "holy silence!"

Finally, I have a question (speaking of building bridges of encouragement). Why have so many folks in the TSSF directory not indicated their ministry focus? By sharing just a few words about what God has called you to do, you may promote bridge building collaborations and encourage contacts between like-minded tertiaries with similar ministries. Each of us in TSSF-land need the words, ideas, and fresh understandings of each other to rally and cheer us on as the Holy Spirit inspires us through Her encouragement, and our shared words, as we crisscross the province holding each other up, and holding each others' hands, even via prayerful bridge-building snail mail no less. Got mail?

*Frank Romanowicz, TSSF
[God's Joyful Fools Fellowship]*

"Only by understanding our own uniqueness can we fully appreciate how special our neighbor really is. Only by being aware of our own endowments can we begin to marvel at the variety that our Creator has provided in humankind." Fred Rogers



Bruised Reeds

[Healing Ministry ~ The Back Story]

My mother-in-law died in 1982. After the dust had settled and the funeral was over, my husband and I were faced with the task of going through her things: what to keep for ourselves, what to throw away, and what to pass on to other family members. It was kind of bittersweet in a way. Dave had been very close to his parents, especially his mother, so the “Keep” pile kept getting bigger and bigger. And as the pile grew, so did my frustration. Dave and I had a lot of stuff of our own; we certainly didn't need any more to add to it! Especially since I had recently taken provisional vows of simplicity.

The Clean Up

So anyway, there we were one day going through a box of old junk. Dave held something up and said, “Hey Barb, you should keep this.” What he was holding up was an old ceramic rabbit. I had recently started collecting bunny figurines, and apparently Dave thought this old rabbit would make a good edition to my collection. (No doubt he was a little sentimental about it too, because it belonged to his mother.) “Really, Honey, you should keep him,” he said. It was about six inches high, one arm was missing, and whatever paint there had been had long since faded away. “No thanks,” I said. “I'll pass on that one.” So he placed it in the trash can. The next morning when I went downstairs to make coffee, I happened to notice the untouched trash can with the bunny sitting on top of the rest of the debris. I made the coffee and glanced again at the trash can before I went upstairs to get ready for work. “Please give me a home,” it seemed to say. I shook my head and walked away. A few minutes later Dave and I were sitting in the kitchen drinking our coffee, and I couldn't seem to take my eyes off that bunny. Dave remarked, “Why don't you keep him, honey? He'd make a good edition to your collection.”

Bunny On My Mind

“Nah, he doesn't really 'fit.' He's too big, he's too old and ugly. Let's just get rid of him,” I replied. Even at this point, the bunny could be seen peeking out from the other layers of trash. And there was this “look” on his face that seemed to say, “Why don't you keep me? I could love you.” “Oh, all right,” I said resignedly. I plucked him out from the pile of trash and placed him on the table next to my empty coffee cup. It was getting late and Dave and I hurried off to work. Throughout the day at work, I thought about that old rabbit. “I'll hide him,” I thought to myself.

“He can be in my collection, but just not at all that visible.”

Acceptance

In those days I got home from work before Dave and would immediately begin to prepare dinner. On this particular day when I arrived home, I placed our coffee cups from the morning into the sink and when I turned on the water, I decided to clean up the bunny! A little dish soap, a quick rinse, and a swipe with a dish towel. And he looked . . . marginally better. By this time I had even given him a name - “Grandpa Grey-bottom” - for lack of anything more original. “Okay, Grandpa, here you go,” I said as I put him on the shelf with my other figurines. There might even be a story there of how he heroically lost his arm saving other bunnies. I found my heart strangely warmed.

Later On

That evening, as Dave and I sat in the living room doing our respective things, I remembered a passage from Isaiah, “A bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench” Isaiah 42:3. In that moment, goosebumps broke out on my arms. In a way, I had saved a bruised reed! Okay, so maybe it was a toy, a ceramic statue, but toys and figurines can be as real as our imaginations will let them be. I recall an animated movie in which Pocahontas proclaims that, “Every rock and tree in the forest has a name.” Well, the “spirit” of Grandpa Grey-bottom taught me a few things that day.

Lessons Learned & Seeds Planted

Most importantly, I embraced the fact that “disability” doesn't mean useless, and “different” doesn't mean ugly. These truths were seared into my conscience, and while were initially learned by this experience with this bunny, they would eventually be applied to the healing ministry work that God would have me doing. I deeply understood that all God's children are of equal value and need love and comfort.

The Final Straw

About ten years later Dave and I were entertaining some of his friends one evening. Somehow, an argument broke out among some of the younger guests. At first it was just verbal, but quickly it became physical and punches were thrown. Even objects were picked up and used to strike blows! I managed to encourage the combatants to go outside so nothing in my house would get broken.

Fortunately, the situation was quickly resolved and there were no emergency room visits. By the time everyone was shaking hands and calling each other “homie” again, I had more or less put my living room back together. However, the melee was not without its casualties. My prayer book, which had been a gift from Dave at my profession, was torn and a few of my bunny figurines were broken. Most of them I could fix with a little Elmer’s glue, but my Precious Moments Bunny and old Grandpa Grey-bottom had been smashed to pieces. Tears filled my eyes as I swept up the mess. I would miss them, especially (believe it or not) Grandpa Grey-bottom. By that time, he had been a part of my collection for ten years and who knows how long he belonged to my mother-in-law. One might say that he lived a good long life. He fought a good fight and ran the race with patience, and is now in bunny heaven riding herd on all the little rambunctious little baby bunnies. I smiled through my tears and emitted a sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob.

How It All Got Started

In the mid 1980s, as my healing ministry was just beginning to take shape, I realized that the passion I had for “fixing things” like broken china, jewelry, and torn clothing, was just a foreshadowing of greater things to come. From my experience with the ceramic bunny came a personal motto, “Let brokenness be healed.” I probably would have tried to fix “Grandpa Grey-bottom” if I could have found the arm, but I never did! In fact, it is just as well I didn’t because as I began working with people I learned that part of the healing process includes acknowledging and embracing our brokenness. In truth, I grew to love Grandpa Grey-bottom even more! I also began to understand more deeply the incarnation and the value of all creation.

How Is Healing Achieved?

I attended seminars about getting in touch with the whole person, listening well to others, and being present. For over thirty years the Lord has had me working to help bring healing to others. One frequent way this happens is through the “Prayer Desk” at my church (towards the back of the sanctuary near the baptismal font). After mass I stand there and wait for people who want healing prayer, to approach me and when they do, I lay hands on them and we pray together. The number of people who come and ask for this type of prayer varies, though even if just one person comes, I know that I am providing important ministry to them. But

healing is not limited to laying on of hands at the prayer desk. Another aspect of healing is what a former priest at my church called “comforting.” It has to do with being aware of people and their life stories, and what, if anything, you might do to help those life stories “come ‘round right.” It might comprise phone calls, cards, letters, or personal communications to fellow parishioners who are going through troubled times. I have sensed God’s presence in these and other endeavors and I believe that this particular area of encouraging others is part of my overall ministry.

*Barbara Wilbur, TSSF
[Wolf of Gubbio Fellowship]*

Working Girl

By Murray Bodo OFM

I’m making my bed.
You live in my hands
 *your arthritis growing
 in mine.*
From my desk
you smile among dahlias
 *the photo faded
 your bobbed hair tight*
as a bud, your purse light
in hands not gnarled
 *as when I watched you
 smooth my bed the last time.*
Your scrapbook lies open:
A girl’s elastic hand glues
 *pressed petals that rattle now
 among the brittle pages.*

“Working Girl” is the third part of a three part poem entitled *Ending With The Beginning: Three Poems For My Mother*, by Murray Bodo which originally appeared in his book *Wounded Angels*. This poem is also included in a new anthology of poems entitled *A Far Country: Poems New And Selected* published by Tau Publishing. The poem is used with permission from the author.

Final Words

From The Chaplain’s Office: If you need to renew your vows by phone, you may now do so with a special new form that has been created with you in mind. Simply contact your area chaplain or the provincial chaplain for more details. Under certain circumstances we are also offering spiritual direction and even confession by phone! Please inquire if you need any of these services. **TFC**

ST. MARK'S CHURCH
754 Montauk Highway
Islip, NY 11751

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