

Be A Franciscan

A publication of the vocation ministry of Holy Name Province

St. Francis and the Christmas Crèche

By Fr. Brian Smail, OFM

The spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi was deeply rooted in the Incarnation. Francis had a profound reverence for all of creation because he saw it as graced by God through Jesus, the “Word made flesh.”

Francis was particularly moved by the humanity of Jesus and his birth in a stable. In the year 1223, while visiting the Italian town of Greccio at Christmas, he wished to recreate the nativity scene so that the people would always remember Jesus’ humble beginnings. Thomas of Celano quotes Francis as saying, “For I would make a memorial of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes his infant hardships; how he lay in a manger on hay, with the ox and ass standing by.”

St. Bonaventure vividly describes the scene in his *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*: “It happened in the third year before his death, that in order to excite the inhabitants of Greccio to commemorate the nativity of the infant Jesus with great devotion, St. Francis determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff.

Then he prepared a manger and



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In creating “The Gift,” artist Julie Lonneman was inspired by the beauty and simplicity of medieval art, children’s book illustrations and Hispanic folk art. Prior to becoming a freelance illustrator in 1995, Julie was an art director at St. Anthony Messenger Press in Cincinnati, Ohio.

“The man of God (St. Francis) stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called him the Babe of Bethlehem.

“A certain valiant and voracious soldier, Master John of Greccio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake him from sleep. This vision of the devout soldier is credible, not only by reason of the sanctity of him that saw it, but by reason of the miracles which afterwards confirmed its truth.

“For the example of Francis, if it be considered by the world, is doubtless sufficient to excite all hearts which are negligent in the faith of Christ; and the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle, and many other pestilences; God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles.”

As you celebrate Christmas with family and loved ones, may you behold the Christ Child with the same radiant joy of St. Francis. I wish you a peaceful Christmas, and a New Year filled with every grace and blessing.

brought hay and an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise.

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Fr. Brian, a native of Stoneham, Mass., has been vocation director for the Province since 2007. Previously, he served as vicar of St. Anthony Shrine in Boston for nine years.



Discerning Your Vocation

Come and See Franciscan Life and Ministry

Men who are considering a call to Franciscan life often comment that meeting friars and visiting friar communities are very helpful in their discernment process.

Come and See weekends and other vocation events offer these opportunities for candidates, along with first-hand experience of friar life and ministry.

This past October, four men travelled from throughout the Province to visit St. Francis Friary on the west side of Manhattan. Guests of the Oct. 14 to 16 Come and See weekend, Brian, Eufemio, Kevin and Junior, got a taste of Franciscan life by joining the friars for morning and evening prayer, meals, Mass and recreation.

The weekend also afforded the men an opportunity to learn about and experience Franciscan ministry. On Saturday afternoon, they visited one of the three St. Francis Residences, facilities founded by the friars in the 1970s to serve homeless people suffering from schizophrenia and other mental disabilities.

Sponsored by St. Francis Friends of the Poor, the residence facilitates the transition from life on the streets to a largely self-sufficient life with dignity.

The guests chatted with several residents and viewed their artwork on display in one of the conference rooms. They witnessed a clean, secure, and attractive facility that the residents can



From left to right, guests Kevin, Junior and Eufemio, vocation director Fr. Brian Smail, OFM, and Fr. Robert Gavin, OFM, meet in the St. Francis Breadline kitchen as they prepare to serve clients at 7 a.m. on a Sunday as part of their Come and See weekend.

call “home,” and where they feel a sense of community and belonging.

The following morning, the guests rose early for a hands-on experience of the St. Francis Breadline. Begun during

the Great Depression, the Breadline has fed hundreds of New York City homeless every day for the past 80 years.

The men helped to serve the people who gathered outside St. Francis of Assisi Church a substantial sandwich, juice, and hot coffee. For many of the clients, this may have been their only meal and kind words of the day.

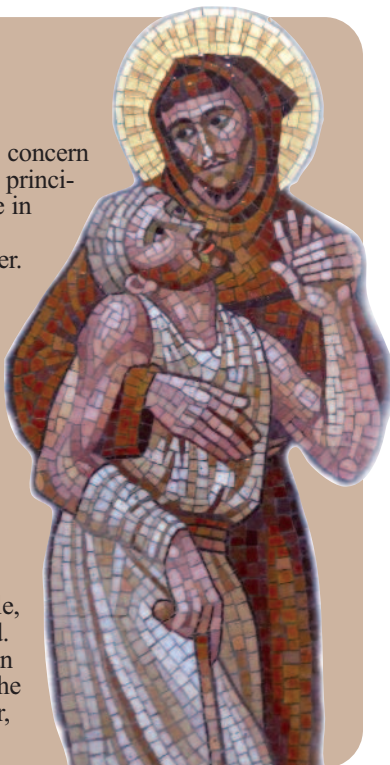
Franciscan Ministry: A Concern for Human Dignity

The spirit behind Franciscan ministry reflects a core concern for the dignity of the human person. The foundational principle of Franciscan spirituality — that everyone is made in the image and likeness of God — has its origin in the memorable encounter between St. Francis and the leper.

Francis was riding his horse one day and encountered a leper on the side of the road. Lepers in the time of Francis were ostracized from their communities; they were feared and loathed. In fact, if a passerby happened to be approaching, lepers were required to ring a bell they carried to warn the individual lest they get too close. Imagine the sense of loneliness and isolation they felt, cut off from their communities and forced to live by the roadsides!

But, when he saw the leper that day, Francis was moved with compassion, dismounted his horse, and embraced him. This act was Francis’ witness to the human dignity of the poor leper. He saw not a horrible, deforming disease, but a human person loved by God.

Committed to the dignity of all people, for more than 800 years the Franciscans have made a difference in the world through their outreach to the homeless, the poor, the sick and the alienated.



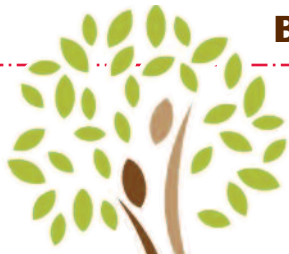
For more on discerning your vocation, read “Taking the Next Step” on page 5.

One guest of the weekend remarked on the sheer number of people present who were in need. Another was struck by the gratitude of so many of the clients for the work of the friars and dedicated volunteers.

If you are interested in Franciscan life and ministry, spend time with us to get to know us better. Whether for a weekend or just a day, a visit can be a valuable and rewarding experience.

Our next weekend will be held March 2 to 4 in Boston. For further information or to register for this event, contact vocation director Fr. Brian Smail, OFM, at vocation@hnp.org or 1-800-677-7788.

All upcoming vocation events are listed on our website, BeAFranciscan.org.



FRANCISCAN

MISSION SERVICE

A Ministry of Peace and Justice

By Kim Smolik

As you reflect on vocation, have you ever felt called to serve overseas with communities in need, in Latin America or Africa? If so, I would like to introduce you to Franciscan Mission Service (FMS). We are a lay mission organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., with longstanding ties to Holy Name Province. In fact, several HNP friars served as missionaries with us before they joined the Franciscan Order. If you think that engaging in a Franciscan ministry abroad could be an important part of your journey, we would like to hear from you.

FMS was founded in 1985 by Br. Anselm Moons, OFM, at the request of the North American Order of Friars Minor. We are here to scatter the seeds of Franciscan ministry and spirituality as widely as possible among the laity. Eight hundred years ago, this passion led St. Francis to found the Secular Franciscan Order, so that religious and lay people could serve and pray side by side. As he wrote, “Let the brothers rejoice when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.”



FMS missionary Nora Pfeiffer serves in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where she regularly hosts movie night for the children at the burn center where she lives. Nora also gardens, composts, and runs an ecological radio show.

In that spirit, our lay missionaries collaborate today with established Franciscan religious communities in Bolivia, Zambia and South Africa. They make a minimum two-year commitment to serve overseas, and are then equipped for mission in their home communities in North America upon return. For the past 25 years, we have seen that lay men and women of all ages, single and married, have a strong desire to live in solidarity with the poor.

Where this desire exists, it is a clear sign of vocation. In this summer’s edition of *Be A Franciscan*, Fr. Warren Sazama, SJ, wrote, “We discover what God is calling us to by paying attention

to what gives us the most life, energy and joy.” I couldn’t agree more. One of our current missionaries serving in Johannesburg, South Africa, said it well: “I’m working with and for people of a vastly different culture, mostly the poor, the dying, and those suffering from HIV/AIDS, and in less than ideal circumstances — and yet somehow I’m happy from morning to bedtime. I’m living in a quiet kind of joy each day the whole day long.”

Two HNP friars can tell you more about what mission with FMS is like. Fr. George Corrigan, OFM, president of our board of directors, served with FMS in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, from 1996 to 1999. He professed vows with the friars of Holy Name Province in 2002. Br. Paul O’Keeffe, OFM, was a lay missionary with us in Kenya and Jamaica (1996-1997), working alongside Franciscans with street children, refugees and the physically disabled. He professed his solemn vows as a Franciscan in 2010, and recently said, “All of my mission experiences have opened me up to new graces and broadened my perspective on what it means to be a Christian and a citizen of the world.”

I myself am not a Franciscan, but my involvement with Franciscans has renewed and deepened my sense of belonging to the Church. I hope this may also be true for you.

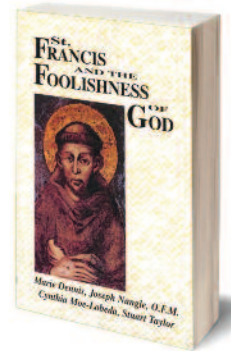
Kim Smolik, a native of Minneapolis, Minn., has worked for more than 18 years as an editor, activist and administrator in a variety of social justice areas, with special interests in experiential and cross-cultural learning, poverty and race education, and organizational development. She became executive director of FMS in 2009.



Several of our friars found serving as an FMS missionary to be helpful in their discernment process. Information about volunteer opportunities can be found online.

www.FranciscanMissionService.org

Recommended Reading



***St. Francis and the Foolishness of God* by Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, and Stuart Taylor. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1993.**

Utilized in the formation of FMS missionaries, this book retells the events in the life of St. Francis. Along with sociological and theological reflection, it facilitates a discussion around Franciscan values and social action. Fr. Joe, a member of Holy Name Province, served as co-director of Franciscan Mission Service for 12 years.

Men who contact our office frequently ask, "What is a typical day in the life of a friar?" This is difficult to answer because there really is no "typical day." A day in the life of a friar is as varied and ever changing as the number of friars in our Province and the diversity of our ministries.

Beginning with this issue of *Be A Franciscan*, our friars share their daily experiences as they follow in the footsteps of St. Francis.

A Day in the Life of a Student Friar

By Br. Gerald Hopeck, OFM

If someone had asked me three years ago whether I would return to Catholic education, I would have said that person was crazy. However, for my summer internship this past year, I was asked to be the interim assistant principal of St. Francis International School in Silver Spring, Md. After a few short months, I realized that the Holy Spirit was calling me to my passion once again, so I applied and was hired for the job. I love people, and in a school you have so many opportunities to minister in people's lives. People are desperately looking for someone they can trust and help them see how God is working in their lives.

It is Wednesday and my alarm goes off at 4:45 a.m. After rushing to the dining room for my first cup of coffee, I return to my room to meditate, read daily scripture and listen to gospel music. Afterward, I add the finishing touches to my homily for the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, put on my habit and join my brothers at Holy Name College in morning prayer. While in the chapel, I pray for students, teachers and parents who might be struggling or having a crisis, and I ask God to help me serve them. After the closing prayer, I grab my bag and walk the short distance to school. Along the way, I review what I need to accomplish, keeping in mind that God is in control and my day never goes the way I plan.



Br. Gerald addresses students of St. Francis International School in Silver Spring, Md., where he serves as assistant principal.

When I arrive, a teacher pulls me aside to ask me to pray for her mother who is in the hospital. When I finally get to my office, I write my morning message on the white board and greet 450 students and 50 teachers as the bells ring. Heading next door to St. Camillus Church to prepare for the celebration of St. Francis, I call upon the Holy Spirit to give me the words to speak to the children and teachers. I begin my homily with a song, "Standing in the Need of Prayer," and see that my message is getting across. I finish and thank God for being able to be His vehicle and voice for the people I serve.

My day continues until 4 p.m. when a client for spiritual direction arrives at the school. I welcome the opportunity to put to use the training I am receiving in this area. Later, upon arriving home, several friars ask how my day was, and I tell them of my adventures. I can feel their love and support. Sometimes they tease me and give me a hard time, but I know they see my passion for educating young bright minds.

As I reflect on the past four years of being with the friars, I realize there have been ups and downs. I have struggled and faced challenges, but I have also experienced the joy and happiness that I have been praying for since childhood. I thank God for blessing me and for the gift of being able to bless others. What can I say but thank you God, and I love you.

Solemn Profession 2011



Stephen DeWitt, OFM, and Daniel Horan, OFM, professed final vows as Franciscans on Aug. 27 at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Manhattan. A week later, they were ordained deacons in Washington, D.C. Currently residing at Holy Name College, Dan and Steve are completing their master's in divinity degrees at nearby Washington Theological Union. After ordination this spring, Dan hopes to pursue graduate studies and eventually teach. Steve will likely use his Spanish skills to minister in a mission or at a U.S. Hispanic ministry.

Above, from left to right: Fr. Tom Conway, OFM, director of post-novitiate formation, Provincial Vicar Fr. Dominic Monti, OFM, Steve, Provincial Minister Fr. John O'Connor, OFM, Dan, Fr. Andrew Reitz, OFM, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church, and Fr. Michael Perry, OFM, General Vicar of the Order of Friars Minor.

Ross Chamberland Professes First Vows



Ross Chamberland, OFM, made his simple profession of vows on Sept. 15 during evening prayer at Holy Name College. "Professing vows in HNP was a special experience for me," said Ross, who joined the Province in 2009 after spending five years in formation as a Capuchin friar in the Province of St. Mary. A second year student at Washington Theological Union, Ross has been impressed by the hospitality of HNP friars and is grateful for his expanding Franciscan family.

Above, Provincial Minister Fr. John O'Connor, OFM, receives Ross' first vows in the chapel of Holy Name College.

Br. Gerald holds a master's in theology from LaSalle University in Philadelphia. Prior to joining the Order, he worked as an assistant principal and pastoral associate at several parishes. Gerald got to know the friars at St. Joseph's Friary in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., and St. Patrick-St. Anthony Parish in Hartford, Conn. A resident of Holy Name College in Silver Spring, Md., he is in his second year of post-novitiate formation.



Taking the Next Step

Come and See weekends and related events provide men discerning a vocation a glimpse of Franciscan life and ministry. Often, as guests process the experience, questions may arise. Vocation director Fr. Brian Smail, OFM, works with candidates on an ongoing basis to provide information and resources, and to assist in the discernment process.

Men who are ready to take the next step are invited to attend a Franciscan Discernment Weekend at Holy Name College in Silver Spring, Md. During the weekend, guests discuss their vocations in depth with friars on the Province's vocation team. They also meet our international community of student friars, who share their experiences and answer questions about initial formation.

Three men who attended the October Come and See Weekend (see page 2) participated in a Franciscan Discernment Weekend held Nov. 18 to 20.



From left to right, Fr. Brian Smail with discernment guests Eufemio, Junior, Matt, Brian and Kevin at Holy Name College.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Are you looking for more meaning in your life? Have you ever considered becoming a Franciscan friar?

Join us to learn about our way of life and ministries.

Vocation Weekend

When: March 2 to 4, 2012

Where: St. Anthony Shrine
Boston, Mass.

Discerning a call to religious life? Join us in historic downtown Boston for a weekend of reflection and peaceful recreation. Meet our friar community, pray and listen to what God is calling you to do with your life. Register by Feb 22.



Spend a Day with the Friars

When: March 17, 2012

Where: St. Francis Friary
Raleigh, N.C.

Not able to join us for a weekend? How about spending a day with us instead? Meet our friar community in Raleigh; see how we live and where we minister. The day concludes with Mass and dinner. Register by March 9.



*Registration is required for all vocation events. Space is limited, so sign up now!
To register, contact the Franciscan Vocation Ministry at 1-800-677-7788 or vocation@hnp.org.*

MY VOCATION STORY



Br. Frank Critch, OFM (Pastoral ministry at St. Francis Church, Triangle, Va.)

Date of Birth: Aug. 22, 1961

Hometown: St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

Hobbies: Cooking, playing guitar, staying up with current events

Education: B.A. in religious studies from Memorial University in St. John's

I first felt called to religious life as a teenager. After studying with the Christian Brothers, I attended St. Paul's Seminary for the Archdiocese of St. John's. During my fourth year, I withdrew and worked in child protective services. I later went into the culinary arts.

Though I had left religious life, the calling remained. After my best friend, a priest, encouraged me to look into the Franciscans, I joined Christ the King Province in western Canada in 2005. I transferred to Holy Name Province in 2007 and professed my first vows in 2008.

Initial formation has been an amazing journey so far. I love the fraternal and parish life; both continue to challenge me, deepen my faith and strengthen my "yes" to living as a Franciscan with all its struggles and hopes. For this, I will always give thanks with my whole heart.



Be A Franciscan is published quarterly by the Franciscan Vocation Ministry of Holy Name Province in conjunction with the Province's Communications Office.

Comments are welcome.



Franciscan Vocation Ministry HOLY NAME PROVINCE

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New York, NY 10001-3403

The **Franciscan Vocation Ministry** promotes vocations to the Franciscan way of life and the ministries of **Holy Name Province**. We offer:

- Information on our Order, the admissions process and the initial formation program
- Consultation and assistance with discernment to religious life
- Come and See weekends, discernment retreats and other events
- This newsletter highlighting vocation activities

Save the Date

We welcome you to join us for the following vocation events. For details, see page 5.

Feb. 10-12: Franciscan Discernment Weekend
Holy Name College, Silver Spring, Md.

March 2-4: Vocation Weekend
St. Anthony Shrine, Boston

March 17: Spend a Day with the Friars
St. Francis Friary, New York City

For further information, please contact:

Fr. Brian Smail, OFM
vocation director

1-800-677-7788
vocation@hnp.org

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Be A Franciscan channel
on ?

Watch friar interviews and learn more about
Holy Name Province and its ministries.

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