

# The Way of St. Francis



## Works of Justice

# Prayer, Fraternity, Joy, Service

The Franciscan Friars of the Province of Saint Barbara are members of a Roman Catholic religious order, from a diversity of backgrounds and cultures, dedicated to serving the poor and promoting justice, peace, care of creation, and reconciliation in the joyful and prophetic spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

★ ★ ★

## **The Way** of St. Francis

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**ON THE COVER: Brother Victor Vega is chaplain at St. Francis Center in downtown Los Angeles. Started by Friar Hugh Noonan 50 years ago, in 2022 13 staff and hundreds of volunteers ran a whole list of programs, with staggering impact.**

Photo courtesy of St. Francis Center

[www.sbfranciscans.org](http://www.sbfranciscans.org)





inside

# Works of Justice



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dear friends

# Peace & all good!

**"Love and truth will meet;**

justice and peace will kiss."

Those words, from Psalm 85, can be heard both as a comforting promise, and as a challenge.

On the one hand, we hear the promise of a reign of peace and solidarity, a future we all long for. But wars and starvation around the world, indeed hunger, abuse, and homelessness at our own doors, warn us not to get too comfortable.

Yes, God promises us the incredible fullness of life: love, truth, justice, peace. But in another sense, for love and truth to meet, we must lovingly face the truth. For justice and peace to kiss, there must be justice *and* peace. That is why St. Francis learned to embrace the leper; that is why Franciscans, at our best, are immersed in the lives of the poor. We are trying to witness to God's truth, to God's justice.

Each of us needs to be tender with the poverty within that all of us experience, that's for sure. We all need to be gentle with our neighbors, rich and poor. But we each are deeply challenged to work toward a time when justice and peace will kiss.

In this issue we've tried to highlight some ways that we Franciscans, along with our lay partners, are working for justice. Maureen Day sets the stage with a Franciscan approach to justice and peace; Russ Testa gives some highlights of Franciscan efforts across the United States. Friar Murray Bodo reflects on St. Francis' contemplation that so fueled his action for the poor. Also in this issue Brother Keith Warner gives a progress report on the coming together of friars in the Order of Friars Minor across the United States into the new Our Lady of Guadalupe Province. That's been in the works for some years; it will happen officially in October.

Faternally,

**David Gaa, OFM**

Minister Provincial, Province of Saint Barbara

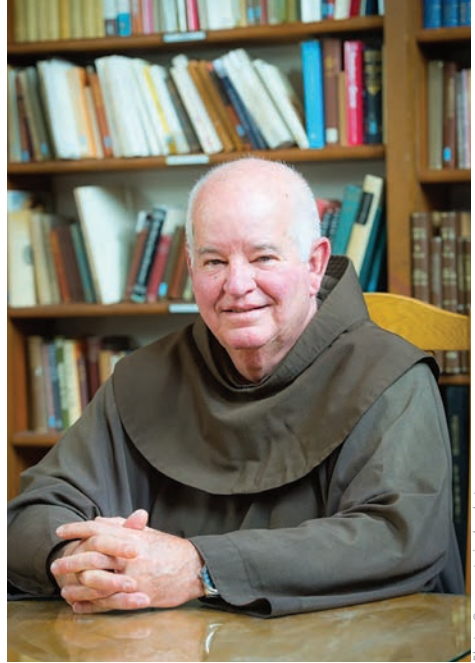


Photo: ©www.peterjordanphoto.com

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# calendar



Photo: Bradley Tuel, OFM

Franciscan Renewal Center  
Scottsdale, Arizona  
[thecasa.org](http://thecasa.org)  
Retreats Portal:  
[frc.retreatportal.com](http://frc.retreatportal.com)  
408-948-7460

**Popcorn, Pizza, Peace &  
Movie Night: Mission Joy**  
**March 31**

Laugh out loud funny. Poignant. Powerful. Practical. A once-in-a-generation film with a “just-in-time” message from Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In what is likely their last time together, this film traces the epic life stories of these Nobel Peace Prize winners as they faced oppression, exile, death threats, cancer, and more—unyielding and still laughing.

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**Weekend Retreat**  
**Holy Week 2023**  
**April 1–5—Part I**  
**April 6–9—Part II**

Facilitators: Fr. Phillip Chircop, SJ. Please see the Franciscan Renewal Center Retreat Portal for full details.  
Registration required.

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**Weekend Retreat**  
**Legacy Retreat**  
**April 15–16**

**Facilitators: Mary Dunn and  
Alanna Mack**

Whether you’ve experienced a Legacy Workshop before or this will be your first time, we warmly welcome you to join us for our newly expanded Your Story, Your Legacy Retreat. Come join us for a wonderful weekend of self-discovery and soulful conversation that will renew and strengthen you for the journey ahead! Fee, including lodging and meals: \$200 per person. Registration required.

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**Fast Talk Theology: Pope  
Francis calls us to be  
missionary disciples, in the  
spirit of St. Francis**  
**April 16**

**Facilitator: Br. Keith Warner,  
OFM**

Pope Francis’ project for the Church — the “Francis Option” — has now come into focus, and it challenges everyone participating in religious formation and the life of the Church. Much has been written about the “novel” social dimensions of his project, expressed in *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*, but these can only be fully understood in light of the development of his ecclesial vision over the past 20 years.

**8-Day Retreat**  
**St. Bonaventure's Journey  
Into God**

**May 4–12**

**Facilitators: Fr. André Cirino,  
OFM, & Josef Raischl, OFS**

Based on St. Bonaventure’s masterpiece, “Itinerarium Mentis in Deum”—his Journey Into God. Each day is dedicated to a chapter with a balance of instruction, reading, personal/ community participation in Eucharistic liturgy, morning/ evening prayer. Fee, including meals: \$1,100 single room; \$850 double room; \$700 commuter. Pre-registration required.

**Mission San Luis Rey**  
**Oceanside, California**  
[sanluisrey.org](http://sanluisrey.org)  
760-757-3651

**Spring Lecture Series:**  
**Exodus and Easter**  
**4-week series: April 11, 18, 25,  
& May 2**

**Facilitator: Fr. Michael Guinan,  
OFM**

Exodus imagery forms the background for many of the readings we hear in the Easter season. At the Transfiguration, Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah about “his exodus that he was going to accomplish in

*continued on page 28*

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# along the way

## Encounter

By Dan Lackie, OFM

A poem I stumbled on last week contains all the tenderness, wonder, and desire that mark our faith in the Incarnation, a theme close to St. Francis' heart: "An angel robed in spotless white, / Bent down and kissed the sleeping Night. / Night woke to blush; the sprite was gone. / Men saw the blush and called it Dawn."

The author of the poem, Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906), was one of the first widely acclaimed African American poets in US history. I've been wondering if the "sleeping Night" he writes about is in any way connected to the trauma of the Civil War, which shadowed his own life experience, along with the memory of his parents' experience of enslavement. In his poetic vision, perhaps, he perceived a new dawn.

In his apostolic letter last June, Pope Francis wrote of the deep desire that

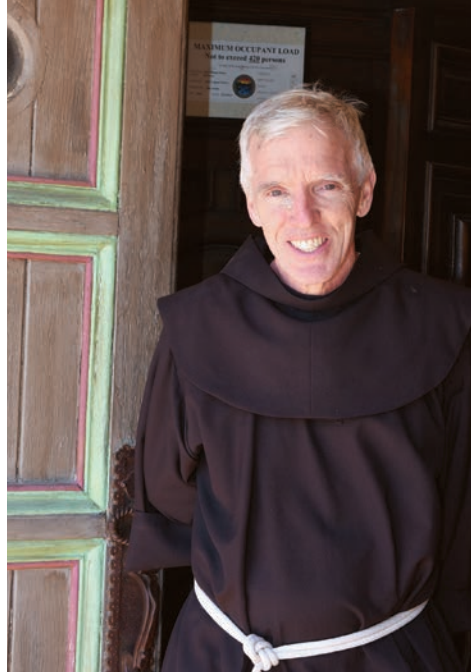


Photo: John Feister

resides at the heart of the celebration of the Eucharist. It is a desire for reconciliation, justice, and peace expressed by Jesus on the very night before his own violent death (Lk 22:15). That Passover meal and the "earnest desire" at its core is rooted in the Christian story and God's desire to be with us ("Emmanuel") in all the poverty and confusion of human reality. The Holy Family would live, after all, as refugees exploited by the political machinations of Herod.

Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit, present at the dawn of creation, seeks out all shadowed places with the love of God, so that our Eucharist, at the table of God's desire, directs us as well to the humility of the *place* of God's desire. That place was right there in Galilee, on the edges of the empire. And that place, today, is everywhere. As Jesus taught us, "The kingdom of God is among you."



Photo by Sylvain Brison, Courtesy of Unsplash

**At the heart of the Eucharist is a desire for reconciliation, for justice and peace, that same peace Jesus wished for his disciples.**



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# donor profile

## Gift of Time and Talent

By Joseph Schwab, OFM

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1989, Ben Combs is now working as the Director of St. Francis Retreat Center in San Juan Bautista, California. I asked him about his commitment to the Franciscans.

### How did you discover Franciscans?

Through the Franciscan Spiritual Center in Milwaukie, Oregon. I talked to a spiritual director. What really kind of drove it home for me was when my Nana passed. Both of my grandmothers had strong connections to Franciscan spirituality. They had cousins who were Franciscan friars and sisters.

### Why did you take a pay cut to help us?

I had a keen interest in social entrepreneurship, but what I had learned was hollow. What helped me go deeper was a quote of Pope Francis, "To change the world you help someone who can never repay you." I thought, *This is the truth!*

### What do you find compelling here?

Care and love of creation is just inherent on such a beautiful property. We are in the foothills of the Gabilan Mountains, east of Monterey Bay. The hills are planted with vineyards or forested with old oak and other trees, and the valley below is often used for orchards or vegetables and growing flowers for seed. Care of creation is part of what we aim to do while providing service to the poor, spiritual growth, and providing a safe place to relate to God. I want to help bring these out in a more vibrant way.



Photo courtesy of Ben Combs

**Ben Combs brings his gifts of passion and entrepreneurship to St. Francis Retreat.**

### What's the priority for you right now?

The year ahead is about understanding. Being new, I have enjoyed learning what St. Francis Retreat means to the wonderful community of staff, neighbors, and patrons. There are often three generations in one family that have received spiritual nourishment here.

My immediate priority is ensuring a viable water source that sustains the center for the next 50 years or more. We are making great headway and expect to have a well operating by summer.

### How do people show their support?

We welcome any and all contributions, large and small. We're now self-sustaining after the pandemic shutdown. People are helping us look at much needed capital improvements and new programming is on the horizon. We have strong volunteers who actively are helping us improve and grow. Hosting Thanksgiving dinner for local people who had no place to go enlivened our relationships with many friends who could not come during the pandemic.

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*Father Joseph Schwab, OFM, is Director of Development for this Province.*

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snapshot







Sunflowers in these United States echo the sunflowers that cover the acres below Assisi, Italy, home of Sts. Francis and Clare. No matter where, they proclaim the greatness of God, and somehow call each of us to join the heavenly chorus of praise.

Photo by Dan Barica, OFM

# St. Francis in Lent

BY MURRAY BODO, OFM

Sometime between his 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> year St. Francis, inspired by God, spent the 40 days of Lent on an uninhabited island in Lago Trasimeno, the largest lake of peninsular Italy. He had spent the night before in the nearby home of a friend whom he asked to row him to Lago Maggiore, the lake's main island, on Ash Wednesday and to not come for him again before Holy Thursday. St. Francis took with him two small loaves of bread; when his friend came for him at the end of Lent, Francis still had a loaf-and-a-half of bread.

For many years I accompanied pilgrims on a day trip to the same island in Lake Trasimeno to ritualize St. Francis' Lent eight centuries before. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, one of the medieval sources of the story, maintains that this incident reveals how St. Francis overcame pride by eating half a loaf of bread, lest the saint outdo Christ who fasted for 40 days in the Judean desert

without any material food. Though that may be true, every time I fasted and prayed on the island with other pilgrims, I wondered if there might not be more to that fast than overcoming pride?

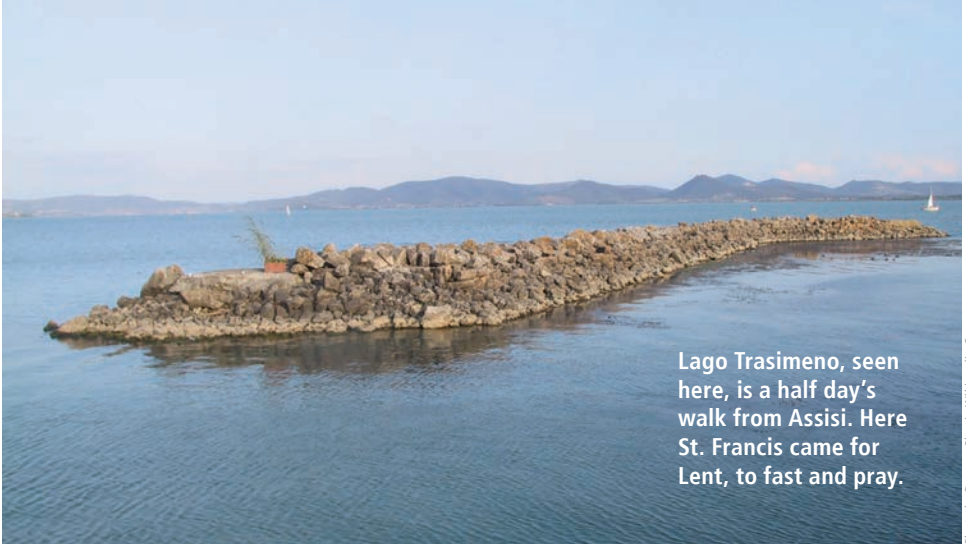
For one thing, Francis was very young in his newly converted life in Christ, and I wonder if he did not undertake this solitary fast primarily to concentrate more intensely on Christ, whose footsteps he had begun to follow in earnest. So much had happened since Pope Innocent III had approved the Brothers' Rule of life only a few years before. In addition, the Brothers had grown in number into the thousands, and Francis needed to regroup and focus on the work that Christ was doing in and through all that was coming to pass.

The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre once remarked, you can't know what to do unless you know what story you are a part of. That observation summarizes for me what I believe is the main reason



Murray Bodo photo courtesy of Franciscan Archives

**Lent can be a time of fasting, of prayer, of almsgiving, all to help us to clear our heads and hearts, so we can see who Christ is and what Christ wants of us.**



Lago Trasimeno, seen here, is a half day's walk from Assisi. Here St. Francis came for Lent, to fast and pray.

Photo by Bouncey2k, via Wikimedia Commons

Francis undertook this solitary retreat so early in the life of the Order he founded.

He wasn't thinking of fasting as perfectly as possible; he was trying to remember and commit himself anew to the story Christ had been revealing from the very beginning of Francis' conversion. And that story was Christ's own story, a story Christ had invited Francis into. It was the story of the Incarnation, the self-emptying of the Word, the second person of the blessed Trinity, in order to take on our human nature.

Francis on Lake Trasimeno wanted to become so rapt in contemplation of the incarnate Christ that he would be aware of nothing and no one else, even forgetting to eat, so rich was the spiritual sustenance of refocusing on the story that he had become part of. He would eat only of Christ, the bread of life.

As the modern mystic, Simone Weil, says so succinctly of contemplation, "Eternal Beatitude is a state, where to look is to eat." I can't think of a better way of understanding what St. Francis did for those 40 days on Lake Trasimeno. He was reminding himself of who and what the story was that he was now part of. And in refocusing on that story for 40 days, he knew again, even more clearly, what he was to do, namely, what Jesus did. He was to start again to pour himself out in love for others, as did his lord, Jesus.

What a way to look upon our own Lent from year to year: a time to relook at our true story, again. In knowing the story of who is Christ, we, too, know what we are to do: to love others as Christ has loved us.

In that dynamic between looking again at the story and then living it, contemplation and action are born in us, a birth which in turn gives birth to what is variously called Christian charity, social justice, or simply justice, which St. Bonaventure said, makes beautiful that which has become deformed.

And we know what that beauty of justice looks like. It is in the story of Jesus as foretold by the prophet Isaiah:

I, the Lord, have called you  
for the victory of justice,  
I have grasped you by the hand;

I formed you, and set you  
as a covenant of the people,  
a light for the nations,

to open the eyes of the blind,  
to bring prisoners  
from confinement,  
and from the dungeon,  
those who live in darkness.

—Isaiah 42:6–7 ♦

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*Father Murray Bodo, poet and author, is a friar of St. John the Baptist Province, OFM.*



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concerning care

# Franciscan Roots of American Catholic Social Justice Ministry

BY MAUREEN K. DAY

When I first was asked to write what is a Franciscan approach to social justice ministry, of course I said yes. I've been immersed in the Franciscan tradition for seven years and I wrote a book on Catholic civic engagement; I could do this upside down in my sleep!

But then I sat down to write. Even right side up and wide awake, I could not figure out what a distinctly Franciscan—as opposed to generally Catholic—approach to social justice ministry might be. Then it hit me. Consciously or not, Catholic social ministry in the

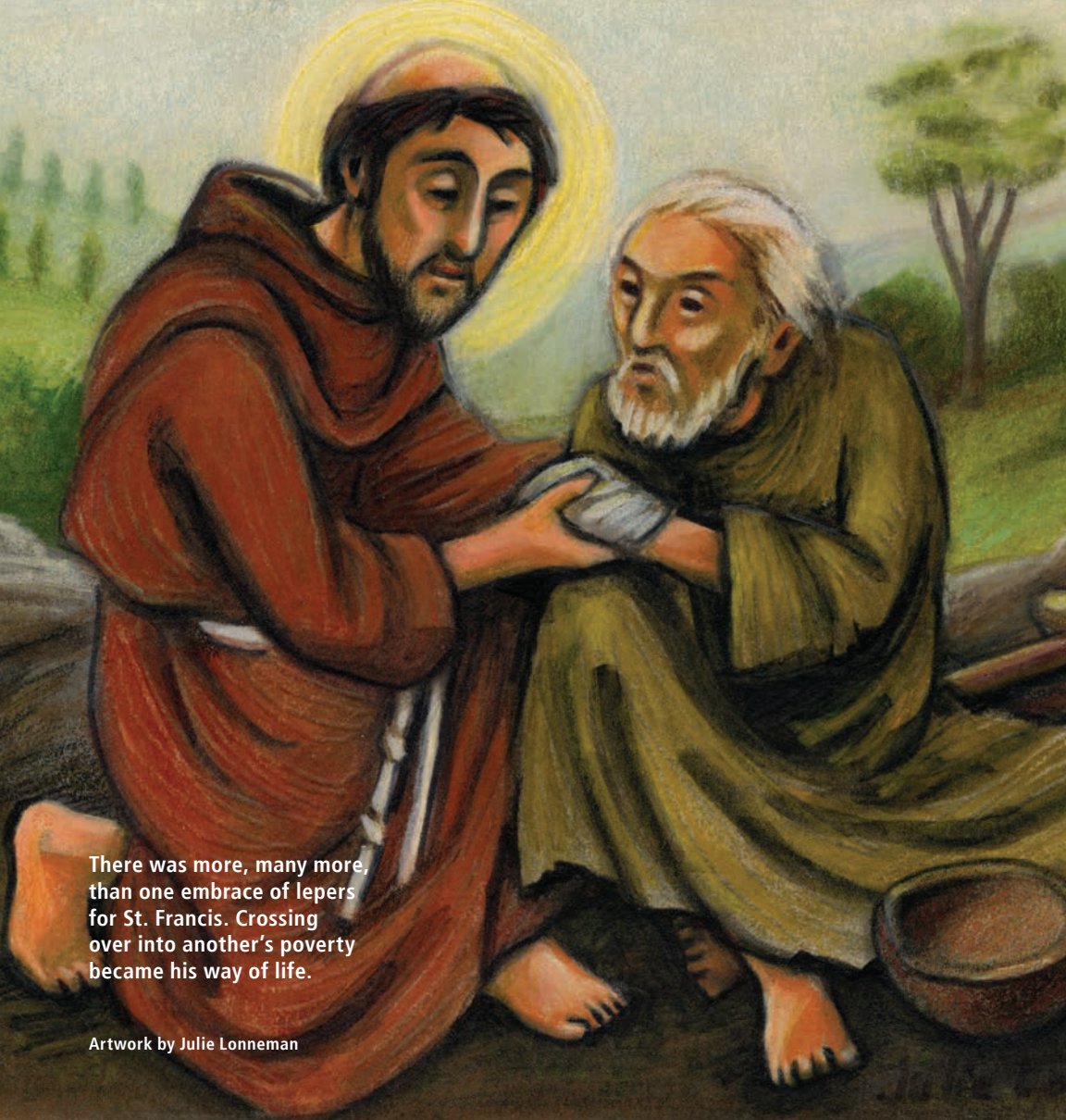
United States has been deeply shaped by Franciscan thought. I had studied JustFaith Ministries, the experienced and compelling nationwide organization for parishes, which is very Franciscan in its mission and values. Indeed, so are the vast majority of Catholic social ministry organizations in the United States.

The five characteristics of social ministry I identified in my book—*transformation, Christ-centeredness, community, justice or outreach, and compassion*—are rooted in Francis' life and the movements he inspired. Let's unpack these.



Photo courtesy of Maureen K. Day

**US Catholic social ministry is shaped by Franciscan thought, says author Maureen K. Day, seen here at the Franciscan School of Theology, in San Diego.**



There was more, many more, than one embrace of lepers for St. Francis. Crossing over into another's poverty became his way of life.

Artwork by Julie Lonneman

**Transformation** is incredibly important to the Franciscan tradition. Jerald Brauer, a sociologist of conversion, wrote that within the whole of Catholic history, Franciscans uniquely understood the role of the Holy Spirit and conversion in the life of the Christian. This is no doubt rooted in Francis' profound conversion in his encounter with the leper. The Lord led Francis to the lepers, a people he found abhorrent. But in Francis' trust and openness, what had seemed bitter to him "was turned into sweetness of soul and body." And far from being the

culmination of his conversion, Francis' encounter with the leper was just the beginning. Francis' transformation while showing mercy to the leper makes social ministry an act of reciprocity and solidarity rather than a paternalistic gesture marked by inequality and social distance.

**Christ-centeredness** needs to be qualified. At its heart, the Franciscan tradition is deeply Trinitarian, and draws upon each of the three persons of the Trinity as well as the loving relationship they



A group of coworkers gathers at Fr. Virgil Cordano Center, a walk-in respite in Santa Barbara, California, started by nearby friars.

Photo courtesy of Old Mission Santa Barbara Facebook Page

share. Even given this, we can still talk about the unique contributions of Christ to the Franciscan tradition.

Perhaps most obviously, the Franciscan tradition is animated by the Incarnation. When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, not only did God love us directly through the particularity of Jesus of Nazareth, but this was a game-changer for the entire created universe. God's love was made visible in that singular moment of Christ's birth as well as in every moment afterward that reveals God's in-breaking.

Christ offers us a window to both the fully divine and the fully human, illuminating who we are as well as the beauty of our brothers and sisters. Franciscan social justice ministry is incarnational.

**Community** is possibly the most visible characteristic of Franciscan life. Friars, sisters, seculars, and the so-called "fourth order" members (the non-professed who live lives inspired by Francis) gather regularly in living arrangements, ministries, parishes, and more to form, challenge, and encourage one another. First, community matters for the Fran-

ciscan heart. The world has a lot of suffering in it. If people know they are not alone in wanting to bring abundance to places of scarcity, community can mean hope rather than despair, bitterness, or apathy.

Second, one of the best ways to bring about social change is in *community*. Not only do we buoy one another in community, but also through collaboration, our gifts come together and grow. Amazing things happen when we work together.

**Justice** or **outreach** were the words I used in my book to describe social ministry. If an organization is focused on structural change, it leans toward justice. If it is more about charity or immediate needs, it leans toward outreach. But Franciscans have their own word that encompasses both: *mercy*.

The charitable work of Franciscans is well-known, but showing mercy through structural change is less discussed. In Franciscan theologian Ken Himes' *Franciscan Urban Ministry*, mercy through social reform was an important focus.

As an example, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century the



friars in Siena had become more lax in their denouncing of riches. The Observant Franciscan reform pushed back on this. They argued against the prevailing sentiment that those in poverty were there because of their own doing, saying instead that the impoverished were victims of an unjust system. They also denounced the common practice of usury and started their own nonprofit pawn shops where people could borrow money at a reasonable cost.

Needless to say, they made both friends and enemies in these efforts, standing as a prophetic witness and bringing good news to the poor. Mercy—structural and charitable—is a hallmark of Franciscan life.

**Compassion** means “to suffer with” another. To experience compassion—which is different from prophetic anger or pity—requires that we step into the suffering of another and feel some piece of it ourselves. It is deeply Christ-like, deeply Franciscan, and deeply human. It changes both the receiver and the giver. It brings beauty to an ugly situation, connection to the isolated, and security to the vulnerable. In truth, it is one of the most powerful human experiences.

A final “bonus” characteristic of Franciscan social justice ministry—this one

was *not* covered in my book—is **gift**. The Franciscan tradition recognizes a total distinction between Creator and creation. When compared to an infinite God, creation—including you and me—seems vastly insignificant. And yet, God sees us as wondrously significant. God is right. God delights in our joys, mourns our suffering, and tenderly embraces us as we leave our earthly life.

God loves us. And with this lavish love comes abundant gifts. Everything that exists—including you and me—is loved into being by God. And once we realize the gift of existence, it transforms everything. Everything and everyone is precious. We desire the good for all. Awe and wonder abound. This lens of *gift* grounds Franciscan social justice ministry.

This, then, is the Franciscan approach to justice: of bringing transformation, Christ-centeredness, community, mercy (charity *and* justice), compassion, and gift to our lives, ministries, and world! And our efforts in this approach are constantly to be renewed. As St. Francis famously said, “Let us begin again, because up until now, we have done little or nothing.” ♦

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*Maureen K. Day is an associate professor of Religion and Society at the Franciscan School of Theology. Her latest book is Catholic Activism Today (NYU Press).*

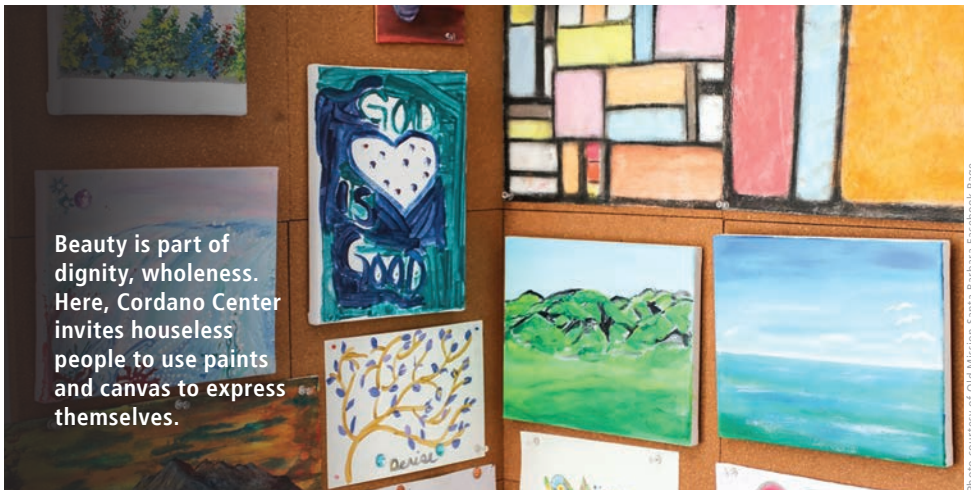


Photo courtesy of Old Mission Santa Barbara Facebook Page

on the cover

Board member  
Michael McGuinness  
(l) and volunteer Vod  
Alajian prepare breakfast  
for guests.



# Serving the Houseless

## LA's St. Francis Center

BY JOHN FEISTER

A quick Google search will tell you lots about St. Francis Center in downtown Los Angeles. It was started in 1972 by the late Friar Hugh Noonan, OFM, with the help of lay Franciscans. Father Hugh and volunteers invited unhoused people, then served basic needs as well as they could. Fast-forward 50 years and you have a Dining Room serving 75,000 meals per year, a staff of 13, and a slew of volunteers working with the immediate and longer term needs of the center's guests.

A conversation with Brother Victor Vega and Jasmine Bravo will take you a bit deeper than that.

Brother Victor, a Franciscan, has been at St. Francis Center since 2020. This once agricultural worker, "working in the fields," he says, was raised in La Cañada, Mexico, a village in Michoacan state.

"I'm the chaplain here," says Brother Victor, taking a break to talk by phone. He explains, "In mornings I welcome all the people who come to the center. After that I give out clothes, I talk with them. I get counseling or pray for them, for whatever they need. Especially, I listen to them. I listen to their stories of struggle, the travails of life. So I try to support them or try to find a job for them." He typically sees about 150

people per day.

"There are some people I usually see, so I build a relationship with them. I know a lot of people!" he says with a smile. He is the only friar serving this location, but that will likely change soon. There is talk of a new friary that will likely be formed after six US Franciscan provinces pool their efforts this fall. "The province was planning to build a friary house next to St. Francis so we can have more ministries, with more friars from other places."

Those plans are connected to a broader expansion of St. Francis Center, says executive director Jasmine Bravo, who has worked at the center these past six years. She explains more of the center's program, and the reason why space has become an issue. "We have a breakfast service for those who are unhoused, a pantry service for families who are low income, and a variety of other services through different partnerships: a laundry service, a shower program, and a diaper program that is community-volunteer based." She explains that many of these services are provided by volunteers, including some of the guests who have become a regular part of the St. Francis Center family. "They give back to the community that helped them," she says.

"There's a lot of insecurity," she explains, speaking of houseless people who couch surf from home to home, or live in vehicles. "We try to make sure we can get them to a program that can help." That could be from short-term supplies to social service programs for long-term housing and food. The families who receive these types of services live with annual income less than \$25,000.

Among the 13 staff and the 1,700 volunteers who serve each

## *from the inside*

### **From a Guest of St. Francis Center**

I had been visiting some social program centers. A lot of them were too rigid or even inhuman. St. Francis Center changes my point of view. After I met Friar Victor, who brought me a Catholic awakening, there was a big change in my life.

Every morning, the homeless community needs a lot of clothing and food. We are talking about hundreds of people. I can see Friar Victor trying not to have any left out, including the mental people while other organizations would leave them unattended. Since I am an artist, Friar Victor told me to paint a mural on the wall of St. Francis Center. During the process I learned a lot about St. Francis from Franciscan life and spirituality to the stories of the wolf. That gave me an understanding of the importance of the virtues of St. Francis: unmaterialistic, giving, ecology concern etc.

Blessed from St. Francis Center and Friar Victor, right now I live healthier physically and spiritually. Thank you, Friar Victor. That means a lot to me. It is my honor to participate in Friar Victor's projects that could change lives.—*David Chu*



Brother Victor and painter David Chu show off David's magnificent portrayal of St. Francis, towering outside of the center.





**Director Jasmine Bravo (I) helps a young guest find balance on a new Christmas-present-bike. Adopt-A-Family links corporate partners and families in need.**

year, Brother Victor has a big presence. “He’s our spiritual chaplain, but he also runs what we call ‘Brother Victor’s Closet.’” Clearly the staff is poking a bit of fun at Brother Victor with that name. “He likes to walk around, chatting with our guests, especially those that live on our block or a couple blocks away. He walks around with pants over his shoulder, shirts over shoulder, a variety of sizes”—imagining the sight of it makes her chuckle. “He wants to make sure that our guests are clean or provided with clean clothing. He likes to carry around hygiene kits with him to pass around that have a fresh pair of socks, a fresh pair of underwear, items so that they can get kind of cleaned up.” Her and Brother Victor’s joyful attitude makes more bearable what is surely very difficult.

In a city of 13 million, where homelessness is in crisis proportion, where the new mayor has declared homeless services a priority for city government, you’d think that St. Francis Center would be a tiny player. “We pack a big punch!” Jasmine asserts, with a smile. “We’re trying to make a difference as best we can. We cannot solve the problem, but by working with different partners in our area, I think we can make a dent in it. And we can help folks know that this is a safe space that they could come to, to receive a variety of services.

“I think what makes us slightly different than, for example, a larger non-profit organization, maybe doing similar services, is that we provide that one-on-one. We know you by name. Folks could come here and can literally point out every single team member and they can say, ‘Hey, you know, I know that person and I know that I can walk up to them and ask them for help,’ and we’ll be there with them.”

Which gets us back to the need for more room. “For many years we’ve wanted to grow our organization,” she says. “Our space is about 7,000 square feet. We try to make it as multipurpose as we possibly can, but we are bursting at the seams!” Recently the building next to the center became available.

“We’d like to expand our common space in the front of our building to where we can serve more of our unhoused guests with a sit-down breakfast.” Right now, with only five tables, much of the breakfast offering is to-go. “Our goal is maybe 15 tables, in a space where we can really bring everyone in, especially in the summer when it’s super hot.”

Jasmine and her staff would also love to expand their resource department, she says, to offer mental health services. “That is something that I think is really an issue these days. This pandemic put everyone in a really difficult situation,”

for years to come, she says. She foresees a space for counselors and other health-care practitioners to work in, even occasionally—a dentist, a doctor or nurse, an optometrist. Her guests have so many basic, unmet needs.

St. Francis Center wants to meet people where they are. That would be in imitation of St. Francis, whose beautiful image offers a towering welcome from the wall outside the center. “We have a term for him: ‘the chilliest saint!’” she says of Francis. “He’s so easy to get on board with. Making sure we believe, or

that we care for the environment, or that we care for serving others, that we treat everyone with dignity and respect. These are things that everyone can easily do in their day-to-day.”

Brother Victor can nod an easy agreement to that. And he offers another Franciscan dimension: “I try not only serving the people in need but *being* with the poor, caring for them,” he says. “Serving the poor always honors God.” ♦

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*John Feister is editor of this publication.*

## *first church*

**Brother Victor's Other Project**

Ever since Brother Victor came to the United States from his village of La Cañada, Michoacan, Mexico, he dreamed of building a church. Victor came to the US as a farmworker before joining the friars. “We never had a church, and I am the only religious. So I have the responsibility, and also the inspiration, to build a church for my whole town, for my own people.”

They charged him with making a design and serving as principal fundraiser. So, using Photoshop software, he designed a church. “I went with the designs and started hiring contractors. It’s a big responsibility, but I feel like this is another story of St. Francis when he started building the churches.”

Our Lady of Guadalupe church is now built, but not finished. A priest comes from a nearby town to say Mass. If you’re interested in helping to finish the church—Brother Victor estimates it will require \$30,000 to add windows, a door, flooring—you can donate through Saint Barbara Province.—J.F.



Photo courtesy of Brother Victor Vega

Our Lady of Guadalupe will be the first church ever for La Cañada, Brother Victor’s home village, in Michoacan, about halfway between Guadalajara and Mexico City.

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concerning care

# Pursuing Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

BY RUSSELL TESTA

The whole is greater than its parts. But how do those parts come together? This October, when the six Franciscan OFM provinces become one Our Lady of Guadalupe Province, there will be a sharing of approaches to the work of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Each province's approach is one that will be continued and adapted to our new coast-to-coast reality. So what will each be bringing? Here's a look at some of what exists today. A full telling of this story would require books or a month's worth of videos! These little paragraphs are just highlights to give a flavor of what each province brings into Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Photo courtesy of Assumption Blessed Virgin Mary Province Facebook Page

## **Assumption Blessed Virgin Mary Province (Wisconsin-based)**

The Assumption Province brings a deep commitment to forming communities of friars that actively insert themselves into complex systems and experiences of injustice. In this insertion they get to know the people and the challenges they face. They work closely with the local Church. They develop strategies and actions both spiritually and materially through aid to support the people in working for social change. In doing so, the relationships that are formed become ones that can bring transformation in areas such as immigration, racism, and deep economic poverty.

**Fr. James Gannon, on a provincial visitation to Wisconsin friars ministering in the Philippines, spent time feeding and aiding local children too.**





Photo courtesy of Holy Name Province

**Author Russell Testa (far right) with participants of the 2018 JPIC Local Contacts retreat during their gathering.**

## Holy Name Province (New York-based)

Holy Name Province has a long history of partnering in ministry with the laity in the ministries in which the friars serve. This partnership is one of shared leadership, mutual learning, friars taking a less visible stance of leadership, and spiritual support. Several years ago, when the Province reorganized the JPIC Office, they adopted this partners in ministry approach to JPIC by developing “JPIC Local Contacts.” These Contacts are appointed by local leadership and could be friars, lay volunteers, the local Secular

Franciscan fraternity, or lay staff depending on the needs and resources of the local community.

The Local Contacts work closely with Province’s JPIC Office to animate provincial and Order JPIC priorities in a way appropriate to the local situation while also helping the Province recognize the issues and JPIC movements locally. Finally this program enables Local Contacts to learn from each other’s experience and gain new skills and spiritual support from the JPIC Office.



Photo courtesy of Greg Friedman, OFM

**In 2019, friars and parishioners gathered at St. Michaels, Arizona, to honor a religious sister for her years of service among the Navajo People.**

## Our Lady of Guadalupe Province (New Mexico-based)

Our Lady of Guadalupe Province emerged from a profound desire to serve the Native American people of the Southwestern United States. The long-time insertion into these communities shows the missionary and evangelizing character of the work of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. Such an approach has enabled the JPIC work to

bring forward a deep relational connection to historically marginalized communities. It reflects a significant desire to be present to communities, where the friars will always be outsiders, yet can be bridges of understanding to the wider world. This JPIC approach opens our eyes and hearts to the best of what Franciscans are called to be.



Photo courtesy of Sacred Heart Province Facebook Page

**Friars are outspoken supporters of anti-racism in St. Louis, a city where studies show racial disparity and segregation remain entrenched.**

## Sacred Heart Province (Missouri-based)

Sacred Heart Province has a history of actively seeking out and supporting ministries that serve persons who are in communities of color in US society. They have done this by encouraging friars to develop their individual talents and direction for service to diverse communities. That could be through the arts, for example, or through social change action, like community organizing. They

have also stressed the imperative to support the lay members of these communities to share in the leadership and direction of the work of social transformation. The local community is able to blossom in difficult social and economic circumstances through shared action for tangible change in coordination with other communities of faith in their local domain.



Photo by Dick Tandy, OFM

**St. Anthony's Foundation staffer Joseph Le works with their Tenderloin Technology Tech Center, for houseless people in San Francisco.**

## Saint Barbara Province (California-based)

Saint Barbara Province set out some years ago to create a structure that would allow some principal ministries to carry into the future. They recognized that the complex and diverse ministries to serve persons who are poor or marginalized would do better, in the long

run, if they were more independent of the Franciscan Province. These "sponsored ministries" are governed independently, but still in close relationship to the Province. I can say this from afar: What incredible insight! There are not enough friars to always provide leader-

ship, and furthermore, there are laypersons who share the Franciscan vision with skills and talents that the friars may not be able to provide.

This insight has led to the formation of a significant number of sponsored ministries. Saint Barbara Province took a further step, the Office of Mission

Integration and Ministry Support. Led by Kathleen Flanagan, they assist sponsored ministries through training, in-service, and other support to be able to live out and grow Franciscan values: a spirit of inclusive welcome, social change, and contemplation in action that is at the heart of each location.



Photo courtesy of St. Francis Seraph Ministries Facebook

**St. Anthony Center, near downtown Cincinnati, offers a multitude of services from family services, food relief, to job training.**

### St. John the Baptist Province (Ohio-based)

St. John the Baptist Province has a strong focus on parish ministry. This has shaped the friars' JPIC efforts to recognize the unique and varied gifts of each local community. JPIC helps them identify ways to address the needs of the people in their local communities. That method moved JPIC beyond being

an isolated parish committee or social service program. Rather, it spreads to all corners of the relationships that the parish fosters. Further, as the neighborhood in which the parish is located changes economically and demographically it provides a continuity of presence and relationship connectivity.

Even a brief look, such as this, shows diverse and complementary approaches and insights to the work of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. As they officially come together as Our Lady of Guadalupe Province this October, each of the Provinces has much to learn from the others! Their work for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation is reflecting the light of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*. Indeed, they offer a sense of pride and hope for the future. ♦

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*Russell Testa is JPIC Animator for Holy Name Province, based in New York.*



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among the friars



# Franciscans Together Pathway to Renewal

BY KEITH DOUGLASS WARNER, OFM

(Opposite page)  
 “Rebuild my Church,”  
 Francis heard Jesus  
 say. Friars continue  
 to follow that call.

(Right) Franciscans  
 step out in faith-  
 and solidarity—in  
 an unjust world.



Photo: Cathy Cline, courtesy of WikiCommons

Six provinces of Franciscan friars in the United States are coming together to form one new national province, Our Lady of Guadalupe Province, in October 2023. In the face of diminishing numbers and aging members, together we decided in 2018 to dissolve our historical provinces, pool our resources, and fashion a fresh, renewed Franciscan organization that can carry forward our vision of Gospel life in this century.

On one hand, this entails a lot of restructuring activities, such as making our Province administration more efficient and designing it to incorporate best practices. But the *heart* of this evolution is *renewal*, in multiple dimensions: among the friars, our lay partners, the Franciscan family and Church, and new members.

Pilgrimage is a powerful metaphor for understanding Francis’ vision of Gospel life. Francis called his followers to be pilgrims and strangers, so we friars are using this metaphor to explain this journey of transformation.

A pilgrimage is a religious journey to a holy place by a path not known. Francis directed his followers to identify themselves as pilgrims, on such a journey through the world. The text that follows does not pretend to explain the countless decisions we are making; rather, it

presents reflections on how the metaphor of pilgrimage guides our path to renewal.

**Pilgrims step out in faith, believing that God will guide the journey.** We began this process by wrestling with the need

*renewal*

**We renew our Franciscan witness to American society by:**

- Fostering spiritual renewal
- Providing inspiring Franciscan formation experiences
- Better stewarding our resources

to move beyond our comfort zones. We do not want to let go of anything good, anything essential about the Franciscan way of living the Gospel. But many of our organizational structures were dated, established for larger provinces in the pre-digital age. The proposal to create





A life rich in liturgy, inspired by the life of St. Francis, is at the heart of Franciscan community, from west to east.

one national province was bold, but gave many of us pause since friars generally prefer things that are small and humble. When we voted, we stepped out in faith because we wanted to renew our Franciscan witness, even though we did not have any real map to follow.

**Pilgrims navigate paths uncertain.** On one hand, we knew what we wanted: a guided process of change that would stimulate spiritual renewal among the friars and those who walk with us. On the other hand, we really struggled to get started. We had an intuitive sense of the need to move out, but we did not have a clear sense of the direction or path. The pandemic tangled our first steps. We have made mistakes and learned from them.

When no path presented itself, we bushwhacked, only to have to turn back and seek out another way. We have proposed ideas that the friars have rejected, and then had to course-correct. In the process, we have gotten to know each other better, and are in fact coming together from different provinces by the process of making decisions. No pilgrim path can be fully known before walking it.

**Pilgrims carry sacred memories.** We are inspired by God's gift of Jesus, the example of our founder St. Francis, and by the gift of our own personal vocations.

These serve as an inner compass that orients our journey. Yet this way of life brings with it a burden of responsibility. We feel a holy obligation to protect and nurture the Franciscan way of life. We never want to dilute our vocation or see it weakened, even when a journey such as this inevitably requires negotiation and compromise. There is little doubt that we Franciscans will have to continue to relinquish ministries and religious houses that we have served for generations, and this prompts emotional distress. Yet we express boundless thanks to God for our memory of sacred events, even as we take leave of good places.

**Pilgrims travel an inner journey at the same time as their outer journey.** We pray as we walk. St. Francis directed his followers to pray on the road, so this journey of change calls us to deepen our commitment to meditation, to contemplation. A pilgrimage is a journey on Earth, but also a movement of the Holy Spirit within us. As we walk this pilgrim road, we reflect together upon what the Spirit is saying to us, to guide us.

**Pilgrims walk together.** The process of forming one new province brought us into greater contact and communion across historical province boundaries. We learn each other's joys and hopes, fears, and anxieties. We share our personal



and fraternal stories. Some friars are tired, some struggle to see hope for the future. We want to walk alongside them, support them, encourage them, and strengthen them. We embrace the spirit of synodality advanced by Pope Francis as a communal discernment process.

Pope Francis wants the Church to practice mutual listening, with everyone sharing their experiences, and then together charting a shared path. We Franciscans have a long tradition of this kind of listening together to the Spirit, and we are renewing this practice as we journey, inspired by the vision of Pope Francis.

**Pilgrims encounter new people and places on their journeys.** The formation of one new province might be understood as the coming together of disparate bands of pilgrims on a common road. We are learning to mix and mingle with each band, to share stories, carry burdens, and renew our commitment to this way of life. This coming together can indeed inspire us to renew our commitment to the Franciscan way of life.

**Pilgrims need guides.** We rely heavily on the advice of Franciscan-hearted laypeople to help us follow our path. We friars do not have all the skills, all the knowledge, or experience necessary to make such an ambitious new venture successful. We have wonderful lay employees

and a cadre of consultants to help us. Their professional experience gives us a degree of confidence that the new province structures can serve us well.

**Pilgrims invite others to join the journey.** We want to attract more younger men to the Franciscan way of life, to join our pilgrimage. As we come together, we are preparing to invest significantly more in vocational outreach, using digital communication tools to connect inquirers to local friars and communities. We want to make the Franciscan vocation attractive and compelling in a fresh way.

**We carry bowls of fire.** In prayer I have had a recurring image come to me. The gift of our Franciscan vocation, our charism, is like a flourishing of flames that we carry in large open bowls through the night. The Spirit calls us to journey toward our ultimate union with God, even through the dark night. We are called to illuminate this pathway for others. May we together make this pilgrimage to God, and guide many along the way. ❖

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*Brother Keith Douglass Warner, OFM, is Director of the Franciscan Renewal Project at the Franciscan School of Theology, and Animator of Lifelong Franciscan Formation for the new Our Lady of Guadalupe Province.*



**Our Lady of the Angels church in Scottsdale, Arizona, is a joyous partnership of lay and religious, a sign of the future.**

Jerusalem” (Lk 9:31). Jesus is referring to his coming death and resurrection, but the foundational story from the Book of Exodus is also in view. Can a deeper look at this book help us deepen our understanding of the Easter season?

***A Brush with God:  
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**May 18–21**

**Facilitator: Peter Pearson, Iconographer**  
Iconography is one of the great treasures of Christian art. Rooted in the tradition of early Christianity, its beauty and spiritual expression continue to inspire us today. In this workshop, guided by expert Peter Pearson, you will create an icon, step-by-step, entering into the prayerful reflection characteristic of this sacred art form. Personalized instruction and all supplies are provided. No artistic experience necessary!

**San Damiano Retreat**  
**Danville, California**  
**sandamiano.org**  
**925-837-9141**

***Spring Book Series - Earth  
Our Original Monastery***  
**Tuesdays, March 7–April 18**  
**(Zoom/online)**

**Facilitator: Kathy Miranda**  
This book is a testament to the holiness of nature and a guide to meeting God in the ordinary. We will experience the wisdom of the seasons, notice what and how you give praise, and realize that our original monastery is where we learned our most fundamental prayers.

***Holy Triduum Retreat***  
**April 6–9**

**Facilitators: Mary Price Dunn & Alanna Mack**  
Experience the Holy Triduum (Holy Thursday evening, Good Friday, and Saturday's Easter Vigil) as one continuous journey ending in Christ's triumphant resurrection. The retreat begins on Holy Thursday and

concludes with brunch on Easter Sunday.

***Your Story, Your Legacy  
Retreat: A Full Sensory  
Exploration***  
**May 20–21**

Come join us for a wonderful weekend of self-discovery and soulful conversation that will renew and strengthen you for the journey ahead! This day-and-a-half retreat will engage you—from beginning to end—in a thoughtful and inspiring look at the stories of how you came to be the person you are and the qualities of your life that can be a true legacy to future generations.

**Serra Retreat**  
**Malibu, California**  
**serraretreat.com**  
**310-456-6631**

***Men's Retreat***  
**April 28–30**  
**Facilitators: Sr. Carol Quinlivan, CSJ, and Fr. Charlie Smiech, OFM**  
We invite you to deepen your



Photo at Serra Retreat by John Feister

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calendar: *continued from page 28*

relationship with God, engaging every part of yourself: heart, mind, breath and body, our wonders, and our wounds. His guidance will help you live life to the fullest, experiencing the holiness of God in the ordinary.

## **Hispanic Men's Retreat**

**May 12–14**

**Facilitators: Fr. Martin Ibarra, OFM, & Ricardo Sanchez**  
Serra Retreat cordially invites you to the Hispanic Men's

Retreat. "Despertar la conciencia de Cristo Interiormente," with Fr. Martin Ibarra, OFM, and Ricardo Sanchez, theologian.

## **Secular Franciscan Order Retreat**

**May 26–28**

**Facilitator: Mark Lesniewski**

What is ours to do in the 21st century? Learning from the past, serving in the present, and preparing for the future.

**St. Francis Retreat**  
**San Juan Bautista, California**  
[stfrancisretreat.com](http://stfrancisretreat.com)  
**831-623-4234**

Registration for programs is full at this time; private retreats are available.



at last



Let the brothers not make anything  
their own, neither house, nor place,  
**nor anything at all.**

As pilgrims and strangers in this  
world, serving the Lord in poverty  
and humility, let them go seeking  
alms with confidence, and they  
should not be ashamed because,  
**for our sakes, our Lord made  
Himself poor in this world.**

This is that sublime height of most  
exalted poverty which has made  
you, my most beloved brothers, heirs  
and kings of the Kingdom of Heaven,  
**poor in temporal things  
but exalted in virtue.**

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from *The Rule of 1223*, Ch. 6

Santa Maria Maggiore church,  
Assisi, in whose courtyard  
Francis left his old life behind.

*Photo by Greg Friedman, OFM*

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