

# FranciscanNews

Volume 7, Issue 3, Christmas 2005



## A word from our Provincial Minister

Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that the end of 2005 is fast approaching! We now enter the Season of Advent: all year we long for peace, but as Christians we spend these four weeks preparing for the coming of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace.

We long not solely for peace on earth, but also, more deeply the peace of Christ 'peace that surpasses all understanding'. As we move towards Christmas, the feast of Christ among us, we are challenged to broaden our understanding of peace and to

open our hearts more.

Our world is longing for peace in so many ways and in so many places! But we long not only for peace among those who fight – we also long for peace in the hearts of those struggling in whatever way. We **need** to celebrate Christmas and my prayer for you and your families is that Christ whose birth was a reality now so long ago will also be a reality in your life and of those you love.

I take this opportunity to thank you for the support and love you give to the Friars in a variety of ways. We need your friendship and care to do what we do for the Church.

To conclude, I share with you something I reflected on when I was recently on retreat, a thought you might like to think about over the Summer:

*To live in God's humble love is to live in attentiveness, openness and relationship: attentiveness to the presence of God in the details of the fragile human person, openness to the ways God is both hidden and revealed in creation, and relationship to the God incarnated in our neighbours, family and community members.*

Enjoy reading the stories in this Newsletter. Happy Christmas and may 2006 be peace-filled for all of us.

*Stephen Bliss ofm*

Stephen Bliss ofm  
Provincial Minister

## Guardians Meeting

From 22-24 September 2005, approximately 22 friars gathered at St Joseph's Spirituality Centre, Baulkham Hills, NSW, for a meeting of Guardians from Australia and New Zealand. The friars were addressed by the English Dominican friar, Timothy

Radcliffe, former Master General of the Order of Preachers. Over a series of five sessions Timothy addressed such issues as Leadership, Happiness, and Freedom, together with several other topics. His input was well received by the friars who felt quite at home with such a distinguished member of an Order with a similar history to that of our own.

Various friars led the group in sessions of prayer and the Eucharist. At the conclusion of the gathering our Provincial Minister, Stephen Bliss ofm, spoke to the friars on matters of current importance to the friars of our Province. Guardians of various friaries also spoke on the wellbeing of various members of each household.

The friars are greatly indebted to Timothy Radcliffe ofm for his wise counsel and humble insights into life of friars in the modern world and the Church in which we live.

*(photo of Timothy Radcliffe ofm on page 2)*



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Timothy Radcliffe  
OP

## More to Francis than poetic image suggests

31 October 2005

GENEVA —

Franciscan International's mission is a kind of third millennium realization of the letter to the rulers, says a renowned expert on St Francis.

Speaking to FI staff on 21 October, Thadee Matura, ofm, said through the organisation, "something of Francis' message is heard in the world today." The leaders of today, he said, are at the United Nations.

Francis aimed for something that remains "essential and valid for all times: a change of heart," Thadee said; as it is from the heart that "structures of oppression or liberation spring." The peacemaker is one who, like Francis, strives to, and sometimes succeeds in, changing hearts.

Francis, Thadee said, carried a certain 'fundamental optimism,' that no one is completely dark. In this sense, even the most vile dictator of today could have his or her heart changed.

After eight centuries, and although the social, cultural and spiritual contexts have completely changed, Francis' message is still heard in international circles. FI's Advocacy Coordinator Alessandra Aula noted the respect that Francis continues to command

at the UN, even among non-Christians. Thus, FI's staff must remember that as an organisation they are in a sense representing the Saint, and must be faithful to his message of living with the poor, fighting for justice and respect for diversity.

Thadee, who was born in Poland and has lived in Canada and Western Europe, is well respected as one of the most prominent scholars in the writings of St Francis. He encourages others to "break the statue." The poetic image of Francis, he says, is "too beautiful to be true." The romantic picture of Francis talking to the birds is well known and enjoys mass appeal.

But, Thadee says, it is also important to demystify the man.

In addition to being deeply aware of the importance of his mission, Francis was also

vulnerable. He famously asked for his favourite sweets on his deathbed. In pursuing his mission, he could be forceful, merciless and even inquisitorial. All these facets came together to form a deeply religious man who was far more than birds and flowers.

"One needs to challenge certain historical clichés," Thadee says.

## The Secular Franciscan Order

*A talk given by Anthony Malone ofm  
At the NZ Regional Elective Chapter*

One major facet of the Second Vatican Council was its teaching on the role of the laity. In the Council Document, "Lumen Gentium" article 31 emphasis was placed on the participation by all the baptized in Christ's mission. In particular the laity's dignity, mission and responsibility in the Church and in the world was highlighted.

At the time of the Second Vatican Council the Secular Franciscan Order (or Third Order of St Francis, as it was then called) had lost to some degree its original focus. Many fraternities prior to the council were merely groupings of like-minded Catholics who prayed together, became acquainted with the basic Franciscan story and were regarded and indeed considered themselves to be somewhat exclusive and therefore privileged.

Following upon the Second Vatican Council members of the SFO began a re-examination of the impetus and structure of their Institute. What was revealed was that contemporary ideas and developments in theology as articulated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council related in a remarkable way to the initial vision of St Francis of Assisi. This is not that surprising. Francis himself was alive at the time of another great Council of the Church and is thought to have actually attended sessions of the fourth Lateran Council. Certainly a number of Francis' ideas can be traced back to directives issued by the Fathers of the Fourth Lateran Council.

So it was following on the Second Vatican Council that the International Council of the Third Order of St. Francis requested permission to initiate an updating of its legislation. The Congregation of Religious responded favourably on 3rd March 1966 and a process commenced to



Thadee Matura  
ofm (left), Yves  
Soudan ofm

prepare a new rule. What eventually emerged was **The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.**

These days, after a period of initial formation, a member of the SFO promises to live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by observing the rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. She or he now begins a lifelong formation.

An SFO member is committed:

- to daily prayer and meditation
- to attending daily Mass if at all possible
- to reading the Gospels assiduously
- to remaining in active communion with the Church, particularly the Pope,
- to developing an ever deeper devotion to Mary the Mother of God, and
- to faithfully fulfilling all one's duties in life.

At profession an SFO member endeavours from then on:

- to live a poor and humble life as Christ did
- to avoid any attachment to power
- to live a life of chastity in accordance with one's state in life
- to accept all people as brothers and sisters
- to stand for justice, defending it by word and example
- to esteem peace and work for it in all ways with all others, beginning with one's own family
- to respect all creatures and work for prudent ecology, and
- to be ready for Sister Death at all times.

This is a long list. This is a staggering blueprint for a lifestyle. A lifetime is needed in order to achieve anything like full conformity to these ideals. However, this is what is encompassed by the promise the SFO member makes at profession.

What lies ahead now?

G.K. Chesterton in his book, *St Francis of Assisi*, wrote that the Third Order was designed to assist ordinary people to be ordinary with extraordinary exultation. This observation is true. Francis was a medieval advocate of courtesy and song, a spreader of joy and love and laughter. Francis knew the value of companions on the way and the Third Order (now known as the SFO) permits a person to travel the road of life happily, in good company, with the means whereby one can experience the deepest spiritual joy in the face of every humiliation and misfortune.

The SFO has waxed and waned over the 800 years since its inception. The SFO now numbers a little over a million members throughout the world. Many SFO members are now elderly, but there are areas of tremendous growth, particularly in Central America, Africa, and South East Asia. In 1987 it was noted that in France many young people were becoming members of the SFO.

Within the lifetime of a generation, the SFO has experienced a major re-orientation from clerical supervision to attaining a true lay identity. As Francis did after the fourth Lateran Council, today members of the SFO face some exciting challenges. All Catholics are concerned for the future of their Church not just members of the Franciscan family. However, the concerns we have as Franciscans for the future are not characterised by fear or despair. All Franciscans and this includes the members of the SFO are by their very nature optimistic. They are always eager to move in new directions as

the Spirit dictates to the Church. Such a positive attitude cannot help but attract new members and bring a renewed vitality.

Francis' life as a worker in the Church began with the voice from the Cross at San Damiano saying: *"Repair My Church"*. It ended at Francis' death with three new Orders, all approved by the Pope. Already the Franciscan movement had gone far to rehabilitate the Church of Francis' day and in passing had revolutionized medieval society. Francis had truly tried to answer the needs of his time. As he was dying Francis said: *"Brothers let us begin."* We may well consider that Francis is saying today to you his brothers and sisters as you seek to live the Gospel in our modern world: *"Sisters and brothers let us begin for until now we have done little or nothing."*

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Mount Roskill, Auckland 1004  
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**The New Leadership team:**  
(from left)  
Sisters  
Joan Murphy,  
Louise Hume,  
Briega O'Hare,  
Pia Galea and  
Joanne Fitzsimons  
(Abbess)

## A Lamp Lit....

*A Lamp Lit and burning so brightly could not be kept so well-shaded that it would not radiate its splendour and illuminate the house of God; this balm-filled vase could not be so closely concealed that its fragrance would not pervade the House of the Lord.*

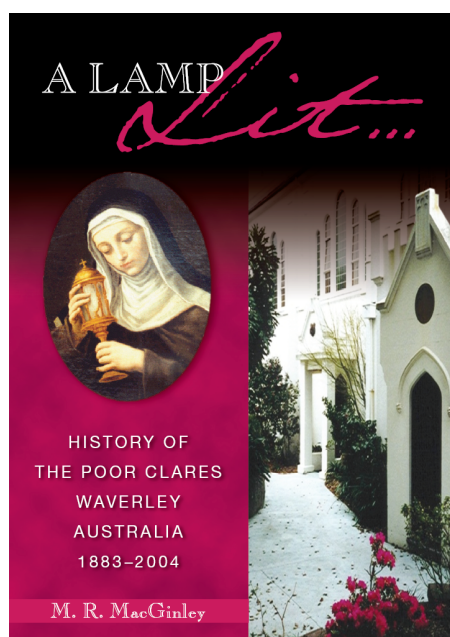
(Pope Alexander IV Bull of Canonisation - St Clare of Assisi, in the year 1255)

And so the lamp which was lit has continued to radiate all over the world for over 800 years and continues even to this day in NSW!

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2005 was a day of multiple celebrations for the Poor Clares of Waverley. In this year marking the 750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the canonisation of St Clare in Anagni, Italy, the Sisters' Chapter was opened at a Eucharistic celebration with a number of family, friends and Associates.



**Editors:**  
Noel Fauth ofm  
Noel English ofm



The Provincial Minister, Friar Stephen Bliss ofm presided.

The Chapter explored the theme 'Unity of Mind of Heart', a theme central to Saint Clare's spiritual teaching. The Sisters discussed the implications of this because throughout history the Poor Clares have always sought to be a sign of unity in Christ, which the sign of the Gospel for the world. They listened to the need that people have to experience God and discussed how, as a Poor Clare community, they can search out this experience with others.

It was a very happy time together, with four Poor Clares travelling from their monastery in Ireland to join their Sisters from Riverstone and Waverley in this very significant Chapter.

As well as holding their Chapter, the Sisters celebrated the launching of the book 'A Lamp Lit' – which is a history of the Poor Clares Waverley 1883-2004. This book is the first historical compilation of the Poor Clares in Australia since their arrival in Waverley in 1883. The book was launched by well known Scripture Scholar, Friar Campion Murray, ofm.

Author, Rosa MacGinley pbvm has traced the story of the Poor Clares from their founders Saint Francis and Saint Clare to the present day. A Research Fellow on the Brisbane Campus of the Australian Catholic University (ACU National). She is a founding member of the ACU Research Centre for Women's History, Theology and Spirituality, now known as the Golding Centre. A researcher for many years, she has written several books, including the widely acclaimed *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia*, some full-length monographs and a number of journal articles.

The book is published by Paulist Press and is available in Hardcover: \$50:00 and Soft cover: \$30:00

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