

Newsletter

Tertiary Newsletter, Easter 2008

Editorial:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For some time now I have been involved in a most distressing family matter which comes before the NSW Supreme Court later this year. I am most distressed by this matter but have so far managed, through prayer and in the receipt of the prayers of those who know more completely my personal situation, to have kept myself on an even keel, with God's help. I offer my heartfelt thanks to Fr Ted and his team in WA for carrying the load of the Newsletter production.

This edition of the newsletter is brief. It contains essentially my thoughts and musings along with a report of part of a trip to the Holy land in January this year. I am holding some short items on the theme 'Why am I a Franciscan?' which I hope to publish next time.

My greatest concern is that I have not made it clear that every Tertiary and aspirant 'owns' this Newsletter. In order to make the newsletter more interesting and perhaps less a Bathurst centric production I really do appeal to each and every one of us to provide some kind of contribution say once each year. It really would be wonderful should Regional Ministers and Area Convenors find themselves able to write a few paragraphs, include a few photographs. Perhaps even a learned discussion of some aspect of Francis' life.

Even dare I say should we not raise issues of possible controversy. In respect of the latter there are several Tertiaries who find it difficult to pay the minimal \$80 fee. I hear questions being asked about how is the fee spent and I hear responses saying that the cost of travel and accommodation to conferences and the like take up much of the money. I also am aware that Tertiaries are aware of the important and costly work being done on our behalf in New Guinea. I am very aware of the very many demands being made on Tertiaries at our organizational level and at our local level. I also hear questions being asked in relation to how can we reduce our costs so that more resources can be devoted to needs which some might see as being more typically 'Franciscan'. Some solutions being suggested include wide use of telephone or video conferencing. One large cost reduction was in the removal of the Newsletter printing costs. I know this is a controversial matter but I would like to see some discussion on matters like these in part of the Newsletter.

Pax et Bonum

Bill Gates, tssf, Area Convenor, Bathurst 15th March, 2008.

St. Francis' Prayer Before the Crucifix

Most High
glorious God,
enlighten the darkness
of my heart.
Give me
right faith,
sure hope
and perfect charity.
Fill me with understanding
and knowledge
that I may fulfill
your command.

In prayer before the San Damiano crucifix, we can imagine our blessed Francis opening himself to God's illuminating and saving presence. Francis was clearly aware of the flood of unconditional love emanating from God through Christ to him. This flow of love would seem to have affected Francis all of his life especially when he was praying before a crucifix like that of San Damiano. Francis in this prayer is assuring us and reminding himself of the sure hope that there is for us in the risen Christ. Such a prayer is most apposite for Easter.

Recently in church we learnt of the bringing back to life of Lazarus and we read that when he emerged from his tomb he still had the grave clothes wrapped around him. What a contrast this is to us learning of those who went into Christ's tomb to discover that He was not there and in contrast to Lazarus that His grave clothes were neatly folded. What a witness that Christ had overcome death even after His crucifixion.

Clearly Francis could see this and through his beautiful prayer is also telling us the same thing.



Saladin's inscription over the door to St Anne's church indicating that the church was once a madrasa for the study of Islamic Law in the year 1192.



One of the beautiful stained glass windows in the Cowra Anglican Church

Recently our Bathurst Franciscan group was invited to deliver the sermon at the Cowra Anglican Church. We chose as our theme ***'What would St Francis do if he were alive and with us today'?*** We chose this theme in our attempt to illustrate the relevance of being Franciscan in this 21st century.

The topic we have chosen today is "Francis in the 21st Century"

As St Francis prayed " All praise be yours my Lord, through all you have made..."

Amen

We are members of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis and are also known as Tertiaries.

We are here to tell you something of the Third Order and what we do.

We are also here to encourage anyone here who might be interested in joining in with Third Order activities to join our worldwide Anglican order.

Father Malcolm has all of the details including phone numbers and email addresses.

I now introduce you to Steve Howes.

THE FIRST AIM of FRANCISCANS

Hundreds, thousands of soldiers were there, besieging their enemy,

the sun glinting off their weapons.

But these soldiers are rubbing their eyes in surprise ...

What's this?? ... A poorly dressed civilian, wanting to cross no-man's land!

to talk with the enemy!!

This is happening back in the year 1219 during the Fifth Crusade against Muslims in Egypt.

That strange civilian was Francis of Assisi, a man on a mission to talk with the Muslim leader,

Al-Kamil - to share the Gospel of Jesus.

What a risk! ... Once Francis had crossed over into enemy territory, how would the Muslim soldiers receive him? But that day, Francis did indeed have an opportunity to meet the Sultan and to hold long discussions about Jesus with that Muslim leader, conversations lasting several days

- a European Christian talking respectfully with a Muslim in the Middle East

- and during a time of hostilities!

We don't know the result of their dialogue but I am impressed by how Francis demonstrated for us the FIRST AIM of Franciscans

To make our Lord known and loved everywhere.

"Our Order believes that it is the commission of the Church

to make the gospel known to all people.

This morning I appreciate the opportunity of sharing with you this first aim.

Those words, "To make our Lord known and loved everywhere", encourage me as I seek to make the Gospel known in Bathurst where I teach SRE, 'Scripture', in schools.

This Gospel is for all people, of whatever ethnic group.

The Christian faith is NOT "the European religion".

[Hold up Franciscan booklet of the Principles]

... As Franciscans we have a booklet of daily readings, one for every day of the month, a paragraph or two to read each day, to keep us focussed on following Christ.

And where does our booklet of readings come from?

From Italy? NO ... From England? NO ... but from INDIA.

It comes from the Christa Seva Sangha – Hindi words for 'Christian Service Association'.

But we are living out here in the Central West, not India nor the Middle East. ...

When we drive to Sydney through Bathurst we come to a T intersection where we turn right.

Next time you drive through there, just before you make that right turn, look across to your left, to the block where the Mitsubishi dealer now stands. Try to imagine what it was like back in the 1880s, when it was Chinatown, home for the hundreds of Chinese who worked their market gardens down on the river flats.

Back in 1889 a group of Bathurst Christians organised the Bathurst Chinese Mission.

This Gospel outreach to the Chinese was led by a local Board made up of the Anglican Dean Marriott together with clergy of other denominations and supported by a Ladies Committee.

As their evangelist they employed David Sing who preached in Chinese every Sunday and also travelled out to Dubbo, Orange, Wellington, Blayney, Sofala and Mudgee.

Ah Sing talked with Chinese gardeners to show them the way to enter God's Kingdom.

He passed on the message that we heard in today's Gospel reading:

... "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in Jesus,
whether Chinese or English or whatever,
may not perish ... but have eternal life."

That Chinese Mission was a partnership in the Gospel between Chinese Christians and Anglo Christians. They remain an example to us today of taking opportunities to

"make Christ known and loved everywhere".

I now introduce you to Lee Steele.

To be a Franciscan (Lee Steele)

Inspired by the vision of Saint Francis, we commit ourselves to the Gospel as our way of life. Our life and our spirituality, however, are characteristically secular, in the world and for the world.

The vision of Saint Francis reveals to us a God who is Father and a life which is love. This demands of us a life as brothers and sisters of all people and of creation.

We are on a pilgrimage, trying to reach our Father, trying to live a life of love. We commit ourselves to the service of those less fortunate than ourselves and to the respect for all life on earth.

In making our way through life, we are guided by Francis' three instruments of peace –

- Humility
- Love
- Joy.

Humility is the situation of the earth; always there, taken for granted and rarely remembered. Trodden on by every creature, yet it is from this same earth that life blossoms. The earth lies open to the sunshine and the rain, it is ready to receive any seed we may sow and is capable of bringing forth a rich harvest. Humility confesses that we have nothing that we have not received, and we seek to serve one another with such humility.

Love is not a matter of emotions or feelings, but rather the gift of oneself to others. It involves risk and is the entire basis for the purpose of life.

Joy flows from humility and love and is a mark of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is not an exciting emotion that leaves us exhausted, but rather a happiness that springs from a steady faith in the goodness of all things and of their maker. Such joy we may feel in the midst of anxiety and suffering because the joy is in the depth of the soul. Joy sustains our lives, fulfills our living and we seek the same for others. Franciscans delight in fun and laughter, rejoicing in God's world, its beauty and its living creatures.

Like Christ, like Francis, we desire to be absorbed by the love of God and to be his instruments of peace, peacemakers, for reconciliation in the world.

To achieve all this is difficult; hence we declare our need for Christ's Eucharist, and the wonderful Franciscan fellowship, caring and support that exists between members of the Third Order through prayer and meetings. Each member adapts the Franciscan Rule of Life to their personal circumstances and spiritual needs, and shares in the fellowship of the Third Order.

What does being a Franciscan mean to us? It provides a focus for our spirituality and service to others, our commitment to God - it serves to promote the spirit of love, harmony and simplicity.

(This last section was presented by Bill Gates)

To repeat the question asked earlier;

Many of us ask, what would Francis do or say were he alive today?

And more particularly,

Since Francis is well known for his love of living things, how might he react to the current ecological crises, including climate change, which we face on Earth in these modern times?

Now, Francis was fully aware of human sinfulness. He had a good sense of his own sinfulness and knew well the causes of unhappiness and much of human suffering. Francis understood that the root causes of environmental destruction are to be found in the attitudes of avarice, ignorance and pride. Francis knew that much of human misery came about because of these sins.

We mainly recognize that the so called 'evils of globalisation' are due to sheer greed. Many of us see corporations some of which are small and some of which are large multinationals and even, dare I say it, many individuals expressing their ignorance of environmental effects by 'buying off' the resources they need to expand, irrespective of the effects their actions have on people or the environment. Many of us see that the 'wealth of the First World is built on the poverty of the Third World'

In the light of current discussions relating to fuels and atmospheric carbon dioxide and the phenomenon of global warming Francis would no doubt have had something to say to each and everyone of us who owns a motor vehicle or who uses lots of electricity generated by coal fired power stations or who uses

consumer goods in an apparently lavish manner. No doubt he would be asking us questions relating to our need and perhaps he would be asking us to consider what he might call our greed and be asking us to conserve our environment by living more simply.

We have no doubt that the 21st century Francis would hold these kinds of views very firmly and would no doubt be doing something about redressing these issues.

Francis would also recognize that pride and arrogance go hand in hand, and he would most likely be of the belief that those who savagely exploit the environment are doing it for their own ends and not for the benefit of God's creation.

Francis in the 12th century sought unity with God and with the whole of creation

He was a mediaeval mystic, but were he alive today he would still be telling us that we are all reliant on the environment for our survival, and, that all lifeforms are interconnected. In his time he extended this to

- the removal of borders between rich and poor,
- the development of friendly relations between Muslim and Christian
- and the integration of the outcast into society

His message from the 12th Century is still the same for the 21st Century

We as a local Franciscan group spend most of our time working on helping the better off in society to understand and assist those who are not so well off. Our small group in Bathurst devotes itself to the assistance of the Bathurst refuges by the provision of furniture and household goods to those who are leaving refuges for their new accommodation.

The furniture and household goods are provided by those who are better off in our community.

We also provide presents for mums to give to their children at Christmas time. The numbers of kids we look after has been steadily increasing so that at last Christmas we made provision for gifts for 45 children who were in refuges.

Other activities we carry out are quite confidential but we have had more than a little to do with single mothers and their children as well.

We could not do this work were not those who are better off in our society not in support of our aims.

Francis tried to negotiate with the Sultan- you remember that this was the time of the crusades.

Like Francis, we too help people irrespective of race or creed.

Like us, Francis would no doubt have been in support of the Sorry events which have occurred in recent days.

St Francis' message from so long ago still speaks to all people of all religions.

Francis teaches us a spirituality that

- has a firm belief in the 'oneness of God'
- And that only through and in God is the whole of creation united and connected
- And that in Jesus Christ, all are equal in the sight of God.

Very clearly Francis' message from the 12th century has great application to us in the 21st Century.

You have heard today about the principal aims that are followed by anyone who wish to become a follower of Saint Francis, in that Franciscans aim;

- To make the Lord known and loved everywhere
- To spread the spirit of love and harmony
- And to Live simply

And that Franciscans do this by

- Prayer
- Study
- And work

Within the contexts of

- Humility
- Love
- And joy

All of these are gifts of the Holy Spirit to people who, then by the power of the Spirit become channels of grace through whom His mighty work is done.

In the words of Saint Francis

Pax et Bonum

Peace and goodwill to each and everyone here present and may the spirit of Saint Francis be kindled within each of us as we each become encouraged to live simply and in harmony with each other and especially in relation to the environment of God's creation..

Amen

The prayers which formed part of this service were written and read by Maureen and David Arnold.

SAINT FRANCIS PRAYER FOR PEACE

(Please pray this prayer with a special emphasis on the Middle East troubles in Gaza and Jerusalem)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury...pardon,
Where there is doubt... faith,
Where there is despair... hope,
Where there is darkness... light,
And where there is sadness... joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying
that we are born to eternal life.

St. Francis of Assisi

Comment on Easter Experiences(found somewhere on the Internet)

If we come out of our Easter experiences with a clearer sense that the universe is driven by love, all-consuming love, then our Easter experience will have been a success. If on Easter morning we are more filled with Hope that we will conquer terror and death, then we've had a wonderful week of Easter celebrations. If, however, the liturgies of this holy time barely affects, then we have let one more opportunity slip through our fingers. Eventually we won't have any opportunities left.

Holy Land Experience

Recently some of us from Bathurst and one from North Queensland paid a visit to the Holy Land. Our experiences there were so rich that we could no doubt write a rather large book on them. I know that whenever I speak to someone about those experiences I am left feeling rather guilty about my excitement and enthusiasm making the conversation rather one way. Such was the nature of the set of experiences we enjoyed.

After the Roman sacking of Jerusalem, after the time of Jesus Christ, the Romans built a large roadway known as the Cardo or Cardus Maximus right through

the ancient city of Jerusalem. This roadway was a place of shops/commerce. It travelled in a North South direction. The cardo began in the South near the pools of Bethesda which formed part of the water supply of old Jerusalem and which were said to have had healing properties. These pools were regarded as a holy place by various pagan sects and Roman deities. It was believed that these pools were the site of the birth of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In Byzantine times a large church called the church of St Mary was constructed over the pools.



The modern day houses above give you a good idea of how steep the valley is. The extent of the nave of the byzantine church of St Mary can be discerned.

Now over the course of time the Byzantine church was destroyed.

By the 11th and 12th centuries the Crusaders had come. On this site they built another church which they named in honour of Mary's mother, Anne. This church apparently was poorly built and fell quickly into disrepair, to be replaced by a new St Anne's church which is still standing today and which has been repaired and maintained ever since that time, even when it was, for a brief period, a madrasa of Salah Ad-din. The 12th century St Anne's Church was built at the beginning of the Roman Cardo as well as at the commencement of the via Dolorosa which was the path followed by our Lord to Golgotha. No wonder this church of St Anne was seen as being very important to the Crusaders!

This 'new' church of St Anne has wonderful audio characteristics being built mainly to enhance the Gregorian chants which were very popular from the 10th century onwards through mediaeval times. At present this church is maintained by the French 'white monks', who are Franciscans. Here are some views of this church.



Remains of the Byzantine Church of St Mary. The intact arch above supported the southern side of the church of St Mary. The arches were above one of the pools of Bethesda.



This is an image of St Anne's . The ruins in the centre are of the earlier St Anne's church and to their right are some of the remains of the earlier St Mary's church.



This is the inside of St Anne's showing the altar, the plain stone church and the beautiful vaulted ceiling.

It is here that our small group of 15 sang "Were You there Lord ". By the time we had finished our song the church was full of visitors , probably more than 200, who were all singing our song. What a wonderful experience.

To give you an idea of the acoustics you should hear the accompanying song from the London Choir (a YOUTUBE production)

The words to our song are available from the editor and when this small event in our itinerary was part of a devotion at the Orange Christian School the staff together sang this song accompanied by one of the teachers on piano.

"choir of London rehearsing.avi" This file is 9.5Mb in size and is available on request from the editor wgates@ix.net.au

The words and tune we sang are available from the editor – send email; to wgates@ix.net.au

Closing prayer:

May we continue to seek your help O Christ so that we may continue on our journey to your heavenly place, giving thanks for all we see and do. In your name, we pray. AMEN



Before the altar at the church of Loaves and Fishes at Galilee