

THE THIRD ORDER:

Australian Province Newsletter

Volume 7.3

St Francistide 2007

**Preach the Gospel everywhere.
Use words if necessary: St Francis**

From the Minister Provincial

Dear brothers and sisters in St Francis.

Happy Feast of Saint Francis! With the worldwide Franciscan family we celebrate the life of our founder. We thank God for the example set by Saint Francis as a follower of Jesus.

St Francistide is traditionally the time when tertiary groups gather. What a great opportunity to be together whether for just a few hours or a couple of days.

It is also a traditional time for Professions. If you are being professed this Francistide, I wish you a warm welcome to the Third Order as a full member.

Making your profession with a larger group of brothers and sisters is a wonderful reminder of the yet larger groups around you:

- ✘ the Region and our Province;
- ✘ the other four Provinces;
- ✘ the whole Society of Saint Francis;
- ✘ Third Order members in other churches;
- ✘ all Franciscan Orders in the Anglican and other communions.

‘We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses’, as the writer encouraged the Christian Hebrews.

These mark the inner and outer boundaries of strong communities: the intimacy of our immediate group, and being able to identify with a far-flung group. The Witham family, like all families, starts with just Rae, me, and our children. In this ‘nuclear’ family, we are deeply known and appreciate how much we are loved. Yet there are other families we identify with, other Witham's, other Kendell's, other

parts of our family with other surnames, and we have a sense of pride and mutual care with our extended kin. We need both the intimacy the nuclear family gives us and the identity the wider family bestows on us. That’s not to say the Witham family is perfect – far from it.

Nor is the Franciscan community perfect, and we grumble sometimes about our area group – or about those people on Chapter! But for the most part, the community works. We know in our smaller groups that we are loved and growing in intimacy. We know that we share ‘Franciscan DNA’ with other tertiaries in our Region and in the Province, and so when we do meet, we recognise each other as ‘family’ and experience its mutual care.

So at St Francistide we celebrate not only our father Francis, but also our sisters and brothers and the way each of us individual Christians is surrounded by their care.

The early Franciscans marked the period from the Stigmata (September 17) until the eve of St Francis’ Day (October 3) as a ‘little Lent’, keeping it as a time of fasting and recollection. This meant that St Francis’ Day itself could explode into a lively party. My prayer is that you will find joy and vitality as you celebrate St Francistide this year. Whether or not you can meet with other tertiaries around this time, do take joy and strength in remembering your Franciscan family and its love for you.

Peace, joy and love,

Ted Witham

Our website is under construction at www.tssf.org.au

Growing in Faith

Grafton Area Retreat

From Hilary Clifton.

One way to journey deeper into Christian faith is to explore our Trinitarian God through the window of St. Francis. St. Francis was passionate about Jesus and exemplified His deep compassion for the poor and suffering. He was exuberant about Jesus the source and sustainer of all creation and expressed this joy in a love for the environment and all living things. St. Francis had experienced the horrors of war first hand and chose a better way by uniting himself with Jesus in the pursuit of peace. And so a small group of Third Order Franciscans from the Grafton Area together with friends and enquirers set aside time to retreat.

We met at the Star of the Sea, Yamba, from Monday 23rd to Wednesday 25th July with Bishop Keith serving as retreat leader. Together we explored what it means to practise healthy humility as a reflection of one of the characteristics of God. Too often humility is misinterpreted as a dysfunctional subservience instead of a loving and creative sharing of ourselves with each other just as Jesus modelled in the washing of His disciples' feet.

We pondered the legendary view of St. Francis which is often romanticised beyond belief and questioned the emphasis on self within a post-modern and hypercompetitive world. There is truth in the legend of St. Francis – he was joyful and freed himself from the constraints of polite society in order to worship God with every fibre of his being, even if that zeal was too much for most people!

Keeping our feet on the ground, at least some of the time, we learned some practical strategies for bringing peace into our homes, churches and communities. We reflected upon the phenomena of compassion burnout and the risk of becoming desensitised to suffering through media saturation. Then we started to feel really challenged as we thought about the ways in which we are personally responsible for discord and carelessness within our own lives and relationships. Bishop Keith presented us with some practical ways to counter these negative tendencies;

1. Become aware of and reflect upon how I am neglecting or being unkind to others.
2. Ask; how can I break out of that cycle and bring God's transforming love?
3. Pray about it and then take action.

St. Francis had a simple but effective way of bringing peace everywhere he went. By greeting everyone he met with "The peace of the Lord be with you" he spoke peace and became peace. It is very hard to speak these words whilst at the same time holding negativity, anger or discord, and in changing ourselves the response of others may also change. Try it, and see if it works!

The Regional Minister, the Reverend Cleone Rolfe-Reardon, had the pleasure of admitting Barry Chambers from the Kingscliff Parish as a Novice to the Third Order. This means that for a period of about two years a person explores this way whilst living out a 'rule of life' to determine whether they are in the right path and wish to commit to a lifetime practice. Congratulations Barry!



(L to R) Michael Hobbs (area convenor), Cleone Rolfe-Reardon (regional minister), Mr. Barry Chambers (newly noviced) and Bishop Keith Slater (Bishop of Grafton Diocese).

Morning and Evening Prayer and a celebration of the Eucharist brought us closer together as a loving and worshipping community. A Taizé worship service gave us the opportunity to sing, reflect and pray in a different style of gentle meditation.

To bring the transforming love of Christ to the world means that first of all we must be willing and open to this transforming love ourselves. Becoming an active member of the Third Order of St. Francis is one way of gaining support, encouragement and a spiritual practice to enable that transformation.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis and how it might help your journey of faith please visit our webpage www.tssf.org.au and go to the contacts page.

New First Order Novice

Congratulations to Brother Wade-Matthew who was clothed as a novice in the Society of St Francis on Friday 15th June 2007.

Brother Wade will continue his noviciate at the Hermitage at Stroud.

Elections for Regional Ministers

We welcome the new Regional Ministers elected in the recent voting:

- ✠ Elaine Jeston (Queensland A)
- ✠ Philip Thirlwell (NSW B)
- ✠ Anne Kotze (SA)
- ✠ Jeremy James (WA)
- ✠ Gerald Ng (Malaysia)
- ✠ Anselm Rupusina (Dogura, PNG)

Regional Ministers have the overall pastoral responsibility for Tertiaries in their Region. They also assist enquirers as they share their story and draw up their Rule of Life prior to being received as a Novice.

Homily for the Feast Day of St Anthony of Padua and St Alban

In the name of ✠ the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – In nomine Patris, Filii et Spiritus Sanctus – AMEN.

St Anthony of Padua, as we all know, was a very well renowned and knowledgeable biblical scholar who died at a young age.

He was a contemporary of our blessed Saint Francis.

St Anthony followed Francis as an instrument of peace and in caring about people, especially the poor.

As I look around among us I see the same Franciscan characteristics at work among us, more than eight centuries after Anthony.

Saint Anthony was initially a religious follower of St Augustine. In Portugal he admired the humbleness of the early followers of St Francis

When Anthony heard of the meetings of Franciscans with the Muslims and their martyrdom and when he heard of the meeting of Francis with the Sultan he was greatly influenced. It was this set of events which

eventually caused Anthony to become a Franciscan.

Anthony wanted to go to Muslim countries to spread the word but he became ill on the way.

In 1221 there was a gathering of some 3000 Franciscans in Assisi.

St Francis was at that gathering but he was so ill that he could not speak. He asked that someone else speak but when no one volunteered the new foreign friar, Anthony, was prevailed on.

It was then that the Franciscans learnt of Anthony's deep Biblical knowledge and his great power to captivate an audience of 3000 friars,

Hereafter, wherever he went throughout Europe spreading the Gospel and the good works of the Franciscans he drew large crowds.

His words he lived out, he said words like

“A preacher must by word and example be a SUN to those to whom he preaches, you are says the Lord, the light of the world. Our light must warm the hearts of the people.”

In 1231 after a series of sermons in Lent Anthony fell ill. He was nursed by the Poor Clares.

He died, reportedly like Francis, singing his final song a hymn to Mary.

Anthony was so popular that he was made a saint within one year of his death.

When his remains were moved in 1263 to a special basilica, built in his honour, his tongue was found to be intact and of the same colour as a living tongue.

We learn from Anthony the Franciscan characteristics of humility, poverty, patience and obedience. We are strongly influenced by his dictum that actions speak louder than words.

A preacher - according to St Anthony - must know what he is talking about and must lay it on himself to practise what he preaches, otherwise he undermines his teaching.

To quote from one of his sermons, “We should speak then as the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of speech.”

Though he died at a young age, his life was a wonderful witness to the life and work of our blessed St Francis.

In this respect I am reminded of the poster that Fr John [Clarkson] gave me some years ago which says “Go forth and Spread the Gospel, and if necessary use words” This Franciscan message emphasizes the importance of actions and our matching them to the words we utter.

Now, on Friday 22nd June is also the day on which we celebrate the life of one of the Anglican saints and martyrs.

I have included this brief talk about St Alban largely because it is his day on Friday and mainly because it is on this feast day, just a few years ago, that Fr John was priested in the Abbey Church of St Alban, where St Alban’s remains still lie.

Briefly, Albanus was not a Christian for long.

He was a Roman soldier who gave sanctuary to a Christian priest. This was in the year 209 in Britain under the Roman Emperor Severus who at the time was living in Britain.

When Severus went on a four month journey into the north he left his son Gita Caesar in charge. Gita Caesar was a vicious Christian hater.

On the night he took in the Christian priest, Albanus was not a Christian but by morning it appears that he claimed that distinction.

It is also very likely that when he took in the priest that he knew of Gita Caesar’s attitude to Christians.

When the Roman soldiers who were chasing the priest to arrest him arrived at Albanus’ door, Albanus donned the priest’s garb and covered his face. He was arrested in place of the priest, who was able to escape.

When Albanus was put before the magistrate he refused to worship the Roman gods. His response was reported to be “my name is Albanus and I serve the true and living God who created all things. I am a Christian and my duties are Christian duties.”

Albanus was then flogged and because he refused to sacrifice to Roman gods he was sentenced to death by beheading.

On his way to be executed several miracles are said to have occurred. One of these was said to

be that the executioner refused to behead Albanus, but both of them suffered the same fate a little later.

It is said that the Abbey Church of St Alban is built on the site of the execution.

Albanus became a well known example of the power of the Holy Spirit, to encourage us like Christ, to die so that others might live, to encourage others to go forth and do their Christian duty.

So, what do they, Anthony and Albanus have in common?

They are both examples of a fervent belief in God and the works of His son, Jesus Christ, to humbly protect others and in their own ways to ensure that others will see virtue in their actions.

Both then showed that deeds speak louder than words and they showed, both of them, true Christian love.

Both went forth and did their Christian duty – this duty is for all of us to show loyalty, solidarity with and for people we have not yet met, to be faithful to the future as well as to the ever present body of Christ.

Now, recall the reading from John; which I believe Anthony would have preached and Albanus carried it out; “*We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.*”

And from the Gospel reading tonight, “*... and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*”

And, “*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*”

Surely these readings reflect the life and love of St Anthony and St Alban!

May we be able to adhere to the ideas of St Anthony the Franciscan and have the courage of St Alban and may we truly declare that we serve the true and living God, and declare that we are Christians and we do declare that our duties are Christian duties.

Bill Gates

Message from
Bishop Riah H. Abu El-Assal

From Knighthood to a Reconciliation Mission in Iran

Salaam and greetings from the City of the
Annunciation - from Nazareth.

As part of my Ambassadorial Role, once again I take the road to Ben Gurion Airport from where I will fly on another mission to Washington, U.S.A.

“Confrontation or Co-Existence” is the title of my upcoming presentation through which a New Road Map for Peace in the Middle East will be addressed. Your prayers, as I with others continue the search for peace, are mostly appreciated.

Having been made a Knight of the Order of the Templars of Jerusalem on April 28th, 2007, at the oldest Anglican Church in the U.S.A., in Williamsburg, Virginia; and installed immediately as a Chaplain of the Order (only a few days before the official visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth), I find myself called and recalled to continue with the mission of missions: that which consists in making peace by bringing down all walls and wars; and allowing space for hands and hearts to rebel, unchain the heavy burdened minds and indeed reconcile.



Bishop Riah installed as a Knight Templar

The present is at our service; while the future awaits our decisions. Time, just as history, shall testify that unless barriers which shape up the world of enmity are destroyed and uprooted, chances for peace and reconciliation will continue to beg for life. The world needs to wake up to the most logical and objective fact which was once summed up by John F. Kennedy rather very simply when he said that,

“If man does not put an end to war – war will put an end to man.” The condition is rather clear: The enemies of the past must shake hands



Bishop Riah in Iran

May 2nd-8th, 2007 at the invitation of the Church in Iran and under the leadership of Bishop Marshal Azad, I travelled on a most challenging mission to Iran. The visit included several meetings with officials which aimed at strengthening the ties and the presence of our Church; as well as expanding the dialogue over issues of peace, justice and reconciliation. The welcome I had was beyond my expectation. Upon arrival at the airport in Tehran, I was officially welcomed by my colleague Bishop Azad, Church members, Representatives of the Office of the President and the Ministry for Irshad (Culture and Religion.) I was also encouraged to know that - in an effort to bring greater awareness to the issue of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East - my book *Caught in Between*, will soon be translated into Persian.

We give thanks to God that the mission for which I have been called to has been accomplished. I truly left Iran with a different impression: I left Iran with a more joyful and hopeful Anglican Christian community. The door that was closed for almost 30 years has been opened. The drums of war must be hushed. The voice of peace must ring aloud. Co-Existence is the map; and Peace is the road. It is time for a historical march.

Keep us in your prayers and may God bless you and continue to make you a blessing unto many.

In Christ,

+ Riah H. Abu El-Assal

Quoted by Merrill Ruback

The well-known quote of St Teresa of Avila (1515 - 82) -

Christ has no body now on earth but ours, no hand but ours, no feet but ours. Ours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion on the world. Ours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Ours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.

could well be the basis of this prayer by Lancelot Andrewes (1555 - 1626)

Lord Jesus,
I give you my hand to do your work.
I give you my feet to go your way.
I give you my eyes to see as you do.
I give you my tongue to speak your words.
I give you my mind that you may think in me.
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me.
Above all, I give you my heart that you may love in me.

Boltie turns 90!

Dorothy Bolton (known to all as "Boltie") turned 90 recently. The next newsletter will contain a report of the celebrations in Toowoomba.

Editor of the Newsletter

Please continue to pray for Newsletter Editor Bill Gates who continues to struggle with family difficulties. Hopefully, the matters will be resolved by next year and Bill will be able to resume his role as Editor.

Novice Counsellor Formation

Provincial Minister Ted Witham has recently completed an eight-hour course to help Regional Ministers encourage the work of Novice Counsellors. The course is designed for maximum flexibility. Each topic is free-standing and can be worked on its own or with other topics. The courses are best used with small groups, but can be used with individuals, face to face or by mail.

The courses include tips on letter writing and for face to face meetings with Novices, giving feedback and the ministry of encouragement. Ted hopes that these courses will allow Novice Counsellors to feel both more competent and better supported in their crucial task of forming new Tertiaries.

Changes to Contact Details

Please ensure you send any changes to your contact details to David White at ProvincialSecretary@tssf.org.au. Changes since April will be sent by email or are available in print from your Regional Minister.



The retreatants at Yamba (see report on page 2)