

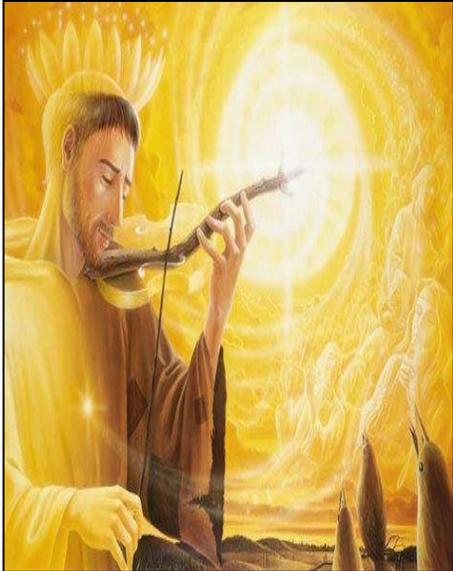
FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 108

Francistide 2013

It's Just a Flat Tire... Peace Comes

David Delacroix, OEF



Friends, siblings, and observers:

From time to time things happen in our lives, in my life, that makes me stop and ask, "What's up God?" It's a little like enjoying a nice cruise down the interstate and then you hear the ominous hiss followed by a thunk-thunk-thunk with a sense of driving a drunk vehicle. And you are in between exits, by 10 miles in either direction. You sit there and deal with the feelings of frustration, probably anger, grumbles and so forth. But you get out to change a flat tire, something you last performed in driver ed class umpteen years ago. You unload the trunk, lift that flap, and reach for the spare, only to discover that it is also flat.

And it starts to rain.

And your cell phone dies.

Get the picture?

So what's left to do but rejoice, right? After all, you ARE a Franciscan and this is just the sort of thing Brother Francis calls "perfect joy." But you don't feel like rejoicing. You feel like crying, beating up the steering wheel, and wondering.

Wondering why now. You feel me?

Life is like that. I confess that I do not want such experiences. I do not look for such experiences. I sure as judgment day do not want to be part of creating such experiences. But I am not in charge. I wrestle with God over taking charge, and God acts to teach me big lessons about acceptance, surrender, and gratitude. I turn to Scripture and am encouraged by the familiar passages from Romans 8:28ff, Lamentations 3; and Psalm 139. I am reminded that though some experiences seem terrible and miserable, something good comes through it all some way somehow... because our God reigns, our Savior resides over the heavens and earth, and I am never alone in the midst of it all.

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Just A Flat Tire...continued

Interim Minister General Chosen

God did not ever promise a comfortable lifestyle. God promised comfort and the gift of the Holy Comforter. Big difference!

In 2007 I resigned as MG due to problems I helped to create. The community survived, but I'll never really forget the pain I caused. Now this year Brother Craig Robert resigned and we are now again feeling communal anguish over this trauma, as is Craig. We dare not respond to this in confusion or anger, but in prayer lift up all who feel hurt, confused, frustrated and more seeking God's extraordinary healing grace and peace that surpasses all understanding. We enter into a period of reflection and prayer, open honest discussion and sharing of creative ideas, as we discern the path and the continuity of the Order. The world continues to spin. The sun still shines. Our God reigns. And we will survive.

So I invite us all to humble ourselves and commit to a fortnight of prayer and fasting in some way, seeking God's will for the OEF, and come together in spirit at the Transitus of St. Francis to renew vows, renew our fellowship, and celebrate the blessed ties that bind our hearts together in Christ Jesus, Who is our Way, Truth and Life.

It's only a flat tire, after all.

Please allow me to introduce to you, Sister Dale Carmen, as our Interim Minister General! Dale graciously accepted the call of your servant team to step in and assist the community in its time of transition and address the day-to-day affairs of the community, guiding and encouraging us to be a people of prayer and action in continuing to follow our common vocation as Franciscans in this world.

Dale resides in North Dakota with her husband Ken Trana. She is one of the originators of the Order and served as the first Minister General from 1983 to 1993. She is a United Church of Christ pastor and served several parishes scattered across the northern plains. An amazingly creative spirit, Dale loves to keep life simple and close to the earth.

Correspondence from her often is illustrated with flowers and birds, or contains a feather or dried flower plucked from her farmyard. Her experience and wisdom are an invaluable gift to the community as we seek to elect a new Minister General in a timely manner. She is working with your servant team to not just keep the 'business of the community' moving forward but also to prepare for next year's annual gathering.

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Interim Minister General ...continued

A Letter from Br. Craig Robert

Please join me in this prayer for her, and for us: "Dear Savior of us all: may You be blessed by the collective and individual ministries of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. We praise and thank You for the gift and the call of St. Francis to be for us an example of living the gospel life, taking the gospel to all corners of life, and bring life to the gospel in our daily lives. We ask Your blessing on Brother Craig Robert as he continues to develop his fellowship with us and serve us in other ways as well. Spirit of God, come upon Sister Dale, the servant team members and the entire community as You continue to guide us to be living examples of ecumenical mission and do our part to 'go and rebuild... the Church'. Sister Dale has been most gracious to accept this burden of service with us. May she know Your peace, joy, and wisdom as she assists us to collectively seek Your Kingdom and will for us to be fulfilled as the O.E.F. In the name of The Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.... Amen!"

David Delacroix, OEF
Scribe



Dale Carmen, OEF

Dear OEF Sisters and Brothers,

There seems to be some concern – and rightly so – among members and especially the non-professed as to why I stepped down as Minister General. I believe that I offered at the time I resigned a general statement to be used by the Servants Team, but am not sure where that has been posted. So, I'll post it here. Again, it is generalized, but please take into account that no reason other than leadership style concerns and my spiritual, emotional, and physical health ultimately lead to my decision. So here it is: "The overall and underlying dynamic in my decision to resign as MG has to do with the fact that the demands of the position are currently more than my spiritual and physical constitution can wholeheartedly embrace and that there are some fundamental differences between the order's leadership needs and my inclination and capacity to meet them."

Please understand that I am still a professed member of our beloved order and that I am in daily prayer for its healing and its evolution into becoming what God desires us to become. This is a time of transition and I have great hopes for the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

I also ask everyone to be supportive of our servants team and especially of Sr. Dale as she once again takes up the role of Minister General as an interim holder of that office.

I hope this helps somewhat for those who are confused about my resignation.

Blessings and deep peace,

Br. Craig Robert, oef



OEF Members Reflect on the Stigmata



In the past, I've been uncomfortable with the stories of the stigmata, and have therefore ignored the "day." **

But today, in my morning prayer time, Julian of Norwich's meditations on the wounds of Jesus "floated" into my consciousness.

Some say Julian was unutterably wounded by the Black Death—that she lost husband and children to bubonic plague. Could that be at least part of the source of her reflections on Jesus' wounds? And what deep wounds do I bring to this day, from my 72 years of living? In a strange and new way today, Julian is pointing me to a "place" where I can "bring" all of my pain and woundedness—into the wounds of Jesus, into the wounds of Mother God--?!

I've been helped by the Jungian concept of the "shadow"—where I "hide," from others, and especially from myself, hurts and anger and fears and woundedness. I watched my father, close to the time of his death, pour out his "shadow" on those around him, no longer able to "hide" the pain (including from World War II), and disappointment (in a son who didn't "live up" to his deepest longings for him—because the son needed to walk his own path—and did!).....

And I wonder how I might sometimes be "pouring out" my own shadow "stuff"—on family members, and friends—and do I sometimes use it in my work and multiple communities—as "warrior"—but the energy is potentially a "two-edged sword"—and can easily harm me—and those whom I love—and those toward whom I direct that "energy from my shadow"—?

Where do I "take" the pain of my wounds?—where do I "go" for balm?—for healing?—for "leaning into"

wholeness?.....?

And Julian seems to be saying to me today—"go" into the unutterable Love of God—gaze on the cross where Creator God's love is revealed—"go" into community/communities that know the wounds of Jesus—



Is OEF one of those communities? And I realize that because of my formation journey with OEF, I "found" my St. Louis spiritual director—Sister Joan, OP (who, when I told her that I was exploring whether to become a Franciscan, said, "Well, Francis was a bit crazy, you know"). And because of Joan, I "found" Julian of Norwich (in a Theology of Grace course at Aquinas Institute of Theology, taught by another Dominican sister, whose parents were third order Franciscans!). I do not know what the experience of the stigmata was for Francis on this day, so long ago. But I am grateful for the "invitation" that this day holds, to reflect on my own wounds, to reflect on my "shadow," to reflect on "safe place(s)" where I find hope and healing—placing my woundedness into the wounds of Christ—letting myself be loved and loved and loved and loved by the One who created me—and this little Order—and Who promises that (quoting Julian) "I shall make all things well which are not well, and you will see it."

May it be so—

Amen.

Anne Nancy Vosler, OEF

(Continued on page 5)



OEF Members reflect on the Stigmata...continued



Dear Loved Ones,

I send love and deep thanks that you have brought the stigmata to my attention and caused me to do some pondering of my own.

With complete respect to all and your thoughts, I would be deeply upset, so deeply upset I do not know if I could continue to be a Christian if I thought the stigmata were about me and my personal woundings, unredeemed shadow side or need of grace, much as I have all of the above.

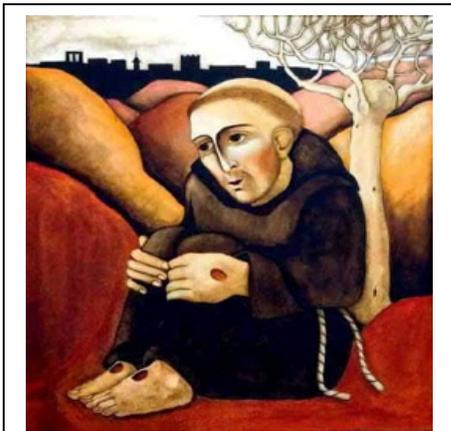
Let me explain. As I understand it, the significance of our faith lies in what Christ did, not just the Cross and the Resurrection, but His freely given choice to become a human being, to live as a human being with all its limitations, to suffer the many woundings of what it is to be human and to show us the Way in all that He did. So if I also understand it correctly, Francis tried to follow, in all the ways he could, the Way of Christ. I am a Christian and a Franciscan because I attempt to follow, in every way I can, to follow the Way indicated by Christ and Francis and Clare and many others I deeply love.

Perhaps there is more that I do not understand, and I would be glad to listen to those wiser than I.

I started by pondering not just the outer wounds of the Crucifixion, but what had to be the many wounds, both inner and outer, that Christ had to have carried throughout the course of his life, the "inner stigmata," so to speak.

Now there is an interesting fact that I have noticed in both myself and the clients I have worked with. It is that the more I get focused and wound up in my own personal wounds, darkness, stuff and need for grace, the worse it gets. There is a saying in the 12-step programs and I think Buddhism also, that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. Not that I ignore the need to work on myself. But the ultimate "salvation" for me is when I become so involved in His work that I freely choose to do, I forget me and my stuff. It is well known that a sure fire cure for depression is to become involved in service to others. So the paradox is: the more I make it about me, the more I am doomed, and the more I make it about His work the more I am freed. So what about those "inner stigmata?" Do I suffer when I take on the hard work of being responsible for my own pain, let go of my resentments and forgive? Do I suffer when I choose to be present for someone else and feel their suffering as my own through my empathy? You bet!

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OEF Members reflect on the Stigmata...continued



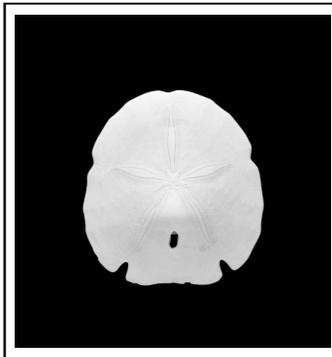
And what about those "outer stigmata," the people who chose to put themselves in harm's way to save and help others, as countless people did gladly in 9/11, in the Colorado floods, the man who led a blind colleague to safety in Washington, whistle blowers who stand up for what is right and true and end up making incredible sacrifices for having done so and many others? Again with all due respect and contrary to what others have said, I believe, if we have at any time truly done Christ's work and chosen to follow in His Way we have had the experience of an inner or outer stigmata to a greater or lesser degree. And if we freely chose to do His work out of love, it should free us from our petty selves, give us joy and great peace.

Respectfully and with love,
Your little sister,
Sharon Inglis, n/OEF

* * *

Dear Sister Sharon,

Following on from, and supporting what you have said, those with a Theosophical interest and perhaps some with an Anthroposophical one, may view Christ's sacrifice/crucifixion as being also, and perhaps more importantly, the self-limitation of the Second Person of the Trinity into matter.



As for the five wounds, the number five is said to combine "the two and the three, or the first even number and the first odd number after unity, representing on the universal plane the union of cosmic substance with cosmic intellect, and representing the heavenly or macrocosmic person, corresponding to the head and limbs of the human body; the same general idea lying behind the five wounds which Christians ascribe to the crucified Jesus." (a loosely adapted quotation.)

Thomas Stebbing OEF

* * *

When I consider Francis' experience of the stigmata, I sigh under the burden of the words ... words... words.

I understand that they are important to some of us.

Dare I say that they are not important at all to others of us... and, in fact, that they can get in the way? For me, at least (and I suspect that I am not alone), it is enough to say that Francis experienced a profound, wonderful mystical experience that defies words.

It was/is a mystical call.

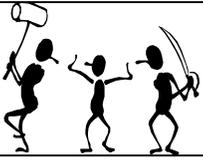
It may be that I was first called to follow Francis when, as a very young pastor, I stood a long time before a mural of that moment at the Franciscan retreat house outside San Antonio.

No words can encapsulate whatever transpired then. I simply know it was one of the steps toward understanding what I believe Brother David D shared:

That Peace Comes.

peace and all good,

James Schwarzlose, OEF



Challenges in Community

By Dale Carmen, OEF



At our 6th Annual Chapter at Mt. Sinai, NY in 1989, OEF member Ron Nuss-Warren showed up for breakfast wearing a white T-shirt boldly proclaiming, "S.H." Now, being an honorary red-neck I know what S.H. stands for in western North Dakota. However, I surmised there must be some esoteric Franciscan theological meaning to these letters if Ron N-W was wearing them, so I asked for enlightenment. He said, "Stuff Happens."

At first I thought that was just a sanitized translation of my rural western version, and I've come to find out accepting "Stuff Happens" is a profound spiritual discipline. I've learned that sometimes we have an idealized, romantic, unrealistic notion of life, and then get wiped out when "Stuff Happens."

The legal purpose of OEF on our incorporation papers is simply, "a community for spiritual growth," and spiritual growth by living in religious community is not easy. It is very difficult at times, as well as life-giving and soul-supporting.

We are at a time of transition as our Minister General, Craig Robert Miller, resigned and we continue under the guidance of a faithful and helpful Servant Team. Many years ago, I read "Quotations for Community" and found it to be wise encouragement for our commitment to a religious community. May we use these quotations in our prayer and reflection time as we learn and grow in a religious community rooted in the companionship of Francis and Clare.

God bless us gently.

"Quotations for Community"

- ◆ Life is difficult.



- ◆ Do not see all you see; do not hear all you hear.



- ◆ I can live for two months on a good compliment.



- ◆ The best way to know God is to love many things.



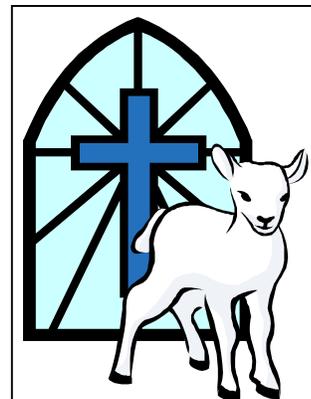
- ◆ A little nonsense every now and then is relished by the wisest people.

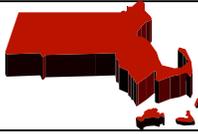


- ◆ A person who trims him/herself to suit everybody will soon whittle him/herself away.

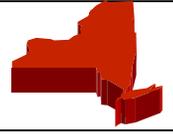


- ◆ What unites us is our single attraction to the same SomeOne.





Regional News!



Northeast Fall Retreat

May the Peace and Goodness of God, fill our lives with Love! I would say this is what happened to those of us gathered September 6-8, At the "Walker Center in Newton, Massachusetts.

What an amazing treat it was! I write for two reasons, 1. I was asked to do it. 2. I want to encourage other groups of Sisters and Brothers to share in the rich experience of gathering as a spiritual gift, One to another.

This will not be a blow by blow description, just a reflection on a few key moments! I invite others to add...

Sr. Angelikia, led our Saturday evening worship. We considered the road that disciples of Jesus, were walking on, heading to Emmaus. They asked the stranger in their midst - Have you not heard? Are you the only one? - And that Stranger opened their eyes!

We shared in the eye opening joy of admitting a new Novice into the Order, As Sr. Carol Stiver took her vows. The Bread was broken, the Cup was shared. We were transformed! We also met Sr. Susan a Postulant, with a "Wow" story of her own!

Bro. Juniper Earlier that day directed us in two exercises using the writings of Saint Francis. At different points in the day, we considered first - The Praises of the Virtue-, and later the -Our Father-, in small groups. Deep spirited sharing is a rich Blessing, we experienced twice. We will be sharing our Our Father, in the Forums on the OEF web site.

The Food was excellent, and at times we shared conversations with a group working on sexuality, relationship concerns that they will take back to youth in their churches around the country.

We had time for walks, and naps and reading, and silence, and conversation about the Order and our lives in general. Some of us even had the excitement of an early morning wandering bear (spelling might be off 😊!) It is a much longer story than will fit in this space..... But, you can ask us about it!

We Started out Friday evening sharing a meal, with Bro. Juniper hunting down chairs as sibs arrived and our circle expanded. We ended sharing another Meal Sunday Morning As Bro Pacificus led us in a Taize' worship assisted by Bro. Bruce... Special THANKS!!! to Sr. Shoshanah who took care of the nuts and bolts of our gathering. The Staff at Walker were delightful.

Bro. Greg

Special, Special, Thanks to Clare and Francis!!!

Novicing Ceremony



from left: Br. Greg (seated),
Br. Pacificus, Carol Stiver,
Sr. Shoshana (back to the camera)



Four Miramar Franciscans renew vows

By Helen Bathurst OEF

On Sunday 29th September I joined with Richard Roberts TSSF, Ruth Martin TSSF and Bobbi Wilson TSSF as we renewed our Franciscan vows in the Morning Eucharist at St Aidan's Anglican Church in the Miramar Peninsula Parish in Wellington, New Zealand.

When I started in Formation with OEF I was encouraged to get in contact with the local TSSF group in Wellington because at that stage there were no other OEF members in New Zealand. I have been meeting with them regularly for some years now and also attended their convocation last year. This year, Richard, Ruth and Bobbi decided that they would renew their vows in our parish rather than at a TSSF meeting so I decided to renew mine also in unity with them!



From left: Sr. Helen, Richard, Ruth, Bobbi

John 15:9-17

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (v. 12)

Our congregation can feel more challenging than comfortable to some people when they first visit. We are definitely a mixed lot. There are gay, straight, bisexual and transgendered people in our community of faith. There are African nationals who came to this country as refugees, Latinos, Asians and Caucasians. There are affluent people and poor people, little kids and old folks, highly educated people and illiterate people, conservatives and liberals—all kinds of people. And they do not all think alike, not about the world and not about God.

But, wow, these people are good at loving each other, *especially* when they don't agree. They strive to live as one body, and they believe it's possible, not because of what they think, but because of what Christ did for them. If we had a bumper sticker to describe church, it would simply read: “Love across the difference. That's how God loves us.” We have discovered that the more we live those words, the more we see the heaven that God's power makes possible. Once you get used to it, it is as comforting as it is challenging.

Prayer: Christ, teach me the power of loving as you have loved me. Amen.

Written by Melody Beckman Eastman, senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Wheaton, Illinois.

From Christ in Our Home, a devotional printed by Augsburg Fortress, Box 1553, Minneapolis, MN 55440.

April/May/June 2013 Edition, page 45.

**Editor's note: This was sent to me as a contribution for our new devotional book, but I thought it was particularly relevant to OEF at this time.*



Words From the Interim Minister General



Grace and peace.

I served as Minister General of OEF from 1983-1993 and at that time we met annually at Chapter and communicated almost entirely by telephone and Post Office mail. It worked then. What we had to get done, we did. We were smaller, perhaps more homogeneous and had a great sense of purpose as OEF members.

This is now. The Servant Team has asked me to be Interim MG until the next regular election and installation. I do accept with trepidation, yet with a great sense of need to serve OEF as best as I am able. I've heard myself described as "technologically challenged" and I am – in the ways of computer technology and internet communications. To salvage some self-esteem I share that my husband and I burn wood for our heat source so I do have my own chainsaw and split wood with a hydraulic hook-up to our tractor. Different technology for different useful purposes. I take up the challenge of communicating effectively with the Servant Team so we can make necessary decisions and planning as a Team for OEF Community.

I believe that all of us in OEF Community are needed to actively let go of "what-ifs" and "omigoshes", and go forward in every spirit-filled constructive way possible. All of us are implicated in errors made intentionally and unintentionally. I ask everyone committed to Ecumenical Franciscan Community to pray daily,..."Jesus Lord, I offer you this new day.....and thank you for your blessings. I am sorry for having offended you and forgive everyone who has offended me. Lord, look on me and leave in me peace and courage and your humble wisdom that I may serve others with joy....."

This is part of the Franciscan Morning Prayer I pray daily at Matins. Some days saying this prayer once isn't enough and I need to crawl into it again and again until a conversion of attitude happens. Sometimes that takes a long time. Let us be patient and persistent with our collective conversion.

We need healing and thanksgiving, honesty and purpose, forgiveness and direction. The heart-beat of Christ among us and Francis' spirit of trust are with us. God is good. We are grateful.

Peace and Joy,

Sister Dale Carmen, OEF





A New Brother's Experience with Transitus



On Thursday October 3, I attended an awesome Transitus service at the Sisters of St. Francis Mother House (AKA-Assisi Heights) in Rochester, MN. The music was excellent and the talks by five of the sisters were inspiring! Each presentation of the sisters who spoke ended with these words of St. Francis-

***I HAVE DONE WHAT WAS MINE TO DO
MAY JESUS SHOW YOU WHAT IS YOURS
DO.***

I felt so inspired by the ladies at the Mother House that have spent so many years as Franciscans, teaching, nursing, missionary work, etc. One of the sisters asked me "What has inspired you to be a follower of St. Francis of Assisi?" I did not hesitate with answering! I told them I had attended Catholic Schools all the way through my early years. Both the grade school and high school were staffed with Franciscan Sisters. Each of the sisters that I had as a teacher was, in one way or another, an inspiration on my life.

Following the service, there was a reception in the sisters' community room. The conversation was amazing as the sisters shared what their mission was. The one story that stays with me is the sister who started out as an LPN and then she was sent to get her Bachelors and Masters degrees in Nursing, but it did not stop there! She was then sent to get her Doctorate degree in nursing. When she finished her education, she was sent to the missionary field to eventually set up schools of nursing in Africa, Haiti, and South America. The stories of each sister may have been different but they all came down to serving the Lord in the Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

Brothers and Sisters, if you have a chance during the coming years, make an effort to attend a Transitus service, as you will come away totally enlightened by what you hear.

Peace and All Good.

Keith Downey



Hear Ye, Hear Ye!



Submissions for the Epiphany 2014 issue of "Fiddlesticks" are being accepted immediately.

Deadline for submissions is Dec.15, 2013.

Send submissions to Sister Chris at
capoef@solarus.biz

or snail-mail to:

Christine Petersen, OEF
853 Norwich Ct
Nekoosa, WI 54457

Thank you!

Fiddlesticks
 c/o Christine Petersen, OEF
 853 Norwich Ct.
 Nekeosa, WI 54457
 U.S.A.



A Prayer of Discernment

By Brendan Shaffer, OEF



Spirit of Guidance, we see before us numerous choices and decisions to be made.

There is division in our hearts. Sometimes we want none of what we find.

Sometimes we want it all. Sometimes we want to give up making decisions and wish that the future would go away.

We entrust our decision-making into Your hands, ready to do our part but also knowing that we cannot do this without Your help.

Lead us through all the unsure, unclear, doubtful, hesitant, and questioning moments that are ours as we search to find the right way in which to go.

Grant us the grace to choose freely, without being attached to the outcome. We trust that You will be with us as we make our decisions

prayerfully and with faith.

Assure us that Your peace will rest deep within us as we make the decisions that seem best for us and OEF at this time.

We may continue to experience feelings of turmoil and confusion, but deep within we know that we can return to that settled place in us where You always dwell.

Guide and Director of our lives, we place our lives and OEF in Your hands.

Lead us to the path that will best deepen and strength our relationship with You.

May it be so!

