

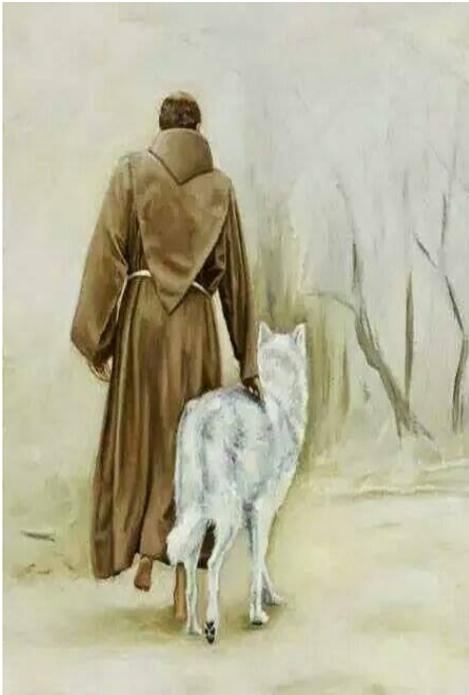
FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 112

Francistide 2014

Beyond the Beyond

by John Michael Longworth, OEF



It's a quirky family phrase that I recall my dad uttering when it was time to clean out the refrigerator. There were regular leftovers, which one could simply re-heat and make into a second meal. There were "this-'n-that" leftovers which might by combined through some sort of alchemy to make one more meal. Then there were the strange things that had gone "beyond the beyond." Contents mutated beyond recognition, these lonely food storage containers had become lost in the back of the fridge. They existed now in a realm beyond revival, beyond creative reuse and beyond any hope for redemption. They belonged in the trash can.

During Lent we heard two "beyond the beyond" stories, as the prophet Ezekiel encounters the dried up bones of a people who have wasted away, and as Jesus weeps at the tomb of his close friend Lazarus. God asks the impossible, "Can these bones live?" The obvious, logical, Cartesian response to the question is "absolutely not". There is no redemption or hope for bones bleached by the sun or for a dead brother who has lain four days in the grave. There is only brittleness and the stink of decay. The dry bones and Lazarus are "beyond the beyond".

For the faithful people in a church that no longer takes up center stage in our culture, it seems as if the cry of the exiles could be their own, "our bones are dried up and our hope is lost, we are completely cut off." We have donned our mourning garments and our wailing veils. If only Jesus had come and renewed our spirits before now! Surely Christ could have healed our ills and calmed our fever. Now the church of our nostalgic imagination is wrapped in bands of cloth and draped in a pall and the truth is we are in mourning.

Then we see Jesus coming on the horizon, walking into our midst and we see the tears welling up in his eyes. Like Martha, we are ready to blame, not because we have lost faith in Jesus, but precisely because we have trusted him so much. "If you showed up on *our* schedule, surely we would not be at this point of pain and grief."

However, it is precisely at the point of pain and grief that we begin to evolve. Jesus is inviting us to evolve, to experience the pain of shifting to a new way of being his body in the world and the joy of being set free from the blue fuzzy Tupperware at the back of the fridge. We are being called to acknowledge the truth about ourselves as a community, as an institution and as a people.

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Beyond the Beyond ...continued**WORDS OF WISDOM**

The truth is, many of us stopped cooking a long time ago. Instead of seeking to discover what God was up to in the world around us, and what kind of future humanity was being led toward, we chose to eat our own leftovers. We had some pretty awesome leftovers (programs, modes of worship, forms of service, institutions, privileges, etc.) and they were our comfort food. When we ran out of leftovers, we moved on to "this-'n-that", combining the bits and pieces that still worked into one more stir-fry, one more soup, and one more stew.

Now, what's left is "beyond the beyond". It's green, it's fuzzy, it smells weird and there is no way we can salvage it. It's time to clean everything out and start fresh. The good news is that God has a whole other definition of "beyond the beyond".

God asks if the bones can live because God exhales the very breath of life into the world. If we are dry bones, then let us be honored to be the bones that God is restoring to life and summoning to service in the world! If we are a Lazarus Church and the popular mythology is busy writing our obituary, then let us pray that in death we are deeply mourned by a community that has really lost something. We can know that we are loved when the voice of Jesus cries out into our darkest place "come out!" Come out! The God of second chances, hope when there is no hope, and love when love is lost calls out to us. That God will make this new community that is being unburied, unbound, and set free into a sign that will astound a world in deep need. At the very moment when the world is heading into profound trials, a sign of resurrection will give us hope, "beyond the beyond."

Peace.

**Editor's note: The above article missed getting into the Lent issue, but I thought it was appropriate for Francistide, considering its theme of a weakening Church and Francis' mission to rebuild the Church.*



"I have done what is mine to do. May Christ teach you what is yours to do"

- Francis' last prayer for his brothers
*submitted by Keith Downey, n/OEF



A Friendly Reminder Regarding Social Media

Please do not post information or pictures of OEF siblings on Facebook or other social sites without their permission. Some of our siblings do not wish to be seen on social media for various reasons. Please protect their information as you would yours.

Thank you!



Regional News



From the Fellowships Coordinator:

Fall Fellowship Gatherings beyond Transitus include:

Oct 24th & 25th., Mid-Atlantic Fellowship in Lexington, KY. Sr. Allegrezza.

Oct. 25th OR Nov. 15th - Golden Gate Fellowship, Bay Area, place not set

November 8th - the Bluebonnets, convened by Katie in Waco.

If there are others, do note it on the List Serve or directly to Michael Vosler.

"We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing..."



ATLANTA AREA OEF FEAST DAY GATHERING

A small cluster of Atlanta-area OEFers and friends gathered to celebrate St. Francis' Feast Day with a Stations of Creation Walk on a cool, breezy sun-lit October 4th. day We began at the head of Central Congregational UCC's Memorial Walk singing, "If I had a butterfly". Brother Sun was then sought out (sliding behind the trees) and praised with the first stanza of Francis' Canticle. Then we moved down the walk, calling to Sister Moon, just over the horizon. Thus worked our way through the wooded area, seeking manifestations of our Sisters/Brothers Wind, Air, Water and Fire praising each. That took us deep into the woods where we greeted Mother Earth gratefully. Finally, we stopped and sat at spot with some of the names of those who had passed beyond Life. There we pondered the imminence of our Sister Death praising her accordingly. At that point, we sat and meditated -- silently and aloud -- upon Songs for the Little Flowers. This series of meditations was written by L. Katherine (Sister Katie) Cook. Having completed this profound time we sang the last verse of the Butterfly Song... which led to the veterans among

us teaching the others "He's a Peach of a Savior" - with motions, of course.

That done, we preceded to descend into Central's WWF-certified wildlife habit, completing an excellent Stations of Creation walk.

-Submitted by James Schwarzlose, OEF



In 2013, at the Great Lakes Regional gathering, we decided to have our local annual retreats during Francistide each year. This year, we met at the Franciscan Spirituality Center located on Viterbo University's campus, run by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA), in La Crosse, WI. Our time together started with fellowship and discussion Thursday evening. By mid-morning on Friday, retreatants included, postulant John Salvesson, novices Kathleen Dlugosz and Keith Downey, and professed members Sr. Chris Petersen and Br. John Son of Syvert. The interactions, both within our group, and with the FSPA sisters, were a gift from God. The Holy Spirit thrived through true Franciscan fellowship and unity. All weekend long, we felt grateful for the facility and the hospitality the sisters shared with us. Whether in sharing a meal, a spiritual exercise in meditation or dialogue, all seemed to enjoy the weekend immensely. Peace rang through the weekend. Friday night's Transitus service with the sisters was particularly special. To know we are bound by something and someone so much bigger than one single person or thing is awe-inspiring! Celebrating the gift we know as Francis with other Franciscans of various faith backgrounds is what we believe is God's ecumenical spirit in action. It's what we are all called to do — to live in Franciscan unity centered on Christ and His love, peace and hope for one another. May your Francistide reflections with God and Francis fill you and renew you, now and throughout the coming year!

-Submitted by Kathleen Dlugosz, n/OEF

(Continued on page 4)

Regional News ...continued

Greetings, Sisters & Brothers, from Coast West of the USA!

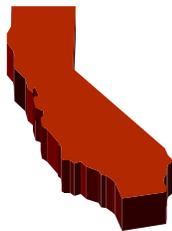
Anne Nancy and I just put Brother CJ on the bus after his 3 day visit with us here in the Bay area. We picked him up on Friday afternoon at the San Francisco Airport and took him to San Jose for the All-Franciscan Family Gathering of more than 150 Bay Area Franciscans. The program was held at the Napredak Center (a Czech cultural center) and centered around 3 Keynote Speakers addressing the topic "Be The Bridge, bringing Christ's love to all" followed by table discussion after each one.

Having attended another such gathering 2 years ago in San Francisco, I served on the Planning Committee for this gathering.

Our speakers were Bishop Richard John Garcia of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Monterey who has centered a good bit of his years around farm worker issues; Sr. Maria Elena Martinez, of the Sisters of St. Francis of Penance & Christian Charity and a member of the Executive Committee of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (of "Nuns on the Bus" fame); and our own Brother CJ Boylan, giving the gathered a chance to really encounter the OEF.

Our new Novices-by-Transfer, Karen & Kathy Lawler, of Elk Grove (just south of Sacramento) were also present giving the 5 of us a chance to gather for a Thai supper on Friday evening. They had come to intimately know Sr. Maria Elena in their previous Franciscan engagements, and were meeting CJ for the 1st time. [Side story in the "It's a small world" category: Kathy's brother lives across the street from the Voslers in Rohnert Park, discovered when they came to meet us a few months back.]

----- this is a good stopping place if you're in a hurry -----



Some reflections on the theme from the Speakers:

Bishop Garcia: so aware of how Francis and Clare adopted the Way and the mission strategy of Jesus; considered becoming Franciscan but the work of "simple diocesan priest in close relationship with the people" won out; 5 visits to Assisi and loving each opportunity "to feel it, to smell it, to walk it", and knowing that Francis belongs to all of us as he brought and we bring others to Christ, each of us bringing different gifts to that work and to who we are as Franciscans.

Sr. Maria Elena: Franciscans live and serve in a world that is both fragile and sacred -- sacred because made out of God's goodness, and because it's so fragile "we were made for these times" as Francis and Clare were made for their times with many of the same challenges (think Crusades and Christians & Muslims). As bridges, so important to the Bay Area, need ongoing care and maintenance, so too the fragile relationships between human beings as we trust that each and every situation we find ourselves in is "full of the Presence of God"; Clare creating her own way of being Abbess guided by Jesus incarnated as a baby, Jesus in the way of Poverty, and Jesus crucified; and sharing from the Conference of Women Religious "the shared commitment to stay in dialogue, to be contemplative, and to be open"; as contemplatives, the charge is to gaze, consider, contemplate, love the love that has loved you, go where your heart directs you, ask & listen in order to connect, enter into sorrow & lament as you regard the world's fragility & sacredness & goodness, live close to the earth and see everything -- preach the Gospel.

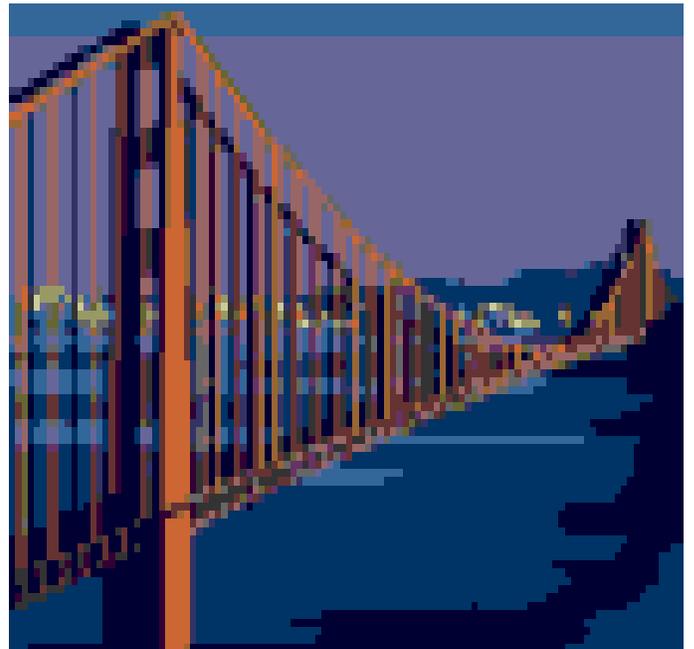
Brother CJ: The challenge before us is to be who we are, and as Franciscans we are the Bridge, so be the Bridge (the Jedi Knight version: "the bridge you must be"); from Richard Rohr, "Everything belongs", being participates in goodness, we're all in this together, diversity is the given -- affirm and welcome it; God's love is universal, inclusive, and eternal; it's the Reign of GOD we're loyal to, nothing else, no one else, reigns, and in the Reign of God, God is present to ALL!, and from that follows the "primacy of conscience" -- we are each one of us responsible for our formation and for discerning our call, but we are invited to live that responsibility together; and then our brother told stories about the

Regional News ...continued

pain that comes when we get distracted by things & status & salaries, when we succumb to lies and lose sight of what's really important, and the events or people or things that can allow a re-bridging back to our life in God.

Then CJ nested in Sonoma County for another day and a half, and is home as you read this.

Blessings! - michael v./oef



Formation Station



Dear OEF family,

Greetings in the love of Christ and the spirit of Francis. In these last few months not only have I been answering the 'OEF doorbell' for the curious and the called but I have also been recruiting new formation counselors (hint, hint). If you are willing to serve the order in this way email me at sr.allegrezza_OEF@yahoo.com. It takes about two hours a month per person (plus prayer).

All of our currently active postulants have been assigned FC's. The next two through the door will also have an FC. After that, I await your service.

Speaking of your service, about once a month I find someone who has been given an application and/or formation chapters by a professed member. It would be more helpful for record keeping if you sent them to ring the OEF doorbell (DFC office).

I have been busy copying and sending out formation counselor handbooks so if you need one, let me know. If you are an FC and have not checked in with me regarding the status of your counselees, expect a phone call in the coming weeks.

New postulants will be introduced as they novice. Please, pray for your newest siblings!

Peace And All Good.
Sister Allegrezza





Chaplain's Corner



Last week, I was gifted to be one of the three keynote speakers at a conference of Franciscans in San Jose, CA. Most of the family tree was represented by a branch: Friars, Sisters, Laity and Catholic, Episcopal, Ecumenical. It was a wonderful gathering which incarnated our rich and diverse 800 year history of men and women desiring to follow Christ in the footsteps of Francis and Clare of Assisi. The theme, "Be the Bridge", could not have been more appropriate.

A couple of years ago at Chapter, I shared a favorite quote. The same quote was used in my presentation at the conference; namely, "Ya gotta be who ya is an' not who ya ain't. Cuz if ya is who ya ain't, ya ain't who ya is. An' dat ain't good!" We as Franciscans ARE "bridge people." Therefore, we must BE "bridge people." Again, our family tree itself is the incarnation of "bridge people". We stand today on the shoulders of men and women who preceded us on the gospel journey of life. Their journey made our journey possible. Their journey made our journey believable to ourselves and, in turn, inspired others who witnessed our lives. We in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans have been the nurse-log for another Franciscan community: the Order of the Franciscans of Reconciliation.

THE bridge is reflected in the Rule of each and every branch of the Franciscan family. We name it thusly: "From Gospel to Life, from Life to Gospel." In that overarching Rule, everything is bridged. Everything is connected. Everything is seen as One because everything is already One in God. The Franciscan Rule is the intentional way of living that all important Truth. It is that intentional way of living that enables us to see what we have not looked for earlier. It is that intentional way of living that enables us to hear what we have not listened for earlier. Like Francis, the bridge of Gospel Life leads us to embrace the leper, to risk the foolish.

Each of the Franciscan branches has its own unique charism, its own gift to contribute to the Whole, its own way of being a bridge so that

others may see and hear anew the Good News of the Gospel that ALL is indeed ONE in God. Our gift is named in the name of our Order. We are Ecumenical. We are MANY Christian faith traditions coming together as ONE Order of Franciscans.

What a gift! And what a challenge! No other branch of the Franciscan family has undertaken this very foolish venture! And that willingness to be such a bridge is what makes us so appropriately Franciscan in this moment of history. We are rebuilding the Church that has fallen into ruin. We are at the forefront of the Emerging Church which is Ecumenical, which recognizes and seeks to honor and to affirm and to celebrate the diversity of the Christian tradition by not having any single expression of that tradition be dominant. Wow! Until this moment of history, such an undertaking would have been unthinkable. Clearly, the Spirit is behind this! Otherwise, it would be foolish in every sense of the word!

In this undertaking, I invite, encourage, and challenge each of you, my brothers and sisters, to reflect anew on your Personal Rule. Stretch yourselves. Add the lens of *Ecumenism* to each of our eight Principles. What does the Principle of **Worship** look like ecumenically? **Prayer?** **Penitence?** **Work?** **Lifestyle?** **Mission?** **Obedience?** And perhaps most importantly, **Community?** Share your insights with the rest of us! And then, ACT on that! Serve on the liturgy committee for the upcoming Chapter, for example. **BE da bridge, cuz ya is da bridge!**

Br. CJ



Words From the Interim Minister General

Dear Ones, Grace and peace.

We are real. Sometimes it seems incomprehensible to inquirers and others that we are a religious community dispersed geographically throughout the world, yet knit together by common Principles of faith and action, in the spirit of Francis.

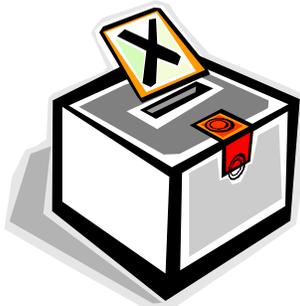


We have an OEF 'Calendar of Intercessory Prayer' with our names and special readings spread over a four week cycle. Each morning we hold each other, in spirit; we worship side-by-side in the companionship of Francis, the poor man of Assisi. We Franciscans also walk together in the world striving to live simpler,

more just and compassionate lives. It seems incomprehensible that we can be a religious community, and yet God knows we are trying and the Holy Spirit works overtime.

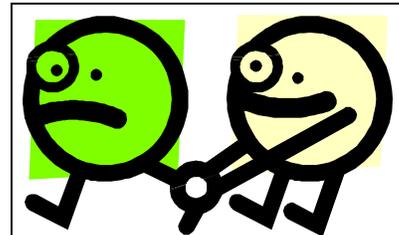
We are in process for election of a new Minister General and are blessed with many candidates and abundant vision for the future. I will work with the elected towards a transition of responsibilities that is the most helpful to the new MG and Servant Team.

We are grateful. God is good. Peace and Joy in Franciscan Community,
Dale Carmen OEF, I-MG



Just for fun: Very Punny!

- ◆ I tried to catch some fog. I mist.
- ◆ When chemists die, they barium.
- ◆ Jokes about German sausage are the wurst!
- ◆ A soldier who survived mustard gas and pepper spray is now a seasoned veteran.
- ◆ I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He says he can stop anytime.
- ◆ How does Moses make his tea? Hebrews it!
- ◆ I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Then it dawned on me.
- ◆ This girl said she recognized me from the vegetarian club, but I'd never met herbivore
- ◆ I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I can't put it down!
- ◆ They told me I had type A blood, but it was a type O.
- ◆ A dyslexic man walks into a bra.
- ◆ Energizer Bunny arrested: charged with battery.
- ◆ How do you make holy water? Boil the hell out of it!
- ◆ What do you call a dinosaur with an extensive vocabulary? A thesaurus.
- ◆ What does a clock do when it's hungry? It goes back four seconds.
- ◆ I wondered why the baseball kept getting bigger. Then it hit me!
- ◆ Broken pencils are pointless.



Are you pulling my leg?



The MAN behind the Saint

A reflection by Damien Nooney*



There is, I fear a great danger of making Francis more than he is. Many discuss his spirituality and debate his philosophy but often fail to see the MAN (Francis the Troubadour, Francis the man about town, the young man who wanted to go off on the crusades to make his fortune and fame. St. Francis, who later in life abused his body by too much fasting; then, in his last breath apologized for it. For many he is the statue in the garden with birds around him and he is the lover of animals and of the environment. But I often feel; that if we only see him in this way we take the MAN and make him something else.

We impose our spirituality and philosophy on him and make him an unreachable and lofty figure. Francis never intended to found a community of men or women; he never sought to surround himself with followers of any kind. But through his own Personal Conversion, found God and found himself. He developed his spirituality over a life time, but it was nothing he would claim to himself.

Nor did he see himself as being unique. He severely struggled in his pursuit of Christ-like perfection never seeing himself like Christ, he struggled with his celibacy, and he struggled with that all important relationship, his relationship with the Devine. Sometimes he got things right and sometimes got it wrong.

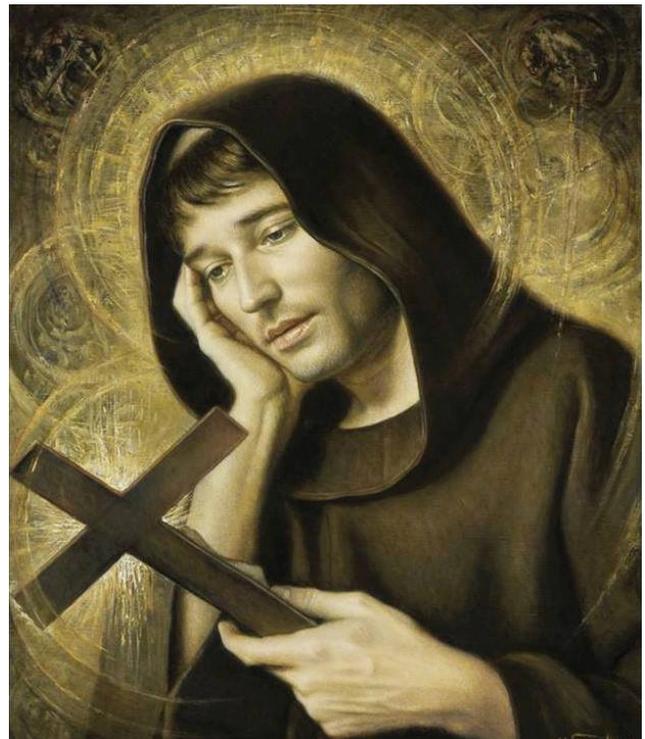
Francis could be as harsh with a person as he was compassionate. There is a well known story of Francis sending a band of Brothers after a novice who fled the community. Francis told them to bring him back by what ever means necessary (even if that meant roughing him up a bit), all this for the sake of his soul. Francis was both a simple man and a complicated man all in one. He was also a man of his time who was completely devoted to his church. He would admonish those who did not listen to the Pope or his priests. His whole religious life was devoted to showing **ANOTHER WAY TO CHRIST**. This WAY in Francis's original Blue Print was hard and full of Unconditional Love and Joy for the Devine. The reward for this Unconditional Love of the Divine, many would see in the Stigmata event.

It was because of his life struggle and his imperfections that as a Saint, Francis drew me to him. His

imperfections and lifetime struggle, his absolute desire to come so very close to God. It made me feel that we can all change; that no matter how bad our past was or is, if we truly give ourselves over to the Devine, much is given in return. I am sorry to say that the movie "Brother Sun and Sister Moon" has a lot to answer for, yes it was beautiful, but it made Francis more of a romantic figure and took from him that harsh and real struggle that Francis faced all his life.

Remember, it was not just with his family that he often had problems; his own followers often times made life hard for him. And that is why, in the end, he withdrew from the Brothers into the mountains.

**This article is a re-print from "Fiddlesticks" issue 87, Francistide 2008. Damien Nooney is a former novice living in The U.K. He is no longer journeying with us.*





Prayer for Autumn Days

by Sr. Joyce Rupp, OSM



God of the seasons, there is a time for everything;

There is a time for dying and a time for rising.

We need courage to enter into the transformation process.

God of autumn, the trees are saying goodbye to their green,

Letting go of what has been.

We, too, have our moments of surrender,

With all their insecurity and risk,

Help us to let go when we need to do so.

God of fallen leaves lying in colored patterns on the ground,

Our lives have their own patterns.

As we see the patterns of our growth,

May we learn from them.

God of misty days and harvest moon nights,

There is always the dimension of mystery

And wonder in our lives.

We always need to recognize Your power-filled presence.

May we gain strength from this.

God of harvest wagons and fields of ripening grain,

Many gifts of growth lie within the season of our surrender.

We must wait for harvest in faith and hope.

Grant us patience when we do not see the blessings.

God of geese going south for another season,

Your wisdom enables us to know what needs to be left behind

And what needs to be carried into the future.

We yearn for insight and vision.

*God of flowers touched with frost
and windows wearing white designs,*

May Your love keep our hearts

From growing cold in the empty seasons.

God of life,

You believe in us, You enrich us,

You entrust us with the freedom to choose life.

For all this, we are grateful.

Amen.



Hear Ye, Hear Ye!

Submissions for the Epiphany 2015 issue of "Fiddlesticks" are being accepted immediately.

Deadline for submissions is Dec 15, 2014.

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.
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 U.S.A.

Rainbow Prayer

Lord, make of us, the Franciscan family, a rainbow
 A visible sign of peace and reconciliation

A rainbow which boldly bridges the two millennia,
 The old and the new.

A sign from heaven that You Yourself have set there.

A sign of that promise which never deceives;

The rainbow is to be for everyone a sign of hope.

A sign for Your creation,

Of the promise of Your Spirit which renews the world.

Make us restless, if we are too self-satisfied

And too self-assured, too narrow-minded.

If instead of remaining on the path

We think ourselves already at the goal.

Make us restless if over the many things we possess

We lose our thirst for Your presence

And for peace with justice.

As we look at our future and mission,

Let us manifest neither blindness nor indifference.

Grant us the inner peace which comes

From encountering You, also tact, friendliness,

And courtesy towards all life

And the whole of Your creation.

Shake us awake, Lord,
 so that we may become more daring,

More in solidarity with one another,

More attentive to Your Word,

More alert to hear the cry of the poor,

More open to new generations.

Make us follow You more faithfully.

Yes, Lord, make us, the Franciscan family, a rainbow,

A sign of hope for a new world.

Written by Herman Schaluck, OFM