

## Chaplain's Report

I have a sense that Charles Dickens was a Franciscan at heart. He embraced a worldview in which the marginalized of the world, the poor, were seen in the fullness of their humanity. And he affirmed the dignity their humanity demanded. He also had a great sense of “the big picture”. He learned the great lessons that life itself and history teach. And he held the apparent contradictions together in tension. He was open to the mystery of paradox. Like our brother Franciscan, Richard Rohr, observes, Dickens realized that “Everything Belongs.” Dickens held up a mirror to humanity so that humanity can see things as they are. Nothing more. Nothing less. And so he begins his classic novel, *The Tale of Two Cities*, with the words: **“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.”**

Those words certainly and accurately describe our times. Really, all times. That is, if we have eyes that can see and ears that can hear. Our Franciscan spirituality, grounded in the Gospel, is our pair of glasses and our hearing aid. Contemplation has been defined as “a long, loving look at and a listening to the real.” Such a stance is integral to our Franciscan way of being in the world. Without that, we become incapable of discerning the real from our egocentric fantasies and projections.

We are coming together at our Chapter/Convocation to take a good look at who we are as an Order. We are coming together to listen to our inner voice, to listen to each other, and to listen to those outside of our community, the greater community, the microcosm of our world. We will be practicing the art of discernment.

But this just can't be something we do at Chapter. This must be what we do always and everywhere. We must see and hear the real. We must name the real. And we must love the real. And hold it together. Somehow. By God's mysterious and amazing grace, we will. We will be salt. Not the main entrée. We will give whatever we are doing, wherever we are, its flavor. Others will know when we are there. And when we are absent. By the grace of God, the latter will be very infrequent.

So we go to places like Ferguson. We go to places like Cleveland. We go to places like New York. We go to places like Olympia, WA. We go to places like the A.M.E. Church in South Carolina. We go anywhere and everywhere. And we are a discerning presence. A seeing people. A listening community. We sow love where there is hatred. Pardon where there is injury. And we become who we are: a

Franciscan Order. An Ecumenical Order. In the best of times and in the worst of times. It all belongs. It all is there. At chapter and in the world. Love it all!