

# Be A Franciscan

*A publication of the vocation ministry of Holy Name Province*

## The Greatest Saint and His Admirers

By Fr. Roy Gasnick, OFM

**M**ore books have been written about St. Francis of Assisi than about any other Christian saint. Each year, another five books about him roll off the presses in countries around the world.

He has fascinated and captured the imaginations of persons of all walks of life: Christians and Muslims, kings and presidents, the rich and the poor, intellectuals and laborers, philosophers and theologians, poets and novelists, artists and movie makers, biographers and journalists, historians and sociologists, peacemakers and environmentalists, people of all religions or no religion at all.

His imprint has long been left upon the United States. One of our major cities — San Francisco — bears his name. Another California city, Los Angeles, was named after a small run-down church which St. Francis rebuilt with his own hands and made his headquarters: Our Lady of the Angels (Los Angeles) of the Portiucula. The original name of Santa Fe, N.M., was Santa Fe (the holy faith) de San Francisco. The San Francisco Peaks are the highest mountains



in Arizona. There's a St. Francis River which flows through St. Francois County, Mo., and on past St. Francis, Ark.

He has been called the one true perfect follower of Jesus Christ, so closely did he embrace the gospel way of life, living the Sermon on the Mount, identifying with the Son of God so intimately that God granted him the supreme gift of the stigmata — the same bloody wounds in his hands, feet and side as Jesus himself had during his crucifixion.

Francis — the rich man turned poor man, the cloth merchant turned beggar, the soldier

turned peacemaker, the man seeking glory turned man seeking humility, the poet composing songs of romantic love turned poet composing hymns praising God, the man of the world turned man of God, the man who chose brotherhood over priesthood, the man who became brother to all creatures and all creation — was the man who made other men stop and think, “Yes, I can be someone like him. Yes, I can do what he is doing, maybe not as much as he does, but I can be a part of what he does. Yes, he offers me clear gospel path to God.”

And that is the way that St. Francis would have wanted it. He did not wish any one of his followers to be exactly like him. His dying prayer, uttered a few moments before his death while he lay on the dirt floor of a hut near his beloved Portiuncula chapel, was this: “I have done what is mine to do. May Christ now teach you

what is yours to do.”

In the close to eight centuries since the death of St. Francis, his Order has undergone many changes, always adapting to the religious values and cultural needs of the times. But it has always kept that same dying wish as a key to the new values and needs.

Like Francis, Franciscans today still tend to be a part of the people, not above them. They preach the gospel with simple words, use examples from common life and tend to be down to earth. They hear the voice of

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*This issue is dedicated to our holy father, St. Francis of Assisi, whose feast is celebrated Oct. 4.*

## My Wonderful Franciscan Journey

By Fr. Jud Weiksnar, OFM

My parents and the religious sisters at St. Benedict’s Grade School in suburban Buffalo, N.Y., instilled in me a love for God and for the Church, but I did not meet a friar until my first day of college at the University of Notre Dame. Notre Dame is not a Franciscan university, but as I walked through the door of my dormitory, the very first person to greet me was a friendly man dressed in a brown robe. He was Fr. Chuck Faso, OFM, a friar pursuing his master’s in liturgy. I had thought about becoming a priest since I was a young boy, and Fr. Chuck’s joy-filled manner steered me in the direction of religious life.

Although I went on two retreats with the Franciscans after graduating from college, I did not think I was ready yet to join them. After two years of teaching high school in Chicago, I returned to Buffalo for grad school at the University of Buffalo, known as the birthplace of secular humanism. Yet it was there that I met another friendly man dressed in a brown robe: Fr. Matt Gaskin, OFM.

Fr. Matt was a campus minister at the Newman Center, and he inspired me not just by his great preaching and retreat skills, but by his example of simple living in a room above a homeless shelter near downtown Buffalo, the Little Portion. He became my spiritual director and, one day as we were

speaking in my kitchen, he asked what I planned to do after grad school. He was not satisfied with my answer that I was “keeping my options open” and said I had to seek my Master Possibility. As soon as he said that, I knew my Master Possibility was to give my life to Christ following the footsteps of Francis of Assisi.

Since joining the friars, I have been “*superbendecido*” – unbelievably blessed. I have met the greatest people in the world, including my classmates who helped me through the trials and tribulations of our first years as friars. I have been fortunate to serve at St. Camillus in Silver Spring, Md., at St. Bonaventure University in Western New York, and now in Camden, N.J. I have never been happier, and there’s nothing better than preaching in Camden when the gospel begins, “Blessed are the Poor!”

I am most grateful to my brother and sister Franciscans who serve and live among the poor and those considered least important in society – whether in Camden or across the globe. I thank God and my brother friars for leading me on this wonderful, Franciscan journey.

Francis discerned his call from God over a period of time; it did not happen overnight. Each person hears his or her calling in a different way, under different circumstances. As seen in Fr. Jud’s vocation story, meeting individual friars and a personal invitation made all the difference.



Fr. Jud poses with parishioners of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Camden, N.J., where he is pastor.

Fr. Jud, born and raised in Buffalo, holds a Ph.D. in policy studies and a law degree from the University of Buffalo. He has been pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Church in Camden since 2005.

Adapted from an article of the same name that appeared in the Vocations section of the *Catholic Star Herald*, April 23, 2010.

### “The Greatest Saint...” continued

the poor, the disenfranchised, those living on the fringes of society and those discriminated against because of race, nationality and illnesses such as HIV/AIDS — the modern lepers. They are profoundly aware of the integrity of creation, reinforced when Pope John Paul II named St. Francis the patron saint of the environment. They speak and work for peace, again reinforced by Pope John Paul II’s recognition of St. Francis as a

model for peacemakers during his World Day of Prayer for Peace for religious leaders of the world held in Assisi in 1986.

Ernest Raymond, a biographer of St. Francis, commented that as much as he admired St. Francis, he could never dare become a true follower because St. Francis so literally lived each teaching found in the four gospels. But his admiration of St. Francis caused him at least to “limp after him.”

Perhaps that’s the finest phrase to describe

how Franciscans follow St. Francis today. Each one, according to his own ideals and abilities, captures something of the divine impulse, which drove St. Francis on his dramatic search for God through his fellow men and women and all creation.

If St. Francis and his gospel ideals and values make you consider a life shift in the direction of the Franciscans, then the Vocation Ministry of Holy Name Province is your place to start.



Fr. Roy was received into the Franciscan Order in 1953 and professed his vows in 1954. This year, he is celebrating the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination. He is well-known for his writings about St. Francis, especially *The Francis Book* and Marvel Comics’ *Francis, Brother of the Universe*. Fr. Roy is a staff member at St. Anthony Friary in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Cover icon of St. Francis of Assisi by Br. Robert Lentz, OFM (1987). Courtesy of Trinity Stores, [www.trinitystores.com](http://www.trinitystores.com), 800-699-4482. Br. Robert professed solemn vows as a Franciscan friar this summer (see “Solemn Profession 2010”).

*Francis lived the gospel in the footsteps of Jesus Christ with “good news” for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized. These gospel values are still alive and at work among the Franciscans today. Below, two student friars reflect on their summer experiences serving people in need.*

## ‘Smile – Jesus is at the Door’

*By Br. Jeffery Jordan, OFM*

While discerning a ministry site for the summer, I immediately felt drawn to St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia. Having volunteered at the Inn once a week as a novice, I wanted the full experience of living and serving there for an extended period of time. This, I thought, would be a unique opportunity to discern more clearly how God is calling me to minister as a Franciscan friar. I was not disappointed!

St. Francis Inn provides a variety of services from hot and delicious meals to clothing from St. Benedict’s Thrift Shop. Regardless of the particular service, however, the focus is on treating guests with the utmost dignity and respect. Unlike traditional cafeteria-style soup kitchens, guests are seated in table arrangements and served as though they were patrons of a first class restaurant. In this way, we reveal to them how special they are and, more importantly, that they are loved as children of God regardless of their marginalized and often oppressed state.

Service to the guests is strengthened by the special community at St. Francis. Friars, religious sisters and lay ministers share daily Eucharistic celebrations and prayer, and all decisions are made as a group. It is truly one to be imitated and held up as a standard for collaborative ministry.

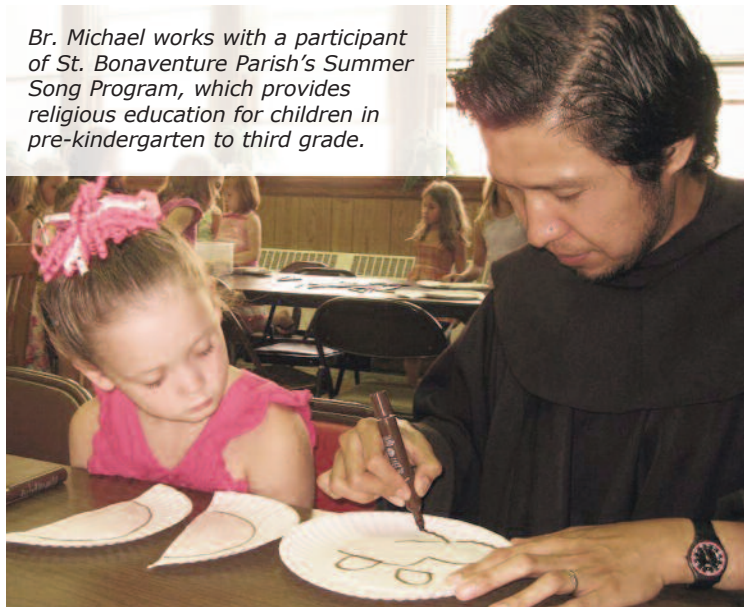
Words alone cannot do justice to St. Francis Inn. It needs to be experienced; one needs to see the smiles, the gratitude, the brokenness, the hope, and the love in order to truly see the face of Jesus. The sign at the entry says, “Smile, Jesus is at the door.” After this summer, I am convinced Jesus is at the door waiting to smile back!



*Br. Jeffery helps organize donations at St. Francis Inn’s thrift shop with longtime volunteer Bernice.*

## Utilizing My Talents for God’s Work

*Br. Michael works with a participant of St. Bonaventure Parish’s Summer Song Program, which provides religious education for children in pre-kindergarten to third grade.*



*By Br. Michael Reyes, OFM*

Once, a mentor told me, “Your talent is God’s gift to you. What you do with it is your gift to God.” I remembered these words as I discerned where to go for my first summer internship.

While I wanted to experience parish ministry, I also hoped for an opportunity to explore the artistic talent I had rediscovered during my novitiate year. And so, two days after professing my simple vows, I found myself driving through a picturesque landscape of dark green mountaintops and splendid farmlands on my way to the vibrant community of St. Bonaventure Parish in Allegany, N.Y.

During my time there, I helped out at “The Bridge,” the centerpiece of the outreach program, and brought communion to patients of Olean General Hospital. I also chaperoned the youth group during their service trips to St. Luke’s Mission of Mercy in Buffalo and coordinated activities for younger kids at the summer religious education program. In addition, I shared reflections during weekday Masses and led a communion service every Friday at the parish.

My free evenings were spent working with Br. Robert Lentz, OFM, in his studio at the nearby St. Bonaventure University Friary. In the past, I had painted for relaxation, working with watercolors and oils. With Br. Robert, I learned how to use my talent as a tool for evangelization.

My summer in Allegany introduced me to the joys and challenges of parish ministry. I long to help people realize how much God loves them. As I continue with my formation, I must discern how God wants me to do this. Recognizing, cultivating and utilizing what talents God has given me are important steps in this process.

Br. Jeffery and Br. Michael reside at Holy Name College in Silver Spring, Md. Jeffery is entering his second year of graduate studies at Washington Theological Union in nearby Washington, D.C., and Michael is entering his first year of graduate studies at WTU.

# "The Lord gave me brothers" – St. Francis of Assisi

## Meet Our New Postulants

Evening Prayer at St. Paul Church in Wilmington, Del., was the setting for the Welcoming Rite for the postulant class of 2010. Provincial Vicar Fr. Dominic Monti, OFM, presided over the Aug. 26 liturgy, which signified the official beginning of their Franciscan journey for postulants John Aherne, Pedro Corces and Jeffrey Upshaw. In his homily, Fr. Dominic remarked that, while the backgrounds of the candidates were quite diverse, each had chosen a "common path" toward discerning God's call in their lives. He then placed a Tau cross and said a blessing over each man. Also attending the ceremony were members of the Wilmington friar community and Fr. Brian Smail, OFM, vocation director. Pictured below, postulants Jeffrey, John and Pedro, far left, and third and second from right, respectively, stand with Br. Bill Herbst, OFM, assistant postulant director, second from left, and Fr. Ron Pecci, OFM, postulant director, far right.



## Professing First Vows



Brothers Gerald Hopeck, OFM, and Michael Reyes, OFM, professed their simple vows as Franciscans at a June 5 Mass celebrated by Provincial Minister Fr. John O'Connor, OFM. During the ceremony, which took place in the lower chapel of St. Paul Church in Wilmington, Del., the friars read their vows individually and were welcomed officially into the Province by a fraternal embrace. In the photo above, Michael and Gerald, second from left and right, respectively, are joined by then novice director Fr. Ron Pecci, OFM, Provincial Vicar Fr. Dominic Monti, OFM, Fr. John, and then assistant novice director Br. Bill Herbst, OFM.

*Francis did not initially intend to form a religious order. When he made a radical decision to leave a wealthy, privileged life for the sake of the gospel, he soon found that others were attracted to the same way of life. As the number of his followers grew, Francis gave thanks to God with the words, "The Lord gave me brothers." Today, we Franciscans continue to attract men to our gospel way of life.*

## Solemn Profession 2010

Four friars professed their final vows as Franciscans on Aug. 21 at a Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Church on West 31st Street in Manhattan. Provincial Minister Fr. John O'Connor, OFM, accepted the vows of Brothers Cidouane Joseph, OFM, Robert Lentz, OFM, Erick Lopez, OFM, and Paul O'Keeffe, OFM, to live in chastity, obedience and with no possessions of their own. The solemn profession marked the culmination of the friars' preparation to be full members of the Order and of Holy Name Province.



## Franciscan Interprovincial Novitiate



This summer, Holy Name Province joined the Franciscan Interprovincial Novitiate in Cedar Lake, Ind., a collaborative effort by the U.S. provinces of Holy Name, Assumption, Sacred Heart, St. John the Baptist, Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Custody of the Holy Land, as well as the Western Canadian province of Christ the King. The joint novitiate is not only an opportunity to work with other provinces in the area of formation, but also allows the novices to share their experiences with a more diverse group of classmates in a contemplative rural setting. The photo of this year's class, above, was taken on the grounds of San Damiano Friary in Cedar Lake. Holy Name Province novice Br. George Camacho, OFM, appears in the front row, second from right.

## Upcoming Events

*Are you looking for more meaning in your life?  
Have you ever considered becoming a Franciscan friar?*

*Join us to discern your calling and learn about our way of life.*



## Come and See Weekends

**When:** Sept. 17-19, 2010  
**Where:** St. Anthony Shrine  
Boston

Visit our community in Boston for a taste of Franciscan life. Share meals and conversation with us, pray and celebrate the Eucharist and learn about the many ministries of St. Anthony Shrine. Guests will have an opportunity to serve clients of the Shrine's innovative Food Center. Register by Sept. 13.

**When:** Oct. 15-17, 2010  
**Where:** St. Francis of Assisi Friary  
New York City

Join us in Manhattan for a weekend of hospitality, fraternity and discernment. See how we live and where we minister and reflect on the gospel life of joy, compassion and service inspired by St. Francis himself. The weekend includes a chance to serve in St. Francis of Assisi Church's Breadline, the longest running breadline in the United States. Register by Oct. 8.

## Dinner and Transitus

**When:** Oct. 3, 2010, 6 to 8:30 p.m.  
**Where:** St. Francis of Assisi Church, New York City

Enjoy dinner with our vocation director and other men discerning a vocation and attend the Transitus, a moving service commemorating the last hours of the life of St. Francis. This event is part of Francis Week at St. Francis of Assisi Church. Register by Sept. 27.

## Franciscan Experience Weekend (FEW)

**When:** Nov. 12-14, 2010  
**Where:** Holy Name College, Silver Spring, Md.

FEWs offer an opportunity for men to discuss their calling with our vocation director and other members of the vocation team. Guests, who are generally invited to attend the weekend, also meet our friars in post-novitiate and learn about our initial formation program.

## Twilight Retreat for Men Discerning a Call to Franciscan Life

**When:** Dec. 1, 2010, 6 to 9 p.m.  
**Where:** St. Francis of Assisi Church, New York City

Join us for a quiet evening of reflection as you consider God's call for your life. Come pray with us as we reflect on God's call in the scriptures in the stories of Moses, Jeremiah, Jesus' first disciples, and St. Paul. Listen to the vocation stories of some of our friars, and begin your own vocation discernment journey. (Pizza, soft drinks, and coffee will be served.) Registration is required by Nov. 23.

*To register for an event contact the Franciscan  
Vocation Ministry at 1-800-677-7788 or vocation@hnp.org.*

## Ask the Vocation Director

**Q:** *Some Franciscans call themselves "Father" and others "Brother." What's the difference?*

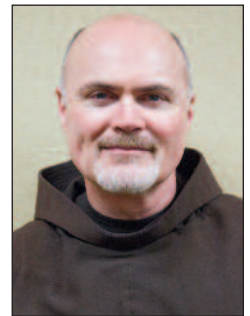


As Franciscans, we see ourselves as brothers to one another, living in community. In this sense, all friars are "brothers" first and foremost. In fact,

when Francis attracted his first companions, he said, "And the Lord gave me brothers."

Beyond that primary identification, there are two ways in which friars can practice ministry. Some friars are called to the ordained ministry of priesthood and use the title "Father." Ordained friars serve in sacramental ministries in the Church, although they may also be involved in other areas.

Other friars who do not feel called to ordained ministry undertake studies to prepare to work in other areas of their choosing. Non-ordained friars typically use the title



Fr. Brian Smail, OFM

"Brother." Brother friars work in a wide variety of ministries including education, counseling, spiritual direction, administration and facilities maintenance.

Many people are not aware that St. Francis himself was not a priest. Francis' focus was always on "the brotherhood."



**Be A Franciscan** is published quarterly by the Franciscan Vocation Ministry of Holy Name Province in conjunction with the Province's Communications Office.

Comments are welcome.



## Franciscan Vocation Ministry HOLY NAME PROVINCE

129 West 31st Street, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10001-3403

The **Franciscan Vocation Ministry** is called to promote vocations to the Franciscan way of life and ministries of **Holy Name Province**. We offer:

- Information on our Order, the admissions process and the initial formation program
- Consultation and assistance with discernment to religious life
- Come and See weekends, discernment retreats and other events
- This newsletter highlighting vocation activities

For further information, please contact:

Fr. Brian Smail, OFM  
vocation director

1-800-677-7788  
vocation@hnp.org

BeAFranciscan.org  
BeAFranciscan.WordPress.com  
Facebook.com/BeAFranciscan

## Save the Date

*We welcome you to join us for the following vocation events and joyous celebrations of our friar life. See "Upcoming Events" for details.*

- Sept. 17-19: Come and See Weekend**  
St. Anthony Shrine, Boston
- Oct. 3: Dinner and Transitus**  
St. Francis Friary, New York City
- Oct. 15-17: Come and See Weekend**  
St. Francis Friary, New York City
- Nov. 12-14: Franciscan Experience Weekend (FEW)**  
Holy Name College, Silver Spring, Md.
- Dec. 1: Twilight Discernment Retreat**  
St. Francis Church, New York City

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*Visit [www.HNP.org](http://www.HNP.org) for updates on formation events and how Holy Name Province ministries are celebrating the feast of St. Francis.*