



# Midland Franciscan

Autumn 2014

**The Midland Region of the Secular Franciscan Order comprises the active Fraternities of:**

Belper  
Clay Cross  
Nottingham  
Olton/Acocks Green  
Oxford  
Rednal and Stourbridge  
Sleaford

## **Regional Elective Chapter 2014**

The Chapter was held on 6 September at St. Ambrose Barlow Church, Hall Green Birmingham. Those elected are:

Minister: Andrea Hambleton (Belper)  
Vice-Minister: Patrick McGuire (Clay Cross)  
Secretary: Mark Bligh (Nottingham)  
Treasurer: Michael Martin (Oxford)  
Formation: Seán Ward (Rednal and Stourbridge)

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On Sunday 21 September Lyda Bell Hunt (Sleaford) was co-opted as JPIC (Presence in the World) member.

## **Chapter of Mats - OFSGB National Assembly**

19-21 September 2014 at The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

Most of the fraternities in the region were able to send representatives to the Chapter, some of whom stayed the whole weekend and some who came as day visitors on Saturday 20 September. On the Friday evening each Region showed its own position on a map of Great Britain and the position of the fraternities within the region. The programme for Saturday consisted of reports from all the regions within the United Kingdom (including Gibraltar) of the situation within the region and the activities of each fraternity.

From 8 until late on Saturday evening there was home-spun entertainment with a lot of Secular Franciscans showing how talented they were at music, dance, singing and telling jokes and stories.

Sunday morning was devoted to the Canticle of the Creatures. Each region had been given a theme from the Canticle to illustrate and talk about. Midland Region had been allocated Sister Moon and the Stars. Like other regions we had created a static display for our theme, which was set up on the Friday evening and taken down at the end of the Chapter on Sunday morning. The display was inspired by Psalm 8 and a short speech by Pope Francis just before his election when he spoke of how the church reflects the light of Christ as the moon reflects the light of the sun.

### **Psalm 8**

When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged,  
what is man that you should keep him in mind, mortal man that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him little less than a god; with glory and honour you crowned him,  
gave him power over the works of your hand, put all things under his feet...

How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!

**Pope Francis:**

***The Church is supposed to be the mysterium lunae - the mystery of the moon is that it has no light but simply reflects the light of the sun. The Church must not fool itself that it has light of its own; if it does that it falls into the greatest of evils - spiritual worldliness. That is what happens with a self-referential Church, which refuses to go beyond itself.***

**Put simply, there are two images of Church: a Church which evangelises and comes out of herself or a worldly Church, living within herself, of herself, for herself - the Pope should be someone who helps the Church surge forth to the peripheries like a sweet and comforting mother who offers the joy of Jesus to the world....as St Ambrose said the Church shines not with its own light but with that of Christ: "fulget ecclesia non suo sed Christi lumine".**

The centre of the display was a mirror (made of mirror card) which reflected the light, and an infinity tea-light holder which reflected the lights within it. The display boards were edged with blue, yellow and red to represent the colours most commonly associated with the moon at various times and seasons. Ann Gannon (Belper) composed a short piece to explain our theme still further:

**Francis realised that God revealed himself to us through nature. How many times did Jesus use nature to show us the path we should take – the birds in the air, the flowers in the fields, the mustard seed. If we truly immerse ourselves in the wonder and beauty of creation and be at one with it in all its complexity, then and only then can we begin to understand God’s greatest creation, our fellow man!**

**If we study the moon’s place in nature we see that she reflects the light of the sun, so too does the Church reflect God’s light to the world but as the moon waxes and wanes could this symbolise the times in the Church’s history when she failed to reflect the full power and compassion of God’s love?**

**We experience the rare astronomical event known as the Blood Moon Tetrad when the moon turns red, which it did in April 2014, (there have been only seven other Tetrads since the time of Jesus Christ’s first coming and 2013) do these events indicate the times that the Holy Spirit performs another Pentecost and inflames his church with tongues of fire. Let’s hope so!**

On Sunday morning we presented two short movies of beautiful images of the moon set to music as our contribution to the exposition of the Canticle. Many thanks to Clay Cross, Belper, Olton/Acocks Green, Rednal and Stourbridge Fraternities for their excellent contributions to the exhibition and presentation.

**The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone with everything is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation with violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his or her work for peace. It destroys his or her own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.** Thomas Merton.

### **From the OFS Rule**

United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance”, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls “conversion”. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

### **From the OFS Constitutions**

[Secular Franciscans] should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.

They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to "create worthy conditions of life" for all and to work for the freedom of all peoples.

Following the example of Francis, patron of ecologists, they should actively put forward initiatives that care for creation...

**Justification by faith**... ought to be preached by the whole Church—and with more vigour than ever—not in opposition however to good works, which is an issue that has been settled, but in opposition to the claim of people today that they can save themselves without a need for God or Christ.

*Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa OFM CAP. Preacher to the Papal Household. Second Lenten Sermon 2014.*

**“Evangelii Gaudium”** -The Joy of the Gospel - Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World”. Pope Francis. *Brian Davies, a member of the Archdiocese of Birmingham’s Justice and Peace Commission, has produced an excellent summary of Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel.) Here is an excerpt.*

Making the poor feel welcome is the most effective way of presenting the good news of the kingdom. Francis is quite explicit about the unjust systems that are responsible. He says:

- **No to an economy of exclusion and inequality!** “Today everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalised: without work, without possibilities, without any means of escape’. Human beings are treated as ‘consumer goods to be used and then discarded’ in a ‘throw away’ culture (53).
- **No to the idolatry of money!** “The dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacks a truly human purpose” [55]. “While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few.” [56]
- **No to a financial system which rules rather than serves!** [57]. He exhorts politicians and the rich ‘to generous solidarity’ with the poor and a return to an ethical economic system ‘which favours human beings’. [58]
- **No to the inequality which spawns violence!** He calls on the church to oppose spreading income inequality and unemployment, as well as to advocate stronger environmental protection and oppose armed conflict.

*See next column*

**Managing Meetings.** At the Chapter of Mats I was asked if it would be possible to organise a training session about *managing meetings*, for fraternities in the Midland Region. Clearly not everybody who is elected to a Fraternity Council has had previous experience of committee work - the Council is a committee! - and may feel themselves, initially at least, at a bit of a disadvantage. The OFS Constitutions describe the tasks of each officer on a fraternity council but they don’t give any details about **how** to do those tasks. Sound management and good planning helps the Council to better animate (but not dominate!) the fraternity. The good management of fraternity meetings is important too if the fraternity is to flourish.

It is possible to arrange a meeting but in the meantime you may wish to look at two books I have found very helpful – indispensable really – during the years I spent working on committees in public institutions.

**The ABC of Chairmanship. Walter Citrine.** Originally published in 1939, this book remains the gold standard work about committee organisation. It was written for use by Labour Party members/trades unionists but is relevant to all committees. It contains easy to follow guidance about agenda, minutes and correspondence, motions and amendments, keeping order, reports.

**So, you’re on a committee now... Michael Kindred and Malcolm Goldsmith.** 4m Publications. This covers the same topics as Citrine but the format is rather less formal. It has an amusing section about the types of personalities one often finds on a committee.

*New and used copies of both are available from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)*

**Evangelii Gaudium.** Instead of ‘blaming the poor’ for their troubles, we should recognise that “today’s economic mechanisms promote inordinate consumption, yet it is evident that unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve” [60]. When Jesus says, “You yourselves give them something to eat” (Mk 6:37) Francis explains, “It means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor.” He calls for solidarity with the poor which ‘must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them and be open to needed ‘structural transformations’ [189]. He reaffirms the ‘preferential option for the poor’ [200] and stresses that ‘none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice’ [201].

### Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on Franciscan Spirituality.

In a series of talks during general audiences in 2010 and early 2011, Pope Benedict spoke at length about St Francis, St Clare, St Bonaventure, Blessed Angela of Foligno, St Elizabeth of Hungary, St Anthony of Padua, Blessed John Duns Scotus, St Veronica Giuliani, St Lawrence of Brindisi and in so doing explored Franciscan spirituality in an interesting and simple to understand way and acknowledged his indebtedness to Franciscan scholars and saints. Here are two extracts.

**St Francis:** *From love for Christ stems love for others and also for all God's creatures. This is yet another characteristic trait of Francis' spirituality: the sense of universal brotherhood and love for Creation, which inspired the famous Canticle of Creatures. This too is an extremely timely message. As I recalled in my recent Encyclical Caritas in Veritate, development is sustainable only when it respects Creation and does not damage the environment (cf. nn. 48-52), and in the Message for the World Day of Peace this year, I also underscored that even building stable peace is linked to respect for Creation. Francis reminds us that the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator is expressed through Creation. He understood nature as a language in which God speaks to us, in which reality becomes clear, and we can speak of God and with God. Francis was a great Saint and a joyful man. His simplicity, his humility, his faith, his love for Christ, his goodness towards every man and every woman, brought him gladness in every circumstance. Indeed, there subsists an intimate and indissoluble relationship between holiness and joy. A French writer once wrote that there is only one sorrow in the world: not to be saints, that is, not to be near to God. Looking at the testimony of St Francis, we understand that this is the secret of true happiness: to become saints, close to God!*

**St Elizabeth of Hungary (Patron of the OFS):** *With her profound sensitivity, Elizabeth saw the contradictions between the faith professed [at court] and Christian practice. She could not bear compromise. Once, on entering a church on the Feast of the Assumption, she took off her crown, laid it before the Crucifix and, covering her face, lay prostrate on the ground. When her mother-in-law reprimanded her for this gesture, Elizabeth answered: "How can I, a wretched creature, continue to wear a crown of earthly dignity, when I see my King Jesus Christ crowned with thorns?". She behaved to her subjects in the same way that she behaved to God. Among the Sayings of the four maids we find this testimony: "She did not eat any food before ascertaining that it came from her husband's property or legitimate possessions. While she abstained from goods procured illegally, she also did her utmost to provide compensation to those who had suffered violence." She is a true example for all who have roles of leadership: the exercise of authority, at every level, must be lived as a service to justice and charity, in the constant search for the common good. The talks in full may be found at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) – click on English Language tab and then on General Audiences tab for Pope Benedict.*

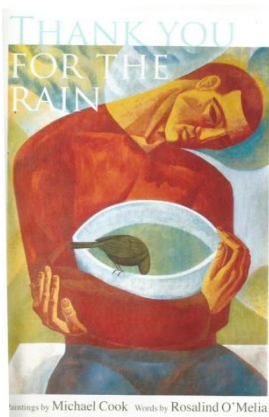
### Around the Region - news and views from Fraternities.

**Belper. A treasure for every Franciscan.** It is most timely and apposite that having celebrated the Canticle of the Creatures at the national chapter there should be made available to us an original and beautiful exposition of the Canticle in art and verse. Inspired by a beautifully illustrated copy of the Canticle of the Creatures exhibited in the parish room at Belper, Michael Cooke, a Derbyshire artist, has painted pictures on each theme. Rosalind O'Melia, a parishioner, has written verses to accompany the pictures. The booklet is called **Thank You For The Rain** and is a simply wonderful series of meditations on the Canticle. The booklet costs just £8 plus postage (postage free for Franciscans). This is superb value for such a stunning and original production. The painting of Sister Water can be seen at [www.hallowed-art.co.uk](http://www.hallowed-art.co.uk) in the exhibitions section. As our Region was given the task of presenting Sister Moon and the Stars it is fitting to quote an exquisite verse from Rosalind's poem on this:

[...]Sister Moon and Stars, reflecting  
night-time glow of Brother Sun,  
bend low with soft cool kiss  
to whisper a good night.

Further details from Andrea Hambleton. ([andrea@dhbt.clara.net](mailto:andrea@dhbt.clara.net))

Franciscan sisters came to Belper in the 1930s to open a school which still flourishes, albeit without the sisters who have retired. Our SFO fraternity now carries the Franciscan torch.



## Oxford

In recent months, Oxford has been blessed with establishment of a community of OFM Conventual friars at the former Anglican convent of All Saints, Cowley. The Formation House was established in September 2013, originally near Wheatley, as a place of study, prayer, and fraternity for the friars in conjunction with studies at Blackfriars in Oxford.

On Friday evening 3rd October, OFS Oxford fraternity participants were delighted to join Fr Stephen, other OFM Capuchin friars and parishioners from Greyfriars Oxford at a very moving celebration of the Transitus, hosted by the Conventual friars in their community church of St Mary and All Saints. Fr Charles Serignat OFM Cap. Guardian of Greyfriars, gave a very thoughtful homily following the journey of St. Francis passing away from this life into God. We were further moved by prayers in peaceful surroundings of the church, the lovely singing by the Conventual friars of the Canticle of Creatures and passage of all attendees through the beautiful carved stone rood screen into the sanctuary where the prostrate habit and candles represented St. Francis in his adoration of the Father.

For many years in Oxford the Franciscan Capuchin Friars have shared the 4th October Feast of St. Francis at Greyfriars with their Dominican brothers, who by return share the Feast Day of St. Dominic with their Franciscan brothers at Blackfriars. For a number of years now, the OFS have also been included in the celebrations and since 2013, our OFM Conventual brothers have also taken part, after their move back to the Oxford area.

Holy Mass is a very joint concelebration by Franciscans and Dominicans, for St. Francis a Dominican preaches, and at Blackfriars for St. Dominic a Franciscan preaches. Along with the friars who were not on the Altar were the Secular Franciscans and then behind us were the parishioners and any special friends invited. Thus the family was complete.

After a truly wonderful and very beautiful Mass the four orders and special guests were all invited to partake of Lunch together. A truly lovely meal in the refectory which was simply bursting with joy and full to capacity, a feast in every sense of the word, everyone anxious to learn more about those they were sitting alongside and opposite. Truly a day of thanksgiving and great happiness as we celebrated the feast day of our wonderful founder. Let us never forget all he taught us, and live our lives as he did, thanking Almighty God for everything.

### Duns Scotus's Oxford – Gerard Manly Hopkins.

TOWERY city and branchy between towers;  
Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-racked, river-rounded;  
The dapple-eared lily below thee; that country and town did  
Once encounter in, here coped and poisèd powers;

Thou hast a base and brickish skirt there, sours  
That neighbour-nature thy grey beauty is grounded  
Best in; graceless growth, thou hast confounded  
Rural rural keeping—folk, flocks, and flowers.

Yet ah! this air I gather and I release  
He lived on; these weeds and waters, these walls are what  
He haunted who of all men most sways my spirits to peace;

Of realty the rarest-veinèd unraveller; a not  
Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece;  
Who fired France for Mary without spot.

### Rednal and Stourbridge.

#### Transitus Celebration at Rednal and Stourbridge.

As we have a number of old, frail or disabled members we decided, from 2014 onwards, to celebrate the Transitus in their homes. This year we went to the home of our oldest member who is in her nineties. We celebrated with great simplicity and much love, followed by tea and cakes and conversation. It was a real family affair.

#### Day of Reflection for Lent

Saturday 14 March 2015 at Stourbridge.  
11am-4pm (Adoration and Mass from 9.30am) Details from Seán Ward:  
seanpioward@gmail.com.

## The Last Word - From the Regional Minister

A small group of brothers and sisters from Midland Region attended the National Chapter of Mats from 19-21<sup>st</sup> September 2014. It was a very enjoyable event and we were able to renew our acquaintance with old friends and make new friends too. As mentioned above, we were assigned Sister Moon to exhibit and talk about. We had a static display, the theme of which was "reflections and waxing and waning". On Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> we did a short presentation about Sister Moon using two short movies of images of the moon in all its changes, set to music. It was very beautiful. If any Fraternity would like a copy of the two movies please contact Seán Ward (seanpioward@gmail.com). We also had an opportunity to talk about the affairs of our Region. We used as a statement of intent a poem published in *The Cord in 2010*:

### If Saint Francis were here ...

He would tell us that Jesus said what he meant  
and meant what he said;  
that the Gospel was intended to be lived,  
not just to be read, ignored and forgotten.

He would tell us that to follow the poor Christ  
is to share with those who are in need.  
He would tell us that we are to simplify our lives  
so that those less fortunate can have basic necessities.  
He would remind us that this is God's justice.

He would tell us that he liked Christmas best of all  
because that is the day when God bent low to walk in our skin  
and to show us how much he really wants us for himself,  
to share his love and his happiness.  
He would tell us to really celebrate Christmas.

He would tell us that war is not holy, that it is not good for  
anyone, and that war does not bring peace.  
He would tell us about his meeting with the  
Muslim Sultan of Egypt,  
how they both desired to have peace in spite of the  
Crusades, and how they became friends.

He would tell us about lepers. He would tell us  
that those who we think are the lowest members of society  
are also God's children  
and that we must accept them as we would accept Christ.  
And he would tell us that this is not easy!!

He would tell us that all creatures are our brothers and sisters  
because we have the same Father.  
He would tell us to respect and care for the water, the air, the  
wild creatures, the land, the sea and each other.

And he would tell us to sing, *sing a lot*, because  
we are children of a Great King!  
(Mary Esther Stewart, S.F.O.  
From "The Cord" Vol. 60 NO.4 2010)

By the way, The Cord is a very good Franciscan publication.  
Fraternities may wish to subscribe to it.

Andrea Hambleton ofs

The Regional Council exists to help the local fraternities to flourish and develop their Franciscan vocation and to help them to be truly present in the world. I think we have been fortunate to collect together a team who are committed and talented. Our job is to animate not dominate and we prefer to map out the future rather than mop up the past. But it is at local fraternity level that the real work is done in living and proclaiming the Gospel. If we can help you in any way please let us know. We hope to arrange a few regional events each year but these will be in Spring, Summer or early Autumn. We'll hunker down for the winter!

The Regional Council is keen to foster good communications between fraternities and this newsletter is the start. We would be really pleased if you would let us have your news and views. It really is a case of fill this space.

Please send any contributions to Seán Ward who is editing the newsletter at present. (seanpioward@gmail.com). Bear in mind that there will be only four issues each year so any news of events that is time-critical can't be published but will have to be announced by a round-robin letter or email.



Our new logo has been produced for us by a young artist – Rebecca Higgins. It depicts St. Francis praising God through the Canticle of the Creatures, within the Tau. Rebecca will shortly produce prayer cards with this design which she will offer for sale. Please buy some! To see more of Rebecca's work go to <http://beckamay.wix.com/rebecca-may-illustrations>. She will be pleased to discuss commissions