



## Ordo Franciscanus Secularis

### Southern Region Newsletter November 2015 4/15

*If I follow in the Franciscan path, it is a following of Jesus in a distinctive way in which the heights and depths of human experience are lived out and shared.*

**Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

Recently I made a visit to Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland (close to my home in Comber) I visited St Coeey's wells, which left a deep impression on me and became a source of inspiration. St Coeey was an Irish saint who lived in isolation on the edge of the coast. He was a hermit who by his way of life and his interaction with the local people encouraged them to become Christians. The coast is wild and bleak and far removed from civilisation yet he was visited by many of the local people and pilgrims from far and wide. He had a series of wells which were sources of spiritual blessing and healing to all who came.

The first well was for washing all over, the second well was for cleansing the eyes and the third well was for drinking. These three wells were health giving and healing and it is these three wells I encourage you to use today before you read the enclosed attachment.

Immerse yourself in the first well of washing to cleanse away the grime and dust of the world so that you may read it with spiritual mind. Carefully wash your eyes so that they may be opened to see what God has for you in this document. Finally drink deeply and fill yourself with the good things God has for you.

The document which follows deals with '**How to manage an Order like ours**'. It is a sometimes harsh yet real and honest document about the state of our Order. If we are to be followers of St Francis and to be Christ in the world then we need to address our short-comings and acknowledge and celebrate our achievements. We too at times, as St Coeey did, live in a wild and bleak world yet we too are a source of attraction for those around us. We too become a source of spiritual blessing and healing for those who come to us in our daily life.

I encourage you to read the document, which is a compilation of the combined thoughts of your Executive Council, to discuss it within your Fraternity and to feel free to comment. May God continue to bless you with every good thing and keep you safe and well.

Pax et Bonum

**Betsy Hart (Regional Minister)**

### **How do We Manage an Order like Ours?**

#### **The Order**

As an Order we all share the same Prime Objective; to grow closer to God on a day-to-day basis with, in, and through the Risen Christ. We must all be in no doubt about this objective. The specific nature of our calling is the

person of Francis of Assisi; he is our inspiration. Just as Francis did, we must allow God to conform us to His Son. Either we are called to be Franciscan or God has something different in mind for us. **The Prime Objective is NOT optional!**

## **Fraternity**

Sadly, we do have members who clearly have little or no understanding and therefore little or no acceptance of an ORDER or the nature of Vocation and Profession. We do find Fraternities “doing their own thing”! **We are ORDER and not a prayer group or a study group.**

**Fraternities must take the Time required to engage in Real Formation.** The meetings must be structured so that all members can and will share in the formation process. Formation does not stop at Profession; that is just the start of a momentous journey. The nature of that journey needs to be understood by all members. **As well as the guide for Initial Formation there is a need for guidance about On-Going Formation.** Ongoing Formation should give the nature and purpose of the formation and a reaffirmation of “What it is to be Franciscan”. Help with suitable method and means may be offered, but Fraternities should be allowed and encouraged to develop their own character. **Nevertheless, On-Going Formation must include a study of the Scriptures and the Rule. Reference needs to be made to the Constitutions as well. Formation must define and support the Prime Objective of the Order;** individual Fraternities can bring their own personalities and abilities to that aim. **Formation is the responsibility of the Councils; Formation Ministers are the enablers and must not be left to work in isolation.**

**Good Meetings require good leadership and preparation, and they need the full participation of the members.** Everyone needs to engage with the meeting otherwise the meeting misses the point and the life of the fraternity does not grow. Each of us needs the support of our fellow members in our growth as Franciscans. This is always a group activity and never a solo activity! Whatever method of formation is used they must be designed to encourage and assist the full participation of all present.

**Elections must be taken seriously;** fraternities at all levels must prepare prayerfully for elections so that the most suitable people are elected to office. These are the people who will lead and enable the fraternal formation. The greatest care must be taken by all members; our future depends on this care.

## **National and Regional Fraternities**

All members need an understanding and an appreciation of these fraternities. Only then can there be any understanding of the International Fraternity. We are all Family. **Links need to be strengthened.**

**Region, National, and International should give guidance and, when necessary, direction.** There perhaps needs to be an increase in visitations, particularly from Region to Local fraternities to offer guidance, encouragement, and assistance by answering the questions which inevitably arise. Some local fraternities will need precise guidance and even definition of the On-Going Formation needed.

Regional and National gatherings should follow and conform to the “overall plan” shared so that the Prime Aim and Objectives will be reinforced and understood better and, above all, inspire members to dive deeper into their vocations. Personal contact is invaluable and where possible should replace written information; we are after all family.

## **Members**

**If we do not recognise OFS as an Order and all that that entails how can we expect to pass on the benefits to anyone else?** Our calling carries with it the individual responsibility to immerse oneself in to the Order but also to

help others. But in order to help others we must be confident in “our own skins”! We must develop our own prayer lives; we need to be aware of our own selves in relation to God. Hence that need for the personal conforming to Christ by God, just as Francis allowed.

**Enquirers and candidates are individuals and demand a personal approach. They bring their own life’s experience to the fold. Let us listen to them and assist them in their discernment of God’s calling, whatever that may be. This is a two-way process. Those entrusted with their guidance must be secure in their own calling and lives.**

Some may blanch at rigorous change but many will welcome the clarification, embrace it, and blossom. If we are positive and consistent we will succeed. **The development of the Website is of enormous benefit; it will assist greatly in communications. We must assist members in its usage and encourage that usage so that we are all willing and able to offer constructive suggestions as to improvements. We will always need to be fully aware of the needs of members who do not have access.**

We have a wonderful gift from God in His calling; let us use it and not simply admire it from a distance! If we do not use it we will lose it!

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***Editorial This matter is of fundamental importance. It will benefit the Region if you would share your views on where you feel we are now and where we should be in the future? We are Family!***

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## **Further News from Around the Region**

**Portsmouth:** The Portsmouth fraternity is suffering from the countrywide problem of an aging membership of whom a number are physically unable to attend centralised meetings. Nevertheless, the fraternity remains committed to its on-going formation. A significant part of this during the next few months will be a reflection on “Laudato Si”.

**Ladywell:** We started our study of *Laudato Si* (Praise be to You) at our September meeting covering the Introduction. It was led by our minister, Charles Marriott, who described the World as **“God’s gift to humanity – a joyful mystery to be celebrated”**. We are called to engage with all creation with praise, joy, love and peace. We followed this up in October with one of our Fraternity Members, Sylvia Reilly, leading a discussion on Chapter 1. *“What is happening to our Common Home”*. Sylvia opened with the Encyclical statement **“If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations”**. She concluded with the plea, **“Let us redress the balance by a collective reconciliation with other nations so that God will not be disappointed but look at Creation and see that it is “indeed very good”**. There was considerable discussion on how we can change.

At the invitation of the Anglican Third Order Secular (TSSF) on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 8 of our members attended an all day meeting. We felt very welcome at the meeting. In the morning session, in both plenary and small group sessions, we discussed our relationship with our environment and were challenged to write down and share the top three things that we did to help our environment. After a shared lunch, in the afternoon session, there was a Eucharistic Service and renewal of commitment by the Guildford Area TSSF members conducted by the Bishop of Guildford.

Over the weekend Nov. 20<sup>th</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup>, we will have our Annual Retreat at Ladywell which will be led by Fr Patrick Lonsdale OFM who leads the OFM Order (Custos) in Great Britain. The Retreat is open to all those with “a Franciscan heart”. It is fully booked with just over 30 attending. A more full report will be in the next Newsletter.

As a Fraternity we are very excited about progressing our **Twining** relationship with St Bonaventure Fraternity in the Cameroons. We have nominated contacts in both Fraternities and have been sharing information about our two Fraternities. Our African Sister is much larger and covers a wide area. It has three main events in the year "The Day of the African Child" in June which focuses on education. In early December there is an Assembly for the physically handicapped and the disabled and late December they have a large gathering to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. St Bonaventure is very much missionary beyond the Fraternity boundaries embracing many segments of society. We have sent them a collage of our Wintershall Gathering in August this year. Currently the two Fraternities are very much in a learning mode. This will take a little time and we can then ask what we can do to help them and vice versa what they can do to help us. Hopefully over the next two years we can arrange visits between the two Fraternities.

All Fraternity members have been given a copy of the Regional Paper on "**How to Manage an Order Like Ours**". Each Fraternity member was asked to identify up to 3 areas that they feel needed to be addressed. We will discuss this more fully at our Fraternity December Meeting ahead of the Regional Meeting on Jan. 16<sup>th</sup> 2016.

**The Chilworth Pilgrimage to Assisi** which includes a number of OFS members is taking place from Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup> to Saturday May 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 (8days), visiting the Hermitages in the Reiti valley, the main Franciscan sites in Assisi itself, and a day trip to La Verna in Tuscany where St Francis received the stigmata. Fr Patrick Lonsdale OFM will be with the Group. The trip has been run over a number of years and is very popular with many pilgrims returning on repeat pilgrimages. The total pilgrims are 30 and currently 25 places have been taken. There are therefore places still available. The cost is £650 plus air flights currently about £120 return. To register an interest and receive further details contact Rita Beggins at [rita.b3828@icloud.com](mailto:rita.b3828@icloud.com) or Tel. 01737 211166.

**A Reflection from Ascot:** Whilst praying one day, a woman asked, "Who are you God?" The answer was, "I AM". "But who is I AM", she asked. He replied, "I am love; I am grace; I am joy; I am strength; I am creator; I am the beginning and the end; I am life". With tears in her eyes, the woman exclaimed, "Now I understand, but who am I?" God smiled at her and tenderly wiped away her tears; "You are Mine", He replied.

St Francis de Sales advised, Do not look forward to what might happen tomorrow; the same everlasting father who cares for you today will shield you from suffering tomorrow or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace then and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginings.

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## **Who is Blessed John Duns Scotus?**

He was born between December 1265 and March 1266. Although it is now accepted that John was Scottish, there was for a time the opinion that he had been born in Ireland. Research tells that he was almost certainly born in Duns, in Berwick. His father was Ninian Duns of Littledean, whose family had been benefactors of the Franciscans since 1231 when they had first set foot in Scotland. Ninian's brother Elias was himself a Franciscan friar, and had a hand in John's education. John's early education is said to have been at Haddington in East Lothian, where the Franciscans had a friary. These early ties with the Order must have sown the seeds of a vocation in the young John.

In 1278, it was decided that the Scottish Friaries should no longer be subject to the custody of Newcastle and that a Vicar general be chosen to rule them, thus forming a body quite distinct from the Province of England. Accordingly, the guardians met at Haddington where they chose Elias Duns, then guardian of Dumfries, to be their vicar general. After his election, Elias returned to Dumfries, taking with him his young nephew John. It was in

Dumfries that John was received into the Franciscan Order. Now the age required for reception was fifteen, and so John must have entered the Order before 1280 with profession probably in 1281.

John was now introduced to a form of life and spirituality that was to be his mainstay throughout the years ahead. St Francis' burning love for the crucified, his literal observance of the Gospel, his tender concern for all God had created, and his loyalty towards the Church all became John's own ideal. It is this ideal that gives the key to any understanding of John's life and works. Everything he taught and everything he wrote was founded in his Franciscan vision of the world.

It is not known where John undertook his early studies in the Order, but it is known that he spent the next eight years in the assiduous study of the Arts. In 1290, John was at Oxford University. The statutes of the university required that theology students should have completed at least eight years of study of the Arts, and so it is likely that John entered Oxford after his study of the Arts. On 17 March, John was ordained by Oliver Sutton, Bishop of Lincoln, in the Church of St Andrew at Northampton. After his ordination John began a series of comings and goings between England and the Continent which would extend throughout the rest of his life.

John remained at Oxford for the next two years or so, but in 1293 he was sent to the Sorbonne where he attended lectures on the Sentences. 1297 saw him back in England, but this time at Cambridge where he settled and lectured for the next three years. In the summer of 1300, he went to Oxford and lectured on the Sentences himself. Then in 1302, he was nominated by the Minister General to lecture in Paris. He set off with the keen intention of lecturing through to the following summer, but events took a dramatic turn.

For several years during this period, Philip the Fair, King of France, and Pope Boniface VIII had been immersed in a struggle. Philip had imposed taxes on Church property in defiance of immemorial custom. By early 1303 the struggle had intensified while Philip sought support from among the clergy. He was determined to appeal to a general council against the Pope. In June the higher clergy and later the Sorbonne together with the Chapter of Notre Dame openly declared for the King! On 25<sup>th</sup> June, the King's ministers visited the Franciscan Friary in Paris to ascertain whether they favoured the King. Eighty Friars gave their assent but one hundred and eighty including John Duns Scotus dissented. These dissenters were given three days to leave the kingdom. Thus John's stay in Paris was cut short! He returned to Oxford and lectured throughout the scholastic year 1303/04.

In the meantime, unsurprisingly, Boniface had suspended the power of the Sorbonne to grant academic degrees, but this was overturned on his death in October 1303 by his successor Benedict XI who restored the University's privileges in April 1304. King Philip did all he could to restore the university to its former glory and John returned some time before November that year.

At Easter 1305, John Duns Scotus became a Master of Theology, the crowning point of his many long years of study. A further period of teaching at the Sorbonne followed though some time during the academic year 1307/08 he left Paris for Cologne where he taught in the Franciscan House of Studies. Just why he left Paris is not certain but he left at the time of a further struggle between the Pope and King Philip, this time over the process against the Knights Templar. It could well be that John left Paris to avoid yet another rapid exodus from the University as King and Pope flexed their political muscles! It was at this time, furthermore, that John Duns Scotus had proclaimed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception against which there was fierce opposition within the university, and not least from among those who supported the stance of the King. Thus, the move to Cologne was quite probably a prudent move by the Minister General to keep John safe.

But time was running out for John Duns Scotus and on 8 November 1308 he died. He was barely forty three years of age and was at the height of his maturity in every sense. After his death his reputation spread rapidly throughout Europe, and veneration for him has continued down the centuries. He is honoured as Blessed in the

Franciscan Order and a canonically approved diocesan cult is paid to him in Italy. In 1905, a formal petition was made to the Holy See for his canonisation.

***Blessed John Duns Scotus is remembered on 8<sup>th</sup> November. The above is taken from Eric Doyle's writings. Tradition has it that John prayed to Our Blessed Lady in his early days that her Son would open his mind. I think his clear thinking and consistent action show that his prayer was answered positively.***

## **A Tale to tell – believe it or not!**

St Francis is the same yesterday, today and in as many tomorrows as you can count. Why do I say that? Because of a personal experience I had the other day of his work in the here and now.

I came down for breakfast one morning – a few weeks ago – and heard a loud commotion coming from the back garden. A squawking and chattering of birds emitting all tones of birdlike emotion.

I looked out of the back window and immediately saw a small brown bird huddled on the lawn, not moving. “Oh dear” I thought “is it injured or dead?” I watched closely and couldn’t see any movement, its head was down. The other birds perched on every branch of my apple trees and the bushes squawked either in terror, dismay or alarm.

What should I do? I’d seen a similar scene once in our close where a dead bird had a chorus of birds all around shrieking and squawking until a neighbour took the dead bird away. “Will I have to do that?” I asked myself. Going through all the options I could think of I said in despair “St Francis, this is your territory – please do something for that bird”!

I went upstairs to change and went through in my mind how I was going to pick up the bird carefully and take it to the woods and lay it down somewhere safely, or should I phone the RSPB or should I ask my neighbour?

Not relishing any of these options I got dressed and came down slowly thinking that a cloth to wrap the bird might be the best option. It seemed quite quiet in the back garden. I looked out the back window and lo and behold – no bird on the lawn, no squawking birds in the trees. I opened the back door and gingerly stepped out looking for signs where the bird might have crawled to or that a cat might have attacked it. Nothing!

Thank you St Francis! You really came to my rescue.

Yes of course I said a prayer of thanksgiving –in Church when I went for Mass.

**Val Pearce, Secretary to Ascot Fraternity**

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## **Viewpoint**

John Duns Scotus knew God as Being more than as a Being. We relate to God as a father figure, in line with the teaching and guidance of Jesus, Son of God. This emphasises a relationship with God, and rightly so. We also respect what God has made; we see His hand in everything. But do we go far enough? Does the thought of God

as Being bring God's hand in creation closer? And what of our very selves; how does God relate to you and to me now?

A sermon on the topic of prayer recently expressed the fact that when we pray, we are not asking God to change His mind nor to do something new. After all, God knows what is best for us all and knows what He is doing. When we pray, we are asking for a change of mind. We are asking God to open our minds to His will. That personal conversion is rarely if ever instantaneous; more often it is life-long. We need to adopt the habit of listening to God, and letting go of the self.

As Christmas approaches, we think of that stable in Bethlehem. We perhaps think on a cosy scene rather than the reality of a young girl giving birth in less than ideal conditions. Spare a thought for the many homeless on our streets as the weather takes on a more seasonal hue!

**May the Lord bless you and keep you.**

**May He show His face to you**

**and be merciful to you.**

**May He turn His countenance to you**

**And give you His peace.**

**May the Lord bless you**

**this Christmas and throughout 2016**

**Edward Cuerden OFS**

*This Newsletter is published 4 times a year, in February, May, August, and November, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month. Copy for inclusion should be sent to me by the 16<sup>th</sup> of the month of publication at [cuerden2ed@talktalk.net](mailto:cuerden2ed@talktalk.net) or by the snail-mail to 94 Mays Lane, Fareham, PO14 2ED.*