



NOVEMBER 2015

COMMUNION OF SAINTS & COMMUNION AMONG THE SAINTS

It is the month of November, that time of year in which we celebrate the Saints of the Church and of our Servite Order, those women and men whose earthly lives are models for ours, and whose heavenly intercession helps us to answer our own daily, ongoing call to holiness. But more than models and intercessors, they are our companions, by their communion with us. Such a truth becomes an emotionally heartfelt one as we think of our brothers and other loved ones who have died during the past year. I think especially of Paddy Boyle, about whom those of you in Australia spoke warmly, and humorously, during my visit in October. And I think of my own father and Tony O'Connell, and Bonnie McGovern, whose one-year anniversaries are right around the corner.

On Earth as in Heaven? Aside from our faith in the mystery of the "Communion of Saints," however, I have also reflected on the theme of our 2015 Chapter, "Experts in Communion," and

on its challenge to experience "communion" among ourselves (saints?), in our religious lives here on earth. To think of ourselves as such may sound either pretentious, or simply the statement of an undefined goal toward which to work. But some recent events in my life, and in the life of our Province have included moments of connection and collaboration, steps toward even deeper communion. When have you last felt a sense of our communion?

International Communion I continue to think back to my time in Peru with the other Provincials of the Provinces of the Americas, and the warm sense of fraternity and friendship I felt among these talented, caring and enjoyable brothers. Although South Africa, Australia and the U.S. are so geographically distant from each other, the human issues, common struggles, and shared values bind us together – as do our friendships. That is especially true when we get to the depth and heart of the matter in honest and respectful conversation and decision-making, as we did during the respective Delegation Assemblies, and in valuable communication between myself



and the Delegates. Unfortunately, the desire for greater communion between jurisdictions in a regional conference (like Australia with CASA and Zululand with the African Conference) is up against significant obstacles, whether in the form of overly-busy lives that keep us myopically focused on what is local, or due to international challenges of language, culture and immigration law. Yet the hope – let's say the need – for greater collaboration, rooted in our communion, drives new efforts forward.

Think globally, act locally We were all reminded that we are part of something much bigger



Visitation with the OLS Secular Order group

than our own Province, as we welcomed Gottfried, our Prior General, and Souriraj, our General Councilor, in September. In itself, the visit provided many moments of communion. While we are 'connected' in part by spirituality, legislation, tradition and history, we were encouraged, in our Visitation Report, to connect more in depth and to collaborate more in breadth: a) with each other in community by sharing less business and more spirituality when we meet; b) by greater regular participation of *de familia* friars in community life; c) with friars of other jurisdictions, who may assist us in our critical 'succession' decisions; d) with those who speak Spanish, either by learning their language or finding friars elsewhere who speak it or can learn it; e) with lay persons who can assist us in administration and in passing on our charism; f) continuing collaboration with NAC, Cono Sur, India, Philippines, and Mexico/Indonesia; g) greater opening to multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity in vocation ministry, for ministry among diverse peoples; g) communicate the good things happening in the Province with the whole Order (also to

reinforce our sometimes missing "sensus Ordinis"). Some of you have requested a more frequent presence of the Provincial and Council in your communities, another sign of our communion as a province that can improve (how much do you really miss me/us?). Even when I hear a brother say, "I can't live with him," the communion created by our vowed life reminds us that we "can't live without him" either. In the articles which follow, I will focus on two moments of communion and collaboration – the OSSM National Conference and the Australian Delegation Assembly. While I am glad to report on each of them as positive experiences of communion, questions and concerns were raised in each context about their viability in the future. The entire Australian Delegation will be living in one community by the end of 2016, and the OSSM, while growing in numbers, continues to have many 'grandparents' and not many "children." I am becoming more acutely aware that our "expertise" in communion needs to be manifested not only in the quality of our relationships, but also in our openness to broader Servite

communion, that will have to be more youthful, international, inclusive of diversity, and truly collaborative in partnership and mutuality, and not just in words.

We fragile and limited human persons know that being a 'saint' does not mean being perfect. But I'm not sure that we can be saints without being in communion with others, on earth, as we believe it to be in heaven. Let us, in this month of the saints, reflect on our personal call to holiness, our vocational call to community, and our call by the signs of the times to extend our communion to an always broader spectrum of persons. The God who calls us will do most of the work! Some of you are growing older and feel a loss of energy, while you who are younger may feel overworked, spread too thinly, and sometimes neglected. There is a little story, recounted by Colm McGlynn in the Isles' newsletter, that reminds us that nobody has to "do it all" by ourselves. The child asked the mother, "Who are those saints in the (stained glass) window? The mother responded, "The saints are the people who let the light in." There is the source of communion! And for all that is still dark, what a grace it will be to begin, next month, a Holy Year of Mercy! Thank God for this incredible gift of compassion and forgiveness, which will give us yet another opportunity to enter more deeply into the great mystery of light, love and communion that we call Trinity.



AUSTRALIAN DELEGATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY

For three days, October 8-10, 2015, the 6 active members of the Delegation - Stephen Barker, Peter Porteous, Chris Ross, Oscar Aguilera, Liam Mackle and Myles Lynch, plus Anthony Xavier Rathinam, who is working at Latrobe University, and has been resident in Parkville/Melbourne - gathered in the Priory at Tuart Hill/Perth, together with Sister Therese Carroll, RSJ (facilitator) and myself. Bob Zivkovic and Leo Spicer were excused. And all were sensitive to the absence of Carlo Marchetti and Paddy Boyle, who had recently died.

Under the very capable guidance of Therese, the Assembly began with prayer, a sharing of hopes, leaders' reports, and a review of the past 3 years. A sharing of priorities for the next 1-2 years, and the subsequent lively, honest and transparent conversations, led to very concrete, and significant, decisions: 1. The Melbourne friars will relocate to Perth by the time of the 2016



Assembly; 2. The Melbourne St. Peregrine Ministry would transition to Perth; 3. Ministry succession planning will include ongoing collaboration and consultation with the CASA jurisdictions (Philippines, India, Indonesia); 4. the Melbourne house will be retained, and options for its use will be discussed; 5. The Statutes were amended (pending approval by the Provincial Council); 6. The Servite presence in Servite

College will continue, with Stephen Barker recommended as the Prior (formerly, the President) and Oscar Aguilera was invited to discern his possible future ministry there; 7. The role of Formation Director will be reviewed at the 2016 Assembly; 8. Chris Ross will be named the Vocation Director for the present; 9. The plan will be reviewed in a Delegation gathering in 6 months, with Sister Therese facilitating.



Stephen Barker, Jeff Allen, Principal of Servite College, Sr. Therese Carroll, Facilitator

The agenda also included discussion of a needed Formation Director and a presentation of the new Delegation website (check out www.servite.org.au). As already announced in the Council Minutes, Peter Porteous has been elected Provincial Delegate, and Stephen Barker has been elected Prior of Servite College. Let us pray for the members of the Australian Delegation, both present and – hopefully – future!

OSSM NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Family About 80 women and men in the Servite Secular Order, one Diakonia couple, and one member of Regnum Mariae gathered in Sierra Madre, CA, on the weekend of October 23-25, 2015, for their National Conference V, entitled "Family: Cornerstone of Love." The opening keynote address, called "This Family Doesn't Look Like the One I Grew Up In," was delivered by Jerry Horan. He spoke about the changes, diversity, challenges and recent literature about 'family,' and included autobiographical notes, alarming statistics, quotations from Church documents (including the recent

Synod on the family) and helpful graphs and graphics. His realistic snapshot of broken and blessed families today, and an invitation to 'encounter' and 'dialogue' as primary elements of the 'domestic church,' was very well received by those in attendance. He also mentioned the needed accompaniment' of families in their diversity, as they journey forward in faith (something for all of us ministers to note).

Dr. Claire Frazier-Yzaguirre, a dynamic speaker, therapist and spiritual guide, delivered a lively keynote as well. She focused on some very practical communication skills that would work as well in religious communities as in nuclear families, all part of five main relational behaviors: 1. Practice

empathy; 2. Enjoy each other; 3. Solve problems; 4. Practice forgiveness and reconciliation; and 5. Focus on mutual love. [*What do you say we all make those intentional practices during the Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas seasons!*]. I was especially struck by how she used her professional psychology to undergird our journey toward greater spiritual unity, "that all may be one." She reminded us that our witness to unity is a very effective form of evangelization. (see her website, www.thrivingfamilies.com).

A third speaker, Christine Watkins (who got mixed reviews) addressed one approach to welcoming God into family life. A number of workshops complemented the main input, featuring our own Don Siple ("St. Peregrine: Hope for the Troubled") and Arnaldo Sanchez, ("Jesus y su Familia Fueron Refugiados" and "Familia: Identidad, Retos y Esperanza").

Other topics focused on new understandings and old family wounds, and reaching out to families experiencing difficulties.

Business The weekend also included some business, presented by the outgoing National Council, which included a financial report (and appeal for greater self-sufficiency), some well-organized guidelines for leading local communities, communication and Statutes. Many thanks to Jack Rhine, Mary Ann Andersen, Debbie Nunes, Mark McCallick and Arnaldo Sanchez for their four years of service on behalf of OSSM, as well as to Vidal Martinez who has served so long and well as the National Assistant. And I had the privilege of installing the new National



Ed and Mercedes Thrush



Jack Rhine



Council members: Debbie Nunes (Union City, CA), Valentin Rosario (CT), Paulette Martin (St. Philip Benizi, Fullerton), Kathy Baragiola (SHF, Affton), and Sue Weigand (Spring City, PA). The weekend also included the usual presentations, skits, and a new addition, karaoke, as part of the Saturday night celebration.

Something to think about I end this article about the OSSM with some comments relative to a presentation made by Ed and Mercedes Thrush, a Diakonia couple from New Mexico, who are often involved with our Servite brothers in Mercedes' home country of Mexico. They highlighted our Marian identity, our call to present our 'connection with Mary' to the world, and the need for more Servite diakonia couples who not only pray weekly with lectio

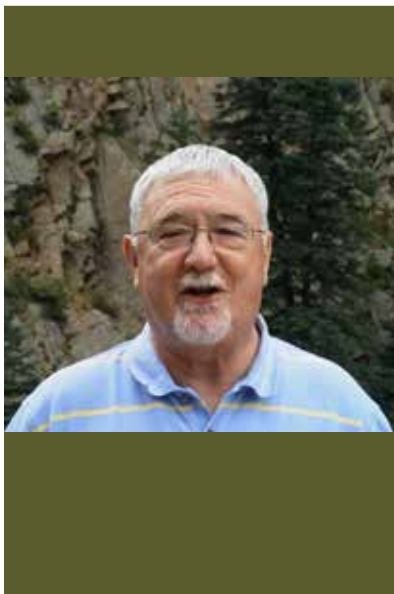
divina, but who are also called to share their particular Marian qualities with the rest of the community...and beyond. Ed began with a meditation on the wedding feast of Cana, and asked us where we find ourselves in that miracle? He asked specifically, and pointedly, "What do we do, where do we go, when we realize we're running out of wine?" I heard his question as a reference, at least in part, to the diminishing number of friars in our part of the Order, especially when he asked what role the 'domestic church,' specifically the Diakonia, plays in the life of the Order.

I invite us all to reflect on his question. In my closing homily, I quoted a member of our Servite Family who envisions the future of the Order in the U.S. NOT so much in the Secular Order, but rather in the Diakonia, in Servite

families! As I said earlier (and is obvious), among friars and OSSM, there are a lot of grandparents, but not many children. I went on to say, "Who better to share their faith, devotion to Mary and mutual service than those who are already together in a household! Let's all be better informed about what the Diakonia is, and make an effort to encourage families to consider formation in the Order...together. We can start by reading, on the Servite website: www.servidimaria.net, and click "Order," then "Servite Family," then "Diakonias." We all know wonderful families whom we might invite to learn about, and to hear a possible call to Servite Diakonia, a more formal living of our charism as a couple and family. Using the story of the healing of blind Bartimaeus, I called all Servites to ask for healing of any near-sightedness, in which we might squint with suspicion at our differences, or cast a fleeting glance at those with whom we relate only superficially. Rather, may we be more far-sighted when we 'look' more contemplatively and open-heartedly at lay persons, couples and families, black and brown and white, some with accents and 'foreign' passports, yet all part of our "communion among the 'saints.'" May we be healed of whatever blocks our vision of such sisters and brothers as collaborators in our Servite future together, or we will remain blind, and it will seem like night...even as the sun of a new day may be rising, with or without us.

TONY O'CONNELL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Among the many forms of communion of the saints, is that of deep, caring and generously loving friendship. A couple of dear friends of Tony O'Connell, have decided to remember Tony's first anniversary of death, and new life, by initiating a scholarship in his name. The precise description of the recipients is in process, but the intention is to assist one or more young men in formation, particularly in the area of psychological growth and healthy human development. I will soon be working with others to try to grow this fund, and, through it, to remember Tony's contributions to the formation of so many, including a few of us friars, a contribution which will now continue in Tony's name and memory. How grateful I am for such wonderful friends, in Tony's life, in mine, and in ours!! And how grateful we are, I'm sure, for the companionship that we have felt from Tony throughout his life in communion with us.



IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES:

- **December 2:** deadline date for receiving and counting of 1st ballot for Prior Provincial
- **December 2-3:** Provincial Council meeting – Chicago
- **December 8:** beginning of Holy Year of Mercy
- **December 22:** deadline for receiving and counting 2nd ballot for Prior Provincial
- **January 11-12:** Provincial Council meeting – Southern California
- **February 15-19:** Provincial Chapter of Elections – Sierra Madre, CA

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John".

