



Being brothers to all

BY EILEEN CONNELLY, OSU



Robert Seay, OFM



Jim Bok, OFM



Jeff Scheeler, OFM

Discussions about racism can certainly be challenging, but when approached with the Franciscan spirit of openness, acceptance and fraternity, they can also be eye-opening, transformative and strengthen the bond of community. This has been the case with the friars of St. John the Baptist Province. At the final provincial Chapter in May 2022, they passed a proposal “to take immediate ‘Gospel’ action to confront and condemn the sin of racism. We can eradicate racial injustice through appropriate and ongoing conversion, both internal and external, personal and institutional.”

In a reflection for the Feb. 17, 2023, issue of *News Notes*, **Robert Seay**, who brought forth the proposal, recalled that as a young man he questioned whether he would be rejected or accepted as he discerned a call to religious life.

“I previously had encountered rejection, being told by my pastor, ‘We don’t know what to do with a colored priest.’ So, I was not encouraged to pursue my vocation,” Robert wrote. “Nevertheless, I continued asking Jesus, ‘What do you want me to do?’ The answer came when the Franciscans accepted me.”

“At this momentous time of transition, we must show leadership, inspiration and example to the Church by being one of the few groups willing to talk about anti-racism techniques within our own structures and to empower those who are oppressed by racism,” he said. “However,



PHOTO BY UNSPLASH, KATIE MOUM

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FROM MARK

Transformative revitalization

The recent meeting of the “new Council-Elect” reminded me of a line that I heard from the actor who plays Jesus in the “The Chosen” video series. He says to townspeople who witness one of his miracles, “Get used to different.”

But there’s also an old saying that goes: “No one likes change, except a baby with a wet diaper.” The restructuring and revitalizing experience was working even before we made the decision to

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PHOTO BY UNSPLASH, ALEX SHUTE

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the main focus of anti-racism is not to sensitize, but to break down racist structures. It is not to change hearts, but change structures and processes while hearts change.”

The Provincial Council entrusted the mandate to the Fraternal Life Committee (FLC), comprised of Robert, **Jim Bok** (chair), **Jeff Scheeler**, **Bob Bruno**, **Dennis Bosse** and **Kenn Beetz**, to develop and implement a plan of action.

The committee decided to use *A White Catholic's Guide to Racism and Privilege*, by **Fr. Dan Horan, OFM**, as a guiding resource. The process began earlier this year with a province-wide Zoom gathering, hosted by the FLC, with the late **Fr. Clarence Williams, C.P.P.S.**, as the main presenter. Fr. Clarence, who passed away July 8, was well known for his ministry as a pastor, evangelizer and racial justice advocate. In recent months, each local fraternity or group of fraternities was dedicated to reading and discussing Dan's book using prompt questions. Fraternities were asked to provide minutes of their conversations to the FLC. **John Barker** agreed to take the minutes of each session and put them into an executive summary. Those summaries were then shared with the FLC.

In summarizing the discussions, John noted that conversations about racism need to begin with “an assessment of one's own experience and perspective. Most, if not all, of the friars came to these discussions with at least some awareness of their own social position as members of the dominant ‘white’ culture and its implications for their approach to the problem of racism, how to understand it and how to address it.”

“**M**any friars noted that conversion and change begin at home, in their own minds and hearts and in their immediate environments,” he added. “With the help of these discussions, many of them have become more aware of their own unconscious biases and assumptions, and the way these



PHOTO BY UNSPLASH, NATHAN DUMLAO

might contribute to unconscious and unintended racism in their fraternities or ministry. They have committed themselves to further study and reflection.”

John also noted many other ways friars can contribute stemming from the discussions. “They can bring their heightened awareness of the dynamics of racism to a broader public, exercising something

of a pastoral ministry in this regard. Preaching, parish or other learning programs remain options. Getting involved in local or national antiracism efforts is another example.”

As chair of the FLC, Jim thanked “our brother, Robert, for calling us to address the issue of racism in our province, the Order, the Church, society and around the world because it is an issue that touches the lives of so many people,” and praised his fellow friars for their dedication to the discussions, as well as their commitment to continue to converse and act moving forward. “Going through the process was a reminder that we must change our behavior toward one another. We must be accepting. We all have biases and prejudices and need to acknowledge them.”



Dennis Bosse, OFM



Tom Richstatter, OFM

A longtime missionary in Jamaica, Jim noted how the experience has reinforced for him the need to understand and respect the circumstances under which people live, and grow in his sensitivity. In a simple yet meaningful example, he said, “Jamaicans are typically late for everything, and I'm very much on time. That constantly reminds me of the need to be mindful of the differences in cultures and respect them. It's something you can never be reminded of too much.”

For their final Zoom discussion on Aug. 8, several friars were asked to share reflections with the entire group regarding their thoughts on the process, personal experiences and possible next steps, individually, fraternally and beyond.

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“For those of us who are older and grew up in a different time, we saw things related to segregation that we would consider terrible now, but were accepted at the time,” said **Tom Richstatter**. “We’re shaped by our history, and getting in touch with that was difficult, but definitely helpful. I’m trying to be more aware now and trying not to notice a person’s color first, but to meet the person first. I hope the new province really keeps the issue of racism before our eyes and is particularly sensitive about inviting people of all races into the community.”

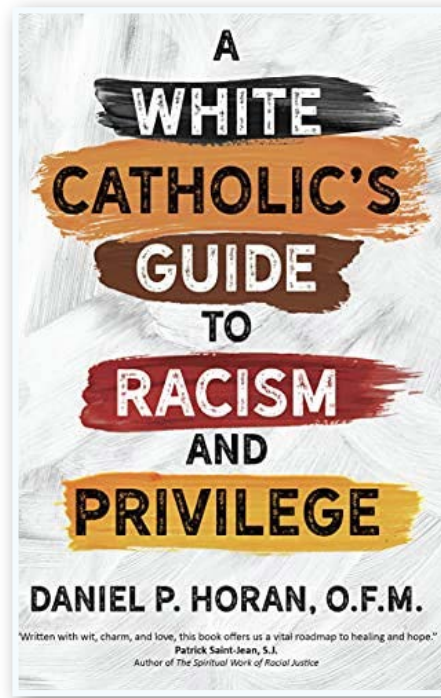
“I think we have to be instruments of change, just as we are instruments of peace, and peace can only come when people are treated justly,” said **Raphael Ozoude**, who is of Nigerian descent. “Our biggest platform is when we give homilies. Friars can address issues and help others begin to think differently. It may make people uncomfortable, but people will hear the Gospel and be confronted with the truth and be willing to make a change.”

“In addition to homilies, our fraternities should endeavor to be diverse and welcome more than one ethnic group, if it is possible,” he added.

“We should find ways to incorporate other cultures by saying the Our Father in another language, preparing different cuisine. There should not be the expectation that the person from another culture will adapt. The only way you can truly be enriched is to allow another culture to flourish.”

“The Franciscans can be collaborators in bringing about change,” Raphael said. “I hope all friars will continue to learn and be open to accepting this as a journey, that they won’t be afraid to make mistakes and be transformed.”

Manuel Viera shared that his experience is based on two perspectives of racism. “In Cuban culture, I’m a white man; from the U.S. perspective, I’m a Latino,” he noted. “As a result, my approach is to see people for who they are. Color? So what? There are very good,



Raphael Ozoude, OFM



Colin King, OFM

holy people in every ethnic group. We all have our gifts, and we all have our sinfulness. As ministers to different communities, we need to be aware of issues from our own history that may give us a sense of superiority. We are not superior. We are servants.”

Looking to the future, Manuel emphasized the importance of “welcoming brothers from different cultures or other points of view. We must consider whether we are welcoming them as a token or trying to understand their history and truly see each other as brothers as **Francis** tell us to do.”

All of us have power in a different way,” said **Colin King**, who serves with Jim in Jamaica. “As a Franciscan, I’m called to look at how I can use my power and privilege to help others. As Franciscans, we need to go to those places where there is poverty, where we can be instruments of reconciliation and racial healing. Maybe it’s just letting a person share their story of how they have been hurt in the past and giving them the dignity of listening.”

“It doesn’t need to be us doing everything,” Colin emphasized. “It’s our way as Franciscans to help others discover their own power and become agents of change. Racism is just one aspect. We can use our privilege and power to empower others who feel ostracized, the homeless, those with addictions. We aren’t the sun or the Son, but can try to be another point of light. It doesn’t need to be that we solve systemic racism or injustice, but we can be a light where we are. As small as that may seem, it’s still a piece of the Kingdom that’s among us now.”

The friars continued their conversations in small group sessions. **Dennis Bosse** reflected on how serving the African American community at St. Mary of the Angels in New Orleans, as well as other cross-cultural experiences among Native Americans and the Hispanic community, has been life-giving for him. “People have been very welcoming wherever I have been, and there is a richness that comes from experiencing other cultures, getting to know other people and seeing Christ in them,”

Back to school!



Left, this year's freshman class has arrived at Roger Bacon! Within the first few hours on campus, they met their senior leaders, heard from the high school's incredible principal, made their way to their lockers and flex rooms and learned the Bacon fight song. Above, students, teachers, parents and parishioners came together for the opening school Mass at St. Clement Church, celebrated by E.J. Stein. May this new school year be filled with blessings!

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he said.

"I hope one thing that comes from this is that we become more cross-cultural as a new province, to help all who accept the invitation to join us feel welcome and comfortable and to know that we value their perspective," he added. "We can only be enriched and benefit from widening our experience of other cultures."

Al Hirt, who served at predominantly African American faith communities in New Orleans and Kansas City, said, "It's been nothing but a grace to become aware of a whole other group of people's experience of life and church. It's vibrant and alive."

"That doesn't take away all of my racism, though," acknowledged Al, who currently serves as pastor at St. Francis Seraph Parish in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine. "I'm deeply involved in the Black community, but there are still times when I'm walking home and see a group of Black men congregated somewhere, that I cross to the other side of the street. If it was a group of white men, I wouldn't feel the same. There's still some caution in me about what could be a threatening situation. I don't know what to do about that caution other than to be aware of it and try not to let it overly influence how I interact with people."

Al expressed his gratitude for the opportunity that his ministry has provided for him to become active in social justice causes. "I've become very aware of the injustices that African American people, in particular, face. That's very important to me," he said. "When I think of racism, I think of African Americans, but there is also the racism that other cultures face. Our province traditionally hasn't



Manual Viera, OFM

been very diverse, so I'm looking forward to being part of province with many different cultures. That will only stretch us in a good way."

"I've had the blessing of attending international meetings in other provinces, in other countries," said **Jeff Scheeler**. "We're a worldwide Order, a multi-cultural one, and when that's your experience, you have a sense that these are my brothers and it makes you just a little more aware that it's a big, beautiful, colorful world."

Also a blessing has been ministering as pastor at the multi-cultural Church of the Transfiguration in Southfield, Mich., said Jeff. "When people come to Communion, I see the whole world in front of me. Being a friar is a privilege because we have these experiences and can be brothers to all. That awareness is a gift, and every encounter with another culture opens minds and hearts."

"This proposal comes on the eve of our provincial merger and challenges us to journey with our brothers and sisters from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds," Robert said. "It comes at a time when racism has peaked and cultural awareness is emerging in society, as well as in the Church. May we continue our work to be brothers to all!"

The proposal was very well received at the all Council meeting in Atlanta the week of Aug. 21. "We anticipate it being part of the Wednesday discussion (at the October Chapter), thematically linked to the fraternal life planning proposal and the intercultural proposal," said **Br. Keith Warner, OFM**, animator of lifelong Franciscan formation, Office of Renewal and Restructuring, noting that things could evolve or change moving forward. "The all Council meeting recognized and affirmed the good work begun by St. John the Baptist Province in this regard."

A transition for Br. Ed

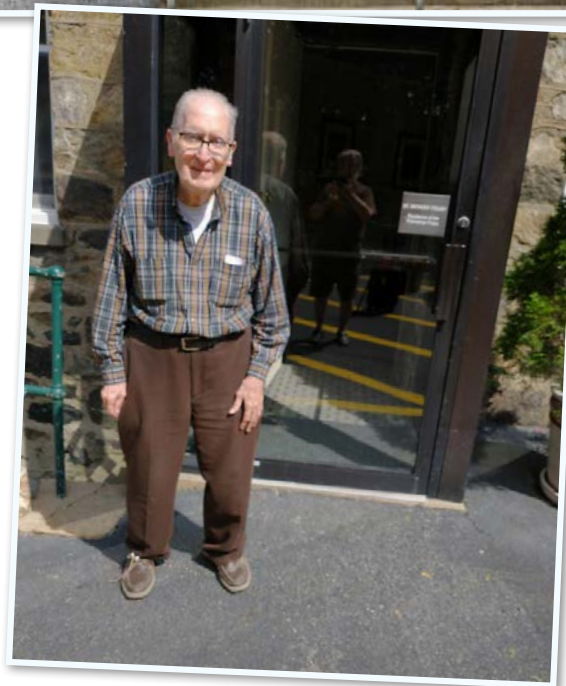
BY LOREN CONNELL, OFM

Tuesday, Aug. 8, the feast of St. Dominic, was a sad day at St. Francis Friary and Retreat House, Easton, Pennsylvania. Friday, Aug. 11, the feast of Saint Clare, was a momentous day at Saint Anthony Friary, Butler, New Jersey. After 52 years, our brother, **Ed Skutka**, has moved! Ed left Easton on that Tuesday to spend a few days with his family in Hibernia. On Friday, I met him at his sister's house, and together we went on to Butler, a little over 12 miles away.

After graduating from high school, Ed went to live with the Trappists in Genesee, New York. Three months later, he was back home in Hibernia "because the monks didn't talk." He was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in the medical corps in Vietnam. Much like St. Francis upon returning to Assisi after a year as a prisoner of war, Ed returned from Vietnam (not as a POW) looking for something deeper in his life. He was attracted to the friars in the Vice Province of the Holy Savior, and in 1969, he joined them in Easton for a year of pre-novitiate formation. In 1970, he entered the novitiate with the friars of Immaculate Conception Province in Catskill, New York. After professing first vows in 1971, Ed returned to St. Francis, where he faithfully washed dishes for our guests and inflicted corny jokes on the friars for 52 more years.

St. Anthony Friary reminds me of St. Clement Friary in Cincinnati, or the former St. Boniface Friary in Louisville. It was built 100 years or so ago as a house of formation for the friars of Holy Name Province. Like St. Clement and St. Boniface, a parish is attached. Over the years, the building has been adapted for one purpose or another. About two dozen friars currently live there: some in retirement, some in active ministry, some in both. Ed and I visited St. Anthony four or five times earlier this year, staying overnight and joining the friars for prayer, meals and recreation. I have enjoyed getting to know the brothers there, and Ed has enjoyed watching Jeopardy with them weekday nights at 7.

This move is a major adjustment in Ed's life. His 52 consecutive years at St. Francis Friary tie **Stan Bir's** 52 at St. Clement. Add in Ed's year of pre-novitiate



PHOTOS BY LOREN CONNELL, OFM

Top, Ed departs St. Francis Retreat House in Easton, Pa.; above, Ed arrives at St. Anthony Friary in Butler, N.J.

formation, and his 53-year total will stand as a provincial record. I think that our brother will do well in his new home. His family is less than half an hour away, and the friary provides him with the stability of routine and the freshness of variety.

As of Aug. 11, Ed's address is:

Br. Edward Skutka, OFM
St. Anthony Friary

65 Bartholdi Avenue, Butler, New Jersey 07405
973-850-6512

HEALTH MATTERS

Embracing change in a healthy way

For most individuals, a merger is not just an organizational strategy, but a personal disruption as well.

It can be a period of tension, uncertainty, and even chaos. Workloads ramp up, as do pressure and stress. You may have to quickly adapt to unfamiliar policies, practices and politics, and work with strangers from different areas.

In such situations, most people tend to fixate on what they can't control: decisions about who is let go from a particular position, reassigned or relocated. Studies show that individuals faced with organizational upheaval have much more power over what happens to them than they realize. Embrace the dynamic, intense integration process and use it as an opportunity for introspection and growth.

Change is usually inevitable, so you'll need to figure out where you stand. You must first assess your strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats presented by the merger. Although you might feel some anxiety, the first step in overcoming that is to take stock of the situation. Some mergers have little or no practical impact on certain individuals. However, change is inevitable, and you'll need to figure out where you stand before you can plan where to go. I recommend a tried-and-true framework: the SWO analysis. This involves considering the following:

Strengths: What in your personal make up and career background could be an asset in your new situation?

Weaknesses: What aspects of your personal situation could be a deficit for moving forward in the integration?

PHOTO BY UNSPLASH, CHRIS LAWTON



Opportunities: What are the potential landing spots for you in the combined entity?

Try to enter into the integration process in a way that highlights your strengths or allows you to develop new ones.

There's no question that mergers are stressful, but you can embrace the chance by proactively evaluating your situation and seizing opportunities. Establishing a routine can help you adjust to a transition. Consider creating morning and evening routines to facilitate a sense of consistency. Regular sleep and wake times, a daily walk, meditation or intention setting for the day can be great additions to your routine.

May God be with you in this new and exciting endeavor!

Prayers and Love,
Providence Nurse Michelle Viacava

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engage a more determined process in 2018. We were and are learning to walk together in trust.

Ignatius Brady was a friar from our province who lived with us novices during the novitiate of 1980-81. I remember him praying as an elderly man during evening prayer that we friars might be *semper novus* (always new). As young friar, I wondered why or how an elder would pray this way. I learned that Ignatius had struggled to stay fresh all his life, always new, and had continued to have some challenging ideas about how to live our Franciscan life. Here, towards the end of his life, he was continuing to pray that he and us would be always new.

Francis himself was about this constant conversion, this releasing of what we might call the false self that holds us in bondage. The false self could be understood as a general over identification with the way things are, or our self-understanding, or our jobs and titles, unconscious racial privilege, or our enneagram number, to name a few. This past week I've been encouraged by God to understand myself in a new way as a friar of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

As I pack up my things to go to Atlanta, I'm struggling with things being different. Part of me doesn't want to get "used to different." Over the last six years as Provincial, I've rediscovered Cincinnati and been



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DETTO FRANCIA

able to see my parents in Dayton. I have grown close to the brothers with whom I live at Pleasant Street Friary, in particular, and in my province in general. There is some sadness about leaving the beauty and support, the familiarity! After a moment of recovery, I find myself chuckling at my resistance to change and to a new adventure in Franciscan life.

We are on a pilgrimage, as Keith Warner reminds us. I suspect that Francis felt this way as he moved from his place of privilege as a cloth merchant's son to the world outside the protective walls of Assisi. He had one foot in one world and the other in the next. It culminated in a very definitive, theatrical, gesture in his stripping off his clothes and

handing them to his father. I doubt that I'll do that, although I am stripping away quite a number of books and accumulations! As I anticipate my goodbyes, it leaves that mixture in me: both very sad and excited. Bringing these feelings to prayer, I feel the reassurance of God: his deep presence, telling me that I am his own! God is reshaping me, and us, into lesser brothers on the road, for the 21st century, always reforming, *semper novus*.

-Mark Soehner, OFM

Celebrating the feast of St. Clare

The Cincinnati Poor Clare Sisters celebrated a joyful feast of St. Clare on Aug. 11, joined by friends and friars, including Provincial Minister Mark Soehner.



A fond farewell at St. Boniface Church

BY LISA BIEDENBACH

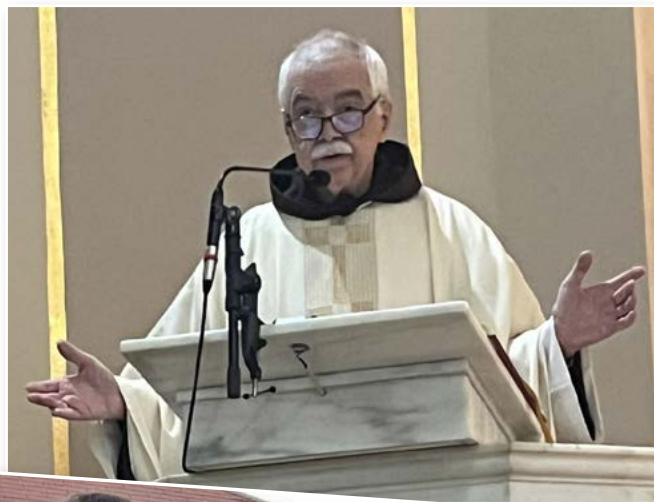
“You have been a Good Shepherd who with simplicity and also intensity—like a good Franciscan—has accompanied us in following Christ,” said St. Boniface Church Parochial Vicar **Fr. Luca Roso, MCCJ**, on Aug. 6, at the end of the 11 a.m. Mass, as he thanked **Pat McCloskey** for his decades of dedicated service to the faith community of St. Boniface Church.

Fr. Luca continued, “I want to thank you, Fr. Pat, from my heart, for your long and dedicated service to our community. May the Lord bless your next service, accompany your walk and always support you with his peace and grace. Thank you, Fr. Pat, and thousands of blessings.”

With much gratitude and love, the St. Boniface faith community bid farewell to Pat, who has celebrated Mass with the Northside parish off and on for almost 50 years, starting in the early 1970s by working in St. Boniface School as a deacon and then saying Mass occasionally during the 70s and 80s, said Business Manager **Jenni Lindgren** as she presented Pat with a gift from the parish.

“For the last 20 or so years, Fr. Pat has celebrated Mass regularly on Sundays and weekdays,” she told the congregation. “His dry sense of humor, knowledge of the saints, flower deliveries and words of wisdom have touched all of us in many ways. We will miss having you, Fr. Pat, as a part of our daily lives. Thank you again for everything. May God bless you!”

Following the Mass, the parish hosted a reception on the lawn outside the rectory where parishioners, friends, and local friars **Larry Dunham, Gene Mayer, Matthias Crehan, Norbert Bertram, Robert Seay** and **Matt Ryan** greeted Pat and said goodbye.



Top, Pat celebrates his final Mass at St. Boniface; above, Pat chats with his fellow friars after Mass. From left, Matt Ryan, Larry Dunham, Matthias Crehan and Pat.

PHOTOS BY ROBERT SEAY, OFM, AND LISA BIEDENBACH

Late summer scenes

Thanks to the efforts of Kevin Duckson, Michael Barrett and Joni Mataitis, the courtyard garden at St. Clement has remained peaceful and beautiful all summer.

PHOTOS BY FRANK JASPER, OFM

