**FRATERNITY VISITATION REPORT**





February 18, 2018

St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity

St. Charles Borromeo Church, Port Charlotte

**Introduction**

Sheila Solomon, OFS, Robert Johnston, OFS St. Thomas More Family Councilors and Patricia Gagnon, OFS, Regional Treasurer attended the monthly Fraternity Gathering of St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity in Port Charlotte, Florida.

**Preparatory Information:**

The pre-visitation questionnaire was completed by the fraternity and received by the visitors prior to the date of the visitation. The minister and 10 actively professed members each had completed the pre-visitation questionnaire. I want to thank everyone for the timely and thorough job you did in completing all the paperwork.

**Demographics:**

The St. Clare of Assisi fraternity currently has eleven professed members, one candidate and three people who will be making their Profession June 16, 2018. At the time of the previous visit, in 2014, there were six professed members and three candidates in formation. In 3 ½ years membership has increased by more than five members. The fraternity minister, vice-minister, secretary and formation director were present at the Gathering. The fraternity’s treasurer was absent because she was sick. Father Philip Scheff, the fraternity’s Spiritual Assistant, was present at the Gathering. St. Clare of Assisi’s council is as follows:

Ann Marie Speir – Minister

Eileen Forte – Vice Minister

Hilde Wendling – Formation

Carla Velasquez – Secretary

Joyce Lenz – Treasurer

Marie Fry – Councilor

Elizabeth Costello – Councilor

Nancy Newell – Councilor

Fr. Philip Scheff – Spiritual Assistant

**Documentation:**

The fraternity maintains a Minister’s binder containing their Document of Establishment, Annual Reports and minister notes. The binder also contains a carefully presented history of the fraternity and various artifacts documenting past fraternity activities and involvements.

The fraternity’s bank statements, checkbook and treasurer’s reports was checked by Pat Gagnon, Regional Treasurer and found the finances to be well documented and complete.

St. Clare of Assisi’s Fraternity Register was not provided, although the fraternity does have one. \*The visitors request that either Ann Marie or Hilde Wendling bring it to the Annual meeting in April so that it can be reviewed.

During the Gathering a thorough and precise Gathering and council minutes were read by the secretary. Because this is a small fraternity the council minutes were shared with the members at large. When questioned, Ann Marie assured the visitors that if a sensitive subject comes up in council it is kept confidential.

**Prayer Life**

Jeane Swaynos reported, after her September 2014 visit, that this fraternity has a strong prayer life inside and outside of fraternity. We found that St. Clare continues to develop and enjoy a strong prayer life. They opened their Gathering from the Ritual Prayer then said a Monthly Franciscan Pledge, and recited a lovely prayer invoking the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Fr. Phil blessed the meeting. Saint Charles Borromeo Church has an Adoration Chapel in the same building as their Gathering place and the members reported that they spend time each week in quiet Adoration. As a group they enrich their prayer life by doing such things as attending First Saturday Mass and twice visiting the Holy Doors at Our Lady of Mercy Parish, Boca Grande, FL. The fraternity also attended St. Clare’s feast day celebration with St. Clare (Naples) Fraternity and the Poor Clare Sisters at Fort Meyers Beach.

**Apostolate Activities:**

Fraternity members Domingo and Sionnie Tolentino, OFS shared that one activity that blossomed forth from their prayer life was “street ministry”. They initiated a program of passing out blankets and paper bags with toiletries and other essentials to those living on the street or sleeping in the parks.

**Monthly Gathering**

At this month’s Gathering nine of the fourteen members (including those in formation) were in attendance. Those not present had been excused for illness or family responsibilities. There was one visitor present and he was warmly welcomed. Before the business of the fraternity began, members enjoyed a social time with wonderful finger food and desserts. Conversation between and among those present was relaxed and friendly. Once the meeting began the agenda was organized in a sequential manner and followed efficiently, however it was not so rigid that it disallowed discussion or the introduction of new topics. Pat Gagnon, regional treasurer, observed that St. Clare’s monthly fair share was collected and counted by two fraternity members, exemplifying the recommended procedure.

**Formation:**

Initial: The St. Clare of Assisi fraternity is using Catch Me a Rainbow by Lester Bach in conjunction with the FUN manual. They also refer to Fully Mature in Christ to supplement and enrich their lessons. Hilde Wendle is an experienced formator and long professed Franciscan.

Ongoing: At each Gathering the fraternity studies an article of the Rule and The Way of Life is facilitated by minister, Anne Marie Speir. To promote formation outside of the regular monthly Gathering the fraternity attended the Marian Conference on the Eucharist at Ave Maria.

**Summation:**

The visitors, Sheila Solomon, OFS, Bob and Loretta Johnston, OFS and Pat Gagnon, OFS thoroughly enjoyed attending the Gathering of the St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity in Port Charlotte. We felt welcomed and enriched. Marie Fry shared that several years ago the fraternity had considered dissolving because they had just a few member who were becoming elderly. When she came into the fraternity she was determined not to let that happen. With lots of prayer, determination, more prayer, and perseverance, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the fraternity is now growing. With the recruitment and acceptance of the position of minister, Ann Marie has provided the fraternity with the structure it needed and the wonderful enthusiasm of formation director, Hilde, has resulted in the profession of several new members and the formation of candidates. The rest of the council made up of Treasurer, Joyce Lenze, Secretary, Carla Velasquez, and councilors Nancy Newell, Marie Fry, and Elizabeth Costello is committed to their Franciscan vocation. The fraternity is grateful and blessed to have Fr. Phi Scheff, as they rely on him for their spiritual guidance.

A wonderful transparency was obvious among the council and members at large. Everyone is very aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the fraternity and the group is obviously working together to celebrate those things they are doing well. Members proposed ideas for improvements that are realistic in terms of the size of the fraternity and the age of its members. The dynamics of those present exemplified a level of comfort and familiarity that is typical within “families”. When explaining their street ministry, as a group, everyone became animated, completing each other’s sentences and interjecting comments.

One recommendation made after the last Visitation was that the fraternity continue to reach out to their parish. This they have done with positive results.

**Recommendations:**

The St. Clare of Assisi Fraternity is not, at this time, printing a monthly newsletter. They don’t feel it to be necessary or manageable at this time. The visitors understand their feelings however, as the membership increases they may want to consider developing a newsletter. Our suggestion is that you start small and simple.

Please be aware that your complete council minutes should not be shared with the whole fraternity. You may however, summarize key points from council that pertain to the fraternity. One suggestion is to keep two books – one with the council minutes that should not be taken into the Gathering and one for Gathering minutes if you take them.

Please consider sharing with your members your Letter of Establishment, Profession Register, and other historical documents so that they understand your fraternity’s rich history.

We will send you a copy of the Nuts and Bolts and Care and Feeding of Fraternity Councils booklets. This will help new members of the council learn of expectations and support experienced brothers and sisters as the group grows.

Some fraternities have been known to invite neighboring fraternities to the Professions of new members as a way to celebrate with the extended Franciscan family. Since you have a Profession this coming June, you may want to extend an invitation.

The fraternity made two wonderful suggestions that will be added to the agenda for our next St. Thomas More Family Meeting. These are:

1. The Franciscan Wake Service is a beautiful way to honor our brothers and sisters when they pass on to new life, but many non-Franciscan family members don’t know about it. We need to develop a way for members to request a service and make their families aware of it.

2. Develop a St. Thomas More Family formation workshop.

I sincerely hope I fulfilled Article 92.1 of the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order which states: “The purpose of pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charisma and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.”

We appreciate your hospitality and look forward to seeing you at our annual ministers/formation directors meeting at San Pedro in April.

May God bless you all and give you his peace.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sheila Solomon, OFS

Robert Johnston, OFS

Patricia Gagnon, OFS

Five Franciscan Martyrs Region Executive Council