

# Franciscan Angles

Australian Newsletter of the Society of St Francis

August 2007

## Franciscan Schools Australia - Inaugural National Conference

Franciscan Schools Australia, an initiative of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters, Kedron, is sponsored in collaboration with Franciscan Leaders throughout Australia. The purpose FSA is to share resources both human and material to enhance Franciscan Spirituality within schools who wish to continue the charism of their founding religious communities or for those who have chosen a Franciscan name for their school and wish to share in the richness of a Franciscan Ethos.

The inaugural FSA Conference was held from the 1st to 3rd of August at Mercy Place, Bardon. The theme of the conference was taken from the Peace Prayer attributed to Francis of Assisi – “Where there is Darkness, let me Sow Light”.

The Conference Convenor and Coordinator of FSA, in preparing the brochure for the conference wrote:

“I trust that this first Conference will give us time to meet one another, to revitalise and replenish our faith lives, to foster our Franciscan connectedness with each other, and to glean ideas that will enable us all to better pass on the gift of Franciscan spirituality to the young people we have the privilege to teach and support”

The aim of the Conference was to bring together Franciscan Educators to be exposed to the rich heritage of things Franciscan through Keynote address and workshops. John Boyd-Boland ofm, Franciscan Friar and scholar and Briega O’Hare osc, Poor Clare Sister and International Lecturer and Musician, were the Keynote Speakers who addressed the topics of *A Franciscan Educator in a Post Modern Culture* and *St Clare and the Dignity of the Human Person*.

Six workshops were available for participants to become aware of Franciscan initiatives as well as coming to know Francis and Clare in a more intimate way. The workshop

topics were: Franciscans International and Franciscan Youth International; Clare of Assisi - A Light for our World; The Portrayal of St Francis and his Ideals; Developing a Franciscan Pedagogy; Transmitting Franciscan Values and Stories in a Primary School Setting.

The Conference was attended by 75 teachers and more than 20 religious from three Eastern States. An important aspect of the Conference was the networking that took place over meals and during the sharing time at workshops. Many schools presented what they were doing in their own schools to promote the Franciscan ethos at the “Bring and Brag” session. This was a very exciting time as participants swapped resources and made connections.

A variety of Franciscan focused liturgies were also a highlight of the Conference. Local Franciscan Schools prepared the Opening and Closing Liturgies. The new FSA Logo was unveiled during the Opening Liturgy. A Twilight Liturgy – Vigil of Pardon was held on the first evening in preparation for the feast on the following day. The Conference Eucharist on the feast of the Pardon / Mary of the Angels was presided over by Bishop

Joseph Oudeman ofm cap

We thank our Official Sponsors Catholic Church Insurance and Australian Catholic University as well as Religious Leaders contributed financially or through providing speakers or workshop presenter.

Information about the purpose of FSA, how to become a member school and Franciscan Resources can be obtained from the FSA website. [www.fsa.asn.au](http://www.fsa.asn.au).

**Sr Pauline Robinson mfc**

*Editor’s note: there are presently over 30 FSA member schools from all over the country, including Anglican and Catholic schools.*



The FSA logo is in the shape of the Tau a very significant Franciscan Symbol. It incorporates the Southern Cross, the moon, sun, land and water. The logo was processed into the Conference Centre during the opening liturgy by the logo art competition winner: Felila Rosenthal, year 5, St Francis College, Crestmead, Brisbane.

## Reflecting on Clare of Assisi

Clare was born in 1193 eleven years after Francis of Assisi. Her early life was one of privilege and wealth. Her father, Favarone, was a knight of the House of Offreduccio, and her mother, Ortolana, was in her own right an extraordinary woman.

It is difficult to determine when and how Clare first met Francis, but she probably heard him proclaim his message of penance and peace in the piazzas of Assisi. It is also possible that Clare heard the young Francis preach in the Cathedral of San Rufino, as her family lived directly opposite.

Refusing an arranged marriage, Clare chose to follow Francis in the pursuit of Gospel perfection. The driving force behind everything they did and said and wrote was a desire to simply live the gospel. Clare and her sisters soon settled into life at San Damiano, the first of the churches that Francis had repaired. There she remained for 42 years until her death in 1253.



St Clare: Fresco - San Damiano Church, Assisi

During this time the Cardinal Protector imposed an austere rule, based on the Benedictine Rule, upon Clare and her sisters. This began a life-long challenge for Clare. Throughout these years, there is not a trace of bitterness, but rather a patient waiting.

Drawing inspiration from the spiritual vision of Francis, Clare desired to write her own Rule in which evangelical poverty would be a firm foundation. It was on her deathbed that Clare finally received papal approval for her Rule of Life. Clare goes down in history as the first woman in the Church to have written a rule for women.

As we study Saint Clare more closely, she emerges clearly as a woman with many rich qualities – a woman of great depth, courage, initiative and tenacity, prepared to give all in her following of the Poor Christ. Francis sought her advice on many occasions.

Reflecting on Clare's life can help us to understand more clearly the call of the Gospel in our own lives. It can also help us to rediscover the contemplative dimension of our lives which influences our whole attitude to life.

The writings which Clare has left behind are few. Among them are four inspiring letters addressed to a King's daughter, Agnes of Prague. From these letters we get some idea of the depth of Clare's spirituality.

In her first letter to Agnes, Clare is already established as an outstanding contributor to the Gospel spirituality of Saint Francis. Clare encourages Agnes in her choice of Christ as her spouse and devotes a large part of her letter to a consideration of poverty. As she continues her

journey along the path of poverty we see her filled with a great reverence and respect for everything created.

Clare's life of contemplation is characterized by the word 'gaze'. It is at the heart of her spirituality, as seen in her letters, and so we may suppose it was at the heart of her own personal prayer life.

*'Gaze upon Him, think about Him and contemplate Him, as you desire to imitate Him'* (Second Letter to Agnes of Prague). Clare leads us to that place where we find our fullest satisfaction in gazing on, looking at, and contemplating Christ. To see Christ is to see God. This happens when we *'gaze upon Him, consider Him, contemplate Him'*. This is Clare's way of leading us step by step into the heart of God.

Images of Christ fill Clare's letters and above all that of 'Christ the mirror' (Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague). *Looking into this mirror we see what God created us to be, and what we are called to become.* In this letter written shortly before her death one can notice a whole programme of prayer summarized in a series of verbs:

***Look into the mirror of Christ daily,  
Ponder there your own face,  
See what you need to become, ready for God  
Contemplate in this mirror Christ and His  
stupendous poverty,  
Look at His work on our behalf,  
Consider His humility,  
Contemplate His love, Consider, look and  
contemplate.***

This surely reflects the spirit that permeated all of her religious life.

Someone has said that her life could be summed up as one long look at Christ. *'Look at Christ'*. She tells us again and again, and in our lives we need to find ways of doing just that – looking at and learning from Christ. As Clare was dying she prayed: *'May you be blessed, O Lord, you Who have created my soul'* (Legend of Clare). It seems fitting that we also thank God, for having created this great woman of such deep faith and conviction, who has been an inspiration, a light, a guide for so many over the centuries.

In conclusion, let us receive the blessing attributed to Clare:

***May the Lord be with you always  
and may you be with the Lord, always  
and in every place.***

**Sr Pat Cullen fmm**

## *Franciscan Vocation*

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Jesus' words relate particularly to people. Even the least important people are part of Christ's body. But Paul and John extended their perception of the 'body of Christ', the incarnation or embodiment of God, to include everything. In Paul's Letter to the Colossians and in the introduction to John's Gospel we read that everything that exists comes into being in and through Christ. Today, thanks to a global crisis, we are more aware of the charity we owe to other things than people – our whole natural environment, in fact. Saint Francis was intensely aware of the indwelling of Christ, glorifying God in all natural things. He called them all "brother" or "sister".

Francis was a supernova among nature mystics, but his sensitivity and aesthetic joy in nature was not unique. Many people feel this sense that nature is sacred. For Francis it was far more intense than for us, but this kind of intuitive pantheism is a common characteristic of those inspired by Francis' vision.

Those of us who, in some measure, share Francis' perception of reality, struggle to give it expression as far as we are able. Few can follow Francis in his unique path of life. It was too hard, too heroic for most of us. But we do sense that simplicity of life is a blessing, that small is beautiful and voluntary poverty is liberating. In the three Orders of the Society of Saint Francis we cultivate simplicity of life, whether in the First Order, as religious brothers and sisters, in the Second Order, in a contemplative life of enclosure, or in the Third Order of secular Franciscans, married or single, having homes of their own and in ordinary employments.

One of the first things Francis did to express his love of Christ in the littlest, the most despised of his human brothers, was to care for lepers in a barn. This was an extremely courageous thing to do. Everyone was terrified of leprosy, and had draconian laws to distance lepers as far as possible from the public. There was a real risk of infection, and in Francis' time it was believed to be much greater than we now know it to be. But it was not a calculated act of daring; Francis was moved by passionate love for Christ whom he saw in those afflicted with the dreaded disease. Francis was a heart person, not a head person.

Franciscans of the First order focus much of their lives around people with disabilities of one kind or another, physical, emotional or social. Often these fall through the complex net of professional social and medical services. We have a number of times initiated work to meet the need of individuals or groups who are not catered for in professional agencies. After World War One, our founding brothers initiated a new kind of care among the million or more unemployed who spent most of their lives on the open road, begging food and sleeping under hedges and in barns. They went on the roads with them, and later accepted a farm property from one of the Dorset nobility that was a more comfortable shelter to supplement the scarce vagrant hostels provided by the Government. This became the first Anglican Franciscan Friary. During World War Two the brothers cared for

delinquent boys there, and later they established a boarding school for misfit (referred to officially as 'maladjusted') boys aged between nine and sixteen.

The Friary continued to provide for older boys on probation and for other men with disabilities or in sickness. In our smaller houses also we provide hospitality to people in need of support of one kind or another – in friendship and understanding rather than in material aid. Our little house in the dockland slums of East London had been a brothel, but when brothers moved in they opened its doors to many who would be welcome nowhere else. They also ran a hostel next door for visiting coloured seamen, unwelcome in the regular hostels.

In 1964, after the brothers had been persistently petitioned by Bishop Philip Strong for years, two of us arrived in Australia as "£10 Poms" to set up house here. We were soon joined by three more from England and began to attract young Australian men.

Saint Francis would have been delighted to see the derelict building we had been assigned by the Diocese - rusty roof, rotted boards and wobbly stumps. It seemed to be only the dirt and cobwebs that kept it from falling down! But with energetic help, largely from school students, we repaired and painted the building. We soon found room also for social misfits and strugglers similar to those in the Dorset Friary. A few years later we opened a halfway house in Taringa, an inner suburb, for discharged psychiatric patients, the first one in Queensland. This later became a hostel for 'problem' secondary school students. In the early 1980s, the Brookfield pottery moved its venue to Fortitude Valley, to hire and train long-term unemployed.

Sometimes we work in established professional organisations also. One of our Brisbane brothers is a registered nurse who works in remote indigenous communities; another is a senior registrar at Princess Alexandra Hospital. In 1993 we accepted the charge of St Phillip's, Annerley where we now minister. We provide chaplaincies in three Hospitals and Queensland University, ministry with Vietnam vets in their bike club and with the Mission to Seafarers. And our Monday morning "coffee club" offers friendship and refreshments to a number of lonely and hard-pressed individuals who are unemployed or have a disability. We don't have room for long-term residential care, but we have provided short-term accommodation to families from the country visiting sick relatives in hospital. And we have brothers working with two organisations that cater for people with disabilities: EPIC and SWARA. EPIC organises regular employment at home for those unable to travel and training to enter regular employment. SWARA is a day care centre for people with a wide range of disabilities. At times we wander further afield to preach and for parish and school missions, retreats and quiet days.

## *Franciscan Vocation (from page 3)*

After this trumpet voluntary about our visible activities, we must not forget the real basis of our life as Religious – the daily prayer, meditation and study, and the liturgy of Office and Eucharist. Without this inner source of renewal and strength our outside work would lose its vitality and value. It is our source of energy, understanding, and discipline and, above all, confirms for us that it is Christ whom we serve and God’s kingdom that we seek to advance.

Community life, like normal family life, is also a source of both strength and discipline. It is a tremendous support but, as everyone knows, family life can be difficult at times. Our frustrations and humiliations keep our feet firmly on the ground and save us, hopefully, from ever feeling “holier than thou”.

**Br William ssf**

## *Br Ghislain of Taizé Visits Cannon Hill Anglican College*

Brother Ghislain of the Taizé ecumenical religious community in France visited Cannon Hill Anglican College for a full day on Monday 23 July. Br Ghislain brought with him the gentleness and loving approach for which Taizé is renowned. The visit was part of Taizé’s worldwide *Pilgrimage of trust on earth – “choosing to love, choosing hope”*. The Brother’s message for our senior students was very simple, that regardless of life’s experiences we can always find hope. This hope is found in the love of God as shown in the life of Jesus Christ and it finds expression in the community of faith.

We are grateful to our Franciscan Brothers, to Brother James for organizing this visit and to Brother Nathan for assisting Br Ghislain facilitate these inspiring sessions. We at CHAC have made a commitment to continue to pray for the wonderful work and example of those who live the religious life.

Brother Ghislain met with two Year 11 and two Year 12 Life and Faith classes as well as a Study of Religion class. These classes were a mixture of sharing his message, answering the many questions from students and teaching the distinctive method of Taizé prayer. As well as this the whole of our Year 12 group experienced a short Taizé prayer service.



Fr Tom Sullivan, Br Ghislain, Robyn Bell (Principal), Br Nathan-James

This was a wonderful experience for both the students and staff who were privileged to meet Br Ghislain. The visit has resulted in us talking with Brother Nathan SSF about a follow-up Taizé Worship Workshop, which he is pleased to help us with.

**Fr Tom Sullivan, Chaplain, CHAC**



Brad Mills (left), SSF Companion, leads the procession at ASSG Chapel 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary



Russell Pitt, SSF Companion, reads the Gospel at All Souls St Gabriel’s School Chapel 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary

Visit our Website: [www.franciscan.org.au](http://www.franciscan.org.au)

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