

TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



December 1999

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TO ALL THAT WILL BE, YES!

JUST THIS MINUTE I had a phone call from a telemarketer who wanted to give me, free, a Rand McNally Road Atlas, in return for my giving a thirty-day trial to their travel agency services. I asked the lady if she wanted to know my annual income. She said, "No, sir, we don't ask about that." So I said, "I'm afraid my annual income is too low to take advantage of any of the wonderful opportunities you're offering." "Thank you for your time," she replied. It's little things like this that make the life of Franciscan simplicity not only a joy but a hoot!

So much has happened since the first issue of **TROUBADOUR** that it's hard to know where to begin to catch our readers up. First, we planned an October issue but now it's December. We still hope to publish monthly but for now quarterly seems to be the schedule we can meet. We had our first Board Meeting in October, on a weekend near St. Francis Day, and you can read about that in an article by Anne Scheibner, who is, among other things, Secretary to the Board.

I went to St. Benedict's Trappist Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, in November for a weeklong workshop on teaching Centering Prayer. Thomas Keating, OCSO, gave two conferences during the week, and was a tremendous inspiration. I realized that Thomas is 77 years old, so that means I have seventeen more years to become as young, vibrant and joyful as he is! Anne had a short retreat at the Mercy Center in Madison, CT, to prepare for an Advent Quiet Day on the Year of Jubilee which she and I will conduct on December 18 for St. James Church, New London.

The kitchen is now installed, and we served our first hospitality meal last Wednesday for folk who gathered to hear Chuck Matthei talk about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement in our first Wednesday Night Meeting for Clarification of Thought. Other December events include me on St. Francis and Nathaniel's famous tuna casserole, Anne on the Biblical Jubilee and Christmas Tree trimming and caroling.

Anne is serving as "general contractor" for all the renovations of the House, and has coordinated electricians, carpenters, plumbers, architects and inspectors various in their work to make the House a home. The first person to actually *inhabit* St. Francis House is Fr. Armando Gonzalez, the Hispanic Missioner at St. James, New London, and my colleague there. Fr. Armando commutes between New London and Boston and lives on the second floor of the House when he is here. He is a joy to have as part of our community – an unexpected surprise arranged by the Holy Spirit. We hope to learn Spanish from Armando and teach him English in return. Welcome, Fr. Armando!

And the IRS gave us an early Christmas present. St. Francis House, Inc. has received a "determination of tax exempt status" as a 501(c)3 organization, effective June 1999. That means, of course, that gifts to St. Francis House are tax deductible contributions under the Federal income tax code.

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Finally, to correct an oversight, I need to acknowledge that the logo of the Dancing Francis, which was designed by Mary Ann Jackman, TSSF, is used with her gracious permission. Since the logo is also used by *The Franciscan Times* and widely associated with the Third Order, Society of St. Francis, American Province, it seems right to say clearly that the Third Order Chapter is not responsible for St. Francis House, financially or otherwise. I believe our ministry is genuinely Franciscan in spirit, but it certainly isn't the creature of the Third Order, American Province Chapter, and they are not responsible for us in any way.

Another oversight in the first issue of **TROUBADOUR** was that we forgot to put our phone number anywhere in the issue. We have now corrected that on the masthead, and included our e-mail address as well. We welcome communications by mail, telephone, or e-mail. Or just drop by if you're in the neighborhood!

All of us are learning patience – with one another, with the pace of renovations, with the graciousness of God's insistence that we live our life together one day at a time without a "program" to limit the Spirit's guidance. May God give all of you a joyful Christmas season, and the opportunity to grow in grace in the new year, the new century and the new millennium, whenever you think those times begin!

■ Emmett Jarrett, TSSF

READERS WRITE:

22 October 1999

I enjoyed reading the first issue of **TROUBADOUR**. It was good to read the stories of how your life is being formed in this new place. I read from **TROUBADOUR** in our lunchtime sharing yesterday. As I was preparing the reading from the daily lectionary and readings Psalm 143 – "teach me the way I should go..." I was reminded of the practice of St. Francis House – "do whatever he tells us." We reflected on our common life at The Open Door and rejoiced with you and remembered St. Francis House in our prayers as you continue to listen for what God is telling you to do...

Joe Hinds, The Open Door
Atlanta, Georgia



First Board Meeting

BIBLE STUDY AND WALKING TOUR LEAD TO "CONVERSION OF LIFE"

SCRUBBING SINKS AND toilets, shopping for mini-blinds and shower curtains and locating sheets and knives and forks: there's nothing quite like a deadline for focusing the work. I had decided in September that if the asbestos was out and the heating system up then we would christen St. Francis House with a slumber party in honor of the board meeting. One of the only useful things I learned in business school is that if you want to know why an organization or group has the structure and communication patterns it has, you need to look at how it started. So here is how we started.

The official board meeting on Saturday morning, October 9, began with Bible Study. Using the African Method of Bible Study, we read the Gospel lection for the day: Matthew 9:35-10:4, in which Jesus has compassion on the crowds who are "like sheep without a shepherd," and commissions his twelve disciples to cast out unclean spirits and heal the sick. Emmett and I have found this method of Bible study enormously useful in previous settings – both regular meetings and one-time conferences. Used in a disciplined fashion, it never fails to focus both the individuals and the group and bring them to a common mind on whatever the work may be.

Following Bible study we went on a walking tour of our immediate neighborhood: the courthouses, performing arts center, churches of five denominations, supermarket, homeless shelter, gutted gingerbread Victorian and old rooming house – the one our architect neighbor told us replaced our house as the drug center for the neighborhood! – and many Victorians which have been turned into lawyers' offices and multi-family apartments, plus two small parks, one currently a rubble-filled vacant lot and the other adjacent to the section 8 housing high rise. This walk gave rise to the suggestion that reporting on the theme of "walking the bounds" (the traditional Anglican idea of the local setting of Christian community)



should be an ongoing feature in the **TROUBADOUR**.

The rest of the morning was spent reviewing our original mission statement, which is included as an insert to this issue. What emerged from the conversation was the realization that the "Program" heading should be replaced with the word "Life." This helps explain our underlying intention and increasingly clear sense that we are not a "program" and do not aspire to be one. This may not help our friends and family who are saying, "But what exactly is it that you are doing?" The answer is "Conversion of Life" – both our own and making that opportunity available to our neighbors, friends and colleagues, and those who join us for various periods of time for prayer, study, and work. So "Conversion of Life" is the answer, although in true rabbinical tradition with a Christian twist, it is also the question. And that seems right.

We reviewed and approved the draft three-year budget which has been submitted to the IRS as part of the 501(c)3 tax exemption application. We agreed that a contribution envelope will be designed to be included in the December issue of the **TROUBADOUR**. We then considered a proposal from board member Canon Edward W. Rodman on behalf of the Episcopal Urban Caucus.

BOARD AFFIRMS PROPOSAL FOR TRIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH EUC

THE PROPOSAL IS that St. Francis House be the administrative headquarters for the Episcopal Urban Caucus from now through the Episcopal Church's General Convention in the summer of 2000. This would include receiving registration forms for the annual assembly and being the center for information for the Caucus. If the arrangement works out from both the EUC and St. Francis House standpoints, a proposal for a long-term arrangement could be acted upon by the EUC Board in March of next year. We are all excited by the possibility that St. Francis House could become a place where projects important to the EUC find a healthy spiritual grounding and continue the EUC tradition of spinning off important work. Ed Rodman already plans to use St. Francis House for a

meeting of the National Institute for Dialogues on Multi-Culturalism & Anti-Racism. The partnership will also give us budgetary support for developing our own database and bookkeeping capacities. The proposal was unanimously accepted.

Following Evening Prayer, at which Sarah Jarrett preached her first sermon (printed elsewhere in this issue), St. Francis House hosted a reception for friends and colleagues who have been part of the initial start-up effort. Over 25 people attended, including the rectors of two local Episcopal churches and their families, the Hispanic missionary at St. James, New London, members of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, the director of the neighboring Drop-In Learning Center, the director of Equity Trust, and my parents. The locally produced cheese for the reception was donated by Cato Corner Farm. Children scampered through all three floors checking out Sarah and Nathaniel's as yet unrenovated attic rooms with their playhouse-size walk-in closets and windows overlooking the street. Everyone stopped by to admire Gladys Rodman's work in the garden.

TAKING ON THE WILDERNESS IN ST. FRANCIS' BACKYARD

WHILE THE BOARD LABORED on financial data, Gladys Rodman was hard at work in the back yard laying the foundation for a meditation garden. St. Francis House sits on an L-shaped lot. The bottom part of the "L" is our off-street parking on Cottage Street. A hill rises precipitously to a postage-stamp size backyard. It took 7 hours of hoe and brush-breaking work to reveal a potentially lovely graded area roughly 20' x 20'. Nathaniel joined his godmother in swinging the machete. Sarah learned a lot about planting strawberries, herbs and flowers and agreed to be responsible for the first week's watering. Gladys firmly refused our invitation to join the board. "I'll come and get the garden going for you," she said. "I don't do fund-raising, but I will do that." Thank God for such a diversity of gifts in the same Spirit!

■ Anne Scheibner



MERRY CHRISTMAS !



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SARAH'S SERMON

Sarah Jarrett preached her first sermon – a dialogue sermon – at Evening Prayer at the end of the first Board Meeting. The text was Matthew 9:35-10:4.

Today, October 9, 1999, is when Jesus went to all the cities and the villages. So he could teach in their synagogues and preach the gospel of the kingdom. And healing every disease and infirmity. Once Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion for them because they were helpless and harassed like little sheep without a shepherd. Now what do you think this problem is about? When Jesus says this to his disciples, what do you think this makes you feel? The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray there for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. . . . To end that part of the sermon I would like to talk about St. Francis House. I think this experiment is going to be very interesting. How about you? St. Francis House was for people to stay for awhile. That is what I think. What do you think St. Francis House is here for? I think this will be a learning experience for my whole family. Do you think this will work? This will end my sermon.

■ Sarah Jarrett

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