

**Minister's Letter**  
**Brother Clark Berge SSF**  
**Minister General of the First Order Brothers, writes:**



Dear Friends,

I am about eight months into my term as Minister General. During this time I have visited most of the houses and met most of the brothers throughout the world. This quick overview of the Order impresses me deeply and fills me with a great feeling of optimism and humility: people are hearing and responding to the Gospel. The brothers (actually Franciscans everywhere) are playing an important part in this work.

Our Franciscan responsibility is to point to God who loves all people. This proclamation involves preaching sermons: every Sunday and often in-between, the brothers preach and teach; also brothers live with people in precarious circumstances throughout the world. Through our witness we encourage others to recognize they are not alone in the world, and in the deepest sense it is God who gives them comfort, hope and strength. Our ministries of prayer, hospitality, and service are very diverse and involve many people. Although my visits to the provinces necessarily involved a lot of meetings, it is a great blessing for me that in my travels I have been able to share some pastoral experiences with the brothers. In Honiara, Solomon Islands, we went to the Central Hospital to take Holy Communion to the sick at 4:45 in the morning, bringing the Sacrament and a word of love before the doctors started their rounds.

In Brisbane the brothers run a parish which is a microcosm of the world: people from all over Asia and the South Pacific find their way to St. Philip's Church. In addition to preaching, I went with them to visit the sick in hospitals, to work in an adult day care center, and to visit with students at the University chaplaincy. In Hamilton, New Zealand, I shared in the brothers' marvellous ministry in the midst of a community of different social service agencies: we shared in experimental liturgies, and had tea in a group home for Maori boys.

In New York we had dinner one night with migrant workers: the brothers teach English, and advocate for the workers; they also volunteer in shelters, and run a retreat centre. In San Francisco the brothers cooperate in efforts to relieve the hungry and poor. We worked one day in a soup kitchen, serving 2,500 people in one day; they are also busy in shelters, night ministry and hospitals.

I stayed one night in the friary at Katerada in Papua New Guinea, where for the last eight months the brothers have shared their home with five families, the victims of a terrible flood, and have given away food and money to people who lost everything; I visited schools around the country where the brothers teach religious education, and art in one instance.

In the European Province I helped the brothers working with pilgrims at Holy Island, Walsingham, Canterbury and Assisi, and at Hilfield Friary I did some weeding; it was a way to share in their extraordinary Project combining interfaith ministry with environmental work.

These ministries are the way we live in a divided world. Because we differ on the various ecclesial issues facing the Anglican Communion, the care for the poor and the earth and the proclamation of God's love are part of a larger ministry of reconciliation and witness to truths which are of great importance. I am talking about our Baptism, our interconnectedness in Christ, and of God's unfailing care for the marginalized in today's world. When we stay close to these truths it is easier to keep our on-going conversation about other issues in perspective. Presently we are committed to being a world-wide community in love and service to the world following the example of St. Francis in a radical devotion to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your love and prayers for us. I am grateful for all that you do to support the whole Franciscan movement.

May the Lord give you peace.

**Clark Berge SSF**