TSSF's networks of service

Eight hundred years ago, Francis is reputed to have sought out the advice of his best friend and mentor, Clare, about what was holier: to pray or to work? Should he continue to lead a life of humble service amongst the excluded people of society, as he had been doing, or retreat into a monastic life committed to silence and prayer? Her response, after considerable prayer, was full of wisdom: his vocation was to combine both vocations into his own unique form of spirituality: a life of compassionate service grounded in contemplative prayer.

This spirituality is embedded in our Three Ways of Service: Prayer, Study and Work. Over the past 10 years, several networks have either evolved within TSSF or have engaged members of the Third Order (having been established by members of the First Order). These have encouraged and supported fellow members as well as establishing deeper ties with the other Franciscan Orders. They include: the Contemplative Group; TSSF Study and Prayer (S&P); the JPIC Network; Franciscan Aid; and the Provincial Engagements Group (PEG).

The Contemplative Group
A workshop at the 1999 Residential Chapter led to a group of 18 tertiaries discussing 'Leading the Solitary Life in the TSSF'. Afterwards they hoped to keep in touch with each other, and find others who shared this vocation. Dorothy and John Dennis write:

We became linked together by providing our names to each other and publishing some news in a six monthly 'Solitaries Newsletter'. Among us are some with a strong vocation, others in whom it is less marked and many who have become solitary by reason of age or infirmity and who give more space and time to this life of prayer because they are no longer easily able to go to meetings.

Backing of Provincial Chapter was gained with the recommendation that a minimum requirement might be: 1. to submit the annual report that all tertiaries make to their Area Formation Guardian and to attend the Renewal of Vows at Francistide; 2. to have our name on the list of our local group and honour that attachment by praying regularly for our brothers and sisters; 3. to discuss with our spiritual director what is appropriate regarding attendance at meetings.

The local groups have been encouraged to be aware of a tertiary who is taking a more solitary path. Many of them do attend local group meetings regularly and frequently hold office as well. The local group also needs to include that person in their fellowship by prayer, the imparting of news, making requests for prayer, and establishing regular contacts. Thus the possibilities of this way of life can be explored and monitored for the benefit of the whole Order.
The newsletter has recently changed its name to the 'Contemplatives Newsletter', abandoning the word 'Solitary' with its connotations of the hermit life, as few, if any, tertiaries are living as hermits. Their role is simply to be more contemplative than active.

There are now a little over 100 of us. Two things firmly bind us to each other. The first is the circulated inter-cession sheet, laid out in Areas, so that we can all pray for each other. We can also make contact with those who live nearby and support each other in that way. The second is the newsletter itself, intended as a means of encouraging those who receive it to continue on their own journey.

For more information:
John and Dorothy Dennis, 01962 868881. or johndor_dennis@talktalk.net.

TSSF Study and Prayer Group

Our Principles (Days 17 and 18) and the TSSF Basic Rule encourage us to study in an individually suitable way. The Study and Prayer steering group defines study very broadly as a part of our formation, seeing it as "what tertiaries are thinking, reading, discussing and maybe writing about". For some years we have been organiseing study events in our Franciscan houses, always grateful to SSF for their hospitality. An annual study week takes place each October at Alnmouth Friary, plus a weekend event in the spring which has often been at the Clares' guest house at Freeland, though in 2010 it was at Hilfield Friary. At the study week tertiaries choose their own topic; it is always stimulating to see new ideas and connections emerge about the Franciscan life and about the Third Order. The weekend events are themed (Obedience; the work of Fr Richard Rohr; the Enneagram). Written papers form the staple diet of these events, and can be anything from simple, serious reflection to something more academic. Many of these papers are on the Study and Prayer page of the TSSF website (http://www.tssf.org.uk/Members/TSSF_Studies.html)

Tertiary creativity is expressed in a variety of forms: apart from the papers, we have enjoyed a meditation on icons painted by a participant; a guided spiritual walk; and an artist in residence.

At these events, we share the life and worship of a First or Second Order Franciscan community for a short time. We find this deepens vocations and Third Order fellowship, and indeed it is partly why these activities are called "study and prayer". A more recent focus has been on encouraging study by individual tertiaries and within their local groups and areas. It is encouraging that local initiatives are increasingly taking place, such as the 2010 pan-London area meeting on "Obedience". In September 2010 we organised our largest event on behalf of TSSF, a conference led by Richar Rohr on 'Action and Contemplation: Franciscan Spirituality Today' at which most of the 450
people present were from the Franciscan Orders. The two days spent together were challenging and inspiring.

TSSF Study and Prayer is intended to be a mainstream part of Third Order life and of our collective formation as tertiaries, encouraging the sharing of ideas and spiritual formation.
For more information:
John Wiltshire: katherine.wiltshire1@ntlworld.com or 07717 547672; or Tom Keighley: nurprc@nursing.u-net.com

The Justice Peace & Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Network
This Network was set up in April 2003 by Averil Swanton with the encouragement of Dick Bird, then Minister Provincial, at a time when Br Damian was trying to build closer links between the First Order and Christian Aid. She invited all Areas to nominate a JPIC representative and the Network now has JPIC Area Representatives in nearly 75% of the T O Areas as well as representatives from SSF, CSF and SFO. It has operated primarily as an e-mail communication network, keeping its members informed of JPIC news, events and campaigns.

JPIC has hosted a few study weeks in partnership with the TSSF Study and Prayer group. The first two took place at Alnmouth, and the third was at Hilfield. We wanted to actively show our support of Hilfield Friary and the way in which it promotes "the Franciscan values of care for creation, working for peace and justice, and seeking respectful dialogue with people of other faiths."

In 2008 the Network was invited by Br Hugh to send a delegate to the annual conference of the JPIC Links Group of Religious (which until then had only included members of Religious communities within the Roman Catholic and Anglican Orders). Nancy Adams attended on behalf of TSSF in 2008 and 2009, after which the Links Group invited TSSF, along with other secular Orders, to join as a full member. Chapter agreed to this in 2009. The most recent meeting of JPIC Area Reps set up a Steering Group with representatives of TSSF, SSF and SFO to take the JPIC Network forward over the years ahead.
For more information:
Nancy Adams: nancy@newbigging.org

Franciscan Aid
This charitable trust was set up by Br. Geoffrey SSF in 1982 with Mary Johnson and Bob Diaper (Guardian and Treasurer respectively) of the European Province of TSSF. Its object is "to relieve poverty and advance education of deprived people from third world countries whose needs may not be covered by other agencies and those with whom the Franciscans are in contact and whose needs are known so that they can be aided quickly and precisely."

The trust is now managed by a group of UK tertiaries, in consultation with the Minster General and Ministers Provincial TSSF and the Minister General and European Minister Provincial SSF. The trustees meet
three times a year to review applications from TSSF and SSF members throughout the world. Some recent examples of our work are:

- A refrigerator for an Evangelical Lutheran Boys' Home and replacing 20 computers for Hope Secondary School, both in Beit Jala, Palestine.
- A sanitation project for disabled people in Honiara, Solomon Islands.
- Payment of registration fees for two nurses for midwifery training in Zambia.
- A Franciscan Reading Room in Brazil's largest favela (shanty town).
- Refurbishing wells for Mongolian horses after two years of terrible winters.
- Providing fans, blackboards and desks for Deedhandu school, Delhi

We generally do not fund building costs or tertiary education fees. Detailed funding guidelines and an application form can be obtained from the Secretary: Helen Mossop: hmossop@doctors.org.uk

The Third Order and Mission

One of the ways the Third Order seeks to fulfil our Profession Vow “to spread the knowledge and love of Christ” is our involvement, with the First Order, in the Provincial Engagements Group: PEG, for short. It is where all applications for Franciscan participation in missions are received and considered. PEG consists of the First Order Provincial Ministers, Br. Martin as secretary and a member of the Third Order Provincial Chapter.

Requests received are for parish missions, teaching weeks, and preachers for Holy Week. In addition brothers and sisters are selected to run the Families Camp and the Youth Camp at Hilfield and to be a presence at large gatherings such as Greenbelt, New Wine and Soul Survivor. Arrangements for Missions is quite a lengthy procedure: with review points by PEG along the way, to ensure that it is an appropriate project for us to take on. Sometimes the Team Leader will ask for a tertiary to join that team. The TO representative chooses a person who has volunteered for missions, matching their skills and strengths to the situation.

Third Order involvement in this group provides another opportunity for fellowship and feeling a part of the Society of St. Francis as a whole, and it is hoped the outreach of this group will continue to be a useful resource for the church. For more information:

Pam Saunders: pam_saunders77@hotmail.com