Guest Minister’s Letter

Rev’d Joanna Coney TSSF,
Minister Provincial of the Third Order in the European Province, writes:

Dear Friends,

It is a great delight to be invited to write the Minister's Letter for this edition of the franciscan - devoted as it is to the Third Order. It is always a joy to foster opportunities to further deepen the interdependent relationship between our three Orders within SSF which we all value so highly.

Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few," and challenges us "to go and make disciples of all nations." So as individual Christians, and as a Franciscan community, we hold this gospel imperative always before us and strive to discern how the Third Order can contribute to the bringing in of God's Kingdom.

In my two years as Minister Provincial of the Third Order in the European Province I have been privileged to visit many of our 43 Areas and meet many individual tertiaries. This is always a humbling and encouraging - and, yes, sometimes frustrating - experience. But as I talk and worship with them it never fails to excite me when I learn of their faithful devotion to Christ, and of the mature seriousness with which individual tertiaries live out their vocation and commitment as members of a Religious Order.

It is evident in the depth of prayer and vibrant worship. It is evident in the stunning things initiated and maintained by tertiaries in many parish churches up and down the country and throughout the whole Province. It is evident in the self-giving involvement by individuals and tertiary groups in local communities and in the wider world in amazingly varied and heart-warming ways. It is evident too in the quiet and devoted living out of our life vows: -

To spread the knowledge and love of Christ;
To promote the way of love and harmony with all creation; and
To live joyfully a life of simplicity and humble service.

We may be a dispersed community of 2000 souls of widely differing background and experience, but we are firmly held together by our shared vows, our Franciscan values and our constant shared prayer for one another. As an Order we are growing. We do not recruit, God does that - but we do joyfully make ourselves known to all who might be interested in exploring their vocation with us.
So, as we pray and grow together in the twenty-first century we now ask ourselves:
  What are we for?
  What is God now asking us to be and to do?
  How are we to change and develop?
How can we become more effective labourers in God's vineyard?

Pax et Bonum