

DIVINE MERCY FRATERNITY
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
VERO BEACH, FLORIDA

Regular Meeting: Sun., December 9, at 2:00 PM—South Rm. St. Helen's Christian Living Center.

Council Meeting: Sat. December 15, 9:30 AM—Arby's on west side of Rt 1, at 16th Place, Vero Beach.

Agenda and Schedule for Meeting:

- 2:00 Opening Prayer, Reports, Old/New Business
- 2:20 Blessing of our donations to the Food Pantry
- 2:25 Donna will speak on St. Francis as the originator of the Nativity Scene followed by a sharing of our own personal nativity sets. Please bring your nativity sets to display.
- 2.40 Ongoing Formation: Helen will begin our talks and discussions of Elizabeth of Hungary. Be prepared to show how Elizabeth's life can influence our lives today.
- 3:10 Refreshments and break
- 3:30 Liturgy of the Hours
- 4:00 Closing Prayer and dismissal

Refreshment Committee:

Snacks: Helen Caldarone and Sarah Hardy

Beverages: Donna Haro

Remember in your prayers: Julia McHugh, Jennie Donlin, Jerry Carey, Donna Haro, John Matthews, Fred Schaeffer, Marie Fee, Jack Solloway, Father Richard, and all professed Franciscans in our Florida region who are ill, as well as those members of our Fraternity who cannot attend our meetings regularly.

Upcoming Events: Day of Recollection to be held January 4th at St. Lucie Church in Port St. Lucie, from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Father Michael, a Franciscan priest from St. Lucie Church, will be the speaker. A light breakfast will be provided, but we will have a brown-bag lunch. Cookies and beverages will be supplied.

We have invited Mary Varvaro and her Padre Pio community, and we're looking forward to our first day of prayer together. This is a wonderful opportunity to grow closer to the Lord through prayer, talks, discussions and quiet time. We will be concluding with the Divine Mercy Hour in the Chapel where there will be Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Please come!! Don't let the evil one deter you.

From the Minister's Desk: As we prepare for the arrival of the Christ Child, let us keep our focus on Him. He came into this world as love, and He left this world as a complete sacrifice of love, dying for us, so that we might live. Let us open our hearts to Him and allow Him to fill us to overflowing with this pure love. Merry Christmas!!

Minister: Peggy Rysdyke, SFO

Vice-Minister: Donna M. Haro, SFO

Secretary: Elizabeth Smith, SFO

Treasurer: Sarah Hardy, SFO

Formation Director: Helen Caldarone, SFO

Councillors-at-Large: Ed O'Donnell, SFO,
Fred Schaeffer, SFO, and Kathleen Van Buskirk, SFO

Spir. Assisitant: Fr. Richard P. LaCorte, SFO

Vocation Director: Kathleen Van Buskirk, SFO

Commissioners

Work: Donna M. Haro, SFO

Family: Eugene Caldarone, SFO

Peace and Justice: John Matthews, SFO

Youth: Pauline Pavlick, SFO

Ecology: Fred Schaeffer, SFO

Other: Webmaster/Ed. Fred Schaeffer, SFO

The Celebration of Christmas at Greccio. 1295-1300. Fresco St. Francis, Upper Church, Assisi, Italy

St. Francis began the practice of placing the Child in the Manger at Christmas at Greccio in 1223. When Giotto painted this scene he did not give it in the cramped Greccio chapel but as if taking place in the Assisi Basilica within which this scene is painted.



Formation program for the Eighth Centenary of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-2007)**Year Two: THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT****Month 1. Family and Cultural Traditions**

In last year's program, we discussed what Elizabeth's human ancestry and her call to leave her homeland meant in her life. This year, we want to focus on what these experiences mean in our lives, and for our secular spirituality.

Elizabeth was uprooted from everything that she knew as a child when she was sent to Germany to her future husband's home. All of us, at one time or another, have experienced some uprooting in our lives. We live in a mobile age where people can travel to new cities, even new continents to find greater opportunities. Others have been forced to leave their homelands due to war, poverty or oppression. Whether voluntary or not, leaving everything you know behind is an experience filled with uncertainties, adjustments to make, and often fear, loneliness and regret.

Elizabeth came to see her life in her new homeland as God's will for her. Do I see in the uprooting experiences of my life God's guidance, and do I recognise and accept the opportunities they offer? Do I accept situations and people who cross my path as sent by God, who gives me strength and resilience and makes me strong through them? Elizabeth certainly must have felt loneliness and homesickness too, but she translated this experience into compassion for others. Do I do the same in my loneliness?

Elizabeth cherished the memory of her homeland and its customs while learning and adopting the language and customs of her new home. Am I aware of my family's cultural heritage and customs? What spiritual goods in them can enrich my life and the culture around me?

We can extend these reflections still further. One of our tasks as Secular Franciscans is to bring God's love to the world around us. How do we look on those who live near us who belong to other cultures, or who have been uprooted from their homes, whether immigrants, migrant workers, single people or families seeking new opportunities? Do we accept them and try to help them fit in? Do we show respect for their cultures? Do we invite them to join with us in our community of faith and our local parish?

Scripture:

The entire book of Ruth offers much for reflection on this subject: it tells of the difficulties of immigration in ancient Israel: it is the story of an Israelite woman named Naomi who left her homeland because of a famine, and her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth. Out of love, Ruth followed her Jewish mother-in-law back home to the Israel, adopted the Jewish religion and married in her new homeland.

Exodus 23:9 "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Gospel:

Luke 13:29 (cf. Mt 8:11) - "And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God."



Adoration of the Child. (1439-43), a mural by Florentine painter Fra Angelico.

**Divine Mercy Fraternity of the
Secular Franciscan Order
wishes all our sisters and brothers,
their families and friends,
a Joyful Christmas and good health
and happiness in 2008!**

Let's prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord.

Advent is the time to let the light of the world shine in. It is a time of hope, of expectation as we watch the Christmas story unfold. During Advent we're introduced to a Woman, Mary, and to the Angel Gabriel who greets her with the words: "Hail, full of Grace! The Lord is with you." And Mary replied at the end of Angel Gabriel's message "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your Word." Mary was humble and obedient to God's Will.

As we experienced with great hope the First Sunday of Advent and listened to the Gospel, we find that the focus is on the Second Coming of Jesus. The Gospel commands us to be vigilant because no one knows when the Second Coming will take place except God. This is like our death—death comes as a thief in the night. So we hope for the coming of Christ, we hope to spend eternity with God and we should use Advent to prepare. While it is true that the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) is only required if a mortal sin has been committed, the Sacrament has an immense spiritual value. It is a vast source of grace and since we don't know when death comes, let us always be in the state of grace. The Blessed Virgin Mary at Medjugorje recommends that we go to confession once a month. During Advent it is certainly recommended to go to Confession as a suitable preparation for the Birth of Christ.

A daily or weekly examination of conscience will lead to a more meaningful reconciliation experience when one could identify trends in our life and behavior which can stand improvement. Then, also try to attend daily Holy Mass during this time of preparation and maybe try to make that a permanent part of your morning. Do something meaningful for your family to remind them of the Advent season. Acquire an Advent wreath with four candles and light one each Sunday morning. Have a member of the family read a little prayer as the candle is being lit. Pray for the integrity of your family, for health, for anything that needs prayer. The old adage "Families who pray together, stay together," is true. Make prayer a regular occurrence in your family with your children (single people can join a prayer group or pray alone.) Prayer is a conversation with God!

In Advent frequently pray the Rosary asking Mary our Mother to ask Jesus, her Son, to bless you and your family and to prepare you for the coming of the Lord, the Messiah. As Advent turns into Christmas, you'll want to take your family to Midnight Mass and watch the drama unfold in the Readings and Gospel that are read, and in your heart as you take it all in. We wish you a very special and blessed Advent season. FSS 2007