

FRIARWORKS

FRANCISCAN MINISTRY & MISSION

THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PROVINCE • SUMMER 2008 • VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

Francis and The Sultan

by Fr. Greg Friedman, O.F.M.

Fr. Greg Friedman works in the Electronic Media Department at St. Anthony Messenger Press (SAMP), and is heard as the host of American Catholic Radio on Catholic stations around the country. He also finds time to pastor St. Francis Seraph Church in Cincinnati's inner-city.

The pages of *Friar Works* are often filled with interesting tales of travels of Father Jim. I've enjoyed hearing him at our house, recalling his adventures. This past spring, I got a chance to imitate my brother's travels! He lent me his lightweight traveling habit, and I embarked on a two-week, three-country trek to the Middle East with several colleagues from St. Anthony Messenger Press.

The purpose of the trip was to scout locations and contacts for an upcoming public television documentary. Inspired by an event in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, we are seeking stories which can help our 21st-century world find a peaceful place to share common ground between Islam and Christianity.

In the year 1219, at the height of the Fifth Crusade, St. Francis crossed enemy lines during a cease-fire to meet the Sultan Malek al-Kamil,

commanding the Muslim forces opposing the European Crusaders, near Damietta, Egypt. The two men found a

Francis and the Sultan painted by Sr. Manoel, F.M.M.
Photo by Jack Wintz, O.F.M.

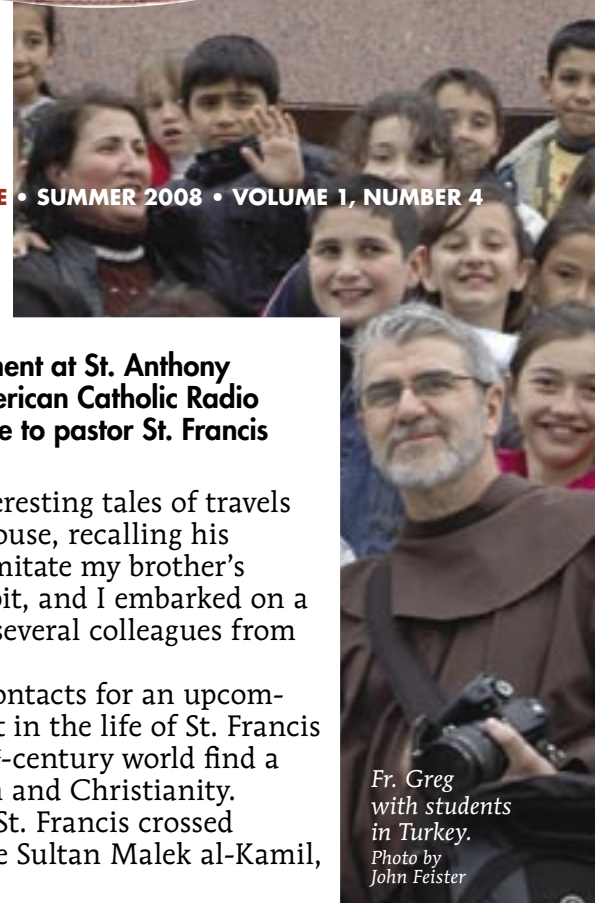


The SAMP team.
Photo supplied by Sr. Kathy Warren, O.S.F.

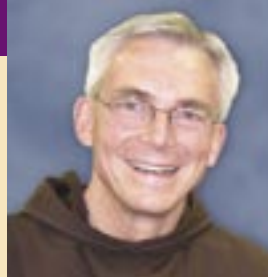
common ground in their shared faith in a God of mercy, who calls us to be peacemakers.

Our Franciscan ministry in St. John the Baptist Province — no matter what our particular work — is a work of reconciliation and peace. In what we at SAMP call “The Damietta Project,” we hope to portray the possibilities for building a peaceful world through the search for common ground in faith. Our hour-long film, projected for completion in 2010, will draw upon the Franciscan story, Muslim and Christian scholars, and the witness of ordinary people in our country and in other parts of the world.

Continued on back page



Fr. Greg with students in Turkey.
Photo by John Feister



Fr. Jim

DEAR FRIENDS,

We are coming up on the first anniversary of Friar Works/Franciscan Ministry & Mission. The merger of the Franciscan Development Office and Franciscan Missionary Union has been beneficial.

As we approach the midway mark in our fiscal year, I can't help but reflect on your kindness to us. You are helping to support our senior and infirm friars, our men in formation and numerous ministries of the province and Order.

The second largest number of gifts we receive are for St. Anthony Bread — gifts for the poor. I am a member of the committee that allocates these gifts. Recent gifts are helping build a school in rural India, a food distribution center and emergency shelter on the Navajo reservation, assisting Kenyan refugees, and providing self-help programs in Shreveport (Read about this on page 2.) and much more. In response to Myanmar's recent devastation, a relief gift was sent through our Order's headquarters. Thank you for touching so many lives.

For more information about our work go to www.franciscan.org and www.stanthony.org. Thanks for supporting us and our many ministries. May the Lord give you peace!

Sincerely,

Fr. James Bok, O.F.M., Director

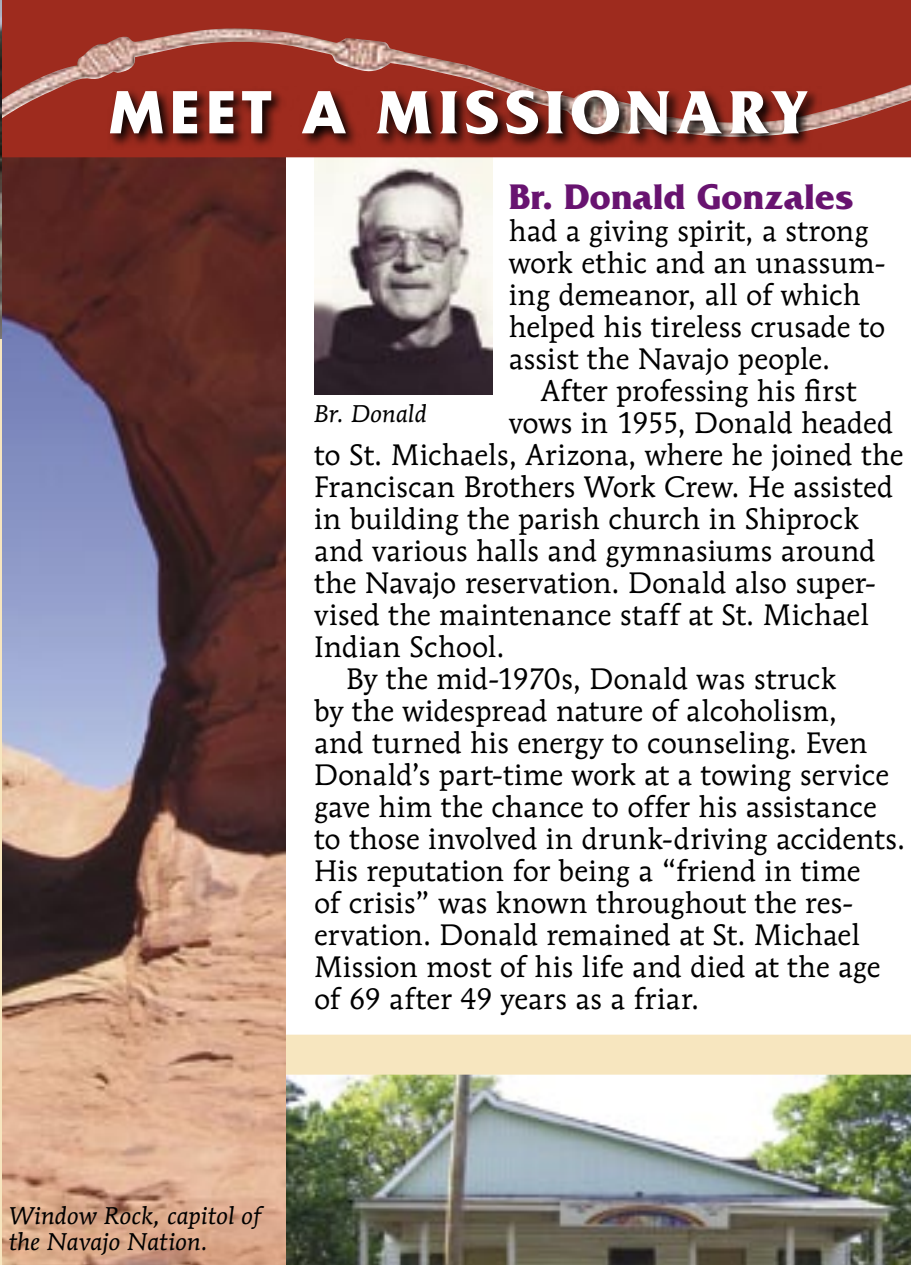


The UTEP Newman Center.
Photo by Jim Bok, O.F.M.

Friar Henry Beck, O.F.M., has been the Catholic Chaplain at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) for just over three years. The Diocese invited Henry to take the position after it had been vacant for five years. "When I started, I had a folding table and chair in a basement room at Holy Family Church about 10 blocks from campus."

UTEP has an enrollment of 19,800 students, 70% of whom are Mexican-American. "The campus is very Catholic," notes Fr. Henry, "so the Church's presence is a must." Thanks to Bishop Ochoa and Jorge Vergen, the Director of Catholic Properties, the

Diocese purchased a house which, after remodeling, became an inviting Newman Center. "Our location is perfect," Fr. Henry notes with enthusiasm. "We are a half-block from the residential area of the campus." With the help of the Diocese and Henry's encouragement a chapel is being added to the back of the Center. "This ministry is touching the lives of young men and women with the Gospel – and the Franciscan spirit – and is a real blessing for the students and me."



MEET A MISSIONARY



Br. Donald

Br. Donald Gonzales had a giving spirit, a strong work ethic and an unassuming demeanor, all of which helped his tireless crusade to assist the Navajo people.

After professing his first vows in 1955, Donald headed to St. Michaels, Arizona, where he joined the Franciscan Brothers Work Crew. He assisted in building the parish church in Shiprock and various halls and gymnasiums around the Navajo reservation. Donald also supervised the maintenance staff at St. Michael Indian School.

By the mid-1970s, Donald was struck by the widespread nature of alcoholism, and turned his energy to counseling. Even Donald's part-time work at a towing service gave him the chance to offer his assistance to those involved in drunk-driving accidents. His reputation for being a "friend in time of crisis" was known throughout the reservation. Donald remained at St. Michael Mission most of his life and died at the age of 69 after 49 years as a friar.

Window Rock, capitol of the Navajo Nation.

A Second Chance at Learning



The future home of the Christian Service Technology Learning Center.

Br. Giovanni Reid, O.F.M. has been the director of Shreveport's Christian Service Program for 10 years. Christian Service is, once again, responding to unaddressed needs in the community.

"The need for a learning center in our area was brought to our attention when we conducted a study and discovered that 40% of our participants had not completed fifth grade," Br. Gio informed us.

"The Christian Service Technology Learning Center will provide a basic adult education program at no cost to participants and will network with local agencies and resources to assist learners and their families to meet their literacy goals," Br. Gio said. The Center staff consists of an administrator, two instructors/counselors in life skills, a GED instructor and an IT director.

With help from the province and other sources the Learning Center is becoming a reality. When the soup kitchen, The Hospitality House, outgrew its location and relocated, Br. Gio and his staff immediately had the idea to use the building for the new learning center. Major repairs and renovations were needed. Br. Gio said with pride, "Our own residents and other community service workers assisted with the construction work. Desks are being built by Wade Correctional inmates, and Jack Spring Electrical Contractors donated their services. What a blessing! Not only will our own clients attend the Center but it is available to other community agencies counseling the poor and illiterate." The Christian Service Program blessings continue in Shreveport!



Br. Gio receives computer hardware for the Center.

New Leadership Team Elected



The new council; Friars Bill, Frank, Dennet, Jeff, Mark and Mike. Photo by Chris Meyer, O.F.M.
Inset: Friar Jim promises obedience to the new provincial. Photo by Frank Jasper, O.F.M.

From Monday, May 19 to Friday, May 23, 123 friars gathered at St. Meinrad Archabbey, in Southern Indiana, for the Provincial Chapter. The Chapter occurs every three years. The *General Constitutions* of the Order say, "It is the responsibility of the provincial chapter to look honestly at the life and activity of the brothers of the province and to search for and propose suitable ways to foster growth and improvement. It is for the chapter to treat matters of major importance and new undertakings and decide these questions by communal deliberation. Finally the chapter carries out elections."

On Thursday the friars elected a Provincial Minister, Vicar and four Councilors. Friar Jeff Scheeler, O.F.M. was elected provincial minister. Friar Jeff has served as the vicar provincial for the past nine years, and has an abundance of enthusiasm and love for our Franciscan life. He will be responsible for the spiritual and corporal wellbeing of the province. His main focus, as the title provincial minister implies, will be to minister to the friars throughout the province. Friar Frank Jasper, O.F.M., a clinical psychologist from Indianapolis, was elected vicar. The provincial and vicar serve a six-year term.



Four friars were elected to three-year terms as Councilors. Friar Mark Soehner, O.F.M., has been the pastor of St. Aloysius Church in downtown Detroit. Just completing a sabbatical, he will join the administrative team at the interprovincial formation house in Chicago. Friar Bill Farris, O.F.M., was re-elected to council for a second term. He is the President of Roger Bacon High School in Cincinnati. Friar Dennet Jung, O.F.M., just completing his assignment at the interprovincial novitiate, was elected to a third term. He will receive a new assignment in July. Friar Michael Dubec, O.F.M., is the superior of the friary and pastoral assistant at Mother of Good Counsel Church in Hazard,



Top: Gathered for morning prayer.
Above: Voting on a chapter proposal.
Photos by Frank Jasper, O.F.M.

Kentucky. These friars will assist the provincial in his administration of the province and ministry to the friars.

In addition to the elections to leadership, the friars addressed other issues that will impact the province over the next three years. Please pray for the new leadership team and the province.



Friar Andy, left, swears in the new Council while Friar John holds the Gospel while kneeling.
Photo by Frank Jasper, O.F.M.

CHECK US OUT ON THE WEB!

The Province: www.franciscan.org

Post a prayer request at St. Anthony Shrine: www.stanthony.org

PILGRIMAGE ANYONE?

JOIN FR. JIM on a pilgrimage to Brazil and Argentina October 6-18. For a detailed itinerary return this coupon or drop us an email.

Name

Address

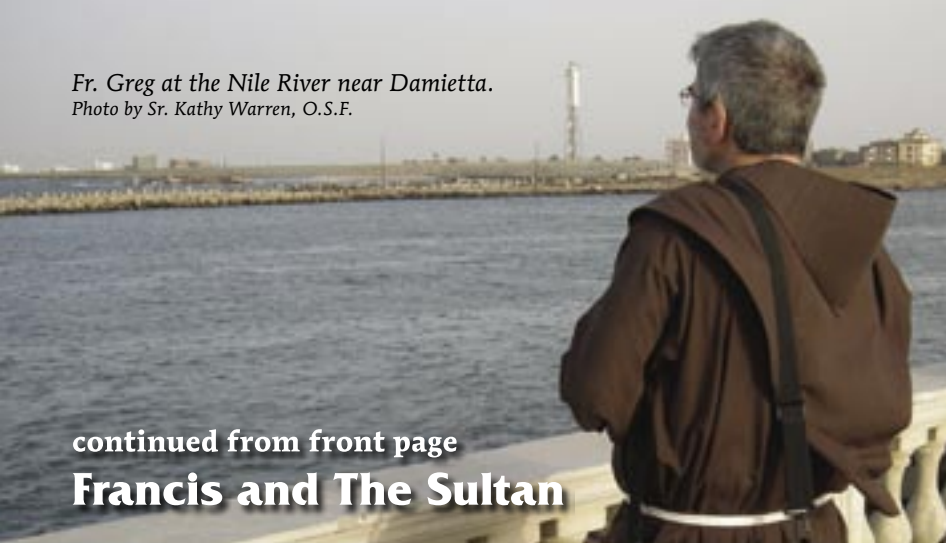
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Fr. Greg at the Nile River near Damietta.
Photo by Sr. Kathy Warren, O.S.F.



continued from front page
Francis and The Sultan



Franciscan Sr. Kathy Warren interviews Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, Vatican ambassador to Egypt.
Photo by Greg Friedman, O.F.M.

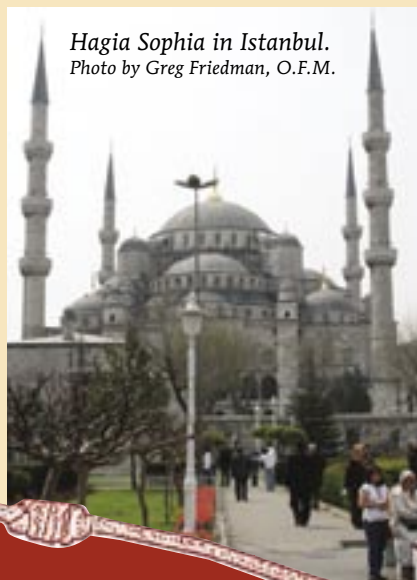
Participating with me on our trip were members of our SAMP production team: John Feister, Sr. Kathy Warren, O.S.F., and independent film director Joyce Hart. In Turkey we visited Muslim shrines, Franciscan churches and the House of Mary, revered by Christians and Muslims as the place where the Blessed Mother lived in Turkey after Christ's Ascension. Along the way, we met Muslims committed to interreligious dialogue, Catholic and Orthodox leaders, and lots of ordinary folks.

From Turkey we traveled to Syria to visit Deir Mar Musa, a centuries-old mountaintop monastery, abandoned for 200 years and re-opened in 1991 as a haven of hospitality where Muslims and Christians come together.

The final stop on our journey landed us in Egypt, where St. Francis met with the Sultan. In Cairo, we met with Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, the Vatican ambassador who has vast experience in Muslim-Christian relations. At Damietta, we imagined Francis coming ashore where the Mediterranean and the Nile River meet, and saw the Grand Mosque in Damietta, being reconstructed. Perhaps the Sultan — and maybe Francis himself — visited this mosque.

We're now sorting through the thousands of images, miles of videotape and lots of memories. We've promised to keep in touch with our new friends in three Middle Eastern lands, across cultures, and in a shared faith in a merciful God. Our Muslim friends say, *inshallah* — God willing. From this journey will come, God willing, the story of a way for people of our time to meet in peace. To learn more visit www.damiettaproject.org.

Hagia Sophia in Istanbul.
Photo by Greg Friedman, O.F.M.



International JPIC Council Meets

By Donna Graham, O.S.F.



International JPIC council

A Franciscan Sister of Oldenburg Sr. Donna is the JPIC director for our Province of St. John the Baptist. She is the only woman of 103 provinces to serve in this capacity.

St. Francis Seraph Retreat Center, high up a mountain in Talisay City, Cebu, Philippines, was the gathering place for the OFM International Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Council meeting in February. Each province has a JPIC director whose task is to “animate” the friars’ care for creation and to seek peace and justice in the spirit of Francis.

As president of the English-Speaking Conference, I joined ten conference presidents, the JPIC Animation Committee, and directors of the Curia’s JPIC Office to discuss global issues. We developed areas of discussion for the next General Chapter including the promotion of environmental justice, active non-violence and conflict resolution, ethical use of financial and natural resources and giving special attention to the excluded and marginalized.

Our Filipino hosts arranged experiences to help us understand life in the Philippines. The poverty and consequent struggles were very evident in our visits. The Filipino friars are truly living Franciscan values as they support the poor and work for change in their country.

FRIARWORKS

**FRANCISCAN
MINISTRY & MISSION**

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