



'Year of the Family'

The seventh annual Interfaith Community Thanksgiving Service is set for Sunday, Nov. 23 at the Summerville Presbyterian Church starting at 7 p.m. The theme for the service will be Year of the Family. All are welcome. Shown here are committee members (top row from left) Eugene Fuerst, Rev. Converse Hunter, Doris Wolven, Ida Saucke, and Oliver Saucke. Bottom from left Pat Kerwick, Ann Ellis, Florence Phillips Byron Buell and Rick Krempin.

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

Would You Rather Be A Vegetable?

A new term — new to me, at least — popped up in the discussions at the Synod of Bishops. The term was "gradualitas." In awkward English, it would translate, "the law of gradualness."

I'm not sure of the exact meaning of these discussions; I hope to be able to get some clarification from one of the bishops who participated.

From the context, though, the bishops who used the expression seemed to be saying something like this:

For many people, the response to God's invitation is not a matter of sudden, dramatic conversions. Instead, it is a gradual progression of awareness, a desire for a good life which allows self-respect, some sense of God's presence in the experience of life, a succession of decisions influenced by deepening faith and efforts to live according to that faith.

We make good decisions and bad ones. We respond to God's invitation in some matters, turn away from it in others. But for many people there is a gradual emergence of God's presence and influence in their lives.

And this is true for people who are trying to deal with serious moral faults in their lives as well as for those who are already leading moral lives, who are trying to enrich their spiritual lives through prayer and virtue.

But this pattern of gradual growth was blurred in the kind of religious education many of us received in the years prior to the council.

Our training for confession emphasized a detailed analysis of sin, particularly the distinction

between mortal and venial sin.

Though it was not intended, many of us took from this training the notion that we could really be pretty comfortable as long as we were this side of mortal sin. If we were on the other side, we were cut off from God's grace and love. If we weren't ready to get out of mortal sin, nothing else mattered very much. We were like prisoners under sentence of execution. Until we repented and were forgiven, there wasn't much more we could lose.

This, I believe, was a popular, gut response to preaching and religious instruction. It wasn't theology, but it was an attitude present in the minds of many Catholics.

In the synod, I gather that the bishops were saying: In our teaching, we must make it clear that God's dealing with each person is a unique experience. God calls us from where we are, in our own individual lives, to respond more generously, to be more than we are now, to take the next step toward Him.

Jesus reached out in love and invitation to some pretty disreputable characters. His harshest judgments were leveled

against those who were living respectable lives of self-righteousness.

I might avoid all of the actions which we had on our list of mortal sins and still be living the spiritual life of a vegetable. Who is responding to God better — the person who is trying and making gradual progress even though he hasn't yet been able to get out of a particular "sinful" condition... or the respectable moral vegetable?

Somehow, while being faithful to its convictions about what is right and wrong, the modern church must find ways of showing the compassion and love which Jesus extended to those seen as sinners.

We are all sinners. We all fail to respond to God's grace and invitation as fully as we could. Which of us cannot see the difference between the lives we are now leading and those we would live if we responded fully to God's call, to all the opportunities presented to us?

Turning away from God's invitation, as we perceive it, that is the meaning of sin.

To recognize this personal, gradual movement toward God, to express it in the pastoral attitude of the Church — this is probably beyond human wisdom and prudence. But Jesus manifested it as He walked among us; He can also manifest it as He lives in the church today. He can, if we ourselves are open to Him, if we allow Him to work through us.

St. Andrew's Church
ON PORTLAND AVE.
Annual Turkey Festival
Sponsored by Holy Name Society
Friday, Nov. 21st
7 p.m. til -
Turkeys! Fun! Refreshments!

Holy St. Francis!

By Carmen J. Viglucci

Move over, Spider-Man. And Incredible Hulk. You, too, Captain America. Make room for the mightiest hero of the past eight centuries — Francis of Assisi!

Yes, leave it to that most contemporary of saints to become the first of his kind to crash the modern-day comic book market.

There he is, splashed in full-color on the cover of a special, commemorative comic book sent to newsstands on Oct. 28 by the Marvel Comics Group.

"Frankly, the idea of doing a comic book inspired by a religious figure had not crossed my mind until it was suggested to me by Gene Pelc, our agent in Japan, who happens to attend the Franciscan Chapel Center there."

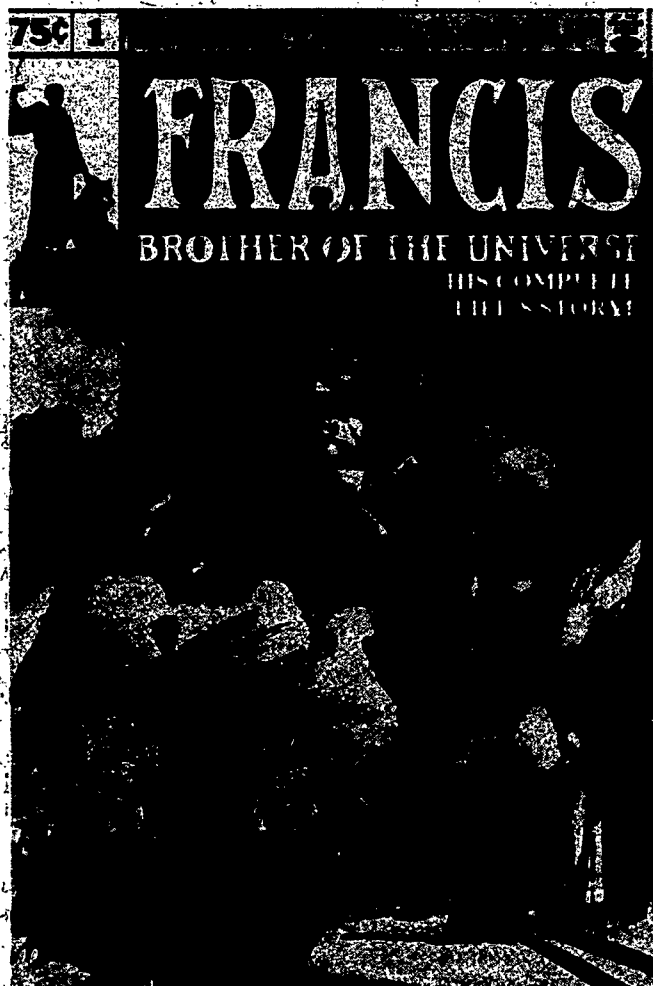
Speaking was James Galton, president of Marvel Comics.

"Initially, it sounded a bit farfetched, but the more I considered it, the more intrigued I became. After all, the life of St. Francis, like the lives of our Super Heroes such as The Amazing Spider-Man, was packed with elements conducive to an exciting, fast-paced comic book — drama, suspense, action."

And while the intrepid Francis now finds himself in the company of such fictitious characters as Captain America, publisher Galton likewise has joined the ranks of those whose policies or lifestyles have changed through contact with the holy man born 800 years ago.

Under Galton's supervision, Marvel Comics determined to preserve accuracy and approached Father Roy Gasnick, OFM, director of communications for the Franciscan Holy Name Province, who provided an authoritative scenario of the saint's life.

"I couldn't be more delighted with the fruit of labor," Father Roy com-



mented. He has developed a set of study guides designed to assist teachers using the comic book, called "Francis, Brother of the Universe," in classrooms.

"The values by which St. Francis lived — justice, brotherhood, peacemaking — are ones that are too often discarded in our modern world," Father Roy said. "A comic book is the perfect way to acquaint youngsters of all faiths with the accomplishments of this altruistic individual."

Mary Jo Duffy wrote the script and John Buscema drew the book's 250 panels which were inked and colored by Marie Severin. It sells for 75 cents at newsstands. In addition, it will be marketed to Catholic book stores, parishes, schools and institutions, as well as to other Christian outlets through the National Reading Distributors Division of the Paulist Press.

In addition to the story, the saint's Canticle of the Sun, a couple of maps of Italy and the Assisi area, a comic-style page on St. Francis and the customs of Christmas, and a sheet of facts on St. Francis and his followers are included.

Further information on orders is available from Ed Shukin, vice president, circulation, (212) 838-7900 or John Twomey of Paulist Press (201) 825-7300. Further information from the Franciscans is available from Jack Donnelly (201) 746-2317.

Singles

The Spiritual Singles Community will hold a Dinner of Thanksgiving at Barry's Restaurant Sunday, Nov. 23 at 7 p.m. Further information and reservations are obtained by contacting Patty Genco, 663-3990; Patty Lippa, 254-4286; or Tony Scuderi 288-4399, before Nov. 20.

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