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## St. Francis

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"The image I think most of us grew up with is that St. Francis was a lover of all creation. So it was a natural to schedule this around his feast day," said Dubel, justice and peace coordinator for Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier.

Along with the Catholic Charities program, many tributes to St. Francis are being held in other parts of the diocese. For example, at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Auburn, the parish is dedicating its annual mission to its patron saint. The mission, which runs through Oct. 6, includes liturgies with Franciscan themes along with a pet blessing Oct. 4.

"In the past we've always had some particular event on the feast day," said 68-year-old Frank Guariglia, a lifelong parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi. Guariglia noted that he was named after St. Francis and has also made two visits to the saint's hometown of Assisi.

St. Francis of Assisi Church in Cata-tonk, meanwhile, planned to celebrate a 7 p.m. Mass on Oct. 4. Earlier this year, Father Moorby added, an image of the San Damiano crucifix — from which the voice of Christ is said to have spoken to St. Francis — was placed in the Tioga County church's sanctuary during a rededication ceremony.

Pet blessings are another favored form of paying homage to St. Francis — who is portrayed by popular legend as a gentle figure who spoke frequently to birds, wolves and other animals.

St. Joseph's Church in Wayland held its sixth annual pet blessing Sept. 30. According to Father Paul Schnacky, pastor of the Steuben County parish, the ceremony serves to remind Catholics of the importance of God's creation.

"Sometimes we get very 'holy' and intellectual in our faith. We don't look down to see what God has given us, right at our feet," Father Schnacky stated.

St. Bonaventure University has also planned a multi-event celebration. Classes were to be cancelled on Oct. 4 so that students, faculty, staff and alumni could pay tribute to St. Francis through prayer, lectures and an outdoor Mass. In addition, a candlelight presentation depicting

the life of St. Francis was planned on campus the evening of Oct. 3.

The 2,500-student college, founded in 1858, is named after one of the early leaders of the Franciscan movement. St. Bonaventure (1217-1274) was a pioneer in spreading Franciscan ideals to the intellectual community.

St. Francis, on the other hand, preferred a simple life.

"This was in an age when power and authority were very, very important," Father Carrozzo noted.

St. Francis had also enjoyed the pleasures of prominence in his early years. Born in 1181 to a wealthy textile merchant, Francesco di Bernardone was a popular and fun-loving figure among his city's youth. He spent a year in prison when he was captured as a result of intercity fighting between Assisi and Apulia, and began an intense self-analysis during that time. This process continued during a year-long illness after he was released from prison through his father's intervention.

His complete conversion began in 1205 at the church of San Damiano of Assisi. There, according to popular legend, a voice emanated from a crucifix instructing Francis to "go and repair my house, which you see is falling down." Thus began Francis' new life of dedication to Christ.

Francis renounced his possessions — and his father, Pietro — by removing all his clothes and handing them to his father, who had been strongly opposed to the direction that Francis' life was taking.

Francis' engaging personality inspired other men to gradually join his cause. In 1209 he traveled to Rome and received permission from Pope Innocent III to establish his order. This movement grew into what is now the largest religious order of men — if one were to combine independent Franciscan communities — in the Roman Catholic Church. These communities include the Friars Minor, the Friars Minor Conventual and the Friars Minor Capuchin.

Francis founded a Second Order in 1812 when he received St. Clare into the order. St. Clare, like Francis, was an Assisi native who had turned her back on a wealthy lifestyle. It was around this time that Francis also established a Third Or-

der — known as the Secular Order — for laymen who followed Franciscan ideals but chose not to take religious vows.

In subsequent years, Francis became renowned as a preacher even though he preferred praying in solitude. The Franciscan movement caught on so quickly that Francis was somewhat a victim of his own success. He decided to relinquish many of his organizational duties in 1221, and devoted the remaining five years of his life to preaching, writing and praying incessantly — even though he was seriously ill and nearly blind.

In 1223 he presided over the midnight Mass crib ceremony at Greccio. This first depicting of the Christmas nativity scene became an annual custom in the Catholic Church.

In 1224 he composed the "Canticle of the Sun" while visiting St. Clare at Assisi, and also experienced the stigmata on Mount La Verna. According to published accounts, the stigmata left impressions on his body in the same places the crucified Christ was believed wounded — symbolizing Francis' fervent desire to feel Jesus' passion to the fullest possible extent.

He died on Oct. 3, 1226, at the Portiuncula in Assisi, where he and his earliest disciples had lived a communal life during their first years together. Francis was buried in Assisi's Church of San Giorgio on Oct. 4, 1226. He was canonized by Pope Gregory IX in 1228.

Father Carrozzo noted that although facts about St. Francis' life have remained fairly consistent in the 770 years since his death, some modern-day devotion to St. Francis lacks historical accuracy. He cited the popular church hymn, "The Prayer of St. Francis," as an example.

"There is no evidence in any of his writings that this was a prayer of St. Francis, or even a sentiment of St. Francis," Father Carrozzo remarked. "Nobody can say where those words came from."

He explained that the song's lyrics ("Make me a channel of your peace") are not consistent with a saint who rarely made first-person references.

Father Carrozzo added that the romanticized image of St. Francis in the 1972 movie, "Brother Sun, Sister Moon," which chronicled the early years of St. Francis' ministry, don't present the full spectrum of St. Francis' workings.

"We've got to recapture the intellectual side. He founded a group of men who were quite bright," Father Carrozzo said.

At the same time, Father Carrozzo emphasized, modern society must also follow the basic ideals of St. Francis by reaching out to the disenfranchised.

"They're the ones who bring Christ to us," Father Carrozzo stated. He cited Matthew 25:40, "Whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me."

Phyllis Burruto, a parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Rochester, bridges the past and present by noting the influence of St. Francis at her inner-city church.

"There's a very strong link. A lot of people are not rich in our parish, and St. Francis gave up most of his possessions," remarked Burruto, 69, a member of the parish since its founding in 1929. "There is a lot of love of St. Francis and what he did in his lifetime. That's what keeps us all going here."

In addition to inspiring service to the poor, Father Carrozzo remarked that St. Francis is also a good model for the pro-life movement.

"We should realize that we are the creatures who do not make the choice of life. It's God's choice," Father Carrozzo said. "If Francis heard that it was a woman's choice, he would find that highly offensive."

Noting that another political topic, the environment, has gained urgency in recent decades, Dubel pointed out that St. Francis devoted his life to such causes in a much earlier age.

"We can't wait another 800 years to take action," Dubel warned, noting that such animals as the grizzly bear and spotted owl are facing extinction.

The challenges presented by modern society, Guariglia of Auburn stated, make living a truly Franciscan life a difficult task at best.

"You've got to be a real follower of Christ today to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis," Guariglia remarked. "If you were a beggar in the streets, people would rip you up. Give up your belongings and follow Christ — who would do that today? Who would give up their wealth? There are good things that happen in the world, just not enough."

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