



# *The JTO Connector 2020*

January, 2020 – Vol . 4

January 25, 2020

As a youth, thanks to Marilyn Grote, I was invited to attend a JTO meeting. Little did I know at the time how impactful that simple invitation would be on the rest of my life. I remember coming home that night so looking forward to the next opportunity to interact with the people I met that evening. The Franciscan message also intrigued me because it was obviously more than words – I sensed that it was a lifestyle choice for those involved. His plan was already enfolding for me. Each time I joined my new JTO friends, God was gently nudging me to be more engaged in a lifestyle modeled by St. Francis and St. Clare. At the ripe old age of 16, I stood in front of my JTO friends at San Antonio Church and promised to live as Francis did for the rest of my life. Though it has been years since I was a part of a Franciscan fraternity, I have attempted to live and own that profession every day. Now 50 years later, every week I can stand before the students at Muskegon Catholic Central after Mass and share how much God's loves them and wants to be in a relationship with each of them because of that profession. It still drives me and challenges me to be the best me I can be. Now 50 years later, that simple profession is the foundational piece that allows me to be a difference maker as leader of Catholic school. Yes, God's plan is still enfolding for me. Now 50 years later, I am a better father and husband because I understand the priority tree puts God first, family second, and works a distant third. That profession continues to challenge me to respond to God's call to holiness with a resounding YES!

Because of JTO, I was molded and formed by so many wonderful Franciscans. We were community. Each lifted me up and encouraged me to grow and flourish. I am so thankful for how each touched my heart and left their mark. How exciting it was many years later when it became apparent that there was a desire amongst JTOers to find ways to reconnect. I eagerly agreed to participate in exploring what that reconnection might mean. Out of those discussions has grown JTO Connect. For me, the coolest part of birthing of the JTO Connect events has been the opportunity provided to explore the continued impact of Francis on and in my life. It has also provided for me a community of Franciscans who want to explore together.

With the theme of ***Francis Rebuild My Church***, JTO Connect 2019 was amazing. With the help of reflections provided by Fr. Murray Bodo in the book “The Journey and the Dream”, we discussed transfiguration events in the life of St. Francis. Brother and sister JTOers served as Muses and shared how these events were still relevant in their lives today. Powerful witness led to inspirational conversation and thought-provoking dialog. Yes, God is still at work. He is still nudging me to find ways to be more engaged in a Franciscan lifestyle.

The theme for JTO Connect 2020 is St. Clare of Assisi. The Program Team is hard a work building a program that will challenge those present to be impacted and inspired by St. Clare. Her example is still very real for us in 2020. I invite you to join us in July in Maria Stein. I also encourage to you to click on the link below and experience JTO Connect 2019. You will find videos of each reflection provided by a Muse. Again, each provided a powerful witness and message.

<https://jtoconnect.org/documents/jto-connect-2019/>

We ask that you prayerfully consider joining us for a spiritually enriching and incredibly fun weekend with JTO “old” and new friends. Please contact Ken Rasp at [kenrasp55@gmail.com](mailto:kenrasp55@gmail.com) or 231.670.1511 with questions or the need for additional information. We hope to see you in July! Praise Him!

Blessings and peace!

Ken Rasp

## Mark Your Calendars

- **Theme – *St. Clare of Assisi***
- Where – Spiritual Center of Maria Stein, Maria Stein, OH – [www.spiritualcenter.net](http://www.spiritualcenter.net)
- When – Friday, July 24 to Sunday, July 26, 2020
- Who – JTOers, their family, their friends – Actually anyone who feels called to join us!
- Registration will open in early February

## Learn more by contacting:

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## **JTO Connect 2020 Theme – *St. Clare of Assisi***

### **Saint Clare of Assisi's Story**

One of the more sugary movies made about Francis of Assisi pictures Clare as a golden-haired beauty floating through sun-drenched fields, a sort of one-woman counterpart to the new Franciscan Order.

The beginning of her religious life was indeed movie material. Having refused to marry at 15, Clare was moved by the dynamic preaching of Francis. He became her lifelong friend and spiritual guide.

At 18, Clare escaped from her father's home one night, was met on the road by friars carrying torches, and in the poor little chapel called the Portiuncula received a rough woolen habit, exchanged her jeweled belt for a common rope with knots in it, and sacrificed her long tresses to Francis' scissors. He placed her in a Benedictine convent, which her father and uncles immediately stormed in rage. Clare clung to the altar of the church, threw aside her veil to show her cropped hair, and remained adamant.

Sixteen days later her sister Agnes joined her. Others came. They lived a simple life of great poverty, austerity, and complete seclusion from the world, according to a Rule which Francis gave them as a Second Order. At age 21, Francis obliged Clare under obedience to accept the office of abbess, one she exercised until her death.

The Poor Ladies went barefoot, slept on the ground, ate no meat, and observed almost complete silence. Later Clare, like Francis, persuaded her sisters to moderate this rigor: "Our bodies are not made of brass." The greatest emphasis, of course, was on gospel poverty. They possessed no property, even in common, subsisting on daily contributions. When even the pope tried to persuade Clare to mitigate this practice, she showed her characteristic firmness: "I need to be absolved from my sins, but I do not wish to be absolved from the obligation of following Jesus Christ."

Contemporary accounts glow with admiration of Clare's life in the convent of San Damiano in Assisi. She served the sick and washed the feet of the begging nuns. She came from prayer, it was said, with her face so shining it dazzled those about her. She suffered serious illness for the last 27 years of her life. Her influence was such that popes, cardinals, and bishops often came to consult her—Clare herself never left the walls of San Damiano.

Francis always remained her great friend and inspiration. Clare was always obedient to his will and to the great ideal of gospel life which he was making real.

A well-known story concerns her prayer and trust. Clare had the Blessed Sacrament placed on the walls of the convent when it faced attack by invading Saracens. "Does it please you, O God, to deliver into the hands of these beasts the defenseless children I have nourished with your love? I beseech you, dear Lord, protect these whom I am now unable to protect." To her sisters she said, "Don't be afraid. Trust in Jesus." The Saracens fled.

### **Reflection**

The 41 years of Clare's religious life are scenarios of sanctity: an indomitable resolve to lead the simple, literal gospel life as Francis taught her; courageous resistance to the ever-present pressure to dilute the ideal; a passion for poverty and humility; an ardent life of prayer; and a generous concern for her sisters.

Story Provided by Franciscan Media

Link to Fr. Greg Friedman speaking about St. Clare of Assisi

<https://youtu.be/6vqn1JFGe0M>