

North American Lay Fraternities

NEWS FROM LAY FRATERNITIES

Leanne (Anna) Le, a Lay Fraternity member in California, was invited by the Serra Club to make a presentation on St. Charles de Foucauld on 11/15/23 in the city of Orange.

According to the USA Council of Serra International's website, the organization is made up of Catholic lay people who are "dedicated to promote and foster vocations to the priesthood and consecrated religious life." Anna's assignment was to present the life and spirituality of Br. Charles in fifteen minutes, which is no small task! With the assistance of Arlene Moeller, Anna was able to create a Power Point

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Letter from Fr. Lenny

Dearest Friends,

Wonder, awesome. I wonder if anyone experiences wonder anymore. When are we so taken by beauty that we are speechless? We say fantastic so often it's lost its punch.

I'm sure that reading and knowing the life of Charles de Foucauld, he was taken by awe and wonder so many times. The natural human response to the expanse and mystical nature of the desert followed him for many years, and he eventually formed his desert presence. How many years in his life did he look with wonder at the brilliant sky with stars so bright and clear he could almost grab them...or experience sandstorms that must have been like gritty hurricanes? He so often expresses awe and wonder when realizing the total love of God and the presence of his beloved Jesus, so near and sometimes so far. It leaves him speechless and lost in God. How I long for this grace!

His sense of wonder and awe was a part of his

childlike simplicity and happiness. He was in awe of Tuareg's poetry and wanted to record every bit of it. It still doesn't make sense as long as I have tried to understand it. Yes, it's his childlike heart that I read in him.

Pope Francis refers to St. Charles in many conferences and situations when addressing various audiences. With all this publicity coming from Rome, the English-speaking world might become even more curious about who this Charles de Foucauld was that has gained a fan in Pope Francis. But then "I

wonder" if the current American mind can make any sense of what Charles de Foucauld has to say to the American Catholic Church. What could Charles de Foucauld add to the North American Catholic Church? I'm still waiting for someone, somewhere, to name a new parish or new parish configuration in honor of ST CHARLES OF JESUS. Call your bishop and tell him the next name to appear on any diocesan property should be St Charles of Jesus. Please let me know your response!

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"He took him outside and said: 'Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so', he added, 'shall your descendants be.' " – Genesis 15:5

Wonder

Editor's Desk

I so agree with Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, who writes in his article, "Wonder Has Left the Building," that our sense of wonder has been lost in "Familiarity and its children: sophistication, intellectual pride, disappointment, boredom, and contempt." Interestingly, both Ciro Piccirillo, our North American Responsible for the Lay Fraternities, and Canon Michael Perko offer some direction and language in their articles as to how to regain that sense of child-like wonder into our lives.

During this past year, I have devised a method to increase my sense of wonder while I wash the morning dishes! I listen to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's rendition of the classic hymn, "All Creatures of Our God and King" on YouTube via my little portable speaker my husband gave to me. While the choir's voices flood my kitchen, I can view glorious nature scenes, which I never get tired of looking at. According to The Tabernacle Choir's website, the hymn's lyrics are adapted from St. Francis of Assisi's "The Canticle of the Sun," which was composed in St. Francis's last year of his life when he was weak and suffering from periods of temporary blindness. The lyrics are provided in this

issue so you can sing along with the choir as well!

The theme for our next issue (March 2024) is LOVE. The deadline for submission of articles is Feb. 20. May all of you experience the wonder and joy of Advent and Christmas!

*Fr. Lenny Concluded**Continued from page 1*

Charles de Foucauld so deeply loved the Holy Land; he knew about every inch of the sacred place. He tried to buy the Mount of the Beatitudes and poured himself out in Nazareth and Jerusalem. He spent most of his time on what we call the West Bank now, or what the Catholic Church calls the Occupied Territories. I, too, have spent much time in the Holy Land, living in Nazareth for a few weeks at a time. With you, my heart bleeds for every wounded, broken soul and body. Nobody wins in a war.

My blessings and love for a beautiful New Year 2024. May you grow evermore in wonder and fall more deeply in love with JESUS and his Body on earth.

Your little brother,

Fr. Lenny

**NEWS FROM LAY FRATERNITIES
CONCLUDED***Continued from page 1*

Presentation, which was the basis for her talk. Anna also handed out copies of "A Worldwide Presence," which was taken from a booklet, "Charles de Foucauld and his Spiritual Family," printed by the Spiritual Family of Charles de Foucauld Association, dated 5/15/2005.

On 10/15/23 Fr. Leonard Tighe trained the California Lay Fraternity on the "Review of Life" via Zoom. The training consisted of a brief history and an in-depth explanation of the topic. We also brain-stormed how to include a formal Review of Life within our monthly Zoom meeting schedule. With Fr. Lenny's assistance, our Lay Fraternity was able

to come up with a new meeting format that would allow time for a Review of Life sharing from at least one participant as well as more time devoted to our Sunday Gospel reflection and sharing. We tested out our new meeting plan on 11/26/23, which turned out to be a success. During our usual beginning "Check-in," where each member summarizes how they have been doing since our last meeting, Arlene Moeller is also encouraging the ladies to share a grace-filled moment they have recently experienced. (As part of their "homework," members are asked to reflect on this question prior to the meeting.).



"Wonder is the desire for knowledge."
- Saint Thomas Aquinas

Brother Charles de Foucauld: *a model for a renewed humanity in today's world*

The spiritual heritage of Brother Charles rests on the presence of God in the poverty of our encounters with others and one of a universal brotherhood inspired by the Gospel. Brother Charles led a life dedicated to Jesus, his Gospel and to those around him. He welcomed all the dimensions of the other: their culture, their background, their religion, the whole person. Brother Charles revealed to us that God is relation. A life in true Fraternity! The spirit and traces of Fraternity are forever engraved in our hearts and lives. Right here and right now. In this sense, Brother Charles offers us a model for welcoming others and establishing a real relationship through which we reach God. What a heritage! Let's be grateful for this!

At the beginning of the Church, a handful of men and women chose to bear witness of their faith at the risk of being ground like wheat. Charles de Foucauld also fell to the ground, on the sand in front of his house in Tamanrasset, like a grain of wheat in the furrow. It often takes time, between sowing and harvesting. It took years before disciples like: Louis Massignon, René Voillaume, LS Madeleine, and many others to reap the benefits... and yet we are all (still) here today! Modern day disciples on the path of universal sister/brotherhood, a source of life and a spark of community/social transformation all over the world. We can only be deeply moved when we witness lives that cry out the Gospel so loudly. Brother Charles would be so proud, and I can only imagine his smile now!

Why are we still speaking of Brother Charles over 100 years after his death? A drop-out in school and military training and an apparent failure in many things he undertook, including his plans for a religious congregation, why is he (still) relevant? The pandemic, on its own, has superbly highlighted why. We all know why....we have all felt it in our bodies, hearts, and souls. This prolonged pandemic has often de-connected us with ourselves, with others, with Mother-Earth and with God. We are relational beings, and this devastating, turbulent and traumatic pandemic period has *de-humanized* many facets of our lives. I imagine the unexpected (and delayed) canonization as an invitation to us by Brother Charles to stand in this new world and proclaim proudly and confidently universal brotherhood in the simplicity of our daily lives, as a humble and gentle reminder to humanity that God is here. How is the spirituality of Nazareth a path for the *re-humanization* of this world and our communities? Brother Charles offers us a path: one centered on the search of God's love in the simplicity of our daily encounters. *In this sense, Brother Charles offers us a model for a renewed humanity in today's world.*

The evangelical witness of Charles de Foucauld has strongly inspired Pope Francis, and this influence can be noted by his references to our brother in several Church documents: in the Synod *on the family*, in *Laudato Si*, and more recently in *Fratelli Tutti*. Following the canonization, during his meeting with representatives of the Spiritual Family of Charles de Foucauld, the Pope vividly referred to the spirituality of Charles de Foucauld as "*a prophet of our time who knew how to highlight the essential and universal aspect of faith [...] especially in returning to the spirit of the origins, to the spirit of Nazareth.*" Pope Francis also added this humble invitation to us all: "*I hope that you also, like Brother Charles, continue to imagine Jesus who walks among the people, patiently accomplishing a difficult job and living day by day within a family and in a town.*" Saint "Brother" Charles is a beacon of hope and love for today's world.

This realization will be embraced at the upcoming **2024 General Assembly of the Lay Fraternity of Charles de Foucauld** which will be held in Montréal, Québec, Canada from July 21-29, 2024. This extraordinary international gathering occurs every six years and reunites delegates from all continents. The theme for this general assembly will be: "*Sharing our home in Nazareth: family, creation, fraternity,*" a resounding invitation to pray for today's world and reflect on our prophetic role in the promotion of a true universal brotherhood. The 2024 edition is historic in nature as it is the first time it will take place on the North American continent! What an opportunity for us all!

The canonization of Charles de Foucauld is a blessing for the universal Church. In deep unity with all the Fraternities from around the world, we must come together as a Church and humbly present our spirituality to the world by simply being a brother and sister to those around us.

In Jesus Caritas,

Ciro Piccirillo, Montréal, Québec, Canada

North American Responsible for the Lay Fraternities of Charles de Foucauld

ALL CREATURES OF OUR GOD AND KING

ALL CREATURES OF OUR GOD AND KING,
LIFT UP YOUR VOICE AND WITH US SING,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
THOU BURNING SUN WITH GOLDEN BEAM,
THOU SILVER MOON WITH SOFTER GLEAM,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
ALLELUIA! OH, PRAISE HIM! ALLELUIA!

THOU RUSHING WIND THAT ART SO STRONG,
YE CLOUDS THAT SAIL IN HEAV'N ALONG,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
THOU RISING MORN, IN PRAISE REJOICE;
YE LIGHT OF EVENING, FIND A VOICE,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
ALLELUIA! OH, PRAISE HIM! ALLELUIA!

THOU FLOWING WATER, PURE AND CLEAR,
MAKE MUSIC FOR THY LORD TO HEAR,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
THOU FIRE SO MASTERFUL AND BRIGHT,
THAT GIVES TO MAN BOTH WARMTH AND LIGHT,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
ALLELUIA! OH, PRAISE HIM! ALLELUIA!

DEAR MOTHER EARTH, WHO DAY BY DAY
UNFOLDEST BLESSINGS ON OUR WAY,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
THE FLOW'RS AND FRUITS THAT IN THEE GROW,
LET THEM HIS GLORY ALSO SHOW,
ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!
ALLELUIA! OH, PRAISE HIM! ALLELUIA!

Desert Ramblings by Arlene Moeller

I have been blessed over the years to see many natural wonders on our planet earth. However, the first wonder of nature that comes to mind are the Waitomo Glowworm Caves in New Zealand, which my family and I visited in the summer of 2011. During the serene boat ride, one feels like you are traveling through a galaxy of stars. According to Great Sights who arranged our tour, these “stars” are actually the insect called “Arachnocampa luminous” aka glowworm. When the insect is in the larval stage, it emits light in order to attract its food.

Of course, newborn babies are always a wonder to behold. The baby Jesus, both divine and human, surpasses just about any wonder I can think of. But wait...There is the wonder of Jesus resurrecting from the dead and appearing to His Mother Mary. I would have loved to be a fly on the wall, observing the entire scene. Here, Mary, in unbearable grief, is surprised by a visit from her dear Son, who looks even better than He did when he was traveling around with his apostles! Perhaps an even more wondrous moment was when Mary was taken to heaven and reunited with her Son. Surely, she must have been given the “Grand Tour” while they caught up on all kinds of chit chat!

Sometimes I wonder about heaven. I have always related to the following quote from Mother Teresa: “If I ever become a Saint - I will surely be one of ‘darkness.’ I will continually be absent from heaven - to light the light of those in darkness on earth.” I like how Mother Teresa wanted to always be on the go, rejecting the stereotype of rest and peace, even in heaven. Surely Jesus has a plan for those of us who always want to be busy with something. (Hopefully house cleaning is not on the agenda!) Will all my inner and outer defects vanish in heaven? Will I still be able to eat my home-made low sugar oatmeal dark chocolate chip walnut cookies?? Will I have conversations with St. Charles de Foucauld? I wonder...



Waitomo Glowworm Caves, New Zealand

Do you have new
or information to
share? Please
an email to the
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*Please submit your articles for the March 2024 issue by
February 20, 2024 to nalf@moeller2001.com.*

Brother Charles and the World of Wonder

by Canon Michael Perko

The Christmas season, more than any other, invites us to a consideration of the place of wonder, both in the life of Brother Charles and in our own lives.

I can still remember, many years ago, coming into the living room in our home late at night in the days just prior to Christmas, and just sitting in the dark, with only the lights of the Christmas tree turned on, absorbing the magic of the moment. There was a deep sense of peace, of things being right with the world, and of a kind of awe at the simplicity of it all.

What exactly is wonder all about? The best articulation of it for me comes in Peter Weiss's play "Marat/Sade" when one of the characters insists, "The important thing. . . is to turn yourself inside out and to see the whole world with fresh eyes." What Weiss is saying so artfully here is that wonder involves coming to a place where we are able to put aside our usual understandings, our customary perspectives, and approach the world as if it were a blank slate, seen for the very first time.

Certainly, this is a quality that Foucauld exhibits throughout his life. It's especially notable in the way that he engages the landscape and people of the Maghreb, the Arab lands of Northern Africa. An incredibly astute amateur anthropologist and observer, we only have to look at his careful notes and detailed illustrations of things like the patterns in which women braided their hair to see the extent that wonder at a new geography and its people had captured his imagination.

After his conversion, this same quality of seeing "the whole world with fresh eyes" also applied to his relationship with Jesus. A key element was his growing deep immersion in the Gospels. As a careful study of Northern Africa and its inhabitants had filled him with a new perspective on the world in which he lived, so also did this encounter with Jesus. Though he had grown up Catholic, it is clear that he now is meeting Jesus for the first time, not as an abstract figure in the tapestry of Christianity, but as a living, breathing human person. For that reason, he continued his quest for the person of Jesus, seen in Scripture, over the course of many years. And all of this was with a spirit of wonder, in which he was able to encounter Jesus "with fresh eyes" and find himself drawn into an ever-deepening relationship as a result. As North Africa presented him with a new physical landscape, so the vital, living Jesus drew him into a new spiritual one as well.

That same sense of wonder is something to which all of us, as Christians, are called. Our special name for it is "conversion." Each one of us, each and every day, is called to approach the world around us, each other, and God "with fresh eyes." In a very real way, we're asked to discover the presence of God in all those around us, in Scripture, and in the Eucharist as if we're encountering them for the first time, as if each experience were brand new--because it is!

Living with that sense of wonder, of daily discovery, isn't always easy. For one thing, it means that we have to be willing to go beyond our normal categories or usual ways of seeing and doing things. It means approaching each new person, each new situation, each new experience as something brand new and asking ourselves, "What is God trying to say to me, right now, in this moment?"

In the Christmas feast, we reflect on the reality that God became human among us and for us, living in a specific space and time, among the concrete realities of our world. And that revelation, it seems to me, has at least one important and dramatic result that impacts on my life every day-- if I let it. In the coming of Jesus as a human person, all of God's creation potentially became a source of grace and revelation. All creation was given the possibility of true holiness, because the Source of all holiness, Jesus, had taken on flesh.

The call that you and I have in our lives, and especially in the Christmas season, is to see all of that creation in fresh, new ways. It's a call to approach every person we meet, every experience we have, every reality of our daily lives, as if we were encountering it for the first time. In a very real way, our call to conversion is a call to experience all of creation as if we were seeing it for the very first time, the way that, as a child, I experienced the wonder of the Christmas tree.

This was the real gift of Brother Charles, who experienced each moment of each day as a call to conversion, as a call to awe and wonder. As we follow his example, it becomes for each of us the best possible gift of this holy season, as our hearts turn more and more to the wonder of the Incarnation and to the wonderful possibilities of seeing in "new and fresh ways" that it always provides for us.

Editor's Note: Canon Michael Perko is a semi-retired Episcopal priest whose ministries include spiritual and retreat direction, as well as mentoring ordination candidates and military chaplains. His interest in Brother Charles dates back about 30 years to when he was living in Israel and first encountered the Little Sisters of Jesus.

Wonder Has Left the Building

by Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

In a poem entitled "Is/Not," Margaret Atwood suggests that when a love grows numb, this is where we find ourselves:

"We're stuck here / on this side of the border / in this country of thumbled streets and stale buildings / where there is nothing spectacular to see / and the weather is ordinary / where love occurs in its pure form only / on the cheaper of the souvenirs."

Love can grow numb between two people, just as it can within a whole culture. And that has happened in our culture, at least to a large part. The excitement that once guided our eyes has given way to a certain numbness and resignation. We no longer stand before life with much freshness. We have seen what it has to offer and have succumbed to a certain resignation: That's all there is, and it's not that great! All we can try for now is more of the same, with the misguided hope that if we keep increasing the dosage the payoff will be better.

They talk of old souls, but old souls are actually young at heart. We're the opposite, young souls no longer young at heart. Wonder has left the building.

What's at the root of this? What has deprived us of wonder? Familiarity and its children: sophistication, intellectual pride, disappointment, boredom, and contempt. Familiarity does breed contempt, and contempt is the antithesis of the two things needed to stand before the world in wonder: reverence and respect.

G.K. Chesterton once suggested that familiarity is the greatest of all illusions. Elizabeth Barrett Browning gives poetic expression to this:

"Earth's crammed with heaven. / And every common bush afire with God. / But only he who sees, takes off his shoes. / The rest sit round and pluck blackberries and daub their natural faces unaware."

That aptly describes the illusion of familiarity, plucking berries while carelessly stroking our faces, unaware that we are in the presence of the holy. Familiarity renders all things common.

What's the answer? How do we recover our sense of wonder? How do we begin again to see divine fire inside ordinary life?

Chesterton suggests that the secret to recovering wonder and seeing divine fire in the ordinary is to learn to look at things familiar until they look unfamiliar again. Biblically, that's what God asks of Moses when Moses sees a burning bush in the desert and approaches its fire out of curiosity. God says to him, take off your shoes, the ground you are standing on is holy ground.

That single line, that singular invitation, is the deep secret to recover our sense of wonder whenever we find ourselves, as Atwood describes, stuck on this side of the border, in thumbled streets and stale buildings, with nothing spectacular to see, ordinary weather, and love seemingly cheapened everywhere.

One of my professors in graduate school occasionally offered us this little counsel: "If you ask a naive child, do you believe in Santa and the Easter Bunny, he will say yes. If you ask a bright child the same question, he will say no. But if you ask yet still a brighter child that question, he will smile and say yes."

Our sense of wonder is predicated initially on the naiveté of being a child, of not yet being unhealthily familiar with the world. Our eyes then are still open to marvel at the newness of things. That changes of course as we grow, experience things, and learn. Soon enough we learn the truth about Santa and the Easter Bunny and with that, all too easily, comes the death of wonder and the familiarity that breeds contempt.

This is a disillusionment which, while a normal transitional phase in life, is not meant to be a place in which we stay. The task of adulthood is to regain our sense of wonder and begin again, for very different reasons, to believe in the reality of Santa and the Easter Bunny. We need to bring wonder back into the building.

I once heard a wise man share this vignette: Imagine a 2-year-old child who asks you, "Where does the sun go at night?" For a child that young, don't pull out a globe or a book and try to explain how the solar system works. Just tell the child the sun is tired and is taking a sleep behind the barn.

However, when the child is 6 or 7 years old, don't try that anymore. Then, it's time to pull out books and explain the solar system. After that, when the child is in high school or college, it's time to pull out Stephen Hawking, Brian Swimme, and astrophysicists, and talk about the origins and makeup of the universe. Finally, when the person is 80 years old, it's enough again to say, "The sun is tired and is taking a sleep behind the barn."

We have grown too familiar with sunsets! Wonder can make the familiar unfamiliar again.

Editor's Note: Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI is an Oblate of Mary Immaculate Father and a spiritual writer. This article was used with permission of the author, Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser. He can be contacted through his website, www.ronrolheiser.com. Follow on Facebook www.facebook.com/ronrolheiser.