

The Academy of Franciscan History, the research institute affiliated with the Franciscan School of Theology in Oceanside, Calif., has begun publishing a series of studies, the *United States Franciscan History Project*, that focuses on the life, work and ministry of Franciscans in the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States. The content of the first two volumes released in the series is relevant to the restructuring and revitalization process being undertaken by six American OFM provinces. The books are titled *Many Tongues, One Faith: A History of Franciscan Parish Life in the United States*, by David J. Endres, and *Voice of Empathy: A History of Franciscan Media in the United States*, by Raymond Haberski Jr. Although the studies look broadly at Franciscan involvement in media and parish ministry (both men and women figures), the books illustrate the central role played by the OFMs.

The presence of the friars in media began almost from the moment of their arrival in the United States. Haberski points to the theme that runs through Franciscan media from its origins to the 21st century — that is, “the way Franciscans communicated with their audiences through print, radio, and television, engaging how Catholics lived their faith in all of its messiness. Franciscans chose, quite consciously, to use their media to evangelize to the heart; to prize empathy above all other virtues for their mission. ...[F]ranciscans attempted to influence their audience by meeting them where and how they lived.”

It is evident in chapter 14 of the *Early Rule* of St. Francis that this description of the friars and their involvement with the media seems to reflect perfectly Francis’ and the early brothers’ understanding of their mission. Haberski’s history reminds us of the significant impact that the friars had on the Church in the United States, how the use of the media was central to their Franciscan mission, and how seriously and devotedly many friars worked to maintain this ministerial outreach through difficult times.

Endres describes the history of representative Franciscan parish ministries and also chronicles the challenge of adapting Franciscan life — for example, friars’ service to immigrants and native populations – to the Church in the U.S. At the outset, he comments on the challenge this form of ministry was for the brothers:

*Many friars longed for the form of religious life that they had known and that many of their European confreres and superiors still expected them to live, but the New World context demanded something different. A new paradigm of Franciscan life developed in the United States and, with it, certain tensions. How best could the friars observe the Rule of St. Francis in the light of the realities of mission life in the United States? Should they accept parishes, knowing that excessive parochial commitments could hinder their ability to live as friars, yet acknowledging the need to minister the sacraments to those without access to them?*

These are questions that we are still asking and need to ask. Endres chronicles the origins of parishes and service churches, some of which are still maintained by the friars. He underscores the fact that the friars were attracted to parishes that would connect them to serving diverse cultures and languages with people on the margins of society – which remains a priority for friars today.

As the friars of the US-6 provinces move forward with revitalization and restructuring — or as I like to call it, the renewal and reconfiguration process — both of these books are timely because they provide an historical look at our collective past. They offer us glimpses

into how each of the six provinces came to be, helping us understand a bit more concretely what has been accomplished by each, what was and still remains important, and how each of our provinces struggled to create and sustain its Franciscan identity of life and mission in a rapidly changing cultural context.

Perhaps it would be more helpful, rather than going to Assisi, to make pilgrimages to some of these sites and ministries in each of the U.S. provinces. In any case, the work of Endres and Haberski can serve as extremely valuable resources in our R & R journey.

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*Editor's note: Information about the American Academy of Franciscan History can be found on its website and Facebook page. This article first appeared under the title: "Reading for R&R – Renewal and Reconfiguration", by Michael Blastic, OFM. January 3, 2019 issue of Friar News (Holy Name Province). Jocelyn Thomas, Editor.*

Artwork: All photos courtesy of HN Province.

1. Book cover: Haberski
2. Book cover: Endres
3. Friar Michael Blastic