2. Building repairs. We have been using five buildings of the former St. Alphonsus Parish in the South Bronx for 29 years. These buildings are owned by the Archdiocese of New York, and our agreement is that we pay rent, but are responsible for all repairs, maintenance, utilities, and insurance.

We use these buildings for serving the poor and to live. The old school building is mainly used by St. Francis Youth Centre. St. Francis Free Medical Clinic has access to the school building. Church is used for community celebrations, ordinations and final vows, as a free Mass for the homeless, for Mass with the neighborhood youth etc. The last building stands St. Anthony's Shelter for Renewal. It is a very humble homeless shelter that has one or two for the volunteers (mainly consisting to our community who work at the shelter), the other floors house the homeless. During a heavy rain storm a part of the concrete patching an upper section of the Youth Centre came crashing down. Thank God there was no one hurt.

Once we inspected all the buildings, professional engineers gave us an estimate for each building’s external walls, roof repairs and/or church steeple. The total minimum cost to repair what is essentially necessary is close to $1,500,000. (One million five hundred thousand dollars). Some funds are already available, but we need your help and a breakdown of costs for each building. For ways that you could help us visit our webpage, www.franciscanfriars.com/news-features/urgent-news or contact Fr. Peter directly at St. Cerepcio Friary: 718-665-2441 or at St. Anthony’s Shelter: 718-993-5161.

Yours in Christ, Br. Joseph Joseph Bruce, CFR
Fr. Andrew Apostoli represented our community at Mother Angelica’s funeral Mass. Fr. Andrew, with Fr. Benedict, was a faithful supporter of Mother’s work establishing the Eternal Word Television Network. May she rest in Peace.

Each year on Good Friday, the friars remember Our Lord’s passion by re-enacting the Way of the Cross from St. Joseph Friary in Harlem to St. Crispin Friary in the South Bronx. Here Br. Benjamin takes his turn carrying the cross as Frs. Sebastian and Francis Mary follow leading the prayers.

Outside of St. Michael Friary, Br. Gerard offers material and spiritual aid to their neighbors in Paterson, New Jersey in keeping with the Holy Father’s Year of Mercy.

I was born in Newark, NJ to a saintly mother and a strong, disciplinarian father who raised me and my 5 siblings to be respectful, hard-working, responsible, and successful. I began playing piano at age 5 and at age 9 started playing the saxophone after asking mom what instrument she liked. I always loved my mom and wanted to please her. I remember when I was an altar boy telling her I wanted to be a priest just to make her happy. Then I grew up! In high school I discovered sports and immorality, and began to nurture a life of vanity and pleasure. Body image became a central focus of my life and immoral behavior was somehow acceptable in the “right” circles. I still remember the first time I cursed while walking with my friends to football practice in eleventh grade feeling all-powerful in my football uniform and entering into the arena of “real manhood.”

I excelled in whatever I attempted. My music skills, weight lifting abilities and my immoral behavior all flourished and began to define who I was. Knowing little of the faith, I began to stray from the Church, not rejecting its tenets, but finding it useless and unnecessary. In college, I found a new freedom to “study” the culture and perfect this new lifestyle. My god became pleasure.

A successful NYC business career enabled me to perfect my vices and eventually “retire” at age 32, providing an opportunity to pursue my true desire: a music career. Practice and partying were my life. Selfish pursuit of pleasure was my daily bread.

At this time, Mom had been introduced to the apparitions of Medjugorje and suggested I go on pilgrimage “to know God’s will for my life.” She was out of touch, so I thought; didn’t she know I was living the dream? However, her persistence, my love for her, and an opportunity to party in Rome gave reason to submit to her wishes. I experienced an instant conversion as the old me died and a new creature was born. Our Lady plucked me from hell! I fell in love with Jesus who knew my every thought, and I desired to know everything about him! I had my second confession soon after and began to live an authentic Catholic life. Mass, adoration, rosary, regular confession, and prayer meetings became my routine. I began to live for others and through a business venture began a street ministry in Newark, NJ for the next 7 years. In 1995, I met the friars at a parish mission and was attracted to their Franciscan lifestyle. I befriended them, playing music and entering into ministry with them. After a 7 year search for a wife, the Lord called me to don the habit. When I entered the community on September 8, 2001, I felt at home for the first time. I have since had the privilege of serving the poor in our neighborhoods with my brothers and in the heart of the Church.

Thank you Jesus, Mary, St. Francis and our founding CFR fathers!

Fr. Louis Marie Leonelli, CFR