



FRANCISCAN FRIARS

HOLY NAME PROVINCE

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Franciscan Mystery Players Approach Milestone

by Richard Wisneski

*The Lent practice of presenting [The Way of the Cross](#) in churches has become a tradition for many parishes as members of youth groups from six states regularly perform this meditation along with “Jesus the Healer” during this season. **Francis Pompei, OFM**, creator of the [Franciscan Mystery Players](#), has called the nationwide youth group “lay ministry at its best.” He shared with the HNP Communications Office an essay written by a former member of a Mystery Players group in Florida. Krista Naughton, who wrote the paper for an English class, describes her visit to [St. Anthony of Padua Church](#) in Greenville, S.C., as a defining moment in her life.*



The essay below was submitted to the HNP Communications Office by the leader of a Mystery Player group that is proudly reaching a milestone this weekend.

MOUNTAIN LAKES, N.J. — For the past 23 years, on nearly every Friday and Sunday of Lent, the teen-aged Franciscan Mystery Players of Morris County, based at [St. Catherine of Siena Church](#), have presented the prayerful meditation “The Way of the Cross” in churches throughout northern New Jersey. On April 10, the group will reach a milestone with its 250th presentation.

Written and developed by Francis Pompei, “The Way of the Cross” is a moving presentation that makes use of special lighting, a stirring soundtrack, live reading and pantomime action by the teen players to help each viewer contemplate the meaning of the Stations of the Cross as it relates to today’s complicated world. The Morris County group is comprised of 14 teen players and 12 adult advisors who collectively represent six different parishes in the [Paterson, N.J., Diocese](#).

This group was started by Francis in 1989 shortly after he had written his version of “The Way of the Cross.” After one year with the group, Francis (ever the itinerant Franciscan) moved on to other places, starting new groups as he moved around.

Francis also wrote other Mystery Plays, including “Jesus the Healer,” the “Sorrowful Mysteries,” and the “The Birth of Jesus: A Franciscan Christmas.” Currently, there are 11 active groups of Mystery Players — in New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Florida, California and Colorado.

The Morris County group, one of four in New Jersey, has continued to present “The Way of the Cross” both locally and on “road trips” in seven other states. Francis credits the strong core of dedicated adult advisors to the ongoing success of this group. Several of the adults have been part of the group for 20 years, with one couple having been involved since the very beginning in 1989.

The advisors find strength and inspiration in seeing the transformation of the teen players over their time as part of the group, from shy, quiet teens without much to say who gradually become outspoken, confident young adults who proudly share their faith with the hundreds of attendees at the “shared prayer” at the foot of the cross that concludes each

presentation. The advisors can recount numerous times where attendees have remarked how the actions of these young adult players have given them hope for the future of our Church.

The players enjoy interacting with attendees at the conclusion of each presentation. At subsequent gatherings, they will often share “Glory Stories,” short anecdotes offered by those who attended and were touched by what they experienced.

More information about the mystery plays and the groups that present them, can be found on the [Franciscan Mystery Players website](#). In addition, members of the FMP groups keep in touch through a [Facebook group](#).

— Rich Wisneski, a resident of Denville, N.J., is a transportation planner with a large public transit agency. He and his wife Debbie have been the directors of the Morris County group for approximately 10 years and advisors with the group for 18 years.