

EVERY PILGRIM'S GUIDE TO ASSISI and Other Franciscan Places, by Judith Dean, with illustrations by Molly Dowell and Colin Dunn. Paraclete Press. 123 pp. \$14.95.

THREE HEROES OF ASSISI IN WORLD WAR II: Bishop Giuseppe Nicolini, Colonel Valentin Müller, Don Aldo Brunaci, edited and written by Josef Raischl, S.F.O., and André Cirino, O.F.M. 148 pp. Editrice Minerva Minerva. 14 euros. Available in the United States from Siena Friary, 25 Laurel Avenue, Mount Vernon New York 10552, for \$??.

Reviewed by BARBARA BECKWITH, book review editor of this publication. She has been to Assisi three times, once was on a Franciscan Pilgrimage conducted by Father André Cirino.

THE HOMETOWN of Sts. Francis and Clare, Assisi holds a special place in the world's heart. Its saints continue to inspire every generation. It was to here that the late Pope John Paul II called leaders of the world's religions together twice (1986 and 2002) to pray for peace. Photographs of the damage to Assisi sustained during the 1997 earthquake, especially the Basilica of St. Francis with its precious frescoes, galvanized the world to help the victims and put right the physical damage.

Every Pilgrim's Guide to Assisi is a simple guidebook, with lovely black-and-white drawings and helpful maps, geared to the pilgrim exploring the area's spiritual legacy. Judith Dean, who lives in London, has led pilgrimages to Umbria and Assisi. Her frame of reference is English. The book was first published in 2002 by Canterbury Press Norwich of London.

The book combines practical information like where toilets are located and the hours restaurants are usually open with detailed advice on what to see in each church and at each site. She has a wonderful explanation of the message in each fresco and includes Francis' prayers at appropriate points.

Besides Assisi, the book includes other places important in the lives of Francis and Clare, like La Verna and San Damiano, and even suggests side excursions to Rome, Florence and Siena.

This is an excellent, lightweight guidebook.

The other book, *Three Heroes of Assisi in World War II*, grew from interviews with Don Aldo Brunacci, who was Bishop Nicolini's secretary during the war years. It focuses on telling two stories: First, the bishop enlisted the help of a German officer, Colonel Valentin Müller, to help preserve the city. The devout Catholic colonel was a medical doctor and got the city declared a hospital city, thereby saving it from the fate of the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino, which was destroyed by Allied bombs in minutes in 1944.

Second, Bishop Nicolini played a pivotal role in the effort to shelter more than 200 Jews during the Nazi occupation of Italy. This was an effort kept secret from Colonel Müller, but

requested by the Vatican. This book corrects some of the misinformation in Alexander Ramati's *The Assisi Underground* book and movie.

Brunacci's documentation proves "only a Bishop--not the Padre Rufino of the romanticized book-turned-film...could hoodwink the Nazis and pull off such a complicated, covert operation. In the film, the Franciscan friars are given far more credit for the safety of the Jews in Assisi than they were in a position to provide. It's a laughable fiction, really, since even St. Francis put himself under the local Bishop. Nothing of such magnitude could have occurred in Assisi without the Bishop spearheading it."

Don Aldo was arrested in May 1944, for hiding a Jewish couple, and taken to a concentration camp.

The book also includes a number of interviews Don Aldo has given through the years, such as his 2004 National Public Radio conversation with Bob Edwards, and different sidelights on the story, like details about Colonel Müller's life after the war offered by his son. It even offers *St. Anthony Messenger's* 1999 story by Susan Saint Sing about Don Aldo.

These and similar stories need to be gathered now because Don Aldo is the only survivor of the *Three Heroes*, and he's 93.

These two books explore Assisi the pilgrim magnet and Assisi the living history.