



National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order - USA
State of the Order
October 2020

Opening Slide

2020 began joyfully. Early in January, I traveled to Guam for the canonical establishment of St. Padre Pio Fraternity. On the way back to the mainland, I met up with the Q Committee in Phoenix to continue our plans for the 2021 Q.

Slide 2 “Contrast”

A few weeks later, the pandemic changed everything. We began months of shutdown, and our attention turned to the racial injustices happening in our society. Polarization and division continued amid cries for justice. The pandemic raged on but wildfires, hurricanes and a contentious national election added to the mix. It seemed that fear, hardships and difficulties were everywhere.

Slide 3 – You can’t quarantine the Holy Spirit

There’s quite a contrast between what has been going on in the world since January, and what has been going on in our National Fraternity. Throughout these long challenging months I have never been more proud to be a Franciscan. Fraternity truly is a panacea for the ills of society. In spite of the pandemic and all the upheaval, the work of prayer, peacemaking and building up of the Kingdom has continued in a thousand beautiful ways. God has guided us.

We quickly realized you cannot quarantine the Holy Spirit. We are moving forward in new ways, responding in faith to the signs of the times. As Donna Hollis recently said, *“Just as Clare lived in a historic time and made a way for women to follow their calling; we are making a way to live through this pandemic which is also a very historic time.”* The Spirit has been moving, and it has been a fruitful year for our Order.

Slide 4 – “hope and joy...prepare for better future”

A few weeks ago, our General Minister Tibor Kauser sent us a video message of encouragement. I hope you all had a chance to view it. Tibor shared a quote from our Constitutions which is so applicable at this time: *“Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future.”* (GC 26.1) I have seen this lived out by you

in a great variety of ways these past months, and I have never felt more confident in the vitality of the Order. The pandemic is not squelching our desire for fraternity - it is strengthening it. In so many ways Franciscans are living the Gospel, making visible the living and active presence of Christ, witnessing to the good yet to come, and calling all to believe in the transforming power of love and pardon. We have done well in living out our 2020 theme "Journey Together in Love and Compassion," and through it all, the joy of the Lord has been our strength.

Slides 5, 6, 7 – List of events

Last year in the State of the Order address we took a long look back at what has transpired since the promulgation of our new rule after Vatican II. We must not forget where God has led us. Let's take another look at this list of events that have had such a profound impact on our Order.

- 1968 -1978 The development of the Pauline Rule
- 1972 - The Santa Clara Statement issued from the Lay Franciscan Congress (the Q)
- 2000 - The Constitutions
- 2002 - 2008 CIOFS "For the Formators"
- 2012 Q – Be the bridge
- 2014 – National Retreat - Signs of the times / Pope Francis – Br. Bill Short
- 2014 CIOFS Management of the Order, which asked "What would it take for our Order to fully develop?"
- 2016 Q – Revive
- 2017 CIOFS – Management of the Order Terms of Reference / General Chapter

Then came our Season of Visioning

- 2017 - Youth Visioning
- 2018 - Formation Visioning
- 2019 - Life Giving Union Event
- 2019 - JPIC Visioning

Slide 8 - Renewal

We came to see how all of this is part of a grand trajectory. We are on a course of renewal.

Let us look again at the quote from Celano that meant so much to us last year – and let this inspire us again:

Slide 9 - "A new spirit was placed in the hearts of the elect and a holy anointing has been poured out in their midst..."

“In these last times,
a new Evangelist,
like one of the rivers of Paradise,
has poured out the streams of the gospel
in a holy flood over the whole world.
He preached the way of the Son of God
and the teaching of truth in his deeds.
In him and through him
an unexpected joy and a holy newness
came into the world.
A new spirit was placed in the hearts of the elect
and a holy anointing has been poured out in their midst.”
(1 Celano 89)

Brothers and sisters, we must continue to look for the “unexpected joy” and open our hearts to this holy newness. We cannot stop now, and we won’t. The Holy Spirit impels us.

Slides 10 – 13

During this past year there has been more forward movement on this trajectory. As natural as flowers forming from early buds, we are beginning to see the fruit from of our “season of visioning”.

In the area of Formation: The new initial formation texts, which incorporate the ideas from all the visioning events, are well underway. The writing of these texts is a huge undertaking, and will take time, but this will be a tremendous step forward for our Order. Throughout this time, the Formation Commission is front and center in assisting Regional Formation Directors and providing wonderful resources such as “Formation Friday”.

In the area of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC): There is new energy – a real awakening - around JPIC. The tent is widened, and as a result of our visioning, JPIC focus groups have formed, and there is more involvement by members at large. (Imagine, JPIC is not just for JPIC animators!) The current goal is to develop one “Franciscan-looking JPIC vision” that is motivated by our Franciscan spirituality, and clearly flows from our Rule and Constitutions. It’s not just about having the right words or the right vision of justice, but we need to LIVE it and SPEAK it justly, courteously, in peace and with charity. This will be stressed in our new formation programs.

In the area of Franciscan Youth and Young Adults (FY/YA): Again, there is new energy and momentum for outreach to youth and young adults has been building. More individual members and fraternities are getting involved. An eleven-week FY/YA animator training series of Zoom gatherings was recently completed, and many are now attempting outreach to youth and young adults for the first time. They are putting into practice the ideals discussed in Zoom

training sessions. Currently there are two officially established Youfras, four Spanish speaking youth fraternities (JuFras) working towards establishment, and 2 emerging YouFras.

Likewise, the work of our many committees is amazing. I know you have seen their reports listing their many accomplishments.

Slide 14 – List of Future Projects

We have made great strides – but have farther to go. In the mind of the NEC there are many future projects that we wish to make a reality:

- We would like to have a “Communications Summit” during which we could explore new ways for Public Relations, Website, Social Media, Database and TAU-USA folks to work together.
- Is it time to move to a new communication platform? (such as Google Groups or Flocknotes?) This would allow direct communication from National to all our members.
- We are still working on our database project.
- We are considering purchasing the copyright to the OFS-USA Ritual from Franciscan Media so we can update it, and have control over it.
- We would like to explore new publishing options for our new formation texts, perhaps Franciscan Media or another publishing house instead of Smoky Valley.
- How can we continue to widen our embrace of cultures? How can we better support the work of translations?
- We are anxious to update our National Statutes, and the CNSA is working on the update to the Spiritual Assistant Handbook
- This year we saw the birth of a new organization bringing together all the branches of the Franciscan Family in the US. This new organization is called “The Franciscan Family Forum” and will provide a place for relationship building and sharing of ministries. You will hear more about this during the CNSA presentation tomorrow. We look forward to the full blossoming of this much needed development.
- And there is still the National Guidelines project

Slide 15 - The path ahead

How do we continue to move to where God is leading us?

In September 2020, the NEC received a document from CIOFS that shone a bright light on the path ahead. This document is the Instrumentum Laboris for the 2021 General Chapter.

Slide 16 – “Animate and Guide”

We were immediately struck by the title ---

“Animate and Guide with Servant Leadership” ---- and by this line on the first page:

“It should be noted... that in order to achieve our goals, we must deepen our sense of co-responsibility...”

We are delighted to see how the Holy Spirit is at work in our order. This 18-page document sets us forth on a common path. **Servant Leadership and co-responsibility truly is the way to move our Order forward.**

This document was such an encouragement to me. I see it as a confirmation – a sign of how the Holy Spirit is working. We are a worldwide order of many members, yet here again God is guiding us through our servant leaders.

Slide 17 – Challenges

The Instrument Laboris (or “IL”) is organized *according to the challenges of leadership* which are many and varied. There are sections addressing the challenges for all levels: local fraternities, councils and Regions. These challenges include: Communication, Legislation, Finances, Leadership in YouFra, Large geographic areas, personality conflicts, lack of capable persons, continuity from one council to the next. Any of this sound familiar?

Slide 18 - Highlights of the Instrumentum Laboris

We have much to gain from a study of this document. Let me share some highlights:

- What does it mean to animate and guide? What does “*being responsible*” mean?
- Leaders must encourage the principal of *co-responsibility*
- What is explicit and expected for Ministers and Councilors must also *be the norm* for all the brothers and sisters who “must show their love for the Fraternity with their spirit of service...” GGCC Art. 32.1

Slide 19 - Highlights of the Instrumentum Laboris, continued

- The Minister exercises this model of leadership *collegially*
- Leaders must listen to God, to the church, to their members and the General Constitutions, as well as the signs of the times
- We need an active collaboration with each doing their part

Slide 20 – Highlights, continued, “*Prophetic Creativity*”

- **Servant leadership requires *prophetic creativity***

Slide 21 – The Presidency asks for our input

The Presidency is asking us for input on this document in order to prepare for the General Chapter. They have provided an extensive list of questions. You will be receiving the entire document, as well as the list of questions, which are wide-ranging. They address everything from the problems we are experiencing in our fraternities to questions like these:

- How do our national councils address servant leadership?

- How do we form servant leaders?
- What are the fundamental points by which we evaluate the servants of a council?
- What tools, programs, or actions do we suggest that CIOFS should consider?

Answering these questions is going to be important for the working of the General Chapter. Equally important, this will give us, as a National Fraternity, direct down-to-earth help with proposals, ideas, suggestions, and solutions to these challenges so we might see where we are falling short. Thus, we intend that the National Fraternity will spend the next several months in an intensive study of this document.

Slide 22 – The Presidency requests of us

As the Presidency requests of us: “Each National Fraternity should work on this document, always seeking God’s plan and will, so that the entire Order will be able to help the sisters and brothers more on their vocational journey into personal holiness.”

This is our next step forward – a step that will help us continue on the path where God is leading us.

Sisters and brothers – in closing – I wish to share with you one scripture reading, and one of Francis’s psalms that have especially been on my mind these past days.

Slide 23 – “Live a life worthy of your call”

The Scripture is from Ephesians: *“I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, **urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received**, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*
Ephesians 4:1-6

Slide 24 – Quote from Francis, Psalm 7

The psalm I wish to share is from Francis’s Psalm 7 from the Office of the Passion:

“Cast off the weight of sin, and take up the Lord’s holy cross, and follow the Lord’s most holy commands to the very end.”

So be it. Amen.