

Statement 3

"Secular Franciscans are the vast majority of Franciscans. They live immersed in the things of the world, and without their contributionThe laity and Seculars are therefore essential. For this reason, we must rediscover the meaning of the common mission, each coordinating with the other. It is an essential mission in God's plan for Franciscans." (Benedetto Lino, OFS)

I'm Alice Aubuchon, Regional Spiritual Assistant to St. Elizabeth of Hungary. I am a retired Registered Nurse and married to my husband for fifty-four years. I am a mother of three children, each of them married. I've been blessed with six grandchildren and one great grandchild. I've been Catholic all my life and most of my education was at Catholic schools. I've been further blessed with going through the diaconate formation of my husband. An ongoing blessing is that I am a Secular Franciscan being professed for 43 years.

As I prayed with my focus statement, I reflected on many experiences that, being an OFS, have formed me into being who I am today. There are so many stories I could tell. I promise I will try to keep this as simple and brief as time allows.

When I first read the statement, I was struck by the words that Secular Franciscans are the vast majority of Franciscans. I had never really thought about that. While reflecting on this, I became more mindful of the many places they would be witnessing to the Gospel, the Word, Jesus. Further reflection reminded me that, as Seculars, we are immersed in the world. This is the place where we have been planted. We are in places where the First and Second Orders will not be. I believe each of us are exactly where we are supposed to be at this moment in time, even here.

Then I reflected on a poster I had years ago which said "Bloom where you are planted." As seculars we must bloom in our marriages, in our families, in our single lives, in our places of work, in our neighborhoods, in our parishes, in our fraternities, wherever we are, "in the world". I have always felt, and still believe, that as Seculars, it is more difficult to live our vocations, especially in the world as it is today. Our challenges are many. We are here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, whether it be staying up all night with a sick child, persevering in our faith in rough times bringing a homemade meal to a neighbor recovering from surgery or holding a parishioner's hand as he/she grieves the loss of a loved one. These are just a few ways of answering the call of our charism to wash feet daily-and, of course we must be this witness in our fraternities to inspire our sisters and brothers in their vocations.

We do have much to offer to the First and Second Orders as we witness to our vocation in a vast and challenging place, in a world wrapped up in consumerism, wars, in a world that lacks faith, in a world that needs to experience the Love of Jesus, the Christ.

St. Francis founded three Orders and we need each other to be complete in our ministry to bring the Gospel to all of God's creation. We, as Seculars, need the guidance of the First Order, the prayers of the Second Order and the life-giving union of each of us to carry out God's plan for each of us.

On one of my retreats I was captured by a picture of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were sitting at a table sharing a meal. There was an empty chair at the table. There was a mutual sharing. Each had their place and each respected the other. There was a feeling of equality-no one was better than the other. Each flowed in and out of the other without disharmony-and each had their own unique part in a common mission. Each came together in union in a community of love. The empty chair was a place for someone wounded to sit and just be-not having to do anything-just heal in a community of love.

Each Order of the Franciscan family is in need of the other to be complete. With one part missing, the other parts cannot complete Francis' call to rebuild the Church. No part can do it alone.

One of my favorite books is "*All I Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten*". One lesson that I learned was that when you go out into traffic hold hands.

To me, to be able to hold hands, we must be in relationship with each other. And, to be in relationship, we must dialogue through all our good times and all our bad times. As Franciscans, our charism is to go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel seeing as Jesus saw. As you know, this is not easy, especially in the bad times. We have been given a gift, our Franciscan family, our sisters and brothers who witness to us who we are called to be. They can challenge us, inspire us, raise us up and in many situations in my life have been Jesus with skin on. As human beings, don't you think we need this sometimes?

We can read all the books on Franciscan spirituality, pray all the Franciscan prayers, go to all the Franciscan workshops, meetings and retreats-these are good and help us to remember who we are. It is in relationship with God and each other-we come to know who we truly are.

One of my biggest joys is being Regional Spiritual Assistant. At first I was hesitant with taking on this ministry. I believed the only gift I had to offer was loving presence. I've discovered that this is the best gift of all. I've been invited into many lives in our Franciscan family and have nurtured and been nurtured. As part of my ministry, I facilitated a Spiritual Assistant class for two years. It was my greatest experience of what fraternity truly is. Because I was a Secular, as they were, we could relate on a level of true understanding of what it takes to live a Franciscan vocation "in the world"-as spouses, parents, grandparents, and in whatever Secular place we were in God's plan. Being a servant leader in my region has exposed me to many servant leaders. This has been truly good for my vocation. Their commitment, dedication, prayer life and example have inspired and affirmed me and encourage me to persevere in my own calling.

In closing, I will share with you the story of my most profound experience of being a Secular Franciscan.

Five years ago, my husband fell down our cellar stairs. Our lives changed in an instant. He was in the hospital for three months with a serious traumatic brain injury. Every day, I held his hand and whispered in his ear "I am with you, every step of the way". I didn't know if he would live or if God would take him to Himself.

Miraculously, he survived and I took him home with opposition from the medical staff. They thought it would be too much for me. I knew he needed to be home, surrounded by familiar things, especially the love of his family and friends. It has taken time and a lot of patience, and a lot of prayers to bring him to where he is today.

I am so grateful for my Franciscan family, First and Second Orders and *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*. I know, without them, I would not have gotten through the worst time of my life.

The only prayer I could pray during this challenging time was "Let me be Jesus to him, let him see Jesus in me". I was unable to attend my daily Mass nor receive daily Eucharist. I learned what marriage truly was-laying down my life as Christ did for His Church. I learned what kenosis (self-emptying) truly was. Through it all, I definitely felt "lifted up" by prayers of others, especially my Franciscan family.

I learned what seeing as Jesus saw meant in a very personal way. I saw a truly suffering servant, my husband, who was a very active Deacon, stripped of everything and never uttering a word of complaint.

Every action of mine reminded me that I was taking care of a wounded Jesus-it was really awesome!!!

One day a priest told me "Alice, you may not be at Mass, yet, you are on the altar." I know today what he

meant.

I tell you this because without being a Secular Franciscan, in the world, in my own unique place at that time, things would have been different.

Yes, Seculars are essential, even in the events of everyday life where only we can be.

I'm not sure we need to rediscover the meaning of our common mission. I believe we know it. I do believe we need to coordinate with each other to fulfill God's plan for Franciscans. I believe our world needs to experience a Trinitarian relationship through us-one of loving community, one of unity. They need to know of the possibility of this-in our world.

Together, we can inspire each other, support each other, encourage each other and be in relationship with each other. Isn't our spirituality Trinitarian-one of loving, affirming relationship-life- giving union?

Bonaventure reminds us:

There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified.

Christ on the Cross bows His head,
waiting for you,
that He may kiss you;

He stretches out His arms,
That He may embrace you; His hands are open,
That He may enrich you; His body is spread
out, That He may give Himself totally;

His feet are nailed,
That He may stay there; His side is open for
you,
That He may let you enter there.

Soliloquy