



Our Life-Giving Union: Themes and Recommendations from the August 2019 Gathering on the nature and support of the *altius moderamen* bonding Secular Franciscans and the Franciscan Friars

In August 2019, Secular Franciscans, Regional Spiritual Assistants, Provincial Ministers and their delegates for work with the Secular Franciscan Order met in St Louis, Missouri, to discuss and discern ways to live out and improve our living of the *altius moderamen* bond between the friars of various obediences and the Secular Franciscans. This bond is greatly facilitated in our country by numerous Sisters and Secular Franciscans as well as occasional diocesan priests and others who help to facilitate the bond as local and regional spiritual assistants. For this assistance, the friars are very grateful.

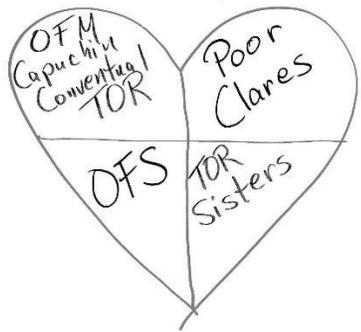
The recommendations articulated in the various groups at the meeting are listed in the appendix. Here, we gather the ideas together by theme, at times enriching them with components from our discussion in St Louis.

The most popular themes are those revolving around communication and enhancing or facilitating relationships within the Franciscan Family.

Communication

The most popular recommendation asks for the establishment of a “**Franciscan Family Council**” to facilitate communication among the four chambers of the heart of the Franciscan

Family: the friars (1st Order OFM, Capuchin, Conventual, and TOR), the Poor Clares, the various Franciscans Sisters (and Brothers) communities, and the Secular Franciscans.



Several specific communication requests also garnered significant support:

- send relevant information about 1st Order/TOR communities to the regional spiritual assistants for dissemination to fraternities through the local spiritual assistants; we might note that the Council described above might assist in determining what might be relevant, and assist in packaging the information in a way more likely to engage the attention in all chambers of the Family;
- better communication between regional spiritual assistants and provincial ministers / provincial spiritual assistants (or delegates of the provincial ministers) especially regarding visitation reports, local and regional newsletters, and notices of events – as well as acknowledgment of such communication being received; in particular notices of professions, elections, and activities;
- more communication from the CNSA (Conference of National Spiritual Assistants) beyond their articles in the Tau-USA, perhaps including a reporting of the issues discussed at their meetings and other notes to assist spiritual assistants at various levels; affirming the type of formation provided regional and local spiritual assistants at occasional multi-region meetings held in conjunction with the CNSA quarterly meetings;
- attention to communication that builds relationships, which might include invitations to gatherings as well as “action photos” with captions to dispel myths and share the reality of Secular Franciscan life; and
- facilitate communication about possible and ongoing mission projects where other members of the Franciscan Family could collaborate or share in various ways.

Presence and Ongoing Formation

In many parts of our country, friars had been historically present and are no longer present at this time. Many fraternities miss the contact they once had with friars, while others are springing up through the work of Secular Franciscans where there had been no friars. Concretely, participants

mentioned the importance of both preaching (and formation generally) and presence. While numerous lectures are available on disc or online, this does not address the desire for personal interaction. The group strongly supported the recommendation that there be a “Franciscan Omni-Bus” or **mission band for 1st Order/TOR friars to travel in those places where there are Secular Franciscans but no friars currently present.**

It was noted that such mission bands could fruitfully include Franciscan Sisters and even those Poor Clares who have the ministry to give such missions outside their monasteries.

This could be expanded into evangelical outreach, where friars and others might give presentations to local groups of Secular Franciscans and to other groups as well, as a missionary outreach of the Franciscan Family.

As St Francis, following the example of Jesus with his apostles, sent friars out two by two, there was some discussion of events that would attract friars or elicit their presence, especially in groups. Friars could be invited to attend an event, even without any expectation that they would preach or lead prayer. The creativity in finding events that would build relationships at the local level is best explored there, but fruitful ideas can be shared – and that type of communication can be facilitated by the regions and provinces (or by the proposed communications Council).

Another popular recommendation asked that the **provincial ministers** of the friar communities (1st Order/TOR) **would invite members of the Secular Franciscan Regions which overlap their provinces to meet with their provincial councils and provincial chapters.** These meetings would include discussion of their mutual needs and concerns, but even the simple presence at each others’ events could prove beneficial including the possibility of an exchange of ideas and eventual cooperation in various ministry or other proposals.

Some recommended that friars in formation be required to attend Secular Franciscan fraternity meetings for about a year during their formation. This presence would allow the friars in formation to become familiar with the Secular Franciscans, as well as allow a (typically) youthful presence to engage the local OFS fraternity. Similarly, the Secular Franciscan formation might benefit from a more experiential influence that would help to develop a sense of shared solidarity with other chambers of the Franciscan Family where this is possible.

Aware of the opportunities in the restructuring of the OFM presence in the USA, one recommendation requests that awareness of the Secular Franciscans’ “culture” and history be part of the OFM preparations for restructuring. It was noted during one of the panel discussions that the six OFM provincials involved in this effort are all intent to enhance the OFM relationship with the OFS.

Appointment of Spiritual Assistants

Our keynote speaker, Fr Michael Higgins, TOR, also noted some particulars regarding the appointment of spiritual assistants.

He stressed strongly that, while it is good for friars to cooperate with seculars, that cooperation should not separate friars from their responsibility with respect to the *altius moderamen*. The General Spiritual Assistants are concerned by the readiness with which the provincial ministers are even occasionally delegating this responsibility to non-friars. Our brother noted his opinion that the actual appointment of spiritual assistants should not be delegated. This suggests a model where the regional spiritual assistant – or even the delegate of the provincial for work with the OFS – could recommend and facilitate a meeting between the provincial minister and the candidate for spiritual assistant, but would never make the actual appointment.

While some groups in this country use the term “provincial spiritual assistant” as a synonym or convenient term to describe the delegate of the provincial, CIOFS has asked that we not use the term, and the TOR friars at their last general chapter determined they would call this person the “assistant to the provincial minister” for work with the OFS. It was also noted that the Conventual Friars now call this position “delegate of the provincial minister” for work with the OFS.

Conclusion

There was modest support for holding meetings like this in the future. A meeting like this centered around a common theme – as this year’s them of the Life Giving Union we share in living out the *altius moderamen* – inviting Secular Franciscan leadership, Friar leadership, and other relevant persons, might well be a good model, keeping in mind that such meetings should probably avoid years that we have major events like the Secular Franciscan Quinquennial. Or, it might be possible to have a theme at a future Quinquennial that would also attract the presence of the friars’ provincial ministers.

Several people noted the importance of praying for the bond, indeed all the relationships which are part of our Franciscan Family. Noting this, we give thanks to God for the grace to be able to gather in a peaceful place, in prayer with our brothers and sisters in the Franciscan Family, and to prayerfully discern ways we can strengthen these family bonds.

Recommendations from Our Life-Giving Union – Discernment and Discussion

1. The Heart of the Family – Franciscan Family Council (This would be permanent) to keep the lifeblood of the information and common concerns flowing. (OFM, Conventual, Capuchin, TOR, Poor Clares, TOR Sisters, OFS). [48 votes]
2. Re-Form/establish “Mission Bands” of 1st Order and TOR friars to travel and engage with OFS that live in areas where friars are not actively present. Franciscan “OmniBus” [33 votes]
3. The Provincials of the 1st Order and TOR to invite a representative of the regions in which they work to meet with the Provincial Councils 2 times a year, to report and discuss mutual needs with possibility of doing same at their Chapter. [30 votes]
4. To continue to build on the model of this gathering by having periodic events in the future. [16]
5. Inter-Order Communication – communication at every level from: [15 votes]
 - a. TAU USA articles not enough.
 - b. CNSA outreach to RMs and RSAs, LSAs in area of CNSA quarterly gatherings are good!
 - c. Pass on pertinent info from 1st Order, and TOR to RSAs to LSAs; synopsis of CNSA notes
 - d. This type of gathering every other year
 - e. RSA to PSA – Visitation reports, newsletters events. PSA-RSA – communication essential.
6. Create Communication that builds relationships! [15 votes]
 - a. Send “action” photos with captions to share who the OFS are and to dispel myths, and share invitations to gatherings.
 - b. Create events to build on these relationships.
 - c. Create opportunities for shared mission projects.
7. Send friars in formation for the OFM and TOR Provinces to attend OFS Fraternity monthly gatherings for one year, more or less. [14 votes]
8. To promote fraternal dialogue between 1st Order and TOR and OFS . . . we propose to exchange representation at each other’s chapters. [12 votes]
9. Email local and regional newsletters to the Provincial Spiritual Assistants and Provincial Ministers. (Include recently professed, newly elected, activities, etc. [11 votes]
 - a. Invite Friars as “Guests” – they are asked to a special local fraternity event. They do not have to speak or perform in a fraternity ceremony.
 - b. When the OFM’s work on their Province restructuring, include the OFS culture, history.
10. To radically change the formation process – to make it more experiential and relationship-oriented by discovering the gift of solidarity through engagement of issues at hand. [7 votes]
11. Pray for each other = awareness of everyone and insight for the path forward. [4 votes]
12. Task Force – How to keep the bonds between the three orders in changing reality. [3 votes]