

## “Rebuilt the Church”: Renewing the Third Order in the Province of the Americas

### Introduction

At Chapter this year we marinated ourselves in prayer and faithful conversation in order to discern together what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church and the Order. The reflection and discussion coming from the Task Force assigned to consider the way forward for deeper life-long spiritual growth and stronger community within the Order leads us to believe that such growth and community strength will come from increased intentional formation being done within the local Fellowship.

The Holy Spirit is in the habit of reviving the church from time to time in order to remind us of the urgency of the mission of God to the world. I believe we are in the midst of another Holy Spirit moment in both the Church and in the culture when we must follow the Spirit’s leading at all costs. This presentation represents an attempt to capture what we discerned during our 2017 Chapter and Convocation knowing well that we must be attentive to the Holy Spirit for principles, methods, and skills, so that we may proclaim the Gospel to the peoples and cultures we serve in ways that they can hear and know Christ. Because discernment is the function of the faithful community, we present this to you that you may discern with us the vision the Holy Spirit is calling us to in this chapter of Franciscan life.

- I. Emphasizing the local Fellowship as the primary place for lifelong formation. This does not deemphasize the Formation process but builds on it for life. We have noted that the lowest common denominator in the New Testament is the community rather than the individual.
  - a. The early part of Acts describes the Jerusalem Community where all things are held in common. They devote themselves to the Apostles’ teaching, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. They devote themselves to the needs of the widows and fatherless and to proclamation.
  - b. The faithful communities of Scripture speak of accountability, intimacy, and a history together.
  - c. The faith communities are also deeply concerned with communicating God’s compassionate and steadfast love to the world.
  - d. We believe that these understandings should shape how we do lifelong formation.
- II. The Fellowships exist to support Tertiaries in ongoing faith formation and encourage their response to God’s call to Franciscan mission
  - a. We want to be more intentional about our mission through our Fellowships
    - i. Most Franciscans are engaged in a Franciscan mission with justice, healing, the creation. We believe that a focus on these vocations on the Fellowship level can serve as encouragement, discernment and support in ways that deepen the mission of Franciscans to the world.
    - ii. Fellowships are to be places of study. As we study The Principles we see how important the study of Scripture is to ever deepening Franciscan understanding of Jesus and the Trinity, and our part in the reconciliation of the world that God has engaged in Christ.
    - iii. Ever deepening prayer and contemplation is best encouraged in the small groups that most our Fellowships are.
  - b. We need to train our Fellowship Conveners to enable Fellowships to become places of continued faithful prayer, reflection on the vocations and missions of Fellowship members, and gardens where new Franciscans can be raised up.
  - c. We should encourage our creative people to try new ministries that grow out of the skill sets, passions, and needs of the people in the Fellowship and to those to whom their ministry is directed.

- d. We believe that the place for the seeker is in community along with those who are more mature of faith. We must avoid turning someone away because they do not appear to fit at first.

### III. Foundations:

- a. Revisiting our foundational Franciscan roots and charisms, including Francis and the experience of the early Franciscan community:
  - i. “The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is simply to live the Gospel.”
  - ii. The Principles of the Third Order
    - 1. Three aims of the Franciscan movement: “To make our Lord known and loved everywhere, to spread the spirit of love and harmony, and to live simply” – ((What we intend). From this starting point we have wrestled with what we would need to look like going forward if we were to fully live into this vision and these aims.
    - 2. The 3 ways of service: “prayer, study, work.” (Resources to accomplish our Aims)
    - 3. The 3 notes of the order: “humility, love, joy.” (Represent the Character of Tertiaries).
- b. Scriptural considerations:
  - i. The Gospel life is informed by the sweep of Scripture
    - 1. The faithful are called to preferential treatment for the poor.
    - 2. The faithful are called to do justice, love mercy (kindness), and walk humbly with God“, Micah 6:
    - 3. Jesus indicates his continuity with the prophetic call of Isaiah in Luke 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
    - 4. In Luke 24:13-35 Jesus began the work of showing the Church that he is to be known in the Scriptures, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.
    - 5. In Acts 1:8 the mission was passed to the faithful empowered by the Holy Spirit. “But you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit comes upon you and shall be witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.”
  - ii. Our Bishop Protector reminded us that our call is to love the neighbor (who may also be our enemy).
  - iii. Our Minister Provincial reminded us of Philippians 2:5-11 and the humility and self-emptying in love of Christ which we are to emulate.

### IV. Our Bishop Protector exhorted us to:

- a. Return to our first love of Jesus and Francis as we see it practiced in the simple Gospel lives of St. Francis and St. Clare. “ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul and mind and strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
  - i. In small groups we remembered what brought us to Francis and Christ by telling stories of our first encounters with God and Francis.
  - ii. We remembered the charisms of Francis that first won our hearts.
- b. Be in relationship with a community of people who long to make loving Jesus and loving neighbors the passionate, risk taking, guiding motivation of their lives.

- c. Seek ever deepening prayer, in contemplation, in whole-hearted relationship with Jesus and the Holy Trinity.
  - d. Act on our love for the poor, the creation, and others in need. Be specific and personal.
- V. Points to ponder in light of these foundations and charges.
- a. Do our current structures, allow enough room for the Holy Spirit to maneuver?
    - i. Bishop Scruton observed that the early church did not quickly move seekers to the formation process, instead they sought evidence of the transformed life before the catechesis began.
    - ii. We embrace the inclusiveness of Francis in our Fellowships.
      - 1. Where our Anglican Fellowships are small we have encouraged our tertiaries to develop relationships with other Franciscan Orders, e.g. Roman Catholic Secular Franciscans, Order of Ecumenical Franciscans and the Order of Lutheran Franciscan, etc.
      - 2. Some of our Fellowships are interested in learning about the experience of the people of faith traditions other than Christian faith.
    - iii. We wonder how the local Fellowship might be more engaged in the early process of formation leading toward profession.