

The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity 2021 Annual Report to the Member Orders

The Minister General and Chapter of the Order of Lutheran Franciscans (OLF)

The Minister, and Chapter of the Third Order, Province of the Americas, Society of St. Francis (TSSF),

The International Governing Body and Chapter of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF)

The National Minister and Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) USA

July 15, 2021

Sisters and Brothers,

Since its inception in February of 2004, the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity (JCFU) has believed:

“For the sake of creation, we are called to bear witness to the essential unity of the church, the Body of Christ, by working towards Franciscan unity in all of its expressions. We will achieve this through dialogue and collaboration among the Orders which follow Christ in the tradition of Francis and Clare.”¹

To This end, the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity (JCFU) has produced and led [Twelve] conferences throughout the United States, designed around *The Elements of Franciscan Unity*, bringing together the leadership of the four Orders to reflect and discuss those Franciscan principles we hold in common regardless of our ecclesial identification. Those conferences have been enthusiastically received and have served to further our mission to broaden our understanding of each other and to deepen our relationship – a mighty task, given the size of our communities, and the history of the church.²

¹Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity Mission Statement (Article 1) *Revised and Accepted by Consensus at its Annual Meeting* February 16---19, 2004 St. Mary’s Retreat House, Santa Barbara, CA

² Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity Annual Report to the Orders. October 7, 2015. Updated July 13, 2021

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Furthermore:

In 2015, the Conference took on an Interfaith Focus bringing Jewish, Christian/Franciscan, and Muslims together to experience each other through Spiritual Practices and Mutuality's.³

In 2017, the Joint Committee created a video to be used by each Member Order in its formation programs (we did this in place of hosting an *Elements of Franciscan Unity Conference*)⁴

In 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic the first Video Mini-Conference was successfully held utilizing Zoom technology.

In order to reduce the cost of our conferences, and in an attempt to give opportunity to involve as many members of our four Orders as possible, the Joint Committee continues to be committed to present these conferences in the various geographic regions of the nation.⁵

The Joint Committee through its Chairperson is committed to continue the work toward unity and be that bridging connection to the Member Orders through individual relationship with the Minister, National Minister, General Minister and Governing Bodies of the Member Orders.

The Work of the Joint Committee in 2021

For all of us the Covid-19 Pandemic changed the way we engaged in everything we do. Our August 20-22, 2020, Annual Meeting was canceled and the Joint Committee regrouped using Zoom. At that meeting we created our calendar and decided to utilize the Zoom format for our regular meetings as well as our Conferences through October 2021.

The Joint Committee decided on scheduling in 2021 two Zoom Conferences and one in-person Conference.

A Zoom Conference with presentations on the Elements of Franciscan Unity with breakout sessions and a special Agape Prayer service were created by Masud. The Committee elected to hire a Zoom Technician to help us navigate the Zoom process. Mr. Christopher Kears from New York and our first Zoom Conference was held January 14-16, 2021, and was a great success.

Our second Zoom Conference planned for May 13-15, 2021, was canceled days before its start with the revelation of the hospitalization of our Zoom technician Christopher Kears with issues related to Covid-19. Our Brother Masud notified the committee of Chris's death due to Covid-19 complications on May 12.

³ Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity History as prepared and presented at its Annual Meeting June 10, 2021, Via ZOOM.

⁴ Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity History as prepared and presented at its Annual Meeting June 10, 2021, Via ZOOM.

⁵ Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity Annual Report to the Orders September 26, 2013

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Chris was 38 years old; he leaves behind a beloved partner, a 4-year-old and a 3-month-old daughter.

This Conference has been rescheduled for September 9-11-2021.

The 2021- 2022 Calendar for the Joint Committee is as follows.

1. ***Elements of Franciscan Unity Conference***, September 9, 10 & 11, 2021 Via Zoom.
2. ***The People of God a Sacred Prism***, in person Interfaith Conference November 14, 15 & 16, 2021.
 - a. Location: To Be Determined, in the New York City area if possible.
3. ***Elements of Franciscan Unity Conference***, May 19, 20 & 21, 2022
 - a. Location: To Be Determined, in Pittsburg PA if possible.
4. ***2021 Annual Business Meeting***. June 9, 10 & 11.
 - a. Location: ZOOM Conference

The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity:

Debra Snider-Scott, OEF

Ron Nuss-Warren, OEF

Rev. Masud Ibn Syedullah, TSSF

Rev. Beverly Hosea, TSSF

Br. Mark Molter, OLF

Br. Andrew Chavanak, OLF

Donna Hollis, OFS

Michael Carsten, OFS

Respectfully submitted, July 15, 2021



Michael Carsten OFS, Chair

Attachments:

- Elements of Franciscan Unity
- Mission and Guiding Principles
- Brief History of the JCFU as presented by Rev. Masud Ibn Syedullah, TSSF at the 2021 JCFU Annual Meeting June 12, 2021

Elements of Franciscan Unity

August 11, 2005 – Feast of St. Clare, St. Francis House – New London, CT

Reviewed November 5, 2006, Institute of Cultural Affairs – Chicago, IL

Revised 4/13/07

Approved 4/13/07

Baptism

Our Franciscan Orders understand that our Franciscan unity springs from our shared relationship with God through Holy Baptism. The waters of our birth in the name of the Triune God signify our unity in one baptism by one God.

This unity through baptism is the underpinning for our shared worship and witness as Franciscans.

Vocation

Our call to Franciscan vocation implies being conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ by means of the radical interior change that the Gospel defines as conversion – taking up our cross daily to follow Christ. Our particular vocation is to observe the Gospel by following the example of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi.

As members of Franciscan orders, we pledge ourselves, with life long intent, to live out our Franciscan vocation in community with our brothers and sisters.

Charism

As Franciscans, we see in the life of St. Francis of Assisi these gifts of the Holy Spirit: Holy Poverty (humility), love and joy. Through our Rules and through the individual and collective work of our Orders, we seek to manifest these gifts.

In our unified emulation of Francis, we seek to express a life that witnesses to poverty, love and joy.

Christ Centered

Franciscan spirituality is Christocentric to the extent that Francis fell in love with Jesus. This love transformed Francis' life. All that Francis did was shaped by what he saw in the Incarnation, and in the ministry and Passion of Jesus.

Franciscan spirituality is a way of life that is centered on the person of Jesus. Our unified mission as Franciscans is to make Jesus known to all – and to pray and work for the reconciliation of all creation.

Prophetic Voice

Fundamental to Franciscan spirituality is a commitment to strive for justice and peace among all people – and to affirm the inter-relationship and holiness of all creation. In a world torn asunder by conflict, divisions, intolerance and exploitation, our unified prophetic witness is an expression of God's light on a dark planet.

In our shared understanding of the spirit of Francis, we are called

- to courageous initiatives in the field of peace making and justice,
- to make definite choices in harmony with our faith whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression, violence or indifference, and
- to protect and restore all of creation.

Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity

The Reverend Dr. J. Frederick Ball, OEF

Jean A. D'Onofrio, SFO

Diana Finch, TSSF

The Reverend Dr. Ysidro (Sid) Mohn, OEF

Dr. Edward L. Shirley, SFO

The Reverend Masud Ibn Syedullah, TSSF

Mission Statement & Organizing Principles
of
The joint Committee on Franciscan Unity
Revised and Accepted by Consensus at its Annual Meeting
February 16---19, 2004
St. Mary's Retreat House, Santa Barbara, CA

1 Mission Statement

For the sake of creation, we are called to bear witness to the essential unity of the church, the Body of Christ, by working towards Franciscan unity in all of its expressions. We will achieve this through dialogue and collaboration among the Orders which follow Christ in the traditions of Francis and Clare.

2 Organizing Principles

A. Inclusive of Any Franciscan Orders.

Any religious community following the tradition of St. Francis and St. Clare is eligible to participate in the work of the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity.

B. Shared Responsibilities.

In the spirit of egalitarian relationship, all sponsoring communities share equally the responsibilities of the Joint Committee, including number of representatives.

C. Responsive Dialogue between joint Committee Sponsors.

Committee members are responsible for maintaining a flow of communication between the Joint Committee and their sponsoring communities.

D. Model the Unity We Seek.

Acknowledging that we share a common Franciscan charism and are committed to bear witness to its dedication to the work of Franciscan unity, members of the Joint Committee work together in ways that demonstrate mutual respect, honor, and affirmation of the several gifts each brings to the work of the Committee.

E. Ministry of Reconciliation.

Central to the Committee's vision of Franciscan unity is its call to engage efforts toward reconciliation among its sponsoring Franciscan Orders, and the ecclesia they represent.

Further Clarification of Mission Statement
Excerpted from Minutes of Annual Meeting of April 12---14, 2007
The Cenacle Retreat Center, Chicago, Illinois

Discussion of our Mission Statement:

Based on our "revisiting" of our Mission Statement, we clarified our mission as bearing witness to a more egalitarian Franciscan unity, dialoguing on issues relating to broader mission, and to facilitate a better collaboration among our Orders. This committee is to live out the dream of Franciscan Unity. What are more clearer and visible ways which we can do this? Shared prayer, shared action and shared worship have validity for this committee's work.

**The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity:
A Brief History**

- I. **Roots in the work of the Ecumenical Commission of the Secular Franciscans (SFO)**
 - A. 2002 – Ministers of The Third Order, Society of St. Francis (TSSF) and The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF) were invited to attend the Annual Meeting of the SFO Ecumenical Commission. The Secular Franciscans had been inspired, encouraged, and authorized to establish relationship with Franciscans of other Churches by the directives expressed by the Second Vatican Council and further encouraged by the International leadership of the Secular Franciscans.
 - B. The TSSF Minister Provincial sent Masud Ibn Syedullah in her place to represent The Third Order, Society of St. Francis; Fred Ball, Minister General of OEF, represented The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.
 - C. Marcella Bina was Chair of the Ecumenical Commission of SFO; Fr. Paul Ojibway, an Atonement friar, was the Spiritual Advisor for the SFO Ecumenical Commission.
 - D. At the second meeting (2003) the Marcella Bina and Fr. Ojibway suggested that a new committee needed to be formed – one to intentionally focus on Franciscan unity composed (at least initially) of members of the three Orders: OFS, TSSF, and OEF. Masud and Fred, taken aback by the suggestion, agreed that it would be valuable to create such a committee, and further agreed to bring the matter before their respective Chapters. The Chapters of both TSSF, OEF, and OFS agreed in their respective 2003 Annual Meetings to support the endeavor.
- II. **The Birthing of a New Committee, and Program – Elements of Franciscan Unity Mini-Conference**
 - A. 2004 (Meeting in Santa Barbara) representatives met to create a mission statement and principles of working together. Representatives: SFO – Marcella Bina & Jean A. D’Onofrio, SFO; TSSF – Masud Ibn Syedullah & Diana Finch; OEF – Fred Ball & Nancy Vossler; Fr. Paul Ojibway, Spiritual Assistant (Resource Person).
 - a. It was established that the Joint Committee would be composed of two representatives from each of the member Orders.
 - b. The Joint Committee would meet annually.
 - c. Each member would serve at least a three-year term for the sake of continuity.
 - d. The Convener would serve three years.
 - e. Convener would rotate among the member Orders.
 - f. The Joint Committee could invite a resource person to its meetings.
 - g. The Joint Committee would be financed by the member Orders at a rate of \$1000.00 per year. The money would be used to support the cost of the Annual Meeting and Conferences/Programs offered by the Committee (less travel cost).

- h. Travel cost to/from the Annual Meeting and Conferences would be paid for by each Order, apart from the annual contribution.

B. 2005 – Met at St. Francis House; New London, CT – Created Elements of Franciscan Unity upon which annual conferences were to be based. Original crafters: Marcella Bina and Jean D’Onofrio, SFO; Masud Ibn Syedullah and Dianna Finch, TSSF; Fredrick Ball, OEF. (Nancy Vossler was not able to attend the meeting.) It was also decided to launch the first Elements of Franciscan Unity Mini-Conference the following year at Little Portion Friary, Mt. Sinai (Long Island), New York, a friary of the Society of St. Francis (Episcopal/Anglican). Five members from each of our Orders would be invited, focusing on those persons holding positions of influence who could be agents to promote the acceptance and engagement of ecumenical cooperation among our Orders.

III. **Launch of the First Elements of Franciscan Unity Mini-Conference**

2006 – The Joint Committee convened the first Elements of Franciscan Unity Mini-Conference at Little Portion Friary, Mount Sinai, New York – a friary of the Episcopal/Anglican Society of St. Francis. Its purpose was to share the Elements as shared spiritual charisms among us; foster community and cooperative projects; be a witness of unity transcending our denominational designations. (See Mission Statement and Organizing Principles.)

IV. **On-going Annual Meetings, Programs, and Project**

- A. The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity has met once each year (in person) since its inauguration. The purpose of the Annual Meeting was to plan program(s) and project(s), and to create a Joint Annual Report to go to the respective Chapter of Member Orders.
- B. The Joint Committee decided to use the theme and format of the “Elements of Franciscan Unity Mini-Conference as its major project, with the intention of familiarizing the various leaders of each of the member Orders to the life and mission of the Joint Committee.
- C. Areas of the USA where the Mini-Conference has been presented:
 - 1. 2006 – Mount Sinai (Long Island), New York – Little Portion Friary
 - 2. 2007 -- Chicago, Illinois – The Cenacle Retreat Center
 - 3. 2011 – Mount Sinai (Long Island), New York – Little Portion Friary
 - 4. 2011 – Burlingame, California – The Mercy Center
 - 5. 2012 – Castroville, Texas (near San Antonio) – Moye Retreat Center
 - 6. 2013 – Westfield, Massachusetts – Genesis Spiritual Life Center
 - 7. 2014 – Tampa, Florida – The Franciscan Center
 - 8. 2014 – Federal Way, Washington – Archbishop Brunett Retreat Center
 - 9. 2015 – Tampa, Florida – The Franciscan Center (An Interfaith Focus: Jewish, Christian, Muslim Spiritual Practices and Mutualities)
 - 10. 2016 – Aston, Pennsylvania – Franciscan Spirituality Center (An Environment Focus using *Laudato Si*)

11. 2018 – Richmond, Virginia – Roslyn Retreat Center (*Agents of Peace in a Time of Fear*)
12. 2019 – Florissant, Missouri (St. Louis County) – Pallottine Renewal Center; OFS National Minister, met with Joint Committee and expressed that OFS would no longer be participating in the joint exchange between the Orders for the national/Provincial Chapter/Convocations.
- 2020 – Canceled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Had been planned for Scottsdale, Arizona)
13. 2021 – via. Zoom due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, January 14, 15, 16.

D. Production of Video for respective Formation Programs and Websites

2017 – Created a video to be used by each Order in its formation program (did this in place of hosting an *Elements of Franciscan Unity Conference*)

V. Expansion of Membership

A. The Order of Lutheran Franciscans joined the Joint Committee, 2017

B. The Order of Franciscans of Reconciliation joined the Joint Committee, 2018 (withdrew in 2020).

VI. History of Conveners

Marcella Bina SFO,

Diana Finch TSSF,

Fred Ball OEF,

Ed Shirley OFS,

Masud Ibn Syedullah TSSF,

Co-Conveners Louis Canter OEF & Richard LeFevre (Br. Elijah) OEF;

Br. Jahiro OEF

Mike Carsten, OFS