**JCFU April 2023 Mini Retreat**

**3Rd Presentation: Chrisms**

**Slide 21: It has been the vision of the JCFU, to define our unique perspective honoring all our brothers and sisters no matter their tradition. In doing so we celebrate our differences and rejoice in that which draws us ever more closely to our Creator.**

The world is searching for Christ and finds in the life of
Francis the living, vibrant and fully understandable representation of Jesus, present in both historical and human form.
F.U.N. Manual

The spiritual path that secular Franciscans follow is a direct reflection of our desire to follow in the footsteps of St Francis encountering the living Christ. As we develop in ourselves this passion of charism received by Francis we develop:

* **An intense Eucharistic Spirituality or Self emptying -Kenosis**
* **Fraternal Communion and mutual equality**
* **Simplicity**
* **Love of Poverty**
* **Humility**
* **A genuine sense of Minority, or littleness- seeking to serve the Lord--- not to be served.**
* **A complete and active abandonment to God, which is demonstrated by obedience, to the Church.**

Slide 22: All are but the graces of the holy spirit, without which we are truly nothing in the spiritual world. Our lifestyle is one of constant change, recognizing that what we are attached to in the physical world often leads us away from the creator. In purging ourselves of worldly attractions, we make immeasurable room for the spirit and love. I always thought it odd that we often thirst for God in our lives but run in the other direction when it comes to our need to work on our shadow selves and know that we need to run towards the creator with all our hearts, minds, and souls. Being humble, recognizing our dependence on God, makes room for growth and expansion of our ability to love and God loves.

Slide 23: Fraternal communion: often we experience the desert spiritually, feeling dry and parched. We get inside our own head and spiral in loss and distraction. When we allow ourselves the luxury of community, we understand that we are not alone- there are many who love us, need us and act as the presence of God to us and for us. God did not design us to be alone in the world, he gave us brothers and sisters.

St Francis was overjoyed when others started to gather with him. He did not understand it at first, but as each new brother and later sisters and couples joined him, he realized that in community we are the expression of love in the world. He sought out the leper colony and the marginalized, knowing that community- brotherhood and acts of kindness were often denied to these brothers in life. He sought to open the doors of understanding and compassion to those most in need, just as Christ did before him.

Slide 24: Simplicity: goodness knows, we make our own lives so over complicated! Francis had what we often think of as everything before he surrendered to the father. What humility and utter surrender he had standing before the bishop naked in being and soul. Undeniable trust in the creator’s love and that the creator would provide for his every need. Could we do that? Yet that is what we are called to do. Surrender everything, so that we might be free to embrace the creator with our whole being.

Slide 25: Love of poverty: in the act of self-emptying, we come to understand that being poor in spirit we continue the radical conversion process; becoming aware that love is all we need and learning to love ever more closely as God loves us individually and collectively.

Slide 26: Humility: genuine humility- we recognize our interdependence on all creation. We live our lives from a space of gratitude. If we understand that God is present in every living thing, how can we not be in awe. In that awe- we are challenged to be mindful of others needs and future generational needs- we must care for this creation with love and compassion, simplicity and joy, and frugality. In my home there is an ongoing discussion of want and need. I find as I peel away the extraneous, my need list goes way down. This has a ripple effect, the less I buy, the less damage I inflict on the environment, the less I inadvertently take advantage of the marginalized- who often are those that pay the price of my glutton. I work at creating a generous spirit and one that is welcoming to those today and future generations. In staying humble, love is easily expressed.

Slide 27: Genuine sense of minority, or littleness- seeking to serve and not be served. Here we are called to let go of pride, egotism, self-righteousness, superiority, and arrogance. All standing in the way of understanding that there is no separateness- only an understanding of how much we need each other, how much we need the love of our brother. We can only see our own piece of god’s love. We need the big picture to see clearly and without encumbrances’ the plan of the creator. The more I work in the interfaith realm, the more I understand how one we are. Yes, there are differences, but that which has separated us through the years steadily declines. I look to my brothers of other denominations and only see a message of love expressed in our unity and bound by our charisms.

Slide 28: Complete and active abandonment to God. Total trust, love, and forgiveness. Doing only the will of God. Can we ever accomplish this? No, not by ourselves, only through the love and grace of God.

Though I doubt you will find in the early documents, or any since then written will you see, warmth and loving embraces. They should be noted as an underlying characteristic of our combined order. There is always room at the table and enough to feed one more- or two or three! When planning a celebration commemorating the 800th anniversary of the sultan and the saint I remember just this situation. We were working with the Turkish Raindrop house that warmly opened its doors to host the event. They had room for only 90 people in their storefront space. The deadline for reservations was approaching and we neared the magic 90 number. I received a call from the raindrop folks asking me to stop taking reservations. I sincerely wanted to honor that request. However, calls kept coming in. Hmm what to do? I have firmly believed that God will provide. I threw caution to the wind. As people gathered- it was clear we exceeded the 90-person limit. What to do? Fortunately, God was smiling on our efforts. We opened the second room and showed the featured film. We divided the speakers -two in one room and two in the other- after 10 minutes we switched so everyone could hear from all the speakers. We had 130 people come to celebrate this event. The Turkish leader nudged me with, i thought we were only going to have 90 people? I smiled and said, God will always provide. Those who attended were thirsty and requested more such gatherings. The warmth and love in the rooms that night was palpable. God was present in love and simplicity!

Slide29: The basic charism of Franciscans everywhere and “every when” is in some way connected to living out “a radical embrace of the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience,” as stated in the prelude to the General Rule of the Order of the Ecumenical Franciscans and has been stated many ways by many different Franciscans through the ages, since the time of Francis. This charism is an extraordinary power given to Christians by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church. Thus, the call of Jesus to Francis at San Damiano is at the very center of our charism or spiritual gift which has called us to identify ourselves as “Franciscan.”

Slide 30: Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience are simply part of the toolkit which helps us to take on the task of rebuilding the church. They are “evangelical counsels.” We must remember that the heart of “evangelical” is “good news.” The word “counsel” is advice that leads a person to good or helpful choices. Most people in the 21st century are not likely to think of poverty, chastity, or obedience as good news or tools to build anything. In our current mindset these words are all limiting, keeping a human being from one’s greatest fullness. For Francis the choice of a life of poverty was absolutely striking, giving up a comfortable life of the successful Italian merchant class and choosing instead to live as the poorest homeless person of Assisi. He renounced his biological family and chose instead to live by begging.

Slide 31: This radical expression of poverty is not a requirement to be lived out by all of those who feel called to follow Francis, for he did indeed see a need to allow various expressions within the movement: mendicant brothers wandering the countryside, women living prayerfully in a cloister, and single and married people with children who lived in the villages and cities. All of them struggled with Sister Poverty whose main characteristic was to help them to strive to be generous with everything, because they owned nothing. Rather they were given access to the great variety of the physical things of God which, when shared, brought joy to the wider community. Self-chosen restrictions on consumption of the goods of the earth is generosity to others, which includes winged creatures, four and six legged beings, microbes, minerals, all "animate and inanimate" objects. We depend on each other for our livelihoods, even our very lives. We are all of God. Slide 32: So, in our consumption of the fruits of the universe, it is helpful to think of the source of the items we consume, what work was needed to produce the goods, and what the expense was to get every to our individual person. It is good to chew every bite of food forty times, giving thought and thanks for that particular gift. At a conference on agriculture I attended, the statement given was “The average chicken travels 2,000 miles to get to our table.” The problem is not the miles traveled, but rather the lack of appreciation for the travel. Generosity comes with knowledge and gratitude.

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Slide33: Chastity can be seen as limiting. In our current time it is generally seen as an unhelpful restriction of sexual expression. Certainly, the idea is of a much greater purpose: the wise experience and use of the Creation of God itself. We human beings sometimes look at the world around us as an object for limitless personal self-gratification. We tend to think we “own” what is in our vision and in our grasp. That view allows all kinds of oppressive and abusive behaviors. What Franciscan chastity limits is a mindless attitude about the universe. Out of chastity Franciscans see all around them as expressions of the love of the Divine Creator. With awe and reverence Franciscans approach all that is as a revelation of the Divine. Chastity is living with an awareness that everything is of God. Slide 34: God cares about the infinite vastness of the universe as well as the tiniest particle within the hydrogen atom. Human beings are within that circle of caring. Human beings are called to care and respect. Chastity is love, care, and respect for all God has made.

Slide 35: Obedience is a third aspect of the charism of Franciscans. At first glance this is seen as rigidity, the setting of artificial boundaries, and a narrowing of opportunities. For Franciscans there is a sense that obedience is a construction of a way of living that makes one live a life as a member of the body of Christ. Obviously, this is best done living as best possible as Jesus taught, to live in the spirit of the teaching of Jesus. That leads not to artificial boundaries but rather to a continuous set of choices about how to help fellow human beings find the joy that God intends for them. Slide 36: Franciscans set their boundaries, build their way of making choices, according to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, in ways that bring joy and peace to others as well as themselves. This is a very complicated matter. Human structures, including the organized church, generally set up rules for the benefit of the organization rather than according to the teachings of Jesus. Slide 37: A Franciscan will strive to follow Jesus first, keeping in mind that the church, no matter how it is experienced, is the Body of Christ. It is the wounded body and sometimes it wounds its members. Franciscans, with respect and love, awe, and tenderness, live in the church, finding ways to rebuild and renew their own lives as members of the Body of Christ, helping that portion of the Body of Christ in which they live be a close match to the Jesus of the Holy Gospels.

Slide 38: Each Franciscan finds by the leading of the Holy Spirit the means to discern how to live daily. We walk in the way of Jesus following in the footsteps of Francis. We can do this because we have within us the “soul spark” of the divine. We enflesh that in the here and now with the process of or daily conversion that happens when we walk with Jesus. The walk with Jesus is the heart of our charism.