

OFS Quinquennial
Saturday, August 6, 2022
Presentation by Doug Clorey, ofs

(Slide: Rejoice in the Choice)

Bunogiorno, Buona gente!
Good Morning, Good People!
Buenos días! Haseyo!

It's a pleasure for Marion, Tim, Kathy, Lori and I to be with you this morning to share a few thoughts around the Memoriale Propositi.

(Slide: The Praises of God – title)

To begin my part of the presentation, I would invite you to place yourself in the presence of God and to join me in praying in song.

Using the words of St. Francis, I wrote music to “The Praises of God” a few years ago. We'll sing a couple of verses of this prayer. Please join us in the refrain of the song.

(Slide: The Praises of God – words and music)

(Slide: Let us begin ...)

Let us begin, brothers (and sisters), to serve our Lord God, for until now we have made but little progress. (or we have done little or nothing)
(The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Bonaventure, Chapter XIV)

These words of St. Francis speak of change – we have done something and made some progress, but we now need to do more ... or perhaps even something else ... in order to progress further.

There is always a sense of movement when change occurs. Think of the Franciscan movement, for example, which has been “moving” for over 800 years! And, it continues. But not movement for its own sake but, movement that leads to the “building a community of love” as Pope Saint John Paul II exhorted Secular Franciscans in 2002 or as David Couturier spoke about on Thursday, to build “communities of caring encounters”.

I've entitled this part of our presentation as “Always Moving Forward” ... towards the building of a more fraternal world.

(Slide: Always Moving Forward)

Clearly, in moving forward, we build on the foundations that have already been laid.

However, we cannot rest on our laurels and keep doing the same things the same way. We must be open to change. Otherwise, we will stagnate.

And, of course, change is the reality of our lives and everything that surrounds us. Everything changes. Nothing remains the same.

When looking at change, we can begin with our outermost circle – the universe - billions of light years away!

(Slide: Universe)

At the level of the universe, scientists tell us that many new events await us each year, not only here on planet Earth, but throughout the entire observable Universe. Despite all appearances that things don't seem to change very much, the galaxy, and even the entire Universe, are all undergoing significant changes. For example, ...

- A day on Earth is slightly longer this year than it was last year.
- The Moon is farther away from Earth this year than it was last year.
- The Sun is slightly hotter this year than it was last year.
- A handful of small new stars have been born in the Milky Way.
- Approximately 20 million stars that were previously accessible at the speed of light are now forever beyond our reach.

Coming closer to home, we are increasingly aware of the changes in our planet and in our world.

- Researchers tell us that the temperature of the earth's surface is increasing.
- Extremely high temperatures and heavy precipitation events are increasing, glaciers and snow cover are shrinking, and sea ice is retreating.
- Growing seasons are longer, and large wildfires occur more frequently.
- Many species are moving to new locations, and changes in the seasonal timing of important biological events are occurring in response to climate change.
- Seas are warming, rising, and becoming more acidic, and flooding is become more frequent along coastlines.

(3 Slides: trees falling into ocean + eroding coastline)

Share about erosion in Argyle Shore.

Lots of changes on our planet ...

We also realize how interconnected we now are on this planet of ours.

(Slide: laptop and phone)

Communication technologies have made distances small in terms of the transmission of information.

And, not only transmission of information, but also transmission of infectious diseases. We only need to look at how COVID-19 spread across the world to appreciate this interconnection of nations and peoples.

This interconnection can be a stimulus for building community, on a global scale ... and, indeed, for building our fraternal world.

But, here, there is a caution: it can also be an off ramp to building community with flesh and bones people, in-person communications replaced by virtual communications.

And, then, we look at the Church and how it is changing to adapt to modern society.

Of course, one of the most significant changes in modern times was Vatican II and the reforms that were ushered in the 1960's. And, since then, more changes.

The Jesuit document, entitled "*A Living Tradition*" (2019), states that the past three decades have witnessed significant changes in the role of religion in society. Western Europe and North America, in particular, have seen a significant decline in the number of people that claim a religious affiliation, especially among younger generations. And, yet, at the same time, the number of Catholics worldwide has experienced a 57% increase since 1980.

I'd also like to share some of the realities that we are experiencing and living within the context of the Canadian Church, in particular.

(Slide: Francis repairing the church)

In Canada, Dr. Reginald Bibby, a leading sociologist and religious trends analyst from the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, states that research paints a picture of a highly polarized religious situation in Canada. A solid core of about 3 in 10 Canadians continue to value faith while some 4 in 10 do not; the remaining 3 in 10 constitute something of an "ambivalent middle".

Bibby also claims that immigration is the most important factor that accounts for the increase in numbers; in 2016, 70% of Canada's population growth came from immigration, of which 55% came from Asia. How the Church responds to the influx of migrants will be key.

And, I would add, how the Secular Franciscan Order responds to these kinds of changes will be key to our future and the sustainability of our communities.

There are also significant signs of hope as the Canadian Church changes.

Cardinal Gérald Cyprien Lacroix of the Archdiocese of Quebec announced in 2021 the move towards reorganizing parishes in the archdiocese to focus on local missionary activities. He points out that the parish system is no longer sustainable and needs to evolve. The focus within

the Archdiocese of Quebec will now be on reorienting pastoral teams toward a more intensely missionary activity, turned toward the people and groups that are often not reached.

In this area of the country, it seems that models of church are being turned upside down - rather than ministry being the result of belonging to a church community, the call is to go minister and come together as church to be supported in ministry.

As an Order within the Church, it is important to recognize that, while the Church evolves and changes, so too must the Secular Franciscan Order in order to remain sustainable into the future.

And, now we turn to the family, and how family life has changed in recent decades.

(Slide: depiction of different family models)

In a document entitled “Changing Families, New Understandings”, the Vanier Institute of the Family (based in Ottawa, Canada) states that “there is much greater diversity in family forms and practices than ever before, and ... that these changes have precipitated a more complex and nuanced way of thinking about families.

As a result, there is much greater diversity in the ways young adults organize their lives as workers and as family members – as partners, as parents, and as members of family networks.

The implications of the rapid changes and growing diversity are often unclear and unsettling. They also invite us to understand families in new ways.”
(Changing Families, New Understandings, Meg Luxton, York University, June 2011)

(Slide: Clorey family)

Share about our own Clorey family.

(Slide: Catechism of the Catholic Church)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1431) calls us to a “radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart ... which entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace.”

(Slide: Called to a radical reorientation ...)

These are important words of change with which we can identify as Brothers and Sisters of Penance. This has been our call from the very beginning and as articulated in *Memoriale Propositi* of 1221.

Kathy, Tim and Lori will speak more about these changes and how we position ourselves for the future.

As mentioned already, our own Secular Franciscan Order has also seen its fair share of changes over the past 800 years, and continues to change and evolve.

At the end of the day, a common thread in the overall direction provided by St. Francis to his followers is that we should live the Gospel life.

And to ensure a sufficient understanding of how this Gospel life ought to be lived, he gave his followers a Rule (or project of life) – to the brothers/friars, to the sisters/Poor Clares and to the seculars living in the world.

And, just as life and the conditions of life have changed over the years, so too have the Rules evolved over the centuries.

(Slide: Evolution of Rules)

The earliest of documents that provide direction to seculars is the Letter to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful), written sometime between 1209 and 1215. You will recall that there are excerpts from this document included in the Prologue of our present OFS Rule.

Following this Letter to the Faithful came the Memoriale Propositi of 1221, identified specifically as a “Rule” and directed specifically to us, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. “Memoriale Propositi”, the title of the Rule, is taken from the two opening words of the text and is generally understood to mean "document for a project of life".

This Rule was later followed in 1289 by Supra Montem, given by Pope Nicholas IV.

We then jump to 1888, almost 600 years later, for another Rule, Misericors Dei Filius, given by Pope Leo XIII.

And, 90 years later, our current Rule, Seraphicus Patriarcha, given to us by Pope Paul VI.

I share this information, not so much to provide a history lesson on the Rules of the Secular Franciscan Order but to make the point that throughout the centuries, our way of life has evolved and changed ... just like the universe, the earth, the world and its people.

Of course, it is wonderful to be able to celebrate Memoriale Propositi because it provided us with a solid foundation, not only for the Brothers and Sisters to live the Gospel Life in their time, but for future Rules that would be developed later to respond to the changing needs of the followers of St. Francis.

We benefit today, 800+ years later, from the direction provided in Memoriale Propositi and from the successive support and direction provided by Pope Nicholas IV, Pope Leo XII and Pope Paul VI.

Marion will speak more about how our first Rule provided this foundation, always moving us forward.

While the Rules given to different branches of the Franciscan Family may differ in specifics, all Rules tend to focus on observing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the manner of St. Francis.

It is this foundation on which we go forward to build communities of caring and trusting encounter.

And, that is the choice made by all of us Secular Franciscans; that is, to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the manner of St. Francis.

We rejoice in this choice!

We rejoice in the choice of going from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel.

(Slide: Gospel to life and life to the Gospel -title)

(Slide: Gospel to life and life to the Gospel – music)