

**OFS Quinquennial**  
**Saturday, August 6, 2022**  
**Presentation by Marion Clorey, ofs**

*(Slide: – from Memoriale Propositi to our Present Rule - 800+ years of living the Gospel Life)*

Paix et Joie! Peace and Joy from Canada!

It astounds me that over 800 years after Francis walked the hills and valleys near Assisi, his way of life continues to be relevant to us as Secular Franciscans. As we have just sung, thanks be to God for this way of life!

I'm going to focus on how Memoriale Propositi compares to our present Rule. Since it has been 800 plus one year since the Rule of 1221, It sounds like it is going to be a long talk!

Some of the wording in Memoriale Propositi may sound a little strange to our ears but the key messages on which our way of life is based are there and are clearly reiterated in our current rule promulgated in 1978. Attilio Galimberti, ofs, from Italy, in his reflection on how to live the values of Memoriale Propositi in today's context, suggests that we should not forget this treasure after the anniversary is over as it gives continuity to the path of our Order. [https://ciofs.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EN-Memoriale-propositi-3rd-Contribution\\_September-2021.pdf](https://ciofs.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EN-Memoriale-propositi-3rd-Contribution_September-2021.pdf)

Doug mentioned that Memoriale Propositi is generally understood to mean “document for a project of life or life project.” When I first met my francophone brothers and sisters in Canada, they often spoke about their “projet de vie” which translates literally as life project. When we talked about following the Rule as a way of life, they would talk about their life's project which essentially means the same thing – following the Rule. The more I thought about it, it made sense. I now like to think about my earthly life as a Secular Franciscan in this way. A project has a beginning, a middle and an end. I'll tell you a little about how I began as a Secular Franciscan, right now I'm in the middle phase and I do not know the day or the hour when my life's project will be complete but I know Sister Death will come.

To celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Memoriale Propositi, CIOFS created a series of short videos. And of course, our brother Bob Stronach was very involved in this project. They identified a number of themes common to both Memoriale Propositi and our current rule. I would like to focus on these themes and share my experience of living my life project by following the Rule of the Secular Franciscan order.

*(Slide: Fraternity)*

The first theme identified is **Fraternity**, and the importance of gathering is strongly emphasized in both documents. In Memoriale Propositi Article 19 we read “all the brothers and sisters of every city and place should gather every month.” Does that sound familiar? Of course it does, because our current rule in Articles 13 and 24 states “A sense of community will make them

joyful” and,” the council should organize frequent gatherings and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity.”

It was really fraternity that drew me to the Secular Franciscan Order. I had been involved in the charismatic renewal in university and the sense of community I had felt there was missing from my life once I left. Doug and I explored various communities and eventually we were led to the Secular Franciscan Order. Reading Francis’ story, I felt a connection to him. His declaration “the Lord sent me brothers” as his way of describing the beginnings of fraternity resonated with me. Some wonderful people in Montreal helped to get us started and encouraged us to just start meeting. It turned out there were a number of other interested individuals living nearby as well as two people who had moved to Prince Edward Island who were already professed.

Our local fraternity began in 1987 and has been an anchor for us for 35 years! We have also been involved at the National level and International level. I remember when Doug went to work in Australia in 1995. I was concerned about how he was managing. An elderly woman in our local fraternity said “do we have Secular Franciscans there?” I said “yes, actually we do”. So she replied, “Oh, he’ll be fine, he’s with family there”. And she was right! By the time the children and I arrived 4 months later, he was well established in the local fraternity in Canberra and had even been on a retreat! We recently held our National Elective Chapter in Canada and we were very happy to have Vice-Minister General Mary Stronach from your National Fraternity delegated to preside . Mary endeared herself to everyone especially the French who were so appreciative of her efforts to communicate with them in their own language! As the song “Gospel to Life, Life to Gospel” suggests, we truly are a global family.

*(Slide: Simplicity)*

What does it mean to be called to a life of **simplicity**? Memoriale Propositi, in Articles 1-3 is somewhat prescriptive in this regard: the brothers shall dress in humble undyed cloth and the sisters also shall dress humbly.... and no one is to attend unseemly parties or dances. I remember early on in formation, one of our fellow novices who really liked to dance was quite concerned about this. Our formation director assured him this prescription was no longer in effect. I don’t know about your fraternities, but a lot of our brothers and sisters love to dance!

Our Rule in Article 11 points us towards simplicity. We are to detach from temporal goods, simplifying our needs. The phrase to” live simply so others may simply live” comes to mind. We are aware that how we live affects the lives of others especially the poor and marginalized. And perhaps Mother Earth has become the most poor and most oppressed among us. As Pope Francis points out in Laudato Si, the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are inextricably linked. In more recent times, our local fraternity’s JPIC team has been challenging us to live more simply and also to promote justice initiatives as suggested in Article 15.

Our Minister General Tibor Kauser, encouraged us as Seculars to get involved in public life. I’m happy to report that my local minister is also the Mayor of her town. She is a good example of a secular who makes choices in harmony with her faith.

*(Slide: Family)*

The importance of **family** is outlined in both rules. In *Memoriale Propositi* Article 18, members are encouraged to fortify their households to serve God. Our own rule in Article 17 says we are to “cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity and respect for life” in our family “striving to make it a sign of a world already redeemed in Christ.”

How do we fortify our household to serve God? Our adult children and their spouses (pictured here) serve God in their own way, but currently, that does not involve attending church very often. At the same time, they are building a better world through justice and care of creation initiatives. After listening to Michelle and Tpbj from the Franciscan Action Network (FAN), I think we need to start our own Franciscan Justice Circle within our family.

What would a family look like if it was a sign of a world already redeemed in Christ? For me, it would be a place where people constantly worked through their differences, respected each other and made peace with each other, and were united in serving each other and the larger community. The members would be faithful to each other and to the still small voice of God within their hearts.

*(Slide: Reconciliation)*

In *Memoriale Propositi* Article 15, the theme of **Reconciliation** is expressed in a prescriptive manner for the most part, outlining how often to go confession, when to receive Communion and being reconciled with neighbours. My favourite part of our Rule on reconciliation is that it recognizes our frailty as humans – Article 7 says we need daily conversion. That line brought me joy and convinced me to become a Secular Franciscan. Being given permission to reconcile with myself that I was not perfect and that I needed to begin again everyday made me feel very much in the right place.

Thursday’s refection question asked us to call to mind a conversion experience. The one that came to me was my time with a street person who became associated with our fraternity. I mentioned earlier that there were many in our fraternity that liked to dance. Jimmy was one of them and he chose me to be his regular dance partner at fraternity celebrations. Now Jimmy was very smelly and I had a hard time with this at first. It was only when I realized that Jimmy was really Christ in stinky clothes that my sense of repulsiveness started to lift. I don’t know – maybe he cleaned up a bit! Jimmy helped me to be more comfortable with street people – he died a few years ago and he continues to have a huge influence on my life.

On a more communal level, I have felt challenged in the past few years to work towards reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. I’m sure you are aware of Pope Francis recent pilgrimage to Canada where he apologized to the Indigenous peoples for the suffering they endured as a result of their time in residential schools. Asking for pardon, Pope Francis says, is a first step towards healing. I believe we, as Secular Franciscans in Canada, need to be allies with our Indigenous brothers and sisters as the healing journey continues.

*(Slide: Prayer)*

The theme of **prayer** is addressed in Memoriali Propositi in Article 7 and 12. It speaks about pray before meals and praying the liturgy the hours. Similarly, our Rule in Article 8 encourages participation in liturgical prayer as well as the sacraments, above all the Eucharist. I love Article 8 of our rule where it says that “prayer and contemplation (should) be the soul of all (we) are and do.” Thessalonians 5: 17 says we should “pray constantly”. When I worked as a counsellor I really took this to heart. I would pray before and often during the sessions praying “Be with me as I listen to this person who is suffering”.

Prayer and contemplation always call for a response. Without prayer, actions, though well intended, can be more like reactions and may not be fruitful and may even be detrimental.

I had an experience of being infused with God’s presence as a very young child which in retrospect, I believe was a contemplative moment. One of my earliest memories is watching my sister and brothers returning from school and feeling that I really wanted to go to school. Finally I turned six and got to go! I was so happy being there. I can remember one day after school being on the sidewalk by myself and feeling such a joy that I just skipped around and around on that sidewalk. I was like the crippled man in Acts 3:6-8 who, after Peter had cured him, went walking and leaping and praising God! I discovered later that this experience in early life came with responsibility. And so, as an adult, my response was to become an educator and share my joy of learning with others - as a teacher at every level from kindergarten to university, as a university counsellor and a family life educator.

*(Slide: Peace)*

The final theme noted is **Peace**. Memoriale Propositi once again urges us to make peace with brothers and sisters and non-members at odds in Article 26. Urging member to non-violence, Article 16 states that the members are not to be bearers of arms. In Article 19 of the present rule we are called to be “bearers of peace” and to “seek... unity and harmony through dialogue.” How do we make peace with non-members? The meeting of Francis and the Sultan comes to mind. David Couturier reminded us of Pope Francis encouragement to have caring encounters. It seems to me that the meeting of Francis and the Sultan was an example of that. What about us? How do we engage in caring encounters? Do we look street people in the eye and ask them how they are doing?

In the program 12 weeks of Franciscan Peace by our sister Carolyn Townes, she quotes Claude Thomas as saying “Imagine, if everyone stopped the war in themselves – there would be no seeds from which war could grow.” In our prayers of the faithful at Eucharist, we often pray for an end to war and conflict in various parts of our world. We need to pray for the seeds of war that grow in the recesses of our own hearts. When I am critical of my neighbour, when I want more recognition for my service – all of these things are the beginnings of anger and resentment which can take root in my heart. We need to uproot those thoughts with the power of God’s grace and forgiveness. And of course our commitment to daily conversion and prayer is the place where this can happen. We trust in the presence of the divine seed in everyone, including ourselves!

*(Slide: Jubilee! Rejoice in the Choice)*

Thank you for inviting us to celebrate this time of Jubilee with you! The overall theme of our talk is Rejoice in the Choice.” Doug and I rejoice in the choice to be professed members of the Secular Franciscan Order and to have brothers and sisters such as you. Francis’ message to his followers is very simple “Go and live the Gospel”. Our rule reminds us that we must go from gospel to life and life to gospel. And as Mary Bittner pointed out in her workshop, an important aspect of this is fraternal communion.

Life as a Franciscan is about fraternity, prayer, and all the themes that we just reflected upon. But it is so much more than the sum of the parts.

We are a part of a worldwide spiritual family in the Church. We recently had a couple of friars with us who were on a week’s vacation on PEI. They were camping on the shore of our place and we had a few occasions to fraternize together. As I listened to them share about their ministries, I think it was the first time I really understood how we are all part of the same Franciscan family. We are not auxiliaries as Bishop Stowe pointed out – we seculars hold a special place in the family circle.

As I look to the future, I wonder what God has in store for me – how will I be called to go from gospel to life and life to gospel. Now that I am retired, my aspiration is to be a fulltime grandmother to Arya, Calista and Danny and to spend more time with our aging members – but maybe God has other plans. In any case, we trust that the Spirit of God is leading us and God will give us the grace and strength to answer the call. Please stand if you would like to join us in singing:

*(Slide: Wherever the Spirit leads us)*