



NAFRA

# NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

## A New Theme for a New Year *O Breath of God, unite us in action!*

by Jan Parker, OFS National Minister

Sometimes God speaks loudly and gives us very clear signs. That's exactly what I thought when I first heard our new national theme for 2017. It was at our Chapter last November that our inspired theme committee came forward and announced, "*O Breath of God, unite us in action!*" Wow! My first thought was, "What better news could there be? I was so happy. This theme fit perfectly with my "let's get it done" personality. I said a quick prayer of gratitude, "Thank you, Lord, this theme is great! It will motivate us so we can really get moving!" Just as quickly as my head was saying this, God spoke to my heart and said, "No, Jan, that's not quite it." What? Isn't this theme about *action*? I realized then that I had jumped to the last word because that is what I wanted to hear. In my hurry, I missed the point. I sat back to think about what God was really saying. In the weeks that followed, the message unfolded.

*O Breath of God!* Our theme is first and foremost a prayer. How beautiful and how right that is! As our Rule says, "let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do."<sup>1</sup> Our first focus then, before any action, is to be open and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us. "*O breathe on me, O breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love the things you love and do what you would do.*"<sup>2</sup> If our work is not guided by the Spirit, then it is in vain. You might think I would know this by heart, but in my eagerness to accomplish things, it is easy to forget. I experienced a moment of conversion last December as I planned the agenda for our National Executive Council (NEC) meeting. In looking at our long "to do" list I was overwhelmed. Would we have time to cover everything? Where should we start? I called Mary Bittner to get her thoughts, and that's when it

happened. Mary helped me to step back from the "to do" list, and take a breath. In prayer we were led to the beautiful passage from Isaiah 55:1-13, particularly, "*My word shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.*" A light turned on, and it all became clear. I knew then that we needed to start our NEC meeting with Isaiah 55, and ask ourselves, "Are we being effective? Are we caught up in projects without thinking about our objectives?" Peace filled me. This is how we would begin. The rest of the story? Our NEC meeting was blessed by fruitful reflection on God's Word, which led us to look at what we were doing, and why. Holy Wisdom then guided us as we covered every item on the agenda.

Our new national theme reminds us of the importance of beginning everything with prayer, so in every moment, let us call on the Breath of God to be with us.

### *Unite us!*

Our theme unfolds further as we ask God to *unite us* in action. When we hear this call to unified action, we may first think of Franciscan fraternity, where we are enlivened for apostolic life.<sup>3</sup> As Secular Franciscans, we come together, working side by side in our ministries and projects. To unite in action with our brothers and sisters is vital, but I believe this theme, and our charism, calls us to contemplate a wider, all-encompassing unity – a *communio*. St. John Paul II defined communion as "the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us to make us all one heart and one

<sup>1</sup> OFS Rule, Art. 8

<sup>2</sup> From the song, "O Breathe on Me, O Breath of God" by Edwin Hatch, 1878

<sup>3</sup> OFS Rule, Article 22

soul.”<sup>4</sup> St. John Paul II also noted that one of our great challenges in this millennium is to promote a “spirituality of communion.”<sup>5</sup> He describes this spirituality as “an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are a part of me”... to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other's burdens” (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations that constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.”

This sense of communion is inherent in all Franciscans who in every moment and in every endeavor are to see in all persons the image of Christ<sup>6</sup>, and see in all creation the imprint of the Most High.<sup>7</sup> For us, unity is not a distant idea but a reality that must guide our actions. We are brother and sister to all people, and with all creation. As we pray, “O Breath of God, *unite us...*” it is this image of unity that we must keep in mind.

### ***In Action!***

Finally and boldly our theme calls us to action, so let us not stand idly by. We have been told: *Set out into the deep! Go to the peripheries! Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel!* My sweet OFS family, yes, let us act. Let us be about loving and witnessing, but let us keep in mind the totality of our call, and our theme. Our need for God is great; let us gather often in the Upper Room where the Risen Christ invites us, and let him “breathe” on us his life-giving Spirit. Our need for each other is great; may the Breath of God unite us in a holy communion with all people and all creation. The need for action in this world is great; may we go forth rejoicing that we have been called to love and to live the Gospel.

It is clear to me that we have not been given a theme, so much as we have been given a prayer and a path. Let us pray now and in the year ahead, “*O Breath of God, unite us in action!*” and may all of our actions along this way befit the holiness to which we have been called.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, IV.43

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, IV.43

<sup>6</sup> OFS Rule, Article 13

<sup>7</sup> OFS Rule, Article 18

## **2021 Quinquennial Committee Chair Needed**

The National Executive Council is seeking applicants for the position of Chair of the 2021 Quinquennial (Q) Committee. If you are interested in serving in this capacity, please send your answers to the following questions to both Jane DeRose-Bamman at [janedbsfo@msn.com](mailto:janedbsfo@msn.com) and Mary Bittner at [mbittner@umich.edu](mailto:mbittner@umich.edu). Please send your response by March 25, 2017. Include your phone, email address, name of your Local Fraternity, name of your Region and Date of Profession.

1. In a few sentences, please tell us about yourself (family, interests, hobbies, etc.)
2. What is your educational background and employment as they apply to this position?
3. What community activities (past and present) have you been involved in as they apply to this position?
4. What OFS leadership, service positions and/or activities (past and present) have you been involved in and at what level of fraternity (Local, Regional, National)?
5. Describe how your gifts, talents and experience lead you to apply for this position.
6. Have you attended past Q's? Which ones? Were you involved in some way (e.g., small Q fraternity leader, vendor, speaker, Q Committee member)?
7. What did you like best about the Qs you have attended?
8. What would you change?
9. What, in your opinion, are the major purposes of the Q?
10. What is your vision for the 2021 Q?

***Thank you for your interest in this national opportunity to serve.***