



OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA



NATIONAL MINISTER'S MESSAGE

by Jan Parker OFS

A CALL TO PROPHETIC CREATIVITY

As Clare once said to Agnes, “*Let us be filled with a remarkable happiness and a spiritual joy!*” It is an exciting time for Franciscans as, one after another, God’s gifts to the Franciscan Order *just keep coming!* The newest three gifts to our Order arrived several months ago, and several months apart, but here in the light of this new year I call your attention to them. Let us look at these gifts carefully, for they will profoundly affect our Order as we move into 2021.

What are these *three gifts*? They are the new **Instrumentum Laboris** from our CIOFS Presidency, Pope Francis’s **Fratelli Tutti** and the **2020 Christmas letter** from our General Ministers. Each of these documents is unique, but for the OFS I see them linked in a single purpose. They are the next set of markers on our journey of renewal. I believe that, by way of these documents placed so directly in our path, *God is continuing to chart our course.*

For some time now, we have spoken of our journey towards the total renewal of our Order and of the trajectory God has set us on towards its fulfillment. This journey began with the promulgation of our Rule 40 years ago. Here in the United States, it has continued with many notable events marking our progress, most recently the visioning gatherings, which led us to re-examine our approach to our commissions of Youth, Justice and Peace, and Formation. Now the Holy Spirit is speaking again, calling us to move forward.

To me, God’s purpose in sending us these three gifts can be summed up in two words from the *Instrumentum Laboris* that jumped out at me as I read them: **prophetic creativity**. As I studied these documents, it became clear that we will not be able to achieve the goal of the total renewal of our Order without prophetic creativity. I believe God is calling us to focus our prayer and energy in this direction.

What is prophetic creativity? It is to see as God sees—to see with spiritual eyes—and then to act, allowing God’s grace to strengthen us to do his will. It is innovative action we take in response to the Holy Spirit working within us. Pope Francis is a master of prophetic creativity; so inspired and innovative are his words and actions that lives are converted. In *Fratelli Tutti* he calls all of us to be creative in building relationships, using the word “create” no less than 44 times. The General Ministers, in their Christmas letter, remind us that “change (conversion) is impossible without a motivation and a process.” They then call us to a prophetic stance, stating, “Jesus, more than anyone, teaches us how to live a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle.” St. Francis of Assisi, who followed Christ most closely, is an excellent model of prophetic creativity. How many times did he hear the Word of God speaking directly to him and immediately put it into practice?

In the *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL) the term “prophetic creativity” is applied *directly to the OFS*. Here the focus is on **servant leadership**, always accompanied in our legislation by two verbs “**animate and guide.**” This function of servant leaders, to animate and guide, is not limited to administration or bureaucracy but, most importantly, applies to the heart of our call—the *full realization of the Secular Franciscan life, both as individuals and as Fraternity*. This “full realization” is the renewal we long for. It is the goal given to us by the Church and emphasized repeatedly by our Popes. The IL states emphatically that to achieve this goal “**prophetic creativity is required.**”

As servant leaders, we need to implement prophetic creativity and plan for the future. This goes beyond the “day to day” running of the fraternity. The IL states, “We should always seek new ways that help the development of the Fraternities and the spiritual life of the sisters and brothers, being open to and

responding to the signs of the times.” So we must ask ourselves, *what will move our fraternities, and our Order forward, so we become what the Church expects of us?*

A good question at this point might be, does this requirement of prophetic creativity in the IL apply only to servant leaders? Certainly, the focus is on leaders, but the IL equally stresses the concept of “co-responsibility,” which applies to every member. Our General Constitutions states, “*The brothers and sisters are **co-responsible** for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.*” (GC 31.1) Think about this. We are responsible not only for the life of our own local fraternity, but for *the entire Order*. The IL stresses this point as well, addressing all of us and stating that “*in order to achieve our goals, **we must deepen our sense of co-responsibility.***” All members must be attentive to the call to prophetic creativity. We must ask ourselves—*what is my part?*

Let us all respond to the Holy Spirit’s call—a call to a season of **prophetic creativity**. Imagine the result of this. We would grow closer to God and to each other. We would engage more deeply in our vocation. Our lives and our fraternities would be more alive with enthusiasm, joy, and hope. We would experience a more intense commitment with unconditional participation. Our Order would become stronger in its witness. We would reach out in the world to build relationships and share the joy of fraternity with all we meet. We would live up to our potential, individually and as an Order.

I believe these three documents give us tools to accomplish this, so let us study and unpack them in the months ahead. Please make them part of your ongoing formation in your local fraternities. My hope is that we might have some teleconferences, perhaps on both a regional and national level, to share and discuss what we discover in these three gifts. God is calling us more strongly than ever to live a life worthy of our call, and as always, he is providing us with all we need.

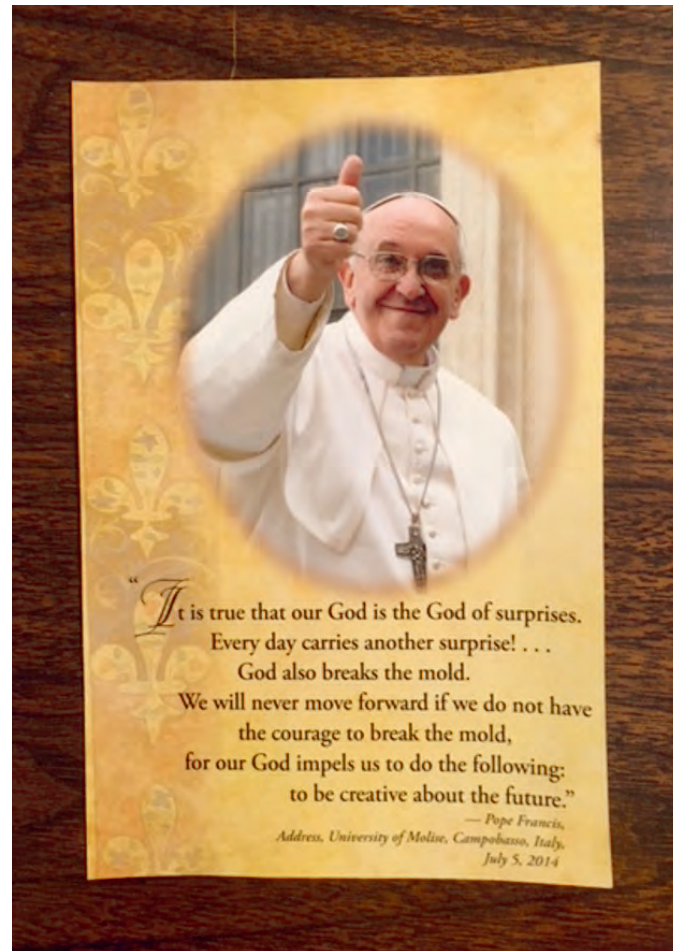
I will close with a story. Five years ago, I was captivated by a photo and a quote from Pope Francis that appeared in a “Year of Mercy” calendar. I cut it out, and it has hung on the wall next to the doorway of my office ever since. This photo of Pope Francis encourages me every time I walk through the door.

His “thumbs up” makes me smile; his words spur me on:

*“It is true that our God is the God of surprises. Each day carries another surprise! ... We will never move forward if we do not have the courage to break the mold, for our God impels us to do the following: **to be creative about the future.**”¹*

Pretty prophetic, right?

May this image, and these words, cheer us on as we enter this season of prophetic creativity.



¹ Address, University of Molise, Campobasso, Italy, July 5, 2014