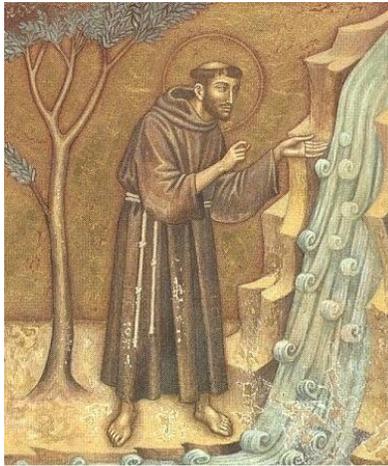




**National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order - USA**  
**State of the Order**  
**October 2019**



“In these last times,  
a new Evangelist,  
like one of the rivers of Paradise,  
has poured out the streams of the gospel  
in a holy flood over the whole world.  
He preached the way of the Son of God  
and the teaching of truth in his deeds.  
In him and through him  
an unexpected joy and a holy newness  
came into the world.

A new spirit was placed in the hearts of the elect  
and a holy anointing has been poured out in their midst.”

(1 Celano 89)

Praise God for the holy flood of the gospel life poured out over all the world by St. Francis who brought an unexpected joy and holy newness to us all. Let us give thanks for our Franciscan vocation and the gift of fraternity.

I am thankful for this gathering, and for the many wonderful gatherings that we have experienced this past year; thankful for the work of the International Council; and that of the councils at every level; and very thankful for each of you.

This week God has brought us, brothers and sisters all, into yet another privileged place – this gathering of the National Fraternity Council. May we experience the joy of fraternity, as fraternity is not only our priority, but our true help.

This past June we concluded a year of celebration for the 40th anniversary of our Rule, a Rule that was a response to the call by Vatican II to all religious to return to their roots. We recalled that when the 1978 Rule was presented, our Minister General, Manuela Mattioli, wrote: **“With the promulgation of the new rule, the renewal of the Secular Fraternity has reached a decisive and powerful moment...”** The Order rejoiced and looked forward in hope that this Rule would indeed renew us and help us become what God had called us to be.

Much has happened in the intervening 40 years, beginning with writing the new Rule and Constitutions, the unification of the Order, and the establishment of structures to serve a

worldwide Order. Our International Council (CIOFS) first focused on formation as the most important element of our renewal. Launching into the “management of the Order” project, the Presidency noted that *“Structurally, unification has occurred, but we still experience problems on how the sense of unity and belonging are perceived. We have not fully embraced the implications of our Rule and Constitutions; have not fully understood our vocation, identity and mission; and have not yet lived up to what the Church expects of us.”* The fulfillment of our hope for renewal has not yet been fully realized. We still wait in longing for the holy newness that Francis himself yearned for.

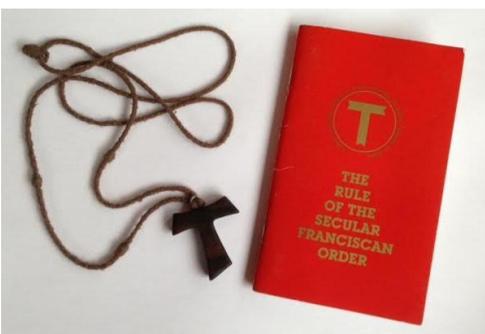


Let us look to another passage from Thomas of Celano to deepen our understanding of what holy newness meant to Francis.

“Francis burned with a great desire to return to his earliest steps toward humility; rejoicing in hope because of his boundless love, he planned to call his body back to its original servitude, although it had now reached its limit. He cut away completely the obstacle of all cares and silenced the noise of all concerns. When he had to relax this rigor because of illness, he used to say: “Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have done little or nothing.” He did not consider that he had already attained his goal, but tireless in pursuit of holy newness, he constantly hoped to begin again. (1 Celano 103)

Francis burned with a great desire to return to his earliest steps.  
We too have a great desire to return to our first love, our roots.  
We too long to cut away cares and concerns.  
We too want to tirelessly pursue holy newness.  
It is time to begin again.

We recall that when the 1978 Rule was promulgated, the four Ministers General of the Franciscan Family wrote:



***“The hope of renewal hinges upon returning to the origins and to the spiritual experience of Francis of Assisi and of the brothers and sisters of penance who received from him their inspiration and guidance. This renewal also depends upon openness to the Spirit in the signs of the times.”***

#### **THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

The ***signs of the times*** became a catalyst that has characterized our national efforts in the last three years. The National Executive Council (NEC) had been reflecting on the work of our Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FYA) Commission and had come to the conclusion that we needed to find a new direction for this effort. Early in 2017 we decided to bring together a group of OFS members who were interested in working with youth for what we called a visioning gathering. Recalling what is needed for the hope of renewal, we looked to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the signs of the times. We simply asked, “What is God’s vision for our Order in the area of youth?” We found the direction we were looking for.

We were suddenly set in motion and began a season of Visioning. This was truly the work of the Holy Spirit. The Visioning on Youth gathering was followed by Formation Visioning in 2018, and JPIC Visioning in 2019.

### A SEASON OF VISIONING

For each visioning we prepared in the same way. We invited Secular Franciscan leaders and members at large, Spiritual Assistants and members of the wider Franciscan family, all with various levels of experience who had an interest in the topic. We took care to have representation from different regions and cultures. We asked everyone to reflect on readings that were assigned ahead of time.

The key question at each gathering was, “What is God’s vision for our Order?” We invoked the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds. We read the signs of the times. We were ready for holy newness.

The result of each visioning has been amazing. What we saw and heard and felt was the outpouring of the Spirit. We sat in awe at what God was doing in our midst. Many of us witnessed this.



This painting by Pat Serotkin, was one of the images that came forth from the Formation Visioning. It captures the experience we had at each visioning; the fire of the Holy Spirit spreading across our National Fraternity.

We came away with **a renewed understanding** of the place of the three commissions in our way of life – the commissions are not add-ons. Youth, Formation, and Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) are firmly anchored in our way of life, our secular way of holiness. Sacred secularity. This is the way we live the Gospel life we are called to by God for the life of the Church.

The vision is clear, and the truth of it is as undeniable as the Lord’s intervention in Francis’ life in February of 1208. While at Mass in the Portiuncula, Francis heard the Gospel read in a way he had never experienced. These words spoke directly to Francis’s heart.

“As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick. The laborer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you enter, look for a worthy person in it, and stay there until you leave. As you enter a house, wish it peace. If the



house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; if not, let your peace return to you.” (Matthew 10:7-13)

Francis was so struck by this passage that his life was turned upside down. The words of the Gospel---the Gospel life---defined his mission. He was filled with unexpected joy.

Just as hearing this message was a pivotal moment for Francis’s conversion – so were the messages we received at each of our three visioning gatherings. I cannot overestimate the importance of these visioning events. We have been granted a renewed understanding of our call and mission. For each commission, a vision was given. In response to each vision, we set out in a new direction. Growth and development will continue over time – bringing new life to the National Fraternity.

### **OUR HISTORY FORMS A TRAJECTORY**

Let’s look back at our history from the time of the new Rule until today. Reflecting on our history can help us understand where we’re going in the light of where we’ve been. It reflects and shows us how God is working in this renewal – the renewal that’s been happening from the time of the new Rule.

- 1968 -1978 The development of the Pauline Rule
- 1972 - The Santa Clara Statement issued from the Lay Franciscan Congress (the Q)
- 2000 - The Constitutions
- 2002 - 2008 CIOFS “For the Formators”
- 2012 Q – Be the bridge
- 2014 – National Retreat - Signs of the times / Pope Francis – Br. Bill Short
- 2014 CIOFS Management of the Order, which asked “What would it take for our Order to fully develop?”
- 2016 Q – Revive
- 2017 CIOFS – Management of the Order Terms of Reference / General Chapter
- 2017 - Youth Visioning
- 2018 - Formation Visioning
- 2019 - Life Giving Union Event
- 2019 - JPIC Visioning

Each of these events have had a profound impact on our Order. Seeing where we are now, we can look back, and we can understand how all of this is part of a grand trajectory.



### **THE HOLY SPIRIT CONTINUES TO MOVE**

The Holy Spirit continues to move us on a trajectory of renewal. We see this in the initiatives, activities and achievements of this past year. These have been reported to you in detail by the various Commissions, Committees and those individuals appointed for a particular service, but they bear mentioning here. Many of the individuals responsible for this wonderful work are present this week at our Chapter.

## The Priority of Fraternity

One of our major initiatives and a driving force behind all of our efforts is the National Priority of Fraternity. The day we made our profession in the Secular Franciscan Order we said these words, “may...the fraternal bonds of community always be my help.”

The NEC has focused on building fraternity: during our visitations to the Regional Fraternities; by way of outreach to our non-English speaking brothers and sisters; through articles on fraternity in each issue of the TAU-USA; and resources on our website. It is gratifying to see the topic of fraternity being used for ongoing formation across our National Fraternity.

A major achievement is the interactive map on our website showing the location of every local fraternity in the United States. This past year we added five new local fraternities to this map, with more to come in 2020, including the establishment of St. Padre Pio Fraternity in Guam this coming January.

We cannot speak of fraternity without mentioning the bond we have with our brothers of the First Order and Third Order Regular. Spiritual Assistance is a “fundamental element of communion” (GC 89.1). Our bonds with the friars were strengthened significantly this past August at an historic three day gathering of national OFS leadership with Provincial Ministers, their delegates to the OFS and Regional Spiritual Assistants - a true gathering of the Franciscan Family. This event, entitled “Life Giving Union – Discussion and Discernment,” was facilitated by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA). This dream of many sunsets finally became a reality. We celebrated our “Life-Giving Union” as one Family. This gathering provided an unprecedented opportunity for us to build relationship and share our common concerns. We listened and learned. Doors were opened. Invitations were extended. Ideas were shared. It was a graced time of discovering new ways to go forward together. A full report on this gathering, including the recommendations that came forth from the participants, can be found on our website.

Our fraternal lives are also enriched by our relationships with the Franciscan Third Order Religious Sisters and Brothers, and with our brothers and sisters who follow St. Francis in the Anglican tradition (the Third Order Society of St. Francis), the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, and the Lutheran Franciscan Order. Additionally, our relationship with the Franciscan Federation continues to develop, and we are engaged with them in planning their next annual conference in June 2020. This will be an event to which the entire Franciscan family in the USA will be invited.



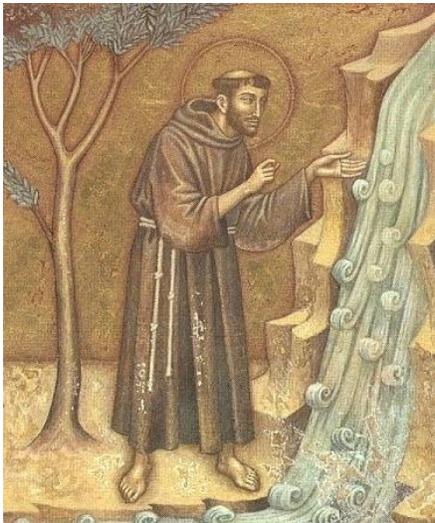
The priority of Fraternity extends widely, encompassing a universal kinship. We are brothers and sisters to the world, bringing hope and extending our hands and hearts in peace. This is reflected in our outreach to the poor and marginalized, to those treated unjustly, and by our care for creation. We sing and we live the Canticle of Brother Sun. Praised be you, my Lord!



## **NEW RULE, NEW UNITY, NEW VISION**

We've been on this journey of renewal for some time now. In the last 40 years the essential structures were set in place – and now we see the progression – the trajectory. What a gift it is to recognize this trajectory as God's direction for our Order, even as we await its fulfillment.

New Rule, new unity, new vision. The new Rule gave us hope for renewal. A new unity as we formed a worldwide Order. A new vision through the visioning gatherings for Youth, Formation and JPIC. Certainly, from the beginning we have always “begun again” and started “something new” – but there is a particularity about this moment. The delivery of our new Rule was a ‘decisive and powerful moment,’ and this ‘moment’ of grace has been prolonged into a ‘season.’ *Truly a new spirit has been placed in our hearts and a holy anointing has been poured out in our midst.*



Let us, like Francis, be tireless as we pursue holy newness. The way is unfolding before us, and God is with us.

“In these last times,  
a new Evangelist,  
like one of the rivers of Paradise,  
has poured out the streams of the gospel  
in a holy flood over the whole world.  
He preached the way of the Son of God  
and the teaching of truth in his deeds.  
In him and through him  
an unexpected joy and a holy newness  
came into the world.

A new spirit was placed in the hearts of the elect  
and a holy anointing has been poured out in their midst.”

(1 Celano 89)

Peace and all good,

Jan Parker & Mary Bittner, in consultation with the National Executive Council

### **National Executive Council**

Jan Parker, Minister

Mary Bittner, Vice Minister

Claudia Kauzlarich, Treasurer

Jane DeRose-Bamman, Secretary

Donna Hollis, Councilor

Josh Molidor, Councilor

Dennis Ross, Councilor

Willie Guadalupe, International Councilor

Fr. Christopher Panagoplos TOR, CNSA President-in-Turn

## Demographic Information

<i>Number of Local/Regional Fraternities in National Fraternity</i>	January 1, 2018	December 31, 2018
Canonically established Local Fraternities:	593	586
Emerging Local Fraternities:	43	45
Canonically established but inactive Local Fraternities:	54	54
Regional Fraternities:	30	30
<i>In the National Fraternity</i>	January 1, 2018	December 31, 2018
Number of permanently professed members:	11,807	11,604
Number of temporary professed members:	---	---
Number of members in the period of formation:	1,762	1,827
Number of Fraternities/groups of Franciscan Youth:	0	0
Number of members of Franciscan Youth:	0	0
Number of groups of Franciscan Children:	0	0
Number of Franciscan Children:	4	4
Number of OFS Fraternities of permanent deacons:	0	0
Number of OFS permanent deacons:	96	96
Number of Fraternities of OFS priests (Const. 35,2):	0	0
Number of OFS diocesan priests:	30	30
Number of OFS Bishops:	0	0
Number of groups of members with private vows (36 GGCC):	0	0
Number of members with private vows:	8	8
<i>Number of Local Spiritual Assistants in the National Fraternity</i>	January 1, 2018	December 31, 2018
OFM:	96	77
OFM Conv:	33	27
OFM Cap:	54	42
TOR:	17	14
Poor Clares:	7	6
3 <sup>rd</sup> Order Franciscan religious brothers and sisters:	64	46
Other religious brothers and sisters:	9	6
Diocesan priest/deacons:	46	49
Members of OFS:	95	75
TOTAL number of local spiritual assistants:	421	359
Number of Local Fraternities without Spiritual Assistants:	151	147

## Visitations

Date	Region	CNSA Visitor	NAFRA Visitor
11/9-10/2018	Holy Trinity	Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, T.O.R.	Dennis Ross, OFS
2/22-24/2019	St. Junipero Serra	Fr. Giles Gilbert, OFM Conv.	Josh Molidor, OFS
3/1-3/2019	Our Lady of Guadalupe	Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cao.	Josh Molidor, OFS
5/31 – 6/2/2019	Queen of Peace	Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, T.O.R.	Dennis Ross, OFS
6/6-9/2019	Troubadours of Peace	Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap.	Donna Hollis, OFS
6/21-23/2019	La Verna		Mary Bittner, OFS
8/23-24/2019	Santa Maria de las Montanas	Br. Alexander Escalera, OFM Cap.	Donna Hollis, OFS

## Elections

Date	Region	CNSA Witness	NAFRA Presider
12/8/2018	Mother Cabrini	Br. Marc Sheckells, OFM	Joshua Molidor, OFS
1/12/2018	St. Joan of Arc	Br. Juniper Crouch, OFM	Donna Hollis, OFS
3/8-10/2019	Franciscans of the Prairie	Fr. Giles Gilbert, OFM Conv.	Josh Molidor, OFS
3/22-24/2019	St. Katharine Drexel	Fr. Francis Sariago, OFM Cap.	Jan Parker, OFS
4/13/2019	Our Lady of Indiana	St. Agnes Marie Regan, OSF	Dennis Ross, OFS
4/27/2019	Tau Cross	Fr. Matthias Wesnofske, OFM Cap.	Donna Hollis, OFS
5/16/2019	Ohana 'O Ke Anuenue and Guam	Fr. Michael Dalton, OFM Cap.	Josh Molidor, OFS
6/7-8/2019	Lady Poverty	Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR	Dennis Ross, OFS
7/19-21/2019	Los Tres Companeros	Br. Tim Unser, OFM Conv.	Donna Hollis, OFS
8/10/2019	Brothers & Sisters of St. Francis	Deacon Tom Shaver, OFS	Josh Molidor, OFS
9/6-8/2019	Juan de Padilla	Fr. Michael Scully, OFM Cap.	Donna Hollis, OFS
9/13-15/2019	St. Kateri Tekakwitha	St. Patricia Larkin, SOSF	Donna Hollis, OFS
9/27-29/2019	St. Maximilian Kolbe	Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR	Mary Bittner, OFS