

**National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States  
October 2009**

**STATE OF THE ORDER**

My dear brothers and sisters, as we gather once again in Chapter, I bid you welcome, peace and all that is good!

I begin a review of our demographics with my thanks to you, the Regional Ministers, for your careful completion of the Annual Report of the Regions, from which I draw the statistics. Their accuracy reflects your careful attention to detail and your dedication and that of your Councils.

Professed Brothers and Sisters: 14,722 – a decline of 1,089 from last year’s reported 15,811. It has been suggested to me that some fraternities are failing to report shut in or other brothers and sisters whose financial situation doesn’t allow them to contribute to the fair share. I hope that this is not a widespread practice. We need to remember that the responsibility of the “Fair Share” is that of the fraternity, NOT the individual. It is a failure against the virtue of justice to simply “lapse” those brothers and sisters who simply haven’t the where with all to contribute to the common fund or Fair Share collection.

Candidates: 1,245 remains steady with a slight increase of 37 over last year’s 1,208  
Inquirers: 898 reflecting an increase of 48 over last year’s 850

Canonically established fraternities: 674; down from last year’s 718. Many older fraternities have been deactivated and this information has been conveyed to the National Executive Council.

Emerging Fraternities: 44 an increase of 7 over last year.

Newly forming groups: 36 representing an increase of 3 over last year.  
While the number of professed, reported has declined, the growth of emerging and newly forming fraternities is encouraging.

**Spiritual Assistants:**

Total: 519; Friars: 286 (down from 314 reported last year); Sisters: 94 (an increase of 3)  
SFO: 70 (down from 80 last year) Other Orders: 3 (down from 6 last year)  
Diocesan clergy: 21 (down from 32 last year)  
SFO enrolled in Franciscan Family Connections: 55 (11 less than last year)  
Fraternities with no spiritual assistant: 194 (an increase from last year’s 185)  
I am pleased to report that all of our Regions have at least one Regional Spiritual Assistant. Last year there were 3 Regions who had none.

As we review these statistics we see the need for additional brothers and sisters who have the necessary attributes and willingness to share their gifts, to enroll in the Franciscan Family Connections Course. I do encourage you to seek out those persons in your regions and local fraternities whom you feel have those necessary gifts and actively encourage them to enroll in the course and support their efforts.

### **Formation:**

With the directives regarding the standardization of the Formation Process internationally, coming down from our General Presidency, the Formation Commission, under the able and enthusiastic leadership of Robert Fitzsimmons, SFO, Commission Chair, they have been working very hard to prepare the National Formation Manual, working on the various chapters/Sections, as soon as they are received from the General Presidency Formation Commission.

Prior to the Directive from the General Presidency, the Commission held highly successful Formation Workshops. They were well attended and presented the best information available. The workshops were very well received and in many instances were attended by both the Regional Formation Councilor as well as the Regional Minister as I had recommended.

The Formation Commission is planning workshops in multiple areas of the country in 2011, when the Manual will be completed and materials are prepared. Meanwhile, the Chair of the Commission has presented workshops in various Regions around the country at their request. (See Formation Commission Chair's annual report)

I am pleased to report that as I have made Visitation of the various Regions, they, too, are diligently working to update their Regional Formation Manuals and have held workshops within their Regions to keep local Formation Directors and teams as up to date as possible. I observe enthusiasm and a lot of energy exerted in these efforts.

Congratulations to you all!

Though often not as highly visible but very important in our **on going formation** many of our Regions have had servant leadership development and spirituality workshops and conferences. They are to be commended for this important work in the development of solid Franciscan Spirituality and the fostering of future servant leaders for our fraternities at all levels.

A vital contribution to our on-going formation has been the Summer Seminar for Secular Franciscans, sponsored by St. Francis University in Loretto, PA. The Summer Seminar is in its second year and this year it was completely filled. While the program is developed for us, it is sponsored by St. Francis University and provided as their gift to us. The costs are kept very minimal and the presentors are skilled, dedicated and knowledgeable – and all have been Franciscans, Secular and Religious. I express my personal thanks and I am certain, yours as well, to the TOR Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, to Fr. Gabriel Zeiss, TOR, President of the University and to Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, who has been the driving force behind the Seminars.

### **Franciscan Youth and Young Adult:**

In their goal to be self-governing, the Young Adults serving on the National Committee have moved ahead slowly toward their self-governance model. They are ably supported by the Adult advisory team led by Kathy Taormina, SFO. For the first time, one of the

young adults on the leadership team was able to be present at an NEC meeting and participate in our discussions as well as update us. We note with delight, the contribution of Manny Hernandez to our NEC meeting in his sharing of the young adults vision and plans. Their annual H2O Project was once again very successful. (See FYYA Report).

**Franciscan Action Network:**

National Vice-Minister Deacon Tom Bello continues to serve as Vice-President of FAN. The network continues to grow and has taken part in various peace, justice and integrity of creation initiatives. The members of our SFO who serve as FAN region representatives have given unselfishly of their time and talents and I thank them all. There continues to be some confusion and misunderstanding about the role of FAN. An excellent opportunity affords itself to answer questions and present the work of FAN could be at your Annual Regional Chapters or workshops. With enough advance notice, a FAN representative could be available to present to our Regions. FAN has done much in terms of advocacy training and explaining issues through its frequent webinars and on site presentations in various parts of the country. This vital organization enables every branch of the Franciscan Family to speak with a united voice. I have served on the Steering Committee since the inception and it has been both an education and a challenge to live the active articles of our Holy Rule more fully. (See National Vice-Minister's report)

**Ad Hoc Committee on Re-Visioning of the Holy Rule:**

The Committee, Chaired by National Councilor, Patricia Brandwein-Ball has completed their initial task. I have observed, in my visitation to the Regions, the various ways the Regions have implemented the concept and adapted their structures to address the re-visioning. It is important to note that various regions have taken different approaches to the implementation. This is an excellent use of their creativity and ingenuity so that the concept is fully embraced and understood in a manner that fits with the personality, corporate culture, if you will, of the individual regions. A "cookie cutter" approach is not necessary – what works for a particular Region to make it a reality **is!**

**Fraternal life:**

As I visited our Regions, I was filled with gratitude and joy at their vibrance! Some Regions have a special event shared with other Regions, such as the program Franciscans Living In Community, which is comprised of several of our eastern Regions. They gather to celebrate their vocations and each other for an entire week of community and it is well attended. Another geographically large Region, gathers in annual chapter, with a delightful twist: The entire Regional membership is invited and in addition to the primary work of the Regional Chapter, there is ample time for spending time in fraternity. This gathering is always very well attended. More than half the membership of the Region were present when I visited.

In talking with the ministers and members of local fraternities as I made Regional Visitations, I learned that the fraternities are involved in a variety of ministries bringing to life our Holy Rule lived in its entirety. Their active works of mercy, reflecting the Beatitudes find them working in Shelters for the Homeless, food kitchens, clinics for the poor and marginalized, prison ministry, homes for battered women, ecological issues, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, making rosaries for the missions, prayer shawls for

the sick and shut in, visiting and conducting prayer services in nursing homes, visiting the shut ins of their own fraternity, volunteering for the Missions, particularly in Latin America and Haiti as well as being very involved in the ministries of their respective parishes. They have also participated in the "Third Order" masses of their respective dioceses.

Our regions and many of our local fraternities have at least an annual retreat and host a variety of workshops and days of reflection, all with the goal of deepening our spirituality and the lived experience of our charism.

Some of our Regions, such as Mother Cabrini and Bl. Junipero Serra, host a gathering for all branches of the Franciscan Family. Many of our fraternities work in a collaborative ministry with the Franciscan Sisters and the Friars which makes visible our Franciscan Family as a reality.

### **Summary:**

The National and Regional Formation Teams have worked diligently at staying attuned to the developments and protocols coming to us from CIOFS. Many of the Regional Formation Manuals have incorporated the information we presently have, nationally, into their local manuals and have taken steps appropriate to their Regions to hold workshops, and communicate electronically as well as by surface mail and telephone, information as it becomes available. We have focused rather intensely on this particular area for the past year and longer.

We continue to be an active presence in FAN and more of our brothers and sisters are signing in as individual members, which doesn't require a membership fee, and learning more about those matters which are so important to us in light of our charism as Franciscans.

Our Communications at all levels appears more satisfactory as our national computer committee keeps making timely changes to the aged computer program which we have in place. Special thanks to all of the Regions who share their Regional Newsletter with me and the Regional Ministers.

TAU USA continues to be engaging, current and informative, contributing to our on going formation and growth in our Franciscan charism. Special thanks to Frances Wicks, SFO, Editor.

Our Fraternal Life is vibrant as evident in all of the annual reports and in my observation at Visitations.

Our Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Committee is coming into its own with the young people gradually assuming responsibility for their leadership.

Vocations to our Order continue at a rather steady rate in the majority of our Regions.

The need for more SFO members to become spiritual assistants continues but enrollment in Franciscan Family Connections is fairly good. I urge more people who are interested and qualified to make their intention and willingness to serve known.

In conclusion, we are a very healthy National Fraternity!

### **Looking ahead:**

We will continue to address the priorities for the Order as set forth by the General Presidency.

1. Formation.

Our National Formation Commission and your National Executive Council have given intense and focused attention to this priority and we are doing well. As the Formation documents are received and translated, the Commission sets to work on them. The Goal of the Commission is to have the up-to-date Standardized National Formation Manual completed and ready for implementation workshops in 2011.

2. Communication:

We have effective communication nationally and communication with CIOFS is always timely as done by our International Councilor, Anne Mulqueen, SFO. Our Regions keep striving for effective and timely communication with the local fraternities and many are working on developing Regional newsletters and electronic communication.

3. Franciscan Youth:

While the numbers are small in the USA, the youth are making strides but much work is yet to be done and other avenues need to be explored for exposure of young people to the Franciscan Charism.

4. Presence in the world:

We continue with our vocation awareness/recruitment efforts. As a National Fraternity we have considerable visibility and with our membership in FAN and active representation, the Franciscan charism is being made better known but we still have a way to go.

5. Emerging National Fraternities:

One of our Regions is currently shepherding a newly forming group in Antigua.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support of me and the National Executive Council. We couldn't have done our job without you.

I also want to express my personal thanks for your very warm welcome, fraternal hospitality and complete cooperation as I made the Visitations of your Regions. It has been an honor and privilege to serve the brothers and sisters of the National Fraternity. I am forever indebted to the very gifted, unselfish and loving brothers and sisters who have served with me on the NEC. They have stood by me and supported me through the challenging and painful times and rejoiced with me in all of the good times.

My thanks also to the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants whose special gifts have made our NEC vibrant. Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap., whose gentle humor and wisdom as well as his dedication to us and many contributions to our formation over so many years is so appreciated. Fr. Steve Gross, OFM Conv. who is always thinking "outside the box" and challenging us to do so as well. Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR, whose great organizational skills, practical wisdom and sense of humor made so many difficult tasks

so much easier. Bro. Bob Brady, OFM, current President in turn whose quiet wisdom and laid back personality reminded us to rejoice in the day the Lord has made. Fr. Bart Karwaki, OFMConv. who was President in turn, when we began our tenure will always be remembered and appreciated for his “no nonsense” and direct approach. He has a wonderful ability to “tell it like it is.”

A very special thanks to all of the Regional Ministers who have walked the journey with me. You have inspired me, encouraged me, challenged me, and made me laugh. I couldn't have asked for better brothers and sisters.

My prayer for you as always is May the Sacred Heart of Jesus surround you with His love and fill your life with His abundant blessings.

Patrick Mendés, SFO  
National Minister