

about how our Christian lives need to be **concrete**. He reflected on the different opposites stressed in Matthew 7:21-27, notably between “saying and doing”:

“To say is a way of believing, but very superficial, half-way: I say I’m a Christian, but I don’t act like a Christian. To say it simply, it’s a bit like making oneself up as a Christian: only to say it is to make oneself up, to say without doing.” **On the contrary, “Jesus’ proposal is concrete, always concrete.** When someone approaches you and asks for advice, it’s always for concrete things. **The works of mercy are concrete.”**

Another opposition: rock and sand. Sand is “a consequence of saying”; it leads to a life “without foundations.” The Lord is the rock, “He is the force. However, very often one who trusts in the Lord doesn’t seem to have success; he is hidden . . . **but he is solid.** He doesn’t have hope in words, in vanity, in pride, in the ephemeral powers of life,” but in the Lord, stressed the Pontiff. **“The concrete aspect of the Christian life makes us advance and build on that rock which is God, which is**

Jesus, on the divinity’s solidity — *not on appearances or vanity, pride, recommendations... no, on the truth.*”

Third opposition: the vain and the humble. The Holy Father quoted the Magnificat: **“The Lord raises the humble, who are in the concreteness of the everyday, and brings down the arrogant, those who build their life on vanity, pride . . . they don’t last.”**

Secular Franciscans should certainly exemplify this **concrete living** our Holy Father speaks of – living solid Christian lives on the foundation that is Christ. The rebar of our Rule is there to reinforce our efforts. As our sister St. Clare says, **“Hold fast.”**

As we close this Jubilee Year in celebration of the 40th Anniversary of our Rule, let’s make it a celebration not just of our Rule, but *of our lives* as Secular Franciscans. We must be resolute. There’s no point in celebrating the Rule unless we celebrate *how we are living it*. Let’s celebrate today and every day by living **concrete Christian lives**, grateful for the Rule and the rebar that it is.

SHARING THE VISION

Report from the National Executive Council (NEC)

40th Anniversary of the Rule – Our Jubilee Year Continues!

Our national goal is that every local fraternity dedicate at least one formation session to the OFS Rule between now and June 24, 2019. Ready-made presentations on the Rule can be found on our OFS-USA website (secularfranciscansusa.org) under “Resources.” We would appreciate seeing photos of your celebration of the Rule, or any photos of your fraternity or regional happenings. Please send photos to ofsusasecretary@gmail.com

Formation “Visioning Initiatives” Workshop

The National Formation Commission, in collaboration with the NEC, has invited a number of qualified professed members and Spiritual Assistants to a Formation “Visioning Initiatives” Workshop on April 4-7, 2019. At this workshop we will further develop the ideas that came from the August 2018 Visioning Workshop and set up task force groups, each focusing on a particular aspect of formation. The proposed Task Force topics are:

1. The Rule and Constitutions
2. Sacred Scripture
3. Franciscan Sources
4. Fraternity
5. Franciscan Spirituality
6. Inclusivity and Special Needs
7. For Up to Now - Foundational Topics for Initial Formation (FUN Manual)

After this workshop, we will be reaching out to other professed members throughout the United States to ask them to offer their gifts and talents to assist with the task forces.

National Gathering of Regional Spiritual Assistants

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) will facilitate a National Gathering of Regional Spiritual Assistants, August 26-29, 2019, to be held at Mercy Retreat and Conference Center in St. Louis, MO. The keynote will be presented by Fr. Michael Higgins, T.O.R., President of Franciscan School of Theology, Oceanside, CA. Fr. Michael is a former T.O.R. General Minister who has worked with Secular Franciscans for 20 years. The following will be addressed:

- Guidelines for training suitable and competent Seculars for their role as Spiritual Assistants.
- Interpretation of Canon Law in appointing and delegating Spiritual Assistants with respect to the *Altius Moderamen*.
- Communication between CNSA and Regional Spiritual Assistants.
- Pastoral issues: “the signs of the times”; how to reach out by listening and dialoging; finding the road to mercy within the Rule in dealing with hate speech, incivility in discourse, same-sex orientation, invalid marriages, etc.
- How to maintain relationships while facing decreasing numbers of friars and increasing numbers of non-friar Spiritual Assistants

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) – National Gathering

Save the date for an upcoming National Gathering for JPIC Animators and other interested OFS members. The topic is “Handling Conflict with Lessons from St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio.” Place and Date: Marianist Retreat Center, St. Louis, MO., from Thursday evening, Aug 29, through Sunday, Sept. 1, 2019. For more information, contact Carolyn Townes at ctownes26@gmail.com.

OFS-USA Facebook Page – Photos Needed

Our new team of OFS-USA Facebook editors are Jane DeRose-Bamman, Diane Menditto, Lee Potts, and Cherryle Fruge. Randy Heinz continues as the administrator. The purpose of our OFS-USA Facebook page is to share inspirational messages and the good news of our Order. *Please send photos of your local and regional fraternity happenings to Jane DeRose-Bamman at ofsusasecretary@gmail.com.*

Vocations Tool Kit

A reminder that the OFS-USA Vocations Toolkit makes it very easy to present a “Come and See” event. All materials in the Toolkit are available in English, Spanish and Korean, and the prayer card is also available in Vietnamese. (For a copy of the Vocations Tool Kit go to <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/guidelines-forms-other-resources>.)



National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order - USA
Annual Demographics - 2018

<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
<i>In the National Fraternity</i>	January 1, 2018	December 31, 2018
Number of permanently professed members:	11,807	11,604
Number of inquirers and candidates in formation:	1,762	1,827
Number of OFS permanent deacons:	96	96
Number of OFS diocesan priests:	30	30
Number of OFS Bishops:	0	0
<i>Number of Local Spiritual Assistants in the National Fraternity</i>	January 1, 2018	December 31, 2018
OFS:	96	77
OFS Conv:	33	27
OFS Cap:	54	42
TOR:	17	14
Poor Clares:	7	6
3 rd 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

*Note that many of our local spiritual assistants now serve more than one fraternity.

We have been working to find Spiritual Assistants for all our local fraternities. Although we have made some progress, 25% of local fraternities in the US (the same percentage as one year ago) still have no assigned Spiritual Assistant. The shortage of Spiritual Assistants is more acute in certain areas of the country. Eight of our 30 Regions report that eight or more of their local fraternities are without a Spiritual Assistant.

Prepared Spring 2019