**PROMOTION**

***In Secular Franciscan Fraternities***

**An Australian response**

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Let us begin by recognizing the gift of our Franciscan vocation. We have the **Testimony of St Clare:**

*“Among the other gifts that we have received and continue to receive from our magnanimous Father of Mercies and for which we must express our deepest thanks to our glorious God, there is our vocation, which the more perfect and greater it is, the more are we indebted to Him. Recognise your vocation. The Son of God has become for us the way that our blessed Father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example.”*

How powerful are these words, which encourage us to recognise the great gift that we have been given in our Franciscan vocation. How can we not want to go out to those around us and invite them to come and see if they, too, are being called to live the Gospel life in the manner of St Francis?

Promotion of our Secular Franciscan Order is vital for us to survive. Promotion is essential to our survival.

Our General Constitutions state in Article 45:

1. The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves.

The brothers and sisters, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan way of life, should pray that God may give them the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new the members.

1. Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member of the fraternity, the councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the secular Franciscan vocation.

So important is promotion to us that we have incorporated an elected Promotions Officer, together with a role description, in our amended National Statutes, which are currently with the Juridical Commission in Rome. However, each Regional and Local Council also has an elected Promotions Officer.

It is vital to have a Promotions Officer as a member of the National Council. He/she will support and coordinate the Regional Promotions Officers in activities that promote Secular Franciscan vocations. In addition he/she will collect, coordinate and distribute promotional resources to Regional Promotions Officers.

One vital aspect of Promotion is organising Promotion Days:

* they are for all the Fraternity;
* personal invitations are given and poster invitations are placed in churches;
* it is necessary to create a Franciscan atmosphere;
* we share our Spirituality;
* personal testimonies are given;
* we love and minister to each individual;
* we celebrate our life and charism.

If we have Promotion Days, we need to keep the aging Fraternities alive:

* this requires a strong commitment from each member;
* to see the value of the aging members – they have the experience of life;
* to encourage diversity by having Fraternities with different cultural backgrounds;
* to nurture and encourage enquirers.

Our **goals** need to:

* bring awareness of the OFS and its role in the Church to the world;
* promote any inspirational role models who we have in our Fraternities;
* reach out to those within our Church who may have a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order;
* encourage younger people to be involved in our Order.

**Strategies** for achievingthese goals are:

1. **Internet and Social Media**

* We have a Website with the facility for people to contact us. Since it was launched, most of the incoming emails have been requests for information regarding the OFS;
* We have a Facebook Page as well.

1. **Other tools** that could be used to inform the wider community about the OFS are:

* YouTube and Twitter.
* Local Catholic Media:Our Diocesan newspapers, Church newsletters etc.
* Windcheaters/T Shirts/Hats with OFS Logo or Franciscan “slogan/idea” to enable us to be seen in our Franciscan life in the world.
* PowerPoint presentations, to be used at Enquirer Promotion days, linked to OFS website.
* Promotional Leaflets and Children’s stories incorporating Franciscan ideals.

1. **Activities:**

* Promote the OFS as a family by being more inclusive in our activities, e.g., invite Parishioners, including the youth and families.
* Involve the Friars perhaps with discussions or meetings. By working together, we could do more to promote the OFS in our local Church communities.
* Plan how to get donations/bequests in order to develop a substantial fund to use in the promotion of the OFS throughout Australia.

Now, having promoted our Order, we need to look at our Local Fraternities. They must be a place of prayer and communion, of genuine friendship and vibrant fraternity. Our meetings must glow with the fraternal spirit of St Francis and become alive with the grace of the Gospel.

At the very core of Franciscan spirituality is the message of our Lord Jesus Christ. By reflecting on the Gospel and sharing our lives and insights, we can develop our spiritual understanding of the mind of Christ so that we may learn to live the Gospel in Fraternity and be able to share this with others. Francis based his Rule on the Gospel. At the heart of his message is a deep personal relationship with our Lord Jesus and his Blessed Mother.

There is in each one of us a yearning for a deeper spirituality; a deeper relationship with the Lord. We believe that the message of Francis can fill this void. This is where we must start.

The local Fraternity is the cornerstone of the Secular Franciscan Order. Friendship/fraternity and prayer/contemplation are the core of our charism. The Franciscan flies to God on the two wings of contemplation and fraternity.

As members of a local Fraternity, each of us has a serious responsibility to be a person who brings life, encouragement and concern into our relationships with one another. The local fraternity must be a place of communion with God and with one another; a place where we can feel at home in the presence of the Holy Trinity, who is a fraternity of Persons, one God.

We need to recognise that the Liturgy of the Church, - the Mass, the Sacraments and the Divine Office - is the essential means of sustaining our life in God and our relationship with Jesus. The Fraternity is the place where we develop an appreciation of the wonderful liturgical prayer of the Church, which takes nothing away from our personal life of prayer and contemplation, but rather encourages and feeds our personal intimacy with God.

It is important to remember that our little Fraternity is a part of a worldwide secular Order numbering many thousands of people. But the Local Fraternities are the foundation of the Secular Franciscan Order.

They are like the links in a golden chain; if one link is weak the whole chain is weakened. So you see how important it is, that we, who make up the local Fraternities all work together to make our little link in the chain:

*If we are vibrant, positive, inviting and strong*

*in our Franciscan spirituality,*

*then we can reach out and*

*SHARE OUR JOURNEY AND OUR DREAM.*