**EVANGELIZED TO EVANGELIZE (Part Two)**

***OUR MISSION AS SECULAR FRANCISCANS***

When John Paul II received in audience the International Chapter of the SFO on November 22, 2002, he replied to questions, firmly guiding the SFO towards the future which is Christ. Three times he exhorted us: The Church waits for you… as per our Rule Art.3 “*The present rule adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times.”*

“[…] You must now look to the **future** and put out into the deep:  *Duc in altum!* (Lk 5:4)

The Church expects from the unique Secular Franciscan Order a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world today. She wants your Order to be a model of organic, structural and charismatic union at all levels, so as to present yourself to the world as a "**community of love**" (Rule, Art.22). From you, Secular Franciscans, the Church awaits **a courageous and consistent witness** of Christian and Franciscan life that aims at building a more fraternal and evangelical world for the realization of the Kingdom of God. […].

You are called to make **your own contribution**, inspired by the person and message of St Francis of Assisi, to hasten the coming of a civilization in which the **dignity** of the human person, **co-responsibility** and **love** may be living realties. You must **deepen** the true foundations of universal fraternity, and everywhere **create** a spirit of hospitality and of brotherhood. **Firmly oppose** every kind of exploitation, discrimination and marginalization, and an attitude of indifference to others.

Secular Franciscans, **you live by vocation your belonging to the Church and to society as inseparable realities**. For this reason, you are asked first of all to bear a **personal witness** in the place where you live: "before all: in [your] family life; in [your] work; in [your] joys and sufferings; in [your] associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father; in [your] presence and participation in the life of society; in [your] fraternal relationship with all creatures"(GC*,*art.12.1). Perhaps, you will not be required to **pour out your blood as a martyr**, but you will certainly be asked to **give a coherent and steadfast witness** in fulfilling the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation, which you renewed and confirmed with your profession in the Secular Franciscan Order […].

***“WHAT SHALL WE DO, BROTHERS?”* (Ac 2: 37)**

We may agree at a Fraternity level – local, regional, national and international – on the elements for a pastoral project (objectives and methods, formation and appreciation of each brother and sister, pursuing necessary means) in order to facilitate the announcing of Jesus which should reach people, shaping communities, deepening society and culture, thanks to the testimony of the evangelical values, as the Pope asked St. Francis. May a renewed boldness encourage each one of us and our fraternities, our SFO and Franciscan Youth. “*The parrêsia of faith must be matched by the boldness of reason.”*[[1]](#footnote-1)

Young people, families, those who suffer, the world of politics, of culture, etc., all these human sectors call for Secular Franciscans. The strong invitation coming from the Rule to “*go from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel”* is a wise practice when one has to choose, either at a personal level, or a communitarian level, and favours the attention that has to be placed on the “signs of the times”.

### *There is a need of evangelization:*

##### for families: sanctuaries of life and love.

The family is the sanctuary of life and love, and today needs strong support more than ever. The institution of marriage is in many ways under attack from the current mentality, and the rise of ways of thinking which trivialize the human body and sexual differentiation (gender). The word of God reaffirms the original goodness of the human being, created as man and woman and called to a love which is faithful, reciprocal and fruitful. [[2]](#footnote-2) The family is irreplaceable. Intense, vigorous family pastoral care is necessary. Authentic family policy must be promoted, and must provide rights for the family as a social subject. Our rule calls us to this (R§17, CG §24).

“Go, Francis, and repair my domestic Church which is in ruins”.

### *to favour the birth of Franciscan Youth and of groups of Franciscan Children*

There is an educational emergency, which is the urgent need for transmitting to new generations the basic values for living and right conduct. When the conscience is no longer educated, the light of the truth is no longer perceived. Many consider speaking of truth as too "authoritarian". Such thinking leads to doubting the goodness of life ("Is it good to be alive?"). A sort of "hatred of self" characteristic of certain cultures develops, and the validity of relationships and commitments which make up life becomes something relative. There is a real need for true educators capable of forming individuals capable of living life to the full, of entering into a living relationship with Jesus Christ, and of making their unique contribution to the common good. Our Fraternities are called upon: many members are parents, some of whom personally experience this educational confusion. And yet the experience of Saint Francis and of the Saints in the SFO is an extraordinary source of inspiration for educational training and action.

##### for the training of trainers.

“To set up truly effective pastoral care, we must promote training for trainers, including specialized schools and courses.”[[3]](#footnote-3) We must make our Fraternities places where free, adult persons are trained, who are then in turn capable of training others, of placing the question of God in their lives, in work, in the family. This is certainly one of the commitments which are characteristic of the new evangelization (Cf. 2Tim 2:2). Our Fraternities also have the duty of supporting persons who commit themselves to educational tasks, tasks which are essential for the future of the Church and humanity. Their training cannot be reduced to a simple technical preparation. It is first and foremost integral training.

### *for human and environmental ecology*

If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in oneself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society. This means that we, Franciscans, must convey the logic of the Gospel in public life, in politics, in the field of culture, health and education

… through courageous initiatives and activities which will build the civilization of love (*Rule* 14).

### *for service of the poor in Christ poor*

If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: the poor. There is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them. In our own time, in addition to the traditional forms of poverty, we think of the newer patterns: by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination. Now is the time for a new "creativity" in charity, by effective help but also by "getting close" to those who suffer. We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel "at home".[[4]](#footnote-4) This is the true sign of the life and teaching of Francis: “I know the poor and crucified Christ”. Secular Franciscans following the example of Francis must also feel “at home” with the poor, and become ingenious with them (Cf. CG §10, 18-20).

For this reason, training in the social doctrine of the Church is needed in our Fraternities.

### *for mass-media to announce Jesus to all*

For the new evangelization to be effective, deep and up-to-date understanding of the current culture is required. Here the different communications resources play a major role. One has to know these resources in their usual forms (Francis wrote to his followers, to leaders etc.), and in their most recent forms (Maximilian Mary Kolbe used printing, radio, and television) and be able to use them.

Internet sites, forums and many other systems must be used to communicate effectively the message of Christ to great numbers of persons.[[5]](#footnote-5)

#### Questions based on a common overview of new evangelization

*Our Fraternities are experiencing significant changes:*

1. What has been discerned from evaluating the present situation in the various local SFO and YouFra Fraternities from the vantage point of the new evangelization?

*The world is undergoing significant changes which bring about new situations and challenges: culture (secularization), society (the intermingling of peoples), mass media, economy, science and civic life.*

1. What questions and challenges have they posed? What responses have been made?

*In the new evangelization, our Fraternities have to be transformed in their thinking so that they can continue to carry out the mission of proclamation within these new sectors.*

1. How have our Fraternities undertaken and accomplished Pope John Paul II's appeal for "a new evangelization; new in its ardour, in its methods and in its expressions"? By what actions or concrete changes?

*Our times call upon the Church to renew her manner and forms of evangelizing and display a new readiness to render an account of our faith and the hope that is ours.*

1. Has the urgency of a new missionary proclamation become a habitual component of the pastoral activity of our Fraternities? Or has there been a decline in the conviction that this mission is also to be done in our Fraternities and local Christian communities and the everyday situations of our lives? How does it become a concrete reality?

*The new evangelization requires us to live out this call for proclamation and witness, which promises to bear fruit.*

1. What evangelization projects do the Fraternities propose? How are the Fraternities reaching out to their members and training them to evangelize families, young people of the YouFra, and children?
2. How can we prepare our Fraternities for this growth, for the fecundity of evangelization, for the welcoming of new brothers and sisters?

**CONCLUSION**

*Duc in altum!* An enthusiastic work of pastoral remodeling is waiting for us. It is a work where we are all involved. The Holy Ghost in person –who made Francis’s heart to be illuminated by His flame, who also identified him with the mystery of Jesus, poor and crucified, in fraternal communion with all creatures, and who entrusted to him the greatest mission of repairing the Church – has called the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth. The Spirit has taken us as his own at the moment of our SFO Profession or our commitment to the Franciscan Youth, and has sent us to the entire world in the name of the Church.

“*I have done my part, let Christ show you yours*” (*Major Legend*, 14, 3).

Mary, Star of the New Evangelization, will support and guide us in this faithful path to living a more daring life according to the Gospel.

*“Almighty, eternal, just, and merciful God, give to us wretches to do for You what we know You to will and to will always that which is pleasing to You; so that inwardly purified, inwardly illumined and kindled by the flame of the Holy Ghost, we may be able to follow in the footsteps of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and by Your grace alone come to You the Most High, who, in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, live and reign and glory, God Almighty, forever and ever. Amen”*

(The Writings of St Francis, *Letter to All the Friars* §50-52)

1. *Fides et Ratio*, Faith and Reason § 48 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Verbum Domini* 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Apostolic Exhortation 30-12-1988 *Christifideles Laici* § 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Apostolic Letter of John-Paul II, 06-01-2001 *Novo Millenio Ineunte* § 49-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Apostolic Exhortation (22-01-1999 *Ecclesia in America* §6 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)