

Sharing The Vision

NAFRA Executive Council Updates

by Jan Parker, OFS National Secretary,
in consultation with Mary Bittner, OFS National Councilor

As I headed home from our National Fraternity (NAFRA) Chapter this past October, I was literally coming down from a mountaintop, leaving behind the mile-high city of Denver and the beautiful Rocky Mountains as I drove east. In front of me was nothing but sky and miles of flat land, but my spirits were high! What was this joy all about? Was I excited about driving across Kansas for the next six hours? Well, to be honest, yes. I love Kansas. But the reason for my joy had more to do with a wide sky of possibility and hearts as open as the prairie before me. I had witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit at our Chapter! My joy wasn't just about Kansas anymore — I was off to share a vision. A wonderful vision of ours! (And, yes, you can put that to music.)

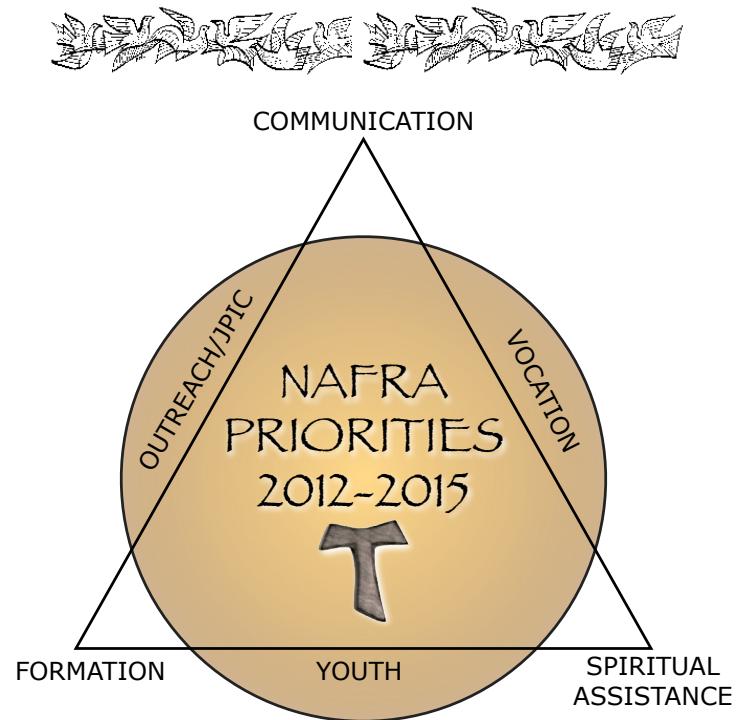
Your servant leaders gathered in Chapter for five days to listen to the Word of God, to pray, to look back and to look forward, and to name the successes and the needs of our Order. We dialogued to share input, to ask important questions and discern our future direction. An incredible amount of prayerful time and energy was given to this.

It was clear that the national gatherings of the past two years, most especially the recent Quinquennial Congress, have contributed significantly to our journey as an Order. The Holy Spirit seemed to bridge one event to the next to help us set a course. At Chapter we asked each other, "What is the most important insight or direction you see coming from the Quinquennial? Are there common themes? How can these common themes, insights or directions be made concrete and implemented by this National Chapter for the future life of our Order?

OFS National Theme for 2013

The importance of relationships came up repeatedly at the Quinquennial in what we heard from our speakers and in our sharing with each other. Relationship is key to peacemaking, justice building, understanding and acceptance. How we build relationships as Franciscans became very clear when Fr. Lester

Bach challenged us to "be the bridge." Our Theme Committee at Chapter embraced these simple but powerful words. Inspired by a talk given by JPIC Award winner Jan Benton, OFS, the committee added a phrase from our Rule, and our national theme was born! Be the Bridge: Accept all people as a Gift of God.



National Priorities

The continued movement of the Spirit was seen in the discernment of our national priorities for the next three years. As each geographic group of Regional Ministers reported back to the body the following priorities were quickly recognized: Communication, Formation, Spiritual Assistance, Youth, Outreach/JPIC and Vocations. These priorities were incorporated in a diagram to show their interrelatedness. The National Executive Council (NEC) will be guided by these priorities for the next three years.

Communication

By early 2013, the NEC will establish a committee to study communication issues at all levels and in all directions, including public relations and the promotion of the Order. Specific concerns include our web page, translations, and the content, cost and delivery of the TAU-USA. A line item for Communications was added to the budget. The NEC appointed Jim Wesley as TAU-USA Editor and Cindy Wesley to coordinate Spanish translations. (Note: Anna Geraci will continue to work on the issue of TAU-USA devoted to the Quinquennial, which was delayed by Hurricane Sandy.)

Formation

Bob Fitzsimmons has been reappointed chair of our National Formation Commission (NFC). New members will join the NFC to work on additions to the *For Up to Now (FUN) Manual*, a follow-up “FUN” workshop, continued regional support, and a revision of formation questions for Visitations.

Spiritual Assistance

The NEC will establish a Spiritual Assistance Development Committee in 2013 to work in conjunction with the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) to address the great need for well-prepared Spiritual Assistants and the surrounding concerns of training, appointment, follow-up support and consistency across the United States. A line item was added to the budget for this purpose. The CNSA has asked the NEC to approve proposals for (1) joint meetings of the CNSA and NEC and (2) bringing a Lay Spiritual Assistant (LSA) into its conference.

Outreach/ Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

Kent Ferris will continue to chair our JPIC Commission for an additional year, developing essential leadership and expanding involvement at every level. A JPIC/Youth Rally will be held July 25–28, 2013, building on the momentum of the 2012 Rally.

Youth and Young Adults

Rob Breen has been appointed Youth Commission Chair to lead us as we set goals and build a foundation for ministry with youth and young adults in the United States. The relationship between youth and JPIC will be explored at the 2013 JPIC/Youth Rally.

Vocations

Serious attention will be given to this priority. Promotion of vocations begins and ends with prayer, but the

vitality of fraternal life, public witness of our charism, communication, public relations and relationship with youth are important aspects to consider.

In other NEC action, Anne Mulqueen was appointed Chair of the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee. The NEC asked that Ed Shirley be honored in some way as this committee continues their work.

Future National Gatherings

National gatherings further the life of our Order, celebrate (make present) our charism, nourish us spiritually, provide formation, build relationships and aid communication. Plans for 2014 national workshops on Servant Leadership and Formation are developing. Both a national gathering on Spiritual Assistance and a national retreat are being considered. The following gatherings are set:

- ❖ Summer Seminar: “Finding Our History: An Interactive Theater Presentation” in Loretto, Penn., July 4–8, 2013
- ❖ JPIC/Youth Rally in Belleville, Ill., July 25–28, 2013
- ❖ National Fraternity (NAFRA) Chapter in Kansas City, Kan., October 15–20, 2013.

A Vision for an “Authentic and Renewed Conversion”

Though several weeks have passed, I am still energized by all that took place at our Chapter Loews Hotel became a sacred space filled with love, joy and sacramental moments. In that space the Holy Spirit guided us and gifted us with a vision — an image — that speaks to our hearts, and also challenges us to conversion.

In his keynote address, our Minister, Tom Bello, echoed this challenge, calling us to an “authentic and renewed conversion.”

- ❖ If we reflected every day on how to “be the bridge” it would require immense conversion. This is where the Holy Spirit is drawing us at this time. Ignited and united by this vision we go forward.
- ❖ You can listen to a recording of National Minister Tom Bello’s keynote address and view the accompanying keynote PowerPoint by going to our National Fraternity’s website www.nafra-sfo.org and clicking on “Meetings and Resources.”