



## From “Life Giving Union” to the Franciscan Family Forum

by Sr. Agnes Marie Regan, OSF

Since that special weekend in St. Louis in August of 2019 entitled “Life-Giving Union,” Franciscans from all three branches of the Order have been astounded at what has developed from that Spirit-filled assembly. The 56 national Franciscan leaders, consisting of members of the Order of Friars Minor, the Poor Clares, and members of the Third Order, Secular, Regular, and TOR, opened themselves to a dream that, despite and perhaps because of the restrictions of the pandemic, would become the “Franciscan Family Forum.”

A post “Life-Giving Union” questionnaire, based on the 18 recommendations of the assembly, produced an exciting eight-page listing of concrete suggestions to keep the momentum of the St. Louis gathering going forward. Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, elicited 18 volunteers to sift through and organize those marvelous ideas, which were passed on to an eight-member Core Team. That team’s task was to work on the nitty gritty of forming a Vision Statement, Mission Statement, structure, and process for moving forward to embody the “dream” of being a “Life-Giving Union.” The original 18 volunteers became known as the *Gathering Place*, which has continued to grow in so many beautiful ways!

The Forum has become a welcoming place to offer a life-giving heartbeat of encouragement, support, and information to the whole Franciscan Family in the United States, through a model of fraternal unity and collaboration. Its mission is “to sustain the life-giving union of the Franciscan family by building relationships and offering assistance through dialogue to address the contemporary challenges that we face in living the Gospel life.” The Forum does not wish to supplant or duplicate the works of already-existing Franciscan efforts such as Franciscans International, the Franciscan Federation, Franciscan Action Network, or other such entities. Collaboration and support are to be the Forum’s hallmark qualities, while continuing to develop its own spirit of BEING (cf. Encarnacion del Pazo, OFS), the heartbeat enlivening the Family.

In addition to *Gathering Place* meetings, the Franciscan Family Forum has created two important initiatives that seek to strengthen Franciscan Family bonds. The first initiative is the Formation/Vocation Panel videos being coordinated by Fr. Jack Clark Robinson, OFM, and

Diane Menditto, OFS, and their team of dedicated Formation colleagues from all three branches of the Order. The team is working on the creation of three visual presentations: (1) **MY STORY:** personal remarks by individuals presently in formation describing what attracted them to their chosen expression of Franciscan life; (2) **OUR STORY:** the “nuts and bolts” of the formation process in our various branches of the Order and (3) **YOUR STORY:** offering aids to vocational discernment in the different expressions of the call to Franciscan life. This talented group is being assisted by the computer gifts of Andy Tretow, the Communications Director of Assumption Province of the OFMs.

DonnaMarie Kaminsky, OFS, and Miriam Kennedy, OFS, are working on the “Franciscan Yellow Pages,” which has become known as “Wisdom Treasures.” When completed, “Wisdom Treasures” will be a handy reference of all US Franciscans and the gifts and talents they are willing to share with other members of the family such as (1) directing retreats, presentations, and or workshops on Franciscan topics, (2) spiritual direction, (3) communication skills, (4) Franciscan formation, (5) leadership, (6) peace and justice, (7) various forms of ecclesial ministry in the Franciscan spirit . . . and the myriad other ways we’ve all been called to serve the Church and the Order.

The Franciscan Family Forum strives to maintain the balance between being welcoming to all professed Franciscans, the need to provide continuity in focusing in on critical topics, maintaining representation from each branch of the Franciscan Family, and facilitating life-giving connections.

The *Gathering Place* meets every other month as a group on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday at 12 PM Eastern and is focused on news, updates, and sharing for the whole group. In the intervening months, on the same day and time, smaller breakout groups are invited to engage in dialogue on current events, communication, and the progress of Franciscan Family Forum initiatives. If you would like to participate in the *Gathering Place*, or are interested in offering your talents and experience to the rest of the Franciscan Family, please send an email with a little bit about yourself to:

[franciscanfamilyforum@gmail.com](mailto:franciscanfamilyforum@gmail.com).