

# Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

By Pat Brandwein-Ball, SFO  
National Councilor, Chair JPIC Transition Committee  
patball76@yahoo.com

JPIC, fully living the Secular Franciscan Rule, responds to the call of the Church in the twenty-first century. The apostolic commissions, combined to form JPIC, allow for maturation of the secular Franciscan charism. The previous two articles written for the TAU-USA were addressed to all members of the SFO in the US. It is crucial that everyone is given the same opportunity to understand JPIC and, from the beginning, receive all information/formation.

Some are eager to jump into restructuring, not seeing the need for formation “after all this is nothing new.” We cannot quickly move JPIC into structure. That implies trading one system for another, remaining dysfunctional and unsure of our Franciscan culture. If we do not take the time for study and prayer about our identity, direction, and the secular Franciscan vision we will be no better off than we were with our frustrations with the apostolic commission model. Formation requires prayer, patience, lively discussion, and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Church calls all Orders to return to their founders’ intentions. Now is the opportunity to do just that as expressed in the Preparatory Document for the International General Chapter in Hungary.

Francis lived in an era of penitential movements arising from the desire to live the gospel more deeply—holiness belonged to the laity also! These movements took on various forms and expressions and not all groups were heretical as we’ve often heard. Francis was moved by scripture and, most likely, spiritual direction from the clergy with whom he associated. He found that Biblical conversion (metanoia) and respect for the clergy was lacking in penitential movements. For him, these were essential elements if one were to follow the gospel authentically.

Some scholars believe his “Letter to All the Faithful” was written for his followers in the ordinary circumstances of life who could not leave family and work responsibilities. Written for us, some 800 years later, it remains vibrant with exhortation for today’s world, becoming the Prologue to our 1978 Rule. Our Rule, a Vatican II document, rich in the context of today’s new evangelization, will lack the vitality of our Franciscan penitential foundation unless we understand it in light of the Prologue

The Penitents of Assisi lived an interior change of heart to God, without which acts of penance are empty. Prayer, fasting, alms giving, and works of mercy take on a new meaning: personal sanctity and transforming the ills of society. Conversion on this level – to this extent – is not easy. It requires a constant vigilance and a community to support and give guidance. Fraternity is another hallmark of the penitential way of life. To quote Henri Nouwen, *Because now the question no longer is: How can I best develop my spiritual life and share it with others? But Where do we find the community of faith to which the Spirit of God descends and from which God’s message of hope and love can be brought as a light into the world? Once this question becomes our main concern we can no longer separate the spiritual life from life in community, belonging to God from belonging to each other and seeing Christ from seeing one another.* (Behold the Beauty of the Lord, H. Nouwen, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN 1987, p 60)

We have a lot of work ahead of us to “re-discern” our Franciscan way of life. Let us rise up with joyful hearts to meet the challenge, embracing the fullness of Pentecost.

## Being and Doing:

- \* Use the preparatory document for upcoming International Chapter with your fraternity as on going formation. Be sure to send Anne Mulqueen your discussion responses by September 15.
- \* Quietly read the Prologue, sit with it a while. Hear Francis speaking these words to you personally, to your fraternity. Listen to the voice of God in the Prologue.
- \* Evaluate your “one new way to energize your life in the Church/ Fraternity” from the last TAU-USA issue **Being and Doing**. What further call from the gospel do you hear?