

**State of the
Order
of the
National
Fraternity
of the SFO
in the
United States
October 2007**



**By Patrick Mendés, SFO
National Minister**

My report and my impressions of the State of the Order are predicated on the replies from 28 of the 30 ministers, who responded to the regional survey.

Statistics:

At the end of 2006 there were **15,293** seculars.

Formation:

Worthy of note have been the “On the Road” workshops led by a team from the National Formation Commission. Perhaps of vital interest and most noteworthy, among the work done by the Commission is the updating of the Workshop guidelines and the strengthening of the first pillar, Discernment, which is paramount for the people in initial formation.

The texts used for Initial Formation continue to be those very popular and proven texts: *Come and See; Catch Me a Rainbow, Too; Fully Mature in the Fullness of Christ* and of course, the Holy Rule and the General Constitutions and Sacred Scripture.

In Ongoing Formation, we have seen *Pick More Daisies* gaining wide popularity as well as the *Writings of Francis and Clare*, and the very popular *To Live as Francis Lived*. Other popular texts for Ongoing Formation include *Essential Documents of the SFO*, *Making Present the Charism* and sparkling newcomer to this year’s report, *The Virtues* by Fr. John Sullivan, OFM along with his entire series prepared for the SFO.

Who and where we are:

Looking further at where we are, we see that there is much activity in all of our regions, relating to the Works of Mercy. Regardless of the “structure” of the apostolic commissions, we see that they are being lived vitally in a variety of ways such as feeding, clothing and sheltering the poor and homeless, ministry to the imprisoned, various pro-life activities and ecology efforts, as well as serving as lay

missionaries in South America and a variety of peace and justice related activities, and very certainly the brothers and sisters are active in the ministries of their home parishes.

Our major success this year was the Quinquennial Congress. Though it was not without controversy, the 430 plus participants in their evaluations rated the conference between 4 & 5, with 5 being the highest ranking. Most impressive was holding the conference in a hotel with excellent handicap accessibility. Over the past 48 years as a Secular Franciscan and that is a lot of Quinquennial Congresses, I have never before seen as large a number of our physically challenged brothers and sisters present. In addition to such amenities as air conditioning, so important for those with heart and respiratory conditions, was the fact that everything from housing to conference rooms and dining were all under the same roof.

The hotel setting offered us a unique opportunity to be present to the world. We are Secular Franciscans and a number of guests who approached us, learned from and about us. It was inspiring. We bore the witness of presence and welcome seeing all we met as “brothers and sisters, children of the same Father.”

Our Youth and Young Adult Commission raised significant funds for the “Water Project.” Thank you, for supporting our young people in this important effort. Eleven Regions report having youth “groups,” but as yet, we have no YOUFRA fraternities established. The Youth and Young Adult Commission has done an excellent job of publicizing the YYA possibilities and bringing the young people together, for National gatherings and have served as guest speakers and participants in local Franciscan youth activities. This has essentially been a “top down” ministry – appropriate and necessary in the formative stages. This needs now, to become a “bottom up” ministry – local, to Regional to National.

Franciscan Action Network:

This new initiative, sponsored by the OFM Province of the Holy Name, Office of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, is still in its infancy. National Vice-Minister, Deacon Tom Bello, SFO, has served on the Steering Committee from the inception. I have served as “back up” whenever Tom was not available. We will look at this further, as we look at our challenges and opportunities.

The Challenges and Opportunities:

(Most cited by the Ministers surveyed)

- Lack of Spiritual Assistants
- Training Servant Leaders
- Uniform formation of Formation Directors

Availability of ongoing formation and growth in Franciscan Spirituality – especially for those fraternities, regional and local, who have no Spiritual Assistants.

Strengthening and emphasis on **living the Rule**.

Respect for each other's spiritual journeys.

Formalizing our Youth groups.

Helping our brothers and sisters to understand the purpose for the Fair Share Contribution and their responsibility in this regard. (Article 25 of the Rule.)

Issues regarding liability insurance.

Goals:

Strengthen the overall formation programs.

Suggested Approach:

The Formation Commission has updated and strengthened the "On the Road" workshops, which are "form the formator" programs and will be offering them in various locations. I strongly encourage the Formation Directors and Ministers of all of our Regions to attend one of the workshops.

These are presented with the intention that the Regional Formation Directors would replicate the workshops for the local formation directors of their respective regions. I strongly encourage the Regions to put a process in place, so that new formation directors are prepared in the same manner so that there is continuity in the formation process. I would also encourage the Regions to have an annual formation directors workshop, where they can share their experiences, learn from one another and have ongoing support from the Region. I encourage the Regional Formation Directors and the National Formation Commission to communicate and dialogue more frequently. Emphasis is placed on dialogue. Are we sharing our ideas, successes, bumps in the road?

Formalize the structures of the identified youth groups into youth Fraternities.

Suggested Approach:

A close collaboration with the Regional YYA Chairs and the National Commission. Guidance and support on the formalizing of youth fraternities would come from the National level to the Regional level and from the Regional level to the local level. Movement in terms of collaboration, should be fluid, between the groups. This suggests a much closer working relationship between the Regional YYA Chairs and the National Commission.

Actively encourage those brothers and sisters, so qualified, to take the Spiritual Assistant Training Program and serve those fraternities in need.

Suggested Approach:

With the help of local spiritual assistants, identify potential lay spiritual assistants. Meet with them and identifying their gifts, discern with them, the possibility of undertaking the studies and the ministry.

Determine how we will best collaborate with the broader Franciscan Family in light of our Apostolic Commissions, especially Article 15 of the Holy Rule, but not excluding articles 16 -19.

Suggested Approach:

Determine from the work and recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Commissions, the structure and approach best suited to living our Rule. Make a decision as to whether or not we will join with the other members of the Franciscan Family in the FAN.

Make known the opportunities available to our brothers and sisters for their ongoing formation and growth in Franciscan spirituality, especially those who have no spiritual assistants.

Suggested Approach:

Give greater publicity and explanation of the Institute for Contemporary Franciscan Life, distance learning program. This program is seriously under utilized by our brothers and sisters.

Make known and promote the new annual workshops created and designed solely for the SFO, by St. Francis University, in Loretto, PA.

Invite neighboring regions to your Regional workshops.

Recognize and respect the brothers and sisters whose spiritual journeys and perspectives are not the same as ours, avoiding "labeling"

Suggested Approach:

Dialogue, perhaps using the RESPECT guidelines.

Regional Retreats with themes of building fraternity and dialogue.



Let us give thanks for our successes and in the spirit of Francis, "may God show us what is ours to do" and guide us in the doing. And may the Sacred Heart of Jesus surround you with His love and fill your lives with His abundant blessings!