



News from the National Executive Council
NATIONAL PRIORITY FOR 2019-2021

At the 2018 Chapter, the National Fraternity Council (NAFRA) discussed the question of national priorities for 2019–2021. Many suggestions were presented, and several were mentioned multiple times, but no one priority stood out clearly. It was the consensus of the body that the incoming National Executive Council (NEC) should decide our national priorities for the upcoming three years. The NEC is happy to announce that this was accomplished at our December 13–16, 2018, meeting in St. Louis, Mo. During this meeting, we prayerfully considered the needs of the national family, as well as the feedback from the NAFRA Geo Groups at Chapter, and the decision became clear to us. While in past years NAFRA has set as many as six priorities, this year we chose to narrow our focus to one—*Fraternity Life*. Note that concentrating on fostering vibrant fraternity life does not imply that previous priorities will be ignored or neglected. Formation, JPIC, Communications, and Spiritual Assistance will all play an important role in strengthening our local fraternities.



The decision to choose *Fraternity Life* was confirmed for us in a wonderful way! A few weeks after we chose this priority, we received a Christmas letter from our General Minister. In this letter Tibor Kausar encouraged us to repeat our “yes” unconditionally—saying *yes to God, yes to our vocation, and yes to our neighbor*. He then repeated three times “...*this will give new life to our fraternities, too!*” (See our General Minister’s Christmas Letter on page 5)

To help all of us achieve this priority we decided to highlight three aspects of fraternity life:

National Priority 2019-2021
Fraternity Life

- 1. Deepening our Franciscan Vocation**
- 2. Growing in Fraternal Communion**
- 3. Cultivating Universal Kinship**

Our relationships with God, with our OFS brothers and sisters, and with all people made in the image and likeness of God will be the subject of future reflections, as will some of the means (commitment, conversion, communication) we must use to enable our fraternities to grow in holiness.

Meanwhile, let us begin by reflecting on the spiritual reality and purpose of our fraternities. We're so used to participating in various groups, both within and outside the Church, that it's easy to treat our fraternity as just another group, rather than as an integral part of our vocation. Let's look at our foundational documents. How do they portray fraternity?

Our General Constitutions state:

Art. 28.1. The fraternity of the OFS finds its origin in the inspiration of Saint Francis of Assisi to whom the Most High revealed the essential gospel quality of life in fraternal communion (See *Constitutions* 3.3 (below); *Testament* 14).

Art. 3.3. The vocation to the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities.

Art. 100.3. Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and **the witness of building fraternity sincerely and openly are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love.** They should be recognized in it by their "being," from which their mission springs.

Points to ponder:

- The fraternity is not an afterthought. It originated with St. Francis, and its essential gospel quality was revealed to Francis by God Himself.
- We don't just "live the Gospel." We live it "in fraternal communion." Fraternal communion is thus defined as a *constitutive element* of our vocation. We have a specific way of being in the world, and a specific way of being together... in fraternal communion.
- The Constitutions tie building fraternity to our Franciscan mission of "rebuilding" the Church. In fact, they term it one of the

principal services we as an Order do for the Church. Recall that during our profession we promised to spend our efforts doing this very thing.

The local fraternity is a visible sign of the Church, a community of faith and love. Together with all the members, you now pledge yourselves to spend your efforts **to make the fraternity a genuine ecclesial assembly and a living Franciscan community.** (Rite of Profession, Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order).

If we fail to take this seriously, if we work half-heartedly, if we rarely show up at fraternity gatherings, we are failing our brothers and sisters, we are failing to live our profession, and we are failing the Church.

- Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis and his brothers rejoiced when others were added to their company.

"Immediately four other good and sound men were added to them as followers of the holy man of God. ...At that time Saint Francis and his brothers felt great gladness and unique joy whenever one of the faithful, led by the Spirit of God, came and accepted the habit of holy religion whoever the person might be: rich or poor, noble or insignificant, wise or simple, cleric or illiterate, a layman of the Christian people. This was a great wonder to those of the world and an example of humility, challenging them to the way of a more reformed life and to penance for sins." (1 Celano 31)

Ask yourself: do people today feel that "great wonder" when they visit our fraternities?

What sort of example do they see?

- "Come to [Jesus], a living stone, rejected by men yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...."(1 Peter 2:4-5a)

And finally, look to the next issue of the TAU-USA and to our national website secularfranciscansusa.com for additional reflections on this year's focus.