

**Time In Memorial: Lessons from These Fifty Years**  
**Keynote address AFC, 2016**  
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Happy 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Franciscan Federation! If you were present at the AFC in San Diego in 2005 when the Federation celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will you please stand? Remain standing for just a moment while I ask the next question: if you were present in Pittsburgh when the Federation celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, will you please stand? If you were involved in the Federation at the time of its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1975-76)... or earlier, please stand. Look around: here is the living memory of the Federation, the evidence of a dream worth holding on to and carrying aloft through the unpredictable currents of time and circumstance. We want to hear your stories these days and the stories of your predecessors who gave so generously of their energy and creativity to incarnate and sustain this dream. Let's give these people a round of applause... and indeed, give a show of appreciation to all who are here, adding another chapter to our story and laying the groundwork for chapters yet to come.

I suspect there are many here who are musing, "How quickly the years pass; it all seems like just yesterday..." Time is a fascinating entity, indeed, a mystery of the universe. Einstein says time is an illusion. (Hard to convince myself of that when I look in the mirror, but he was right). We see time as a series of snapshots or the unfolding of moments, one after another. Let's say that a sheet of paper represents one minute. If we lined up every minute since the Big Bang like back-to-back sheets of paper and placed them in a horizontal file the length of a railroad boxcar so that each car carried one million years and then traveled far enough out in space so we could see both ends of the train at the same time, what would be the meaning of past or present? We would be seeing it all as "NOW." We could not only see the beginning of the Franciscan Federation, but the beginning of Christianity. We could see the era of the dinosaurs and when life first appeared on earth. We could see the first moments of the newly created universe and everything since then. From that vantage point, we could also see beyond the front of the train, into the future, which would also be perceived as "NOW." That's a pretty elementary explanation of Einstein's time-space theory, but current day physics continues to verify it. The closer I am to something, the more limited is my perspective, my sense of time, my "now." The further I move away, the broader is my perspective and the larger is my "now."

Not only scientists, but artists, mystics and lovers, in their finest moments, know this. Jeanette Winterson, English novelist and author of *The Passion*, writes: "All time is eternally present and so all time is ours. There is no sense in forgetting and every sense in dreaming<sup>i</sup>." C.S. Lewis \* reflected, "The present is the point at which time touches eternity."<sup>ii</sup>

St. Augustine, too, puzzled over the meaning of time and reflected on it in the context of faith. He also came to understand time, not as a succession of events: past-present-future, but as a continuous eternal present. This is the insight that persists in our experience of liturgy which is always eschatological, i.e., we experience the present activity of God as we recall past events and yearn for their full realization in God's kingdom.<sup>iii</sup>

Related to the concept of time is the concept of remembering. Intuitively, the Hebrew people seemed to know that past, present and future were intimately intertwined. Their memorial re-enactments (zikkaron), such as the Exodus event, were not just anniversaries of past events, but re-immersions into that event so that its effects could be experienced personally, no matter when one lived. This understanding of time and memory carried over into Christian praxis as anamnesis. Dennis Smolarski, SJ, describes anamnesis as a “remembrance that makes the effects of a historical event present and effective for the believer.”<sup>iv</sup>

I want to take a few minutes to more fully absorb this idea of anamnesis before we take a closer look at the story of the Franciscan Federation these fifty years, so that we can understand our history in a new way; so we can enter into our story in a way that makes the effects of some of our most significant moments *present and effective* for us today.<sup>v</sup>

We know that on this side of death, earth-bound as we are, life is marked by the passing of time. Yet, on the other side of death time becomes irrelevant: all is an eternal, expansive ‘now.’ If you will engage my earlier image, at the time of death we will be able to see the entire train. To some degree this is what people report who have had “after death” experiences: they move apart from their physical bodies, thus gaining some distance and perspective, and their whole life passes before them.

So it could be conceived that on the verge of death we will have one foot in time and the other in eternity. If we have the good fortune to be around people as they near death, we can testify that they may move in and out of “earth reality,” that they may see a loved one, long deceased, who comes to comfort or encourage them or to escort them across the threshold of death. A dying person in a coma may suddenly wake up or a person with severe dementia may have a moment of youthful clarity and energy that delights and amazes family and friends. The experience of time is changing as the dying person straddles the threshold between earth-bound time and eternity. The same is true of Jesus’ death. It could be recorded in the annals of earthly history (and therefore was ‘in time’), but it is also a timeless event, spanning all the ages before and since his incarnation.

So it is accurate to say that Jesus is dying now, at this moment – not over and over again, but rather that he is *still* dying. His one gracious self-surrender, his one generous sacrifice, his one total self-gift still goes on, and all the members of his body experience it. His gift of passionate love and passionate suffering unites all the pain of all the ages to his own pain. Jesus weeps with the brokenhearted, suffers the violence of all who torture or are victimized, and shares the lot of those who are poor in every way. No one suffers alone; no one dies alone, regardless how abandoned he or she may be by other human beings. No one passes through the furnace of suffering and sacrifice who does not have access to the gracious assistance of Jesus who is there in the midst of the suffering and self-gift. I take great comfort in realizing that.

I am also much consoled by the truth that Jesus goes on rising; all of us have access to that experience as well. The human spirit has incredible resilience; people are able to come through great disasters without losing hope or being permanently robbed of joy. Life and death are two sides of the same coin; one does not occur without the other. In that belief, we find the strength to embrace whichever side of the coin presents itself to us at any given time. Because of Christ’s

resurrection we know that ours is a God of the living. Given the perspective of time and space we see that all our dyings are ultimately about more life.

Finally, since there is really only one extended dying and rising for Christ and Christ's Body, there is only one eternal Eucharist. When Jesus gathered with his disciples on the night before he died, I suspect that he was already on the threshold of the time-space mystery; already moving back and forth between time and eternity. "Take and eat... take and drink... it is I you receive... do this and remember." Each time we celebrate Eucharist we are not just re-enacting an event that happened once in history, but we are also, and even more truly, entering into a timeless mystery. Step out into space; away from time and view the train from eternity. Anamnesis. Christ is right now dying and rising. How evident that is as we witness his Body broken all over the world! How evident that is as we witness in his Body the resiliency, courage and faith that still rises all over the world! Eucharist is like that train that goes back into history and forward into the future... it's all NOW: the Paschal Mystery. Because of our limited perception we experience going to Eucharist as a repetitive event, day after day, week after week. But it's really all one Eucharist; our immersion into the timeless mystery of Love poured out. Here we can learn patience and courage, wisdom, trust and acceptance from Jesus, the Christ and from all the people who have ever lived and offered their joys and sorrows.<sup>vi</sup>

So what does all this have to do with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Franciscan Federation? \* Let's return to the metaphor of the train, reduce the scale significantly, so that now, our train represents 50 years and each rail car, one decade. Let's move far enough back so that we can see the entire train as one "NOW." As we do, we begin to notice that there are certain moments, certain themes which seem to repeat and build upon one another as our federation evolves. There is no reason to think that these will not also go ahead of us into the space that we trust is there, but can't see because we stand too close to the train. I want to point out ten that I found as I analyzed and reflected on our story. (I'm not claiming that I have discovered them all!) Anamnesis allows us to feel right now the effects of those transformative events. Join me as we take a look at what's "NOW" going on in our Federation. That's why I write in the present tense.

## 1. IDENTITY

With the call of the Second Vatican Council for religious communities to reclaim their founding charisms, women religious respond wholeheartedly. Mother Viola Leininger, a Franciscan Sister of Millvale, PA, finally succeeds in 1965, in calling other major superiors of Franciscan TOR congregations in the US to come together to learn the TOR charism and find ways to pass on that knowledge to their members. 30 congregations respond and that number gradually grows. The spiritual document, *Go To My Brethren* (1968) becomes a very important resource as we learn that our focus as Third Order Franciscans is on life-long conversion, out of which also flow contemplation, poverty and minority. This document will guide TOR congregations as we rework our Constitutions in post-Vatican II years. Our identity grows stronger through "The Tau Pilgrimage" traveling group, the "Wheaton Affirmation" on a Franciscan way of life in 1971 and through numerous programs and traveling "road shows" that appear in the 80s and 90s. We take a giant step forward in our self-understanding when a new Rule is placed in our hands in 1982-83. When the Vatican Office releases the *linneamenta* in preparation for the 1994 Synod of Bishops on Consecrated Life, many of us find ourselves not fitting the description of monastic or apostolic

religious life described therein. That leads us to further soul-searching and research and we (re)discover our identity as evangelical and are able to articulate it. In fact, Joseph Chinnici, OFM, named this response to the linneamenta “the official articulation of the charism of the Franciscan evangelical life.”<sup>vii</sup>

What lessons do we still need to learn about who we are and what it means to be a Franciscan witness to the Gospel today? How is our identity influenced by the vast field of quantum physics? What is Pope Francis teaching us about our Franciscan charism by the way he lives? Identity for us Third Order Franciscans is sure-footed but not static. We are ever learning how to be definitive without being exclusive.

## 2. INCLUSION

As we view the “train” of our 50 year history, we see the federation gradually reaching out from being a “Franciscan women leaders only” group in 1966 to including TOR Brothers in leadership in 1981 to “grass roots membership” in 1991; then, congregational associates/cojourners in 2010, Secular Franciscans in 2013.. and we now are talking about “all those with a Franciscan heart.” Two of the recommended directions of the 2000 International Franciscan Conference are: “To create and promote communion and collaboration with the Anglican Franciscans and Franciscans of other Christian traditions” and “to seek new forms of Franciscan life in community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>viii</sup>

Zachary Hayes, of beloved memory would be pleased. In a 1995 Federation Conference address, he had this to say:

“I am convinced that this (Franciscan) tradition, like the Gospel itself, is not the private possession of any particular group.... Those like ourselves who are the immediate heirs of the tradition inspired by the spirituality of Francis might better see ourselves as responsible stewards of a treasure that has much to offer for the healing of humanity and of the world at large.”<sup>ix</sup>

Inclusion follows from clear personal and communal identity. Secure in our self-knowledge and self-worth, we need not fear that our unique approach to gospel living will be dissipated if we allow our boundaries to become more permeable. Real unity thrives in diversity.

## 3. COLLABORATION

The isolation, competitiveness, and even suspicion that characterized religious communities in their interactions as few as 70 years ago has given way to a *modus operandi* of co-laboring. When faced with the daunting task of bringing religious life into the contemporary era and rediscovering founding charisms, Franciscan TOR congregational leaders look to one another; that’s why our federation began, first with 30 congregations in 1965, then 56 two years later, then 75 by 1968 and 101 congregations by 1991. Groups such as the *Midwest Franciscans in Collaboration*, *Tau In Pilgrimage*, and numerous others share personnel, resources, experiences and insights as they implement the teachings of Vatican II, open up the richness of our Franciscan charism, respond to the Linneamenta of 1994 and prepare for the Apostolic Visitation of 2008.

The first perpetual vow cooperative program for women religious is offered in 1982 in Sylvania, Ohio. Next, a 3 month inter-congregational initial formation program is piloted in Chicago in 1990. As our experience in collaboration grows, and our trust in one another builds, we become ready to

establish Franciscan common novitiates: one in the Midwest (1996) and one in the East (1998). In 2009 we combine those resources and establish the TOR FCN for Franciscan women in US. How will this collaborative venture evolve, even as the numbers of US novices remains low? Will its recent experience of intercultural community living expand to Central and South American novices, and beyond? To what extent will TOR men novices, or novices from the other Franciscan Orders be drawn into collaboration?

*Next Generation Franciscans* brings vocation ministers together in 1996; that group continues today with the name *Next Generation Franciscan Mentors*, and since 2015 includes those who mentor Franciscan vowed religious, Secular Franciscans, Associates/affiliates/cojourners, high school and university students, volunteers in Franciscan-based service programs and those with a Franciscan heart.

There is not time to elaborate on all the examples of collaboration, some more structured and organized than others: Franciscan colleges and universities, hospitals and health care centers, retreat centers, justice and peace efforts, activities within the regions, etc. The Commission of Charism Services, established with the new government structure in 2008, promotes this kind of collaboration.

#### **4. CONVERGENCE**

The *Dare To Image* task force which has been working the past two years is proposing a new Franciscan entity that would bring together members from all three Orders as well as those with a Franciscan heart. This may sound like a new idea, but again, we find it seminally in Aston Franciscan Sr. Rose Cecilia Case's 1986 invitation to the Friars' Conference to hold a joint assembly. Not until 1995 is that dream realized. Two Franciscan Family Gatherings are held in 1999 and 2000 during which there is a proposal to establish a Franciscan Family Council, "not meant to set up a complicated organization, but simply to concretize our efforts to come together around important topics at least once a year."<sup>x</sup> The idea is tried for three years, but Federation members are not ready to have one Franciscan organization. The idea resurfaces in 2013 from both a desire to be a stronger Franciscan presence in our country and out of need to deal with diminishing membership, financial constraints, and a smaller leadership pool. This week we ponder: Is now the moment to pursue this proposal, realizing it may take a good number of years before we see this endeavor come to fruition? One national Franciscan family is already the norm in many countries.

#### **5. SPIRITUALITY AND EDUCATION IN THE FRANCISCAN TRADITION**

This theme is perhaps easiest to trace through the history since it is the founding purpose of the Federation. Its effects are clearly with us today as we claim our particular charism in the Franciscan family and celebrate the richness of our heritage. Let it suffice to name a few of the many programs offered nationally and regionally to educate us and deepen our Franciscan spirituality: *Roots and Wings* – on our TOR Rule; *The World is Our Cloister* – for Franciscans wanting to work for peace by doing justice; Summer Enrichment programs at the Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, NY; *Build With Living Stones (1988)* - Franciscan Mission; *Facing the Incarnate Christ (1995)*, *Rebirth of a Charism (1997)*, *The Cantic of Creation: Singing the Cosmic Symphony (1999)*.

A tremendous boost to our spirituality and our ongoing education in the charism comes in the form of *Franciscan Morning and Evening Praise*, a 9-year labor of love and endurance through obstacles that continues to feed our souls and inform our spirituality.

## 6. ACTION FOR JUSTICE

In 1983 as Franciscans celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the peaceful prophet from Assisi, TORs worldwide make a public statement to the United Nations, calling for peace and a discontinuation of the production of nuclear weapons. This step onto the global stage will enkindle the dream of a permanent Franciscan influence in the UN, which will materialize in Franciscans International, 1989. The Federation becomes a frequent voice and presence wherever injustice, oppression, poverty, and disrespect hold sway. Statements such as *A Vision of Franciscan Peacemaking* in 1985 and actions such as protests against the School of the Americas where Franciscans endure arrest and imprisonment in the 1990s give credence to our commitment to work for a more just and peaceful world. The Peace and Justice Committee, formed in 1981, morphs into The Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Committee in 2009, reflecting an additional focus of attention. Along the way Franciscans speak out for peace in the Middle East, immigration reform, care of creation, dignity for all people, an elimination of human trafficking, and other issues (which Mary Elizabeth has already referred to).

## 7. CELEBRATION

Where Franciscans gather, joy also enters. Our 50 year history is dotted with rituals and parties that mark significant moments. Reunions are a joyous component of the annual conferences. NOW, today, in a spirit of anamnesis, we celebrate our new Rule, the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Federation; the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Francis in 1983, the Clare Fest in La Crosse, WI in 1993. We celebrate the banquets at the annual conferences and the many Franciscans who have been honored – and teased – over the years. It is good to be here, in the midst of these 50 years remembering! We celebrate roots and wings, past and future as an eternally present now.

## 8. STRUCTURAL EVOLUTION

Our structures seem to be as transient as our way of life. We've changed our federation name three times and our structures at least four times. The initial structures of government determined in 1966-67 are reviewed and modified in 1981; then changed more significantly in 1988 to include a five-person board consisting of president, first vice president, second vice-president, and two appointed members. Six geographical regions are established in 1992-93. The following year Vision and Mission Statements are developed. The Viability Project of 1999-2000, originally intended to help member congregations make decisions about their futures, leads to the *Freeing the Fire* project, an attempt to develop an alternative to merger or union through the exploration of federating in new ways. A 2005 discussion among elected leaders regarding statutes discloses a need to change the Federation structure again. And so the Transformation Task Force begins its work in 2007, hands on the project to the Implementation Task Force two years later, who leads the Federation through 5 years of experimentation. The Commission of Elected Leaders approves the provisional by-laws in July, 2012 and within a year the National Board is taking stock of where we are and sensing the need for something new. Out of that restlessness comes the *Dare to Image* meeting in April, 2014 and the subsequent *Dare To Image* task force that, along with the National Board, has been the engine driving another turn of the spiral in our evolutionary story.

Our structures seem to defy codification; we seem more at home with fluidity, adaptation and evolution. That seems to me to be quite an advantage, given the era in which we live.

## 9. PAIN AND DOUBT

To be living in transitional times is not for sissies. Important things do not come easy. Think of the long, arduous, confusing and delicate task of writing a new Rule. Think of the detours and setbacks involved in developing a common book of morning and evening prayer. Think of the relatively small difference our actions for justice seem to make on the immense problems of our world. Think of the tedious struggle to capture a dream of relationality and inter-connectivity and enclose it in the framework of by-laws. Think of the seemingly endless struggle to stay financially afloat when we would rather be living as the birds of the air or the lilies of the field. We face in the Federation the same diminishment that our individual congregations face: fewer members, an aging population, diminishing finances, a smaller leadership pool. Vulnerability and fear of the unknown can paralyze us unless we can image ourselves as the midwives of what is yet to be. Within the context of the time-space mystery, however, we can see beyond the front of the train. We do not have clear vision yet, but there *is* something there.

## 10. RESILIENCY AND HOPE

As I view this Franciscan Federation “train” I see the low moments. But I also see Mother Viola Leininger in 1967 beaming: “We have a Federation!” I hear Margaret Carney, Thaddeus Horgan, Roberta Cusack, Mary McCarrick choring: “We have a Rule!” I hear the Tiffin Franciscans cheering from the convent library when the final proofing of the prayer book is complete. And I hear Ann Lyons, executive director, proclaiming with great joy at the 2011 AFC; “We are debt-free!”

William De Biase, OFM, in a 1998 article in *The Cord* had this to say:

“A real dream never gets old and no dream is more real than the dream God has for us. Perhaps the greatest challenge we have as Franciscans is to be open to the revelation of the charism in our lives, to be aware that there are still unused parts, to be convinced that the dream is still real, and to have the courage to let go of one dream for another.”<sup>xi</sup>

We can do that, can't we? We want to do that, don't we?

I want to finish this time-space perspective with the timeless words of Elise Saggau, OSF (Little Falls), author of *A Short History of the Franciscan Federation*, which she completed for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The truth of her insights has only grown richer and fuller:

“Perhaps, if there is any lesson to be learned in following the story of the Franciscan Federation, it is the lesson of the Paschal Mystery. From its inception just thirty (**fifty**) years ago the organization has passed through a number of crises, any one which would have been adequate to squelch its spirit and bring it to an early demise. However, in each instance, a “new spirit” fell upon the organization and infused it with life and hope. This is a testimony, not only to those who originally envisioned the Federation, but to those who over the years guided it and suffered with and for it. It is a testimony to those who believe in their hearts that, as Franciscans, it is better for us to work together than to work apart, to live as brothers and sisters than to live as strangers, to

share our gifts, our treasures, our stories, our faith for our mutual edification, for the building up of the body. Even as we celebrate an anniversary of survival and achievement, we anticipate future passions, deaths and resurrections, knowing that in ways beyond our imagining God is with us in Spirit and in Life.”<sup>xii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Winterston, Jeanette. *The Passion*. Grove Press, 1987.

<sup>ii</sup> Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. Oxford: Magdalen College

<sup>iii</sup> Irwin, Kevin W. *What We have Done; What We Have Failed to Do Assessing the Liturgical Reform of Vatican II*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013. Chapter 3: “Making Memory Together.

<sup>iv</sup> Smolarski, Dennis, S.J. *Liturgical Literacy: From Anamnesis to Worship*. New York, NY/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990, p, 11.

<sup>v</sup> “Remembering is not simply recalling past experiences and shared hopes but it is also bringing those events and visions into the present.” Ann Lyons, FSSJ, 2012 Executive Director’s Annual Report, p. 6.

<sup>vi</sup> “Mass is more than attending a representation of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, but entering into a mystery where we move from being spectators to actors – we choose the part we will play in the drama: Peter, Judas, Pilate, Mary, Mary Magdalene, the crowd, the Cyrenian...” Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, ofm, Cap., Preacher of the Pontifical Household. Good Friday homily as referenced by Carl E. Olson, “Renewal, Re-presentation, and Anamnesis,” *The Catholic World Report*, April 7, 2012.

<sup>vii</sup> Chinnici, Joseph, OFM. Comment made at a Washington Theological Union symposium, 2001, as reported by Kathleen Moffatt, OSF,

<sup>viii</sup> Franciscan Federation, Annual Report, 2001, p. 17.

<sup>ix</sup> Saggau, Elise. *A Short History of the Franciscan Federation, Third Order Regular of Brothers and Sisters of the United States.*, Franciscan Federation, Washington, DC, 1995.

<sup>x</sup> Franciscan Family Council proposal, as printed in the 2000 Annual Report of the Federation, p. 7.

<sup>xi</sup> William De Biase, OFM, “Something Always New.” *The Cord*, 48:1 (1998: 32-33) as quoted by Mary Motte, from keynote address of National Forum III, 2000.

<sup>xii</sup> *A Short History of the Franciscan Federation Third Order Regular of Brothers and Sisters of the United States.* Elise Saggau, OSF, 1995