



Living Gospel, Living Piazza:  
The Future of the Franciscan Federation  
Strategic Plan for 2026 - 2029

February 2026

## LETTER FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Franciscan Family,

The Franciscan Federation is living story, woven by sisters and brothers choosing simplicity, kinship, and courageous love. That story continues to unfold among us as the Spirit invites us to begin anew. This strategic plan is our shared "yes."

This plan envisions the Federation as a spiritual piazza, like Assisi's vibrant *Piazza del Comune*, where we gather in prayer, reflection, action. Rooted in Francis, Clare, and Third Order Regular tradition, we become caretakers of creation, prophets of simplicity, bridge-builders, companions of the marginalized, teachers of joy.

### **Four Transformational Priorities guide us:**

- Build the Piazza: Digital/relational hub for connection, learning, collaboration.
- Financial Sustainability: Mission shaped by faith and generosity, not scarcity.
- Network of Belonging: Welcoming religious, associates, lay partners, seekers.
- Streamlined Structures: Clear mission, distinct Franciscan witness.

### **Three discernment lenses anchor every decision:**

- Building Visibility: Making our gentle Franciscan witness shine clearly.
- Honoring TOR Roots: Faithful to our Third Order Regular heritage.
- What Is Ours to Do: Focusing where our unique calling matters most.

This work challenges us to release old structures, build new systems, and invest in connections. Signs of life already stir: associates gathering, young adults seeking grounded spirituality, elders blessing leaders, partners ready to collaborate. The piazza reveals what the Spirit is already doing among us.

This is *our* collective project. Your prayers, ideas, and participation bring it to life.

For sixty years, the Federation has carried St. Francis's vision, a living Gospel witness. Now we hear his call: "*Let us begin again.*" These words call us not to a beginning, but to a *reignited* Franciscan Federation, where humility meets boldness and simplicity shines with beauty. Every connection, resource, and prayer becomes a thread in the living tapestry of love—the Gospel taking fresh form among us once more.

*Pax et Bonum,*

Julianne Wallace

Executive Director, Franciscan Federation

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Living Gospel, Living Piazza:*

#### *The Future of the Franciscan Federation*

The Franciscan Federation stands at a sacred threshold. Building on decades of faithful stewardship of the Third Order Regular (TOR) tradition, we move together into a new landscape, carrying forward its enduring mission amid smaller communities, shifting resources, and a rapidly changing world. In this moment, the Federation takes up a vital role as a trustee of the TOR Franciscan legacy, tending the charism and story of these congregations so that their witness continues to animate the future Church.

#### *Why the Federation Matters Now*

Without renewed support, the Federation will exhaust its financial reserves in approximately two years. As founding TOR congregations discern coming to completion, we are called to be the living trustee of their charism, stories, and witness, sustaining associate congregations through formation when their sponsoring communities can no longer provide it, ensuring the Third Order Regular Franciscan spirit endures. Your congregation's wisdom, resources, and presence can ensure this legacy thrives. What will you bring to this sacred work? This plan is our urgent, hopeful response.

This strategic plan grows from years of listening and discernment through surveys, conversations, and Futures Labs. Over and over, one vision emerged: the Federation as a living center where the people gather for Franciscan formation, collaboration, and renewal, a “piazza” of shared life and mutual inspiration. This plan calls us to clarity and courage, shifting our focus from preserving structures to nurturing a movement guided by four Transformational Priorities that express our commitment to ongoing renewal within the Franciscan family.

#### **The Four Transformational Priorities**

1. ***Build* a “Piazza” of Franciscan Connection:** The Federation is becoming a dynamic, interconnected piazza—both online and in person—where relationships deepen and collaboration grows so members can meet, learn, and support one another in the Franciscan spirit.
2. ***Ensure* Trust and Financial Sustainability:** At a financial crossroads, the Federation embraces this moment as a spiritual act of stewardship, seeking

transparency, shared responsibility, and long-term stability so its mission can flourish for decades to come.

3. ***Grow a Network of Belonging***: Reimagining membership as a shared journey of Franciscan life, the Federation welcomes vowed religious, associates, secular Franciscans, lay partners, and seekers of all ages to connect in relationship, formation, and mission, cultivating a community where belonging deepens through shared experience and purpose.
4. ***Strengthen Internal Structures***: The Federation is moving toward a leaner, more agile governance model with clear communication, simplified roles, and focused committees, freeing energy for creativity, collaboration, and animating the Franciscan charism in today's world.

## Guiding Lenses for Discernment

*As we implement this strategic plan, three lenses will shape every decision:*

1. **Building Visibility**: Does this action help the Federation's light shine more clearly in the Church and the wider world?
2. **Third Order Regular Roots**: Is this faithful to the contemplative, humble, and joyful spirit of the Third Order Regular tradition?
3. **What Is Ours to Do**: Does this align with our unique calling and make wise, sustainable use of our limited capacity?

## A Path Forward

This plan advances through three concurrent actions: Stabilize, Build, Expand, with detailed milestones outlined in page 11 of the full strategic plan text. Board and staff will lead implementation through transparent communication, regular evaluation, and the discernment lenses above, cultivating Franciscan leadership that is both practical and prayerful.

## A Living Covenant

Ultimately, this plan is more than a roadmap; it is a covenant of hope. It invites all who love the Franciscan way to shape its future, to lend their wisdom, share their gifts, and join the joyful work of renewal.

As the Federation builds the piazza, reforms its structures, and widens its circle of belonging, it will grow as a vibrant center of connection for the Franciscan family. Through this work, the Gospel life Francis and Clare embraced will continue to shine: simple, radiant, and alive in every generation.

## **CURRENT REALITY: WHERE WE ARE NOW**

The Franciscan Federation faces profound transition: declining membership, diminished financial capacity, limited digital infrastructure, and urgent need for purpose. Yet beneath these challenges lies resilience, faith, and imagination; the TOR charism remains a vital gift awaiting new forms.

### **Membership and Demographics**

Membership is aging and shrinking as TOR communities decline or complete. Vowed religious—the traditional base of support, are diminishing rapidly, compounded by mobility and technology barriers. Meanwhile, lay interest grows among associates and Franciscan-hearted seekers, but no clear pathway exists for their formation and belonging. The Federation can be, and must be, both a membership organization and a movement: rooted in committed members who together spark broader Franciscan renewal.

### **Current Financial Reality**

Without new fundraising initiatives, the Federation will exhaust its reserves in approximately two years. Primary income from dues and donations has declined sharply, exacerbated by 2023 dues restructuring losses and some communities withholding payments amid viability concerns. Lay leadership, while mission-critical, has increased costs. We must diversify through philanthropy, earned revenue, and donor cultivation, paired with radical transparency to rebuild trust.

### **Governance and Structure**

Current commissions confuse rather than coordinate. Mandates, accountability, and board/office alignment lack clarity despite successes (virtual retreats, FAN collaboration). Recent bylaws and lay board inclusion bring energy, but role definitions remain fuzzy. A light-touch review will streamline for agility and purpose.

### **Communication and Engagement**

Systems fail: irregular *Damiano*, hard-to-navigate website, no member/donor database. Members crave connection ("we love gatherings") and Connection Circles succeed, but events run at loss. Reimagined regional/virtual/hybrid models offer sustainable hospitality.

### **Public Awareness**

Visibility lags even within Franciscan circles; purpose often misunderstood. Opportunity exists for confident storytelling via branding, digital strategy, and impact narratives.

## **A Moment of Holy Reorientation**

Fragile yet full of possibility, the Federation needs clarity, tools, and unifying identity to become the hub where TOR charism thrives anew.

## **VISION FOR THE FEDERATION'S FUTURE**

The Franciscan Federation has always been a living movement, not a mere institution, rooted in the Third Order Regular (TOR) charism of simplicity, peace, and joy. This is why the Federation is needed now more than ever: to steward this charism forward as founding congregations come to completion. As religious life evolves, this movement expands to embrace new generations and expressions of Franciscan spirituality, with your congregation's wisdom and presence ensuring its future.

### **A 2070 Horizon**

By mid-century, amid ecological disruption, technological change, and social fragmentation, the world will hunger for communities modeling kinship with creation, compassion, and reverence for life. Franciscans will serve as:

- Healers of the Earth, cultivating ecological regeneration.
- Prophets of Simplicity, witnessing against consumerism.
- Bridge-Builders, mending divisions of faith and culture.
- Companions of the marginalized, walking with the excluded.
- Teachers of Joy, embodying gratitude as resistance and hope.

The Federation's task: create frameworks and ecosystems for these future Franciscans to thrive.

### **Becoming the Piazza**

Members envision the Federation as a *piazza*, a dynamic center like Assisi's *Piazza del Comune*, linking congregations, associates, lay leaders, and seekers through four modes:

- Resourcing: Curating tools and formation for new generations.
- Connecting: Digital/in-person spaces for relationship and collaboration (e.g., Community Circles app).
- Convening: Regional/national gatherings embodying Franciscan hospitality.
- Communicating: Modern storytelling amplifying the charism publicly.

### **Grounded in TOR Roots, A Community of Communities**

This piazza honors TOR adaptability and humility, translating the charism into digital formation, contemplative action, and decentralized networks. A key role moving forward: sustaining associate communities through formation after their sponsoring

vowed communities come to completion. Vowed religious and lay partners unite in a relational ecosystem, mirroring St. Francis's vision of creation, where each local node contributes to the whole.

### **A Living Witness**

The Federation will steward the TOR legacy while creating renewed pathways, modeling 21st-century religious life: collaborative, inclusive, and responsive to Earth and the marginalized. Through this, Franciscan wisdom will heal, inspire, and transform beyond 2070.

## GUIDING LENSES FOR DECISION-MAKING

This plan is a framework for prayerful discernment, balancing present needs with the spirit of Francis and Clare. Three lenses guide every major choice, keeping leaders centered in purpose, tradition, and focus.

1. **Building Visibility:** The Federation's quiet service must become visible mission by sharing the gentle, joyful Franciscan counter-narrative with a fragmented world.
  - Communicate consistently with one authentic voice.
  - Tell stories of Franciscan joy, service, and transformation.
  - Collaborate with Franciscan and justice partners.
  - Embody simplicity and hospitality in all outreach.
2. **Honoring Third Order Regular Roots:** Renewal stays faithful to TOR charism using conversion, contemplation, poverty, minority as a living compass.
  - Root programs in core values: humility, simplicity, contemplation, action.
  - Begin decisions with prayer and silence.
  - Offer ongoing Franciscan formation for leaders and members.
  - Evaluate ideas for Gospel fidelity, not just feasibility.
3. **Clarifying What Is Ours to Do:** With limited capacity, focus on work uniquely ours to do, avoiding duplication or overreach.
  - Prioritize piazza roles: connecting, resourcing, convening.
  - Release unsustainable projects.
  - Discern through prayer, not obligation.
  - Regularly review alignment with current calling.

### A Culture of Franciscan Discernment

These lenses are spiritual practices, making every decision prayerful conversion. Through visibility, TOR grounding, and focused mission, the Federation cultivates transparent, courageous leadership.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL PRIORITIES

The Federation enters a season of intentional rebuilding. These four priorities translate vision into clear, measurable actions over five years, inviting board, staff, members, and partners to collaborate in spiritual, organizational, and relational transformation.

### **Goal 1: Build the "Piazza" of Franciscan Connection**

**Overview:** Create a digital/relational hub integrating communication, membership, formation, and collaboration.

**Objectives:** Develop integrated network; establish Piazza platform.

**Key Actions:**

- Build Wild Apricot Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) database.
- Launch "The Piazza" platform (social network + resource hub + learning platform) by mid-2026 (Member Engagement).
- Cultivate networks for learning/collaboration (existing networks).
- Host 2027 National Gathering

**Impact:** Vibrant center for Franciscan spirituality and connection.

### **Goal 2: Ensure Trust and Financial Sustainability**

**Overview:** Transform deficit funding into mission-driven stewardship through diversification and transparency.

**Objectives:** Rebuild trust; diversify revenue; align financial systems.

**Key Actions:**

- Form Advancement Committee within 3 months.
- Launch 1 earned-revenue initiative (e.g., piazza learning module) (Member Engagement/National Office).
- Identify 12 new major donors/partners by end-2026 (National Office).
- Host annual "Investing in Franciscan Future" event.
- Align budgeting with mission priorities.

**Impact:** Financial stability reflecting communal trust and flourishing mission.

### **Goal 3: Grow Belonging and Kindle the Movement**

**Overview:** Reimagine membership as participating in the broader Franciscan movement for religious, secular Franciscans, associates, lay partners, seekers of all ages.

**Objectives:** Expand via cornerstone programs; learn from past initiatives.

**Key Actions:**

- Develop a value proposition framing membership as participation in the Franciscan movement
- Engage TOR associate groups to sustain their sponsoring congregations' legacy post-completion
- Pilot online piazza + connection circles for feedback.
- Review Emergent Process/Franciscan Mentors for best practices.
- Define engagement pathways emphasizing participation/impact focusing especially on associates, Secular Franciscans, and young people at Franciscan colleges and universities.

**Impact:** Living invitation to Franciscan life fostering growth and community.

### **Goal 4: Strengthen Internal Structures**

**Overview:** Simplify governance for agility, clarity, and mission focus.

**Objectives:** Streamline structures; clarify roles; retire redundancies.

**Key Actions:**

- Governance review within 12 months (board/commissions/office).
- Expand board + enhance selection for expertise.
- Review CCL process.
- Consolidate/sunset inactive commissions.
- Create success metrics + annual program reviews.
- Establish clear board/office/working group communication.

**Impact:** Lean, focused organization channeling energy to core calling.

## IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Renewal requires steady action anchored in discernment. This 24-month roadmap coordinates Stabilize, Build, Expand and Assess. Phases run concurrently, with Phase 4 assessment embedded throughout and formal review at 24 months.

### Phase 1: Stabilize (0–6 Months)

**Goal:** Restore clarity, capacity, trust.

#### Key Actions:

- Communicate plan via virtual gathering + written summary (frame as co-ownership).
- Form Implementation Steering Team (board/staff/stakeholders; monthly meetings).
- Launch Development Task Force: collate giving data, create "Investing in Franciscan Renaissance" case, begin funder outreach.
- Build CRM database; pilot digital hub (Mighty Networks/Circles).
- Governance review: update bylaws, board selection, simplify structures.
- Redesign logo with Blustery Day (piazza vision).

**Success:** Plan communicated; task force active; CRM launched; governance clarified; digital hub piloted.

### Phase 2: Build (6–12 Months)

**Goal:** Pilot systems, show visible progress.

#### Key Actions:

- Pilot a cornerstone program
- Organize the resource portal.
- Reimagine annual gathering.
- Finalize governance: sunset redundancies, clarify roles.
- Create financial reporting templates; publish Annual Report.

**Success:** Pilot framework scalable; library launched; national gathering held; 5+ new major donors; governance implemented.

### **Phase 3: Expand (12–24 Months)**

**Goal:** Scale initiatives, embed innovation.

**Key Actions:**

- Scale digital hub: integrate all members; support self-organizing circles.
- Fund 2 high-visibility programs (Eco-Spirituality Network, Digital Library).
- Mid-plan review: refine metrics/resources.
- Launch annual giving campaign + earned revenue ("Franciscan Formation Certificate").
- Amplify stories via digital media (global Franciscan voice).

**Success:** Hub active (500+ users); 2 programs funded; balanced budget; membership growth; external recognition.

### **Phase 4: Assess & Adapt (Ongoing, Review at 24 Months)**

**Goal:** Measure impact, celebrate wins, course-correct with discernment.

**Key Actions:**

- Establish success metrics dashboard (financial stability, engagement rates, program reach, associate sustainability)
- Conduct 360° evaluation: board, staff, members, associates (surveys + listening sessions)
- Celebrate milestones publicly (Annual Report, piazza gatherings, storytelling campaign)
- Discern Phase 2: refine priorities using Guiding Lenses (Visibility, TOR Roots, What's Ours to Do)
- Publish "Living Plan Update" with learnings and 3-year horizon

**Success:** Clear metrics show progress (or gaps); community ownership of plan; adaptive roadmap for 2028+; renewed energy for next cycle.

## **ROLES AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **Board of Directors**

- Steward vision, ensure TOR alignment.
- Approve budgets, monitor finances quarterly.
- Model leadership as ambassadors/donors.

### **National Office Staff**

- Coordinate logistics, communications, data.
- Facilitate gatherings, manage hub platforms.
- Provide member/partner support.

### **Development Task Force**

- Lead fundraising/donor cultivation.
- Align efforts with programs/communications.

### **Membership & Program Leaders**

- Pilot/refine engagement programs.
- Welcome new members, facilitate connections.

### **Culture of Accountability**

Quarterly check-ins, annual reports, and dual metrics (quantitative: finances/membership; qualitative: relationships/values) ensure adaptive discernment: "Are we becoming who we're called to be?"

### **Spiritual Grounding**

Begin with prayer: "Let us begin again, for up to now we have done little."  
Celebrate milestones with gratitude rituals. Embrace simplicity—do fewer things well, with love.

## **CONCLUSION: A CALL TO COURAGE AND COMMUNION**

Every generation of Franciscans faced a moment of holy risk; releasing familiar forms to make room for new life. The early friars left wealth for the marginalized. Clare redefined women's community. The Third Order Regular reimagined communal life. Each surrender became fidelity.

The Federation now stands in such a moment. Aging communities, limited resources, and vast world needs surround us. Yet the Spirit whispers: "Do not be afraid." This plan is our courageous response, a commitment to evolve so Francis and Clare's charism may breathe through new generations.

The road requires discipline, partnerships, experimentation, and renewed faith. This is the Franciscan way: walking lightly, adapting, trusting love over scarcity, joy over fear.

The Transformational Priorities Building the Piazza, Financial Sustainability, Building Belonging, and Streamlined Structures are movements of one Franciscan Spirit. Together, they make the Federation what it was always meant to be: a living network bearing witness to peace, simplicity, and communion in a fractured world.

This plan calls for courage: bold action, compassionate decisions, trust in the renewing Spirit. And communion: belonging beyond congregations, rooted in relationships, Gospel faithfulness, and shared joy.

May this plan be a living covenant: guiding discernment, inspiring imagination, anchoring hope. Read it in board meetings and prayer, remembering this work is sacred.

As St. Francis prayed: "Let us begin again..." This is not a beginning, but a Federation reignited, where humility meets boldness, simplicity meets beauty. Each connection, resource, and prayer becomes a thread in the living Franciscan tapestry, love taking on new forms, Gospel embodied again.