



International Franciscan Conference TOR

CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION

*Together in simplicity and Franciscan joy,
as God's instruments, we participate in transforming the world*

June 2014

Brothers and Sisters,

With this posting on the IFC-TOR website, we begin a new series of **Propositum**. At the General Assembly in May, 2013, the sisters and brothers present recommended that the new Council consider ways to enhance communication among Third Order Regular Franciscans. Thus, came the idea to publish **Propositum** on the web instead of in a booklet. The website is open to all who access it, whereas only one booklet was printed for each congregation.

We see this as a way of inspiring and challenging us into the fullness of living the Franciscan charism. We see it also as a means for all the sisters and brothers to contribute and have access through the Internet to our collective wisdom and insights.

The input in **Propositum** over the next four years will focus on the Statement of the General Assembly, 2013, considering one part each year. The articles submitted for this issue, are reflections on **Conversion and Transformation:**

*Together in simplicity and Franciscan joy,
as God's instruments,
we participate in transforming the world.*

This is a new path for us, *So...let us go...let us begin!*

Sr. Deborah Lockwood, President IFC-TOR
Sr. Celestine Giertych, Vice-President
Sr. Klara Simunovic, Councilor
Sr. Maria do Livramento Melo de Oliveira, Councilor
Sr. Marianne Jungbluth, Councilor
Sr. Sinclair, FCC, Councilor

CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION - THE STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

By Sr. Marie Agnès Bossaert - fmnd

United in the Franciscan simplicity and joy, as instruments of God, we participate in the transformation of the world. The strength of evidence can transform the world!
Conversion: turn toward, change (turning movement)

Transformation: radical change, change in appearance, shape change, metamorphosis.
What is our testimony/witness today? How do we live our Franciscan identity?

Our lifestyle is simple? I am happy to live, happy for my journey, happy for my Franciscan vocation?

And our life-style of community life?

Relationships among ourselves have an impact on the outside. Shall we ask ourselves: to whom we speaking? Whom do we welcome ? How do we welcome people different from us?, different from social levels, from different religion, with different ideas, atheists, indifferent?

Our relationships with people outside have correspondence in the relationships among us? Sometimes there is the danger of meeting people outside and flee those with whom we live every day.

Our relations among members of the Franciscan family

Do we give witness that we are members belonging to the same family, who help and love each other? This witness is evident today in our Congregations and Institutes? In a globalized world are we expression of universal love? Our *"lifestyle would it not be the greatest and most effective Good News of the Kingdom of God?"* (Gaudium Evangelii 199)

Through the witness of life of the first Christian community, the Good News was bright and attractive. *"Day after day they met as a group in the temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, taking their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved. "* (Acts 2.46 to 47)

Let us evangelize ourselves, let us accept to be converted individually and as community to be able to transform the world. Our attitudes will lead man and women of the XXI^o century to question themselves. Let us accept 'to turn', to change direction in our journeying, let us go out of the routine, do not repeat " we have always done in this way", why to turn the head ? But turning the head allows me to see that there is another path that I had not seen and that is better and more suitable for this time.



FRANCISCAN CHARISM

by Franciscan Sisters Congregation Oblate of the Sacred Heart

At the request of the IFC-TOR Council we present a text to explain how our elderly sisters are trying to witness to the Franciscan charism.

Sister Marie-Thérèse de la Croix, founded our Congregation in 1875. She was called by the Bishop to NANTES (France) to take care of the sick people during serious epidemics.

In 1887, she bought a piece of land. On it are our Mother House, the residence of our General Minister and the novitiate. For many years, all sisters were welcomed in this place for formation to the religious life, to work together, for prayer, for the annual retreat or for health care and be prepared to live well the last stage of life.



Life in France gradually evolved, vocations to religious life diminished, the number of elderly and sick sisters grew. The various councils have sought how to respond to the needs of each and also how to respond to the Mission of the Church after the Council.

From the years 1975/1980 lay people were started be hired to free Sisters for mission. In 1986, some sisters started mission in HONDURAS.

There was the necessity to think and plan the future for not overload our younger sisters. From the year 2000, after reflections, research, experiments and not having more competent Sisters, the Board decided to appoint an external administrator to manage our Mother House with 40 sisters as residents. Buildings were restructured, the capacity increased up to 80 rooms. This project was ended in 2011 and our Mother House became "NOTRE DAME DU CHÊNE" with 26 sisters and 54 lay people.

The sisters now continue to live the Franciscan charism in a different manner in fraternal life centered on prayer. They have a chapel, an oratorio and a community hall. Our Sisters are happy women, at peace, and reflect their religious life at the heart of this home, by their fraternal welcome, participation in activities, their presence and support to the more fragile and/or disoriented person, especially when new residents arrive.

Through all these changes, each of us has gone through a spiritual path of conversion, renunciation and abandonment. We have nothing and everything at the same time as the greatest wealth/richness is the sharing of life. Thanks to our leaders that year by year worked to this success by involving all the sisters . We wish long life to this house.

OUR CALL TO A LIFE OF CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION

By Sr. Barbara Arceneaux, osf

Conversion is symbolized as a journey of transformation led by the movement of God. This journey towards transformation connects us to our roots and helps us to realize that we are embedded in all relationships to all of life. It is a communal experience involving the entire community in its encouragement and witness.

St. Francis was called to a conversion which totally transformed his life at a very young age. We, as Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, are called daily to live a simple life in the style of St. Francis and St. Clare.

In our New Constitutions which have just been approved in August 2013, under 25. § 2 it is stated, "... life becomes a joy shared as a community, a fruit of the Spirit, based on mutual acceptance and simplicity." Our responsibility as Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady is to share our joy and love with those we serve in the world.

Our charism states that our way of life and our mission is "to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity, committed to following Jesus Christ and the example of St. Francis", by being witnesses and artisans of unity and communion. Const. 2. § 2

Our daily ministry which is in the healthcare field such as hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, etc. is the expression of our style of mission and life. Our mission is to the service of the poor by focusing our attention on the most urgent needs in our world. The following of Jesus Christ, as it is proposed in the Gospel, is the supreme Rule of our mission and our life. Called as He was by God the Father, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, we seek to be converted and commit ourselves to a vow of love expressed through the profession of the evangelical counsels. We live in community, simplicity and minority without any distinctions based on country of origin, nationality, culture, or language.



We form an apostolic community who believe that we have been sent by God to continue, and to give expression to the mission of Jesus Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. To be in a place where our presence can be a bond of unity and communion is a constant concern of ours, which inspires us to go all over the world to serve, "to do good", to be witnesses to love, and to glorify the Name of our God.

BLESSED MARY ANGELA TRUSZKOWSKA

By Sr. Maryann Agnes Mueller, CSSF

Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska founded the Congregation of St. Felix of Cantalice (Felician Sisters) as she began to care for poor women and children in 19th century Poland. The Congregation continues this work today on four continents, transforming the world one man, woman or child at a time.



In the early years of the Congregation, the Sisters served free meals to poor students at Sister Samuel's Kitchen in Krakow, Poland. This ministry enabled the youth to continue their education. Today at the same location, Felician Sisters minister to homeless men and women, treating them with dignity and providing them with hot meals, showers and clean clothes. The Sisters also give these homeless people opportunities for life skills training and for community.

Among the many ministries in North America, the Sisters sponsor and minister in a nursing home in Pennsylvania. For many of the men and women who reside in the small apartments at the home, their living space is the nicest, cleanest, safest place they have ever lived in. Some of these elderly people have never experienced the care and respect they receive at the home.

Also in Pennsylvania, the sisters sponsor an After School Program (and so much more!) in a geographically isolated and economically poor neighborhood. The children are given opportunities that would otherwise never be available to them. More important, the children experience love and care that they may not experience at home. We will never know the fruit

of the seeds the sisters have sown with these children.

Felician Sisters in Brazil bring the face of Christ to children who otherwise would not go to school in their poverty-stricken "favela" in Niteroi. Sisters also teach faith and life-sustaining skills in remote and primitive communities in the Amazon. The evangelizing presence of our Sisters is rebuilding the Church in the Amazon.

In Kenya, sisters work on the belief that if they empower women they are transforming the family and the community. The sisters empower women by offering "women's days" where they learn about nutrition, conflict resolution and peace. The Felician Congregation also empowers women by offering seed money for a group of women to start small businesses, such as a communal bakery or a rental service,

renting out chairs for wakes, weddings and parties. Women use their profits from these small businesses to send children to school who otherwise would not attend due to lack of finances.

The Felician Sisters serve among children and families who are marginalized, people that society has forgotten, with passion and dedication. They minister in the many areas of education, healthcare, and social ministry reminding all they meet of God's unconditional love. The transformation that occurs with each encounter with another made in God's image and likeness is mutual. Sisters find that in their lives and ministries with the economically poor they could echo the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (198) "we need to let ourselves be evangelized by them."

SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS

By Sr. Diane Jamison, OSF

The Constitution of the Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg, Indiana states: “As Francis of Assisi did, we commit ourselves to conversion, that our constant turning to the Lord may enable us to continue the mission of Jesus, proclaiming and extending the reign of God.” (1.1) Our conversion is a daily turning to God in contemplation. Contemplation is an inward and outward movement. The daily transformation, that is only possible by the grace of God (inward movement), enables us to follow the example of Francis and Clare foot washing one person at a time (outward movement). Our Assisi Saints took the words of Jesus literally and figuratively: “...as I have done so you must do.” (John 13: 15) Francis and Clare lived the Gospel in an attitude of humble service. They had a relationship with those whose feet they washed. If one is foot washing one needs to be in service and relationship with the other. This service and relationship is mutually transforming two persons at a time.

In pondering the Gospels, Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:1-7, Luke 9:28-36, the story of the Transfiguration, we might see Peter, James and John, as the ones who needed to be transformed thus experiencing the transfigured Jesus. Our transformation at times is momentary. However, we are never the same after a moment of transformation. Reaching out to another in such an intimate way as foot washing in a technological world that is touch free and depersonalized is a transforming experience. It is the only way to be in relationship with those on the margins who do not possess nor know technology. It can be as simple as providing Easter treats for the children of families serviced by the local food pantry or as profound as being a compassionate presence with someone who is dying. Often we do not know who will be presented to us for foot washing on any given day. Our hearts need to be transformed by the Spirit through contemplation so we recognize Jesus in the person of the other.

These mutual moments of foot washing transform the world. The key is in the mutuality. We must know and allow our feet to be washed at the same time as we are washing feet. Perhaps we are not comfortable with having another wash our feet. Our hearts need to be open to the other, receiving the gift that the other has to give. Part of our on-going conversion is recognizing that we need the other to be complete. This mutual service of foot washing is proclaiming and extending the reign of God in our world today. It is being the Incarnation right here right now.



FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY

*Written by: Sister Martin Flavin, OSF
Painting by :+Sister Victoria Masil, OSF*



We Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity of Manitowoc, Wisconsin USA strive to live the Gospel joyfully, follow the Rule of Holy Father Francis faithfully, and serve God's people wholeheartedly as our Church and Congregation direct us.

We believe our charism as Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity both identifies us and influences our decision making as we become more faithful followers of Jesus and Francis. In joyful acceptance of poverty, we as vowed women religious affirm the need to evaluate honestly how we use material goods so as to become a "disturbing presence" in this world's materialistic culture. In the spirit of Saint Francis we read the signs of the times and express our love for the Church by loving service, openness to Church teachings, and loyalty to the Holy Father.

We witness a radical and joyful way of life through selfless dedication to the service of others, showing loving respect and compassion. Living the Gospel as Franciscan Sisters, we work daily at building community, seeking balance in prayer, ministry, and community. We respond to the mission of the Church by our loving service in the threefold task of witness, fraternity, and ministry.

We dedicate ourselves to and remain available for a diversity of roles in Catholic education, Catholic healthcare, other Church ministries, community service, and loving ministry to the needy and the poor. Daily we surrender ourselves in faith to meet the needs to which the Lord, through the Holy Spirit and our Superiors, has missioned us to live our Franciscan charism and the Holy Rule.

As Cardinal Prefect Joao Braz de Aviz wrote to our Congregation late in 2013, our mission in the world today is "as relevant as it was in the early beginnings of the Congregation" in the nineteenth century. His words of encouragement continue: "In fact it is when we are small and few that the power of God will shine all the more" . . . enabling us "to respond adequately to the challenges of the new evangelization vis-à-vis the current situation and the signs of the times."

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD ... ONE PERSON AT A TIME

By Sr. Maryann Dosen, ssfc



Together in simplicity and Franciscan joy, as God's instruments, we participate in transforming the world.

From our founding in 1869, the School Sisters of St. Francis of Christ the King have been involved in the care, education and faith formation of youth in a Franciscan way.

In 1864, our foundress, Mother Margarita Pucher, arrived in Maribor (Slovenia) with three other School Sisters from Graz, Austria, to educate the abandoned and neglected

children who were roaming the city's streets. These Sisters did not limit their teaching to the faith, books and practical arts. They also taught the skills and habits the children would need for daily living. Not wanting to accept the labels society had given these children, they emphasized the goodness and God-given gifts that each child possessed. Mother Margarita and the Sisters also helped the parents through their work with the children.

Today, our Congregation continues this work of education. Many of us are teachers who work with students of all ages from pre-school to the university. No matter what subject we teach, our first concern is for the personal development of each student as the individual God has created. As a high school teacher, one of my joys was encouraging my students to discover and develop their talents, grow in self-confidence, and use those talents to transform their portion of the world. As students moved to the next level of education, it was my hope that they would continue to develop those gifts and use them for others.

Though out the years, the majority of our Provinces cared for children and young people in need of a home as an extension of our educational apostolate. Today, our Sisters continue this work at 'Mala Škola' (Little School) in the town of Vareš, Bosnia.

Originally founded in 1936 as a kindergarten, early on the school expanded its educational scope. During World War II, the Sisters helped to feed the children of the surrounding area.



Under the years of communistic rule, the school was closed and the building and property confiscated. However, in 2004, the property was returned to the Sisters who then rebuilt 'Mala Škola.'

Today, 'Mala Škola' provides a home for children who are in difficult personal or family situations. The Sisters work to help each child to develop him/herself as a whole person, spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically. In the tradition of Mother Margarita, these children are guided to discover and acknowledge their own goodness and to explore and develop their gifts. The hope is that as they go forward from the Sisters' care, they will continue to grow in appreciation of their personal goodness, cultivate their talents, and use them for the good of others. The Sisters also offer workshops for parents and activities for the other children of the town.



Thus we continue to be God's instruments helping others to transform their lives so as to transform the world ... one person at a time.

FROM COMMUNITY AND MISSION TO COMMUNITY-IN-MISSION

by Sr. Suzanne Phillips, fmm

“To become more Franciscans, to live Franciscan radicality ” has been the deepest desire of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary since the beginning of the new millennium, as we strive to revitalize our congregation. Given the reality of our Institute, our desire to live the self-emptying of Jesus Christ and fraternal evangelical life in community , was seen as one of our major challenges. This soul searching discernment led to two priorities formulated at the 2008 General Chapter : Our Franciscan Identity and Community-in-Mission.

Up until 2008 we always looked at community and mission as two aspects of our life, often in conflict because of the lack of balance. But in the light of the Franciscan challenge we became aware that the Franciscan path -“vita Evangelica” embraced both community and mission at the same time. This has called us to a process of conversion and transformation.

Our 2008 Chapter priority on Community-in- Mission reads: “ *Community-in-Mission is a fundamental value of our life as Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. Together we renew our profound conviction of being sent. We desire to move forward as a community which discerns, accompanies, supports, and is interested in each one’s personal ministries, so that they are included in the mission thrust of the community. In minority and solidarity, we want to be signs that another way of life is possible: by being sisters who call forth and value the good in each one, who are open to receive as well as to give life, who seek to live in communion; and who are ready to commit to a process of reconciliation. This process begins by being reconciled with oneself and then with sisters, recognizing the hurts and traumas which influence us... This process involves readiness to go beyond all that may separate us; the readiness to take the first step towards reconciliation, and pardon offered and received.*”

This priority has challenged us to a life of conversion and transformation. The primacy of our life is to build communion in fraternity which is in itself a mission, a presence and a witness in a divided and violent world. It has called us to a life of simplicity and joy, knowing that I am not alone and there are others on the journey who will accompany me. But to let go of my ego, my prejudices , my position, sense of regionalism, is a conversion I must yield to in order to experience this joy of belonging to a community of sisterhood. Where it is experienced, there is so much of wellbeing and Franciscan joy. This has brought a new dimension to our life, namely that mission is relationship, and it begins in the fraternity and then reaches out in the ministries. All that is accomplished by the community through its individual members, is owned by the whole community and mutual accountability is becoming a way of life.

We have not fully succeeded in making it a living reality, but a deep desire to move in this direction is definitely taking place in our communities.

CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION

Together in simplicity and Franciscan joy, as God's instruments we participate in transforming the world.

By Sister Barbara Vano, OSF

The Touch that Transforms

In my ministry of education, sharing our Franciscan spirit inevitably involves sharing the “family stories.” When I reflect on moments I consider life-changing, I immediately remember the *people* who shared those experiences. Most of us can relate to the power of relationships to transform us. Yet sadly, working with young (and not-so-young) adults as a Campus Minister reminds me we live in a culture that encourages independence over interdependence and where “friends” exist on-line, often as relatively anonymous individuals counted in the thousands. Can we learn, as did Francis, that each step on the conversion journey calls for a face-to-face encounter?

Fortunately, the students I meet are eager to share their energy in new and positive ways. Advertise an outreach project and they respond. The motivation varies. It's *something* to do; something I *have* to do; something I *should* do; something I *enjoy* doing. The end result varies, as well, depending on their openness to the experience.



Whether college student or student of life, each one is touched. How often do I reflect on these encounters and acknowledge I am blessed; I've taken so much for granted? How often do I learn that someone whose life is drastically different from my own – someone I would have overlooked yesterday – has something to teach *me*? How often am I humbled to learn the person serving next to me is unusually quiet because she remembers when she and her mother had to rely on a soup kitchen or shelter.

Perhaps the most humbling moments come weeks later when the same students feel comfortable joining us for prayer and are able to voice their questions, their doubts, their faith. These are moments when I stand back watching as the confident (and the quiet) invite others into the circle of relationships. These are the conversations that stay with me, speaking with the young woman – a former POW – externally looking so much like other students but internally wondering how she can relate. She hears a brief re-telling of the early life of Francis and begins to believe she might be able to tell her own story – that others share her hopes, her dreams, and her struggles.

I am humbled, indeed, to know we aren't responsible for the gifts we bring, for the situations we encounter, or for the transformation taking place. I marvel that I share the experience. With Paul, *I give thanks to him whose power at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.*

This ministry is a daily reminder of the transformative power of education and that relationships are the catalysts that change lives. At the end of his life, Francis of Assisi would reflect that he saw the hand of God leading him throughout his days. All was gift: the call, the ministry, and – perhaps most importantly – the companions on the journey that manifested for him the face of God. For Francis, they were essential to his understanding of our loving and gracious God. Their touch transformed his life.