

Presentation at *Ite Vos Symposium*
November 4, 2017
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

I would like to thank you for this invitation to participate in this workshop. My presentation will be a little different from the others. First of all, I am not a Franciscan scholar. My background is Sacred Scripture, which I suppose we could really call proto-franciscana. The other thing is that although I was trained in academics, my role right now is administration – serving with the Conventual Curia in Rome. I would like to present some of the many ways that Franciscans are now collaborating throughout the world, and challenge us to think in creative ways about how we could organize new forms of collaboration for the future, always keeping in mind the phrase that Bill Short used often during his talk here this past Spring: unity in diversity.

I have to tell you that I am old enough and have been with the friars long enough to recognize what a miracle this type of workshop is. When I was in formation in Rome, one of my professors told us of how in past centuries the Conventual friars would have to leave friaries out the back door singing the *De Profundis* while the Friars Minor would enter the front door singing the *Te Deum*. Not only was the professor caught up in things that happened centuries ago, but he was also perpetuating propaganda that was damaging because it was scandalizing the little ones of Luke's Gospel. Furthermore, his words were betraying our identity. We call ourselves friars minor. The mutual antagonism among the Orders was a betrayal of the concept of our identity as friars, as brothers of all around us, even to the point of being brothers of all of creation. It was also a betrayal of our identity as minors, for we often prided ourselves on the fact that we were not like the others, not all that dissimilar to the Pharisee who vaunted himself for the fact that he was not like the Publican.

Hopefully, those times are over, and I can bear witness to the fact that there are good signs throughout the world that they are at least coming to an end. Why is this new era dawning?

Let's be honest. As with any major phenomenon, there are a series of motivations for the change in climate in how we friars of the first Order treat each other.

Part of the reason is demographics. Our Orders have all suffered from a fall in vocations, especially in the First World. I sometimes compare the Order to individual friars. We weigh the same as when we entered, but it has all gone south. Likewise, our Orders are flourishing in the Third World but suffering and at times dying in the First World. This has a double impact. First of all, the numbers are falling in the older jurisdictions where the difficult history of inter-order relations is felt the strongest, and secondly, the numbers are growing in the very areas where the difficulties of the past have the least impact. Both of these things help to weaken the tendency to see the other families as the enemy.

The fall in numbers in the first world means that if we want to continue our valuable work in certain fields of endeavor, then we must work together. The way that we work together might mean a certain migration of friars from areas where there are more vocations to those areas

where there are fewer, as long as this does not become a form of neo-colonialism. It might also mean working together among the members of the First Order.

What has been said about the numbers of the friars can also be applied to finances. Given the financial situation of our various families, and the enormous cost of providing for a good formation and education for friars in areas of the world which are not autonomous financially, we realize that we cannot go it alone. This is one way that God is allowing us to taste the bitter-sweet flavor of poverty once again. This can be a great motivation to a more faithful stewardship of the resources that all of us have received.

Then we have the advances in Franciscan Scholarship. This Spring Bill Short gave a presentation here on various topics that related to *Ite Vos*. He spoke of the inter-order collaboration in the publication of the *Franciscan Sources*. The more we delve into those sources, the more we realize that the hurtful divisions that we have endured for too long are not from the Spirit. St. Paul reminds us that the Spirit is a Spirit of peace and not of division. Too often our communities sounded like the Corinthians in the early chapters of *First Corinthians* – I am for Paul, I am for Apollos, I am for Christ. I am for Elias, I am for Leo, I am for Matteo.

In recent years, all religious communities have been challenged to give witness to the value of fraternity by post-conciliar documents on religious life. Our first and possibly most important apostolate is to live as brothers. In a world fragmented by divisions and walls, Pope Francis calls us to build bridges. Think of the sign value of members of the families of the First Order working and living together as brothers.

This sign value also has cosmic consequences. There is a Jewish concept called *Tikkun Olam*. The world has been wounded by sin, and each good act that we perform heals in some small way the wounds that our sins have caused. When a Friar Minor, a Capuchin and a Conventual collaborate and live in a fraternity of profound respect, the world is transformed.

Having said all of this, what are some of the ways in which we are working together. Realize that some of these initiatives will come from the top down, while others are taking place at the grass roots level. Some involve only friars of the First Order, while others extend to our sisters of the Second Order, our brothers and sisters of the Third Order, and our brothers and sisters of what we are today calling the Fourth Order. This list is not exhaustive, but it gives examples from various sorts of collaboration.

Collaboration among the Curias

Let's start with the ministry of leadership which is exercised in Rome. I am starting there not because this is where this movement began, but it just gives us a good starting point.

The Ministers meet often, almost every month, to plan joint initiatives. A couple of times a year they meet with the larger group of Franciscan leadership. The Vicars of the First Order also meet almost every month. The Ministers General have issued a number of letters to all the friars of the First Order over the years, and they have joined forces to seek recourse to the Holy See for various issues. One example of this is the question of whether religious brothers can be

major superiors in the Order. As you know, Canon Law recognizes two forms of male religious life: Priestly communities and Brother communities. For many years, the Ministers have sought a third category: that of mixed communities. It is clear that in the present atmosphere at the Vatican, canon law is not going to be changed. The Ministers therefore sought a *grazia* from Pope Francis to allow Mendicants to act as mixed communities. A *gratia* is a favor given to the communities and it is valid as long as it is not revoked. We have not yet received a response from the Vatican, but we are hoping that maybe when the friars meet with the Pope on November 23rd there might be some sort of answer.

The Definitories have also set up a schedule to gather for picnics or other events at least twice a year at each of the Curias. This might sound innocuous, but I am a firm believer that more good is done over a picnic table than in a conference room. We are breaking down preconceptions and prejudices.

A major initiative at this level is also what is happening with the Franciscan University in Rome. The official date for the inauguration of this university is Easter of 2018. Now, realistically, the actual opening of the new university, after all the permissions have been received from the government and the Congregation, is either the Fall of 2019 or 2020. Nevertheless, it is moving ahead. All three Ministers General are firm on this, and they are ensuring that whatever opposition that arises is overcome. At its initial stages, there will be two campuses- one at the Antonianum and one at the Seraphicum. The Seraphicum will be the site for undergraduate studies in philosophy and theology, while the Antonianum will be the site for licentiate and doctoral studies. There will be four faculties – Biblical Sciences, Philosophy, Theology and Canon Law with the Institute of Franciscan Spirituality. One of the critical issues that still needs work is finances, and up to this point the academics in the various commissions have not been able to handle that issue too well. It has been agreed that both of the present faculties will be suppressed and a new entity established, similar to what happens when two jurisdictions of the same order are united.

Working together for a Particular Purpose

One especially successful area of collaboration among the Orders is the joint school for missionaries in Brussels, Belgium. This program is housed in a friary of the Friars Minor, and it offers two programs in missionary preparation a year – in the fall there is a two to three month program in English and in the Spring there is another program in French. There has been some talk of possibly moving the program to Palestrina in Italy, but it is still at the talk level.

Justice and Peace Collaboration

Justice and Peace work is in the DNA of the friars, but at times one has to wonder if the friars have allowed it to become a recessive gene. Friars tend to get busy in their apostolates, and they can, at times, be negligent in addressing the justice and peace issues at home and abroad.

That is why the success of the collaboration of the families of the First Order and the entire Franciscan family in justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation is so important.

Over 30 years ago, a Friar Minor from Malta and a couple of Franciscan Sisters from the States proposed a Franciscan presence at the UN. These initiatives evolved into Franciscans International, which today has offices in Geneva and New York. They are sponsored by the Generals of many Franciscan families:

Friars Minor, Capuchin, Conventual, TOR, IFC, OFS and the Anglican Franciscans. They work on human rights issues, serving as an NGO which can make interventions during various conferences and hearings. One of the moments in which they can intervene the most is during the four year evaluation of human rights issues in each country of the UN. If a country has not mentioned a particular issue that the Franciscans in that area have flagged, the advocacy team of FI can issue comments on it at a public hearing, which often leads to a negotiation between the offending country and FI. One example of the work FI has done is that it was instrumental in getting extreme poverty classified as a form of human rights violation.

What FI does at an international level, FAN does here in this country. They lobby at various levels of government concerning human rights and environmental issues. They also work extensively to educate the friars themselves about these issues.

In Rome, we have the representatives from various Franciscan families working together as Roman 6.

Furthermore, in Rome, there is serious discussion whether there should be one office for the friars working for Justice and Peace, and possibly another for those working together for Ecumenical and Inter-Faith dialog.

Some of the justice and peace initiatives have been started by a particular family of the First Order, but then have spread out to involve other friars. A good example of this is the Capuchin program called the Damietta Peace Initiative in Africa. Remember, Damietta is where Francis met the Sultan, and this initiative seeks to bring together various antagonistic groups to dialog. In South Africa, this is locals and refugees from other parts of Africa, in Kenya it is feuding tribes, in Nigeria it is Christians and Muslims.

Initial and Continuing Formation

Two areas of increasing collaboration are initial and continuing formation.

A highlight in collaboration in initial formation is the inter-order collaboration seen in our joint seminary in Lusaka, Zambia. This particular program involves friars of the three families living in separate residences with separate program but studying in a common faculty. Obviously, there is also collaboration on workshops and joint presentations.

What has recently happened in California is another example of a drift toward collaboration. Early this fall the Friars Minor moved their national novitiate to Santa Barbara which means that all three national novitiates of the First Order are in California – the Capuchins being in

Sant Inez and the Conventuals being in Arroyo Grande. The directors of the three programs are already in dialog of how they might offer joint programs, and we can foresee collaboration with spiritual directors, workshops, etc. Possibly most important, now that all three families are near each other, we might finally have enough talent to beat the diocesan seminarians at Camarillo in soccer.

There are also numerous sites where the friars either study together in one of our faculties (as in Cracow where the Conventuals and Capuchins study theology together, all three orders studying together in the seminary run by the Friars Minor in Vietnam) or we study together in a faculty run by someone else (San Antonio, etc.)

Continuing formation offers many possibilities for collaboration. Again, part of the motivating factors is demographics. It is easier to hold Solemn Vow retreats, guardians workshops, retreats, etc. when there is a critical mass of friars, but part of it is that there is a value in doing these things together simply for the fact of being together. Talking with friars throughout the world, I have heard of joint solemn vow retreat programs in the US and Slovenia, joint guardian workshops in Argentina and Brazil, joint initiatives in Korea and Germany.

Special Events

Over these years, many of our Franciscan feasts have offered the possibility for common celebrations. There is the Transitus. I remember being at Oceanside a couple of years ago when all the families were well represented. There is the feast of the Portiuncula, the feast of St. Clare.

There are also the many Chapters of Mats and pilgrimages that are held throughout the world in these days.

Then there are other special events that present possibilities for collaboration. One of them is the ecumenical gathering called the Spirit of Assisi. This gathering for inter-religious dialog and prayer was begun by St. John Paul II in 1986 in Assisi and continues under the sponsorship of the Communita di Sant Edigio, a lay run organization from Rome which was founded in 1968 as a Catholic response to all the confusion of that year of rebellion throughout much of the First World. While the Spirit of Assisi gathering is held in different sites all over the world, it returned to Assisi last year.

There is the Franciscan Day offered at all of the recent World Youth Days. Rather than having individual gatherings for the hundreds of youth sponsored by the various Franciscan families, there is one common gathering to celebrate our unity in diversity.

The very event that we are commemorating today has offered us a great opportunity for collaboration. The most significant center for this initiative has been Umbria. The birth place of our Orders has not always been a center of inter-order dialog. I remember as a student hearing that the Conventuals in Assisi would brag that we had the body while the Friars Minor at the Portiuncula would respond that they had the spirit. But these past years the friars throughout Umbria have committed themselves to a multi-year program of dialog. The topics in this dialog were for 2015 - remembering, in 2016 it was reconciliation (especially for the anniversary of the

Portiuncula Indulgence), 2017 it was fraternity with a celebration of a type of chapter of mats and a pilgrimage to Rome on November 23rd, and in 2018 it is evangelization, so that our commemoration of this event not be centered upon introspection but lead us to proclaim the dawning of the Kingdom.

OFS

We should not forget the tremendous work that our sisters and brothers of OFS have done for us in reorganizing their presences so that they are no longer under the jurisdiction of any of our individual families. We have assumed the rightful place of being spiritual assistants and not the leaders of their Order. Admittedly, this reorganization has gone better in some places and not so well in others. Ironically and sadly, it was often the friars who placed the largest barriers to the breaking down the walls.

Franciscan Intellectual Tradition

Another very hopeful movement in recent years is the fostering of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition. As we have fewer and fewer academic institutions under our direct guidance, it has been important to foster friars and sisters in this tradition so that we will not lose an important part of our heritage, something which we have an obligation to share with the world. As time has gone by, though, this movement has reached out to people whom we sometimes call members of the Fourth Order. They are not Franciscans by profession, but their spirits are thoroughly within our tradition. I have to recognize Wayne Hellman as one friar who has been instrumental in fostering Franciscan Studies at a graduate level among his lay students.

I have already mentioned the collaboration that we saw in the production of the Franciscan Sources books.

Living Together

In the past few years, we have begun some experiments in establishing joint houses. This month we are opening a project in Jerusalem, actually one of the towns that claims to be Emmaus, where Friars Minor and Conventuals will live together. The Capuchins are not joining this project yet due to some difficulties they have had with their own house in Jerusalem, but we hope that they too will soon be part of this project. At present there are two Friars Minor from outside of the Holy Land Custody, one Holy Land Custody friar, and two Conventuals there. They will spend this year discussing their joint project, and then we will see where it will go.

There are two other projects in active research. One is an invitation from Cardinal O'Malley of Boston to open a joint friary in his archdiocese. The other is to open a friary in Rieti. There the difficulty has been to convince the bishop of Rieti that we do not want to accept so many

parishes in his diocese served by the one friary that we would destroy the tenor of life we want to live there.

There are obvious canon law issues with establishing a joint friary. The Conventual Minister General has a saying. We will make the decisions, and then we will find a canon lawyer to prove that what we are doing is OK. And if the canon lawyer does not agree with us, we will find another canon lawyer.

Possibilities for the future

When Bill Short gave his workshop this Spring, he used the phrase unity in diversity. I don't see the three orders joining together any time soon. Let's face it, it is difficult enough for provinces to unite within the same family of the First Order. We still have too much provincialism in every sense of the word. We still get caught up in our little worlds and have too little energy to dream and risk. We fall into the trap mentioned by Flannery O'Connor, that we firmly resist grace, for grace leads to conversion, and conversion means change, and we all hate change.

However, we have to continue to do things that will move us forward, wherever that forward will lead us. Why can't we set up a joint commission to talk about establishing presences of friars in joint communities in areas of the country or in other countries where the friars don't yet exist. In this country, I am thinking especially of areas around Portland, Seattle and Vancouver. Why can't we set up joint experimental houses for friars who are called to a hermetical life style, or who are artists, or who want to live a very simple life style? Why do we as orders have to duplicate initiatives and reinvent the wheel when it would be more logical to work together?

Questions and Suggestions

At this point, I would like to open the discussion up to the floor to clarify any of what I presented or to discuss possibilities that you would like to see inaugurated.

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