

The Secularization Project

Concluding Message and Summary

July 10, 2022

We have reached the end of The Secularization Project. It was borne out of a perception that our province, order, and church are struggling to keep up with the incredible changes in our society. To keep things manageable, we examined the province, its past, and its future, through the lens of secularization. Admittedly, only one of several sociological movements affecting the province, but arguable one of the more potent forces in our environment.

The Task Force designed a grassroots process through which we hoped to use the well-known strength, weakness, opportunity and challenge analysis, a technique used to identify the external and internal factors that play a part in whether a venture like our province can reach its objectives. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors, while opportunities and challenges are external.

Our five themes for discussion surfaced a great deal of personal experience in our families, society, province, and church. Many comments suggested secularization as an existential challenge to the very life of the province. Others saw secularization as having a liberating effect on the sternness of our past. They saw opportunities for the Province to plug into the social movement of secularization and influence it from within. These challenges and opportunities partially represent the exterior impact of secularization on the province.

Agreement on our strengths and weaknesses was more nuanced. Since strengths include our Capuchin personnel, many identified the recent increase of native-born vocations, international men increasingly joining our province and collaboration of personnel. It's hard to imagine where the province would be had we continued with the existing recruiting practices before 2004. While we identified thankfulness for this growing resource, we had a harder time identifying how to keep it going. Perhaps it will continue on its own for a decade or so?

Oddly, our major strength also uncovered a weakness. Yes, we have a relative increase of friars in community and ministry, but the situation is nothing like it was sixty years ago. Our numerical decline didn't feel like a threatening weakness while we still felt robust about what we were able to do. That has now changed. Our discussions disclose that a new reality is upon us. A significant group of respondents noted the focus on fewer but larger communities, with an emphasis on serving in provincial ministries as an antidote. Others preferred the lifestyle of our more recent past in smaller communities and more ministerial independence. A few seemed to suggest the province was simply gasping its last breath, and there was nothing more to do. The Task Force is unable to group these various responses because we never worked with the names of respondents. However, we wonder if the first group more represents our younger members, and the latter group comes from our more senior brothers.

The Secularization Project was a large extended discussion. Some were perplexed by its structure, perhaps bored by its pedantry. Others were more involved and carried on conversations in and outside of the process. Some entire communities held local chapters during which they enjoyed discussions that went well over the allotted time.

The process was meant to be a discussion. It included trying to describe secularization, noting where we experienced it in our families, ministries, and even in our communities. It surprised some when we ask what good you saw in secularization. Some could only view it in negative terms. We also benefited from numerous people around the world offering video-taped discussions on their perspectives. These included friars from regions far advanced into secularization: France, Germany, Poland, and Québec. We heard from our dear affiliates, Peggy and Henry Bowles. Rodrigo Martinez, a not-too-distant SLS graduate, shared how SLS equipped him to encounter a secular society, but also confessed to succumbing to its powerful forces. We reviewed some publications about secularization, including the seminal work of Charles Taylor. Don't forget our interest in the debate between Archbishop Gómez of Los Angeles and Thomas Reese, S.J. You can still review all this work at <https://www.sjpcommunications.org/resources/the-secularization-project/>

The final phase of the Project was the generation of texts that any individual or group of friars wanted to test with all the province's membership. The requirement was that the texts would flow out of previous discussion in some way. Certainly, this phase created some confusion. A few friars understood that the province was voting on proposals that would have to be implemented. Others could not imagine how some texts had anything to do with secularization. One offered text offended some friars by singling out one ministry for unique scrutiny.

Frank discussions risk all these challenges and more. However, the important thing is that we began a discussion that never could have been accomplished at a provincial chapter or in its short preparatory meetings. The discussion has not ended.

So, we repeat what we have said consistently through The Secularization Project. This has been a process of discussion with no juridic authority. It was never intended to prepare proposals for our next provincial chapter. However, we certainly hope that the province will carry this discussion with it as we very soon begin our preparations for chapter. Thus, we wish to be clear. The entire province can review the results of the Project. If any community, ministry, or group of friars, per the norms for our chapter, wishes to use any of this material in a proposal, please do so. The Task Force itself will not be forwarding proposals to our upcoming provincial chapter.

We close by thanking all who participated in the Project. Special thanks go to TL Auman and Vito Martinez who offered considerable technical help. We now list all the texts that reached a majority of unqualified approval during the process and thus were accepted by the process. It's now up to you to decide what to do with your reflections.

Michael Joseph Groark
Bill Hugo
Thomas Skowron
Gary Wegner

The Secularization Project Task Force

Text #1: Destination Ministries

That as the Province adds, hands over, abandons, sustains, or changes ministries in the future, it gives preference to “destination ministries” that offer opportunities to Catholics, Christians, and others which are not typically available in parishes.

Counting all votes

47 support
6 do not support
3 could support with changes

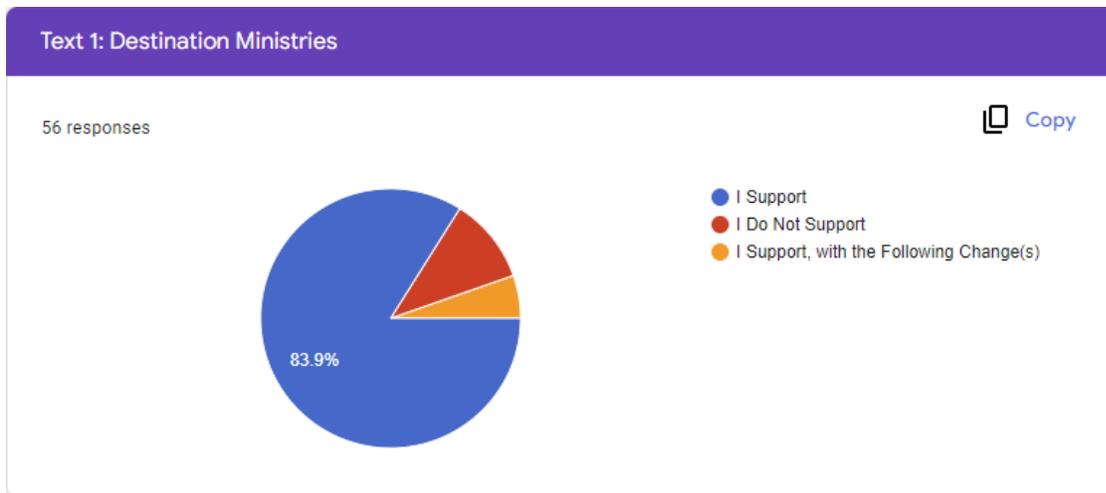
56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

44 support
6 do not support
3 could support with changes

53 Total

Proposal #1 is accepted for the purposes of this process.



Text #2: St. Francis - Milwaukee

That the Province of St. Joseph develop programming, events and displays for the St. Francis Milwaukee church and Capuchin Center to create a pilgrimage/destination site for the region. An open doors policy for the church to provide prayer and other sacraments, enhanced hospitality for groups to visit the center, along with displays that tell the story of this place would be developed. Suitable Capuchin and other personnel would be assigned to this new ministry.

Counting all votes

47 support
9 do not support
0 could support with changes

56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

44 support
9 do not support
0 could support with changes

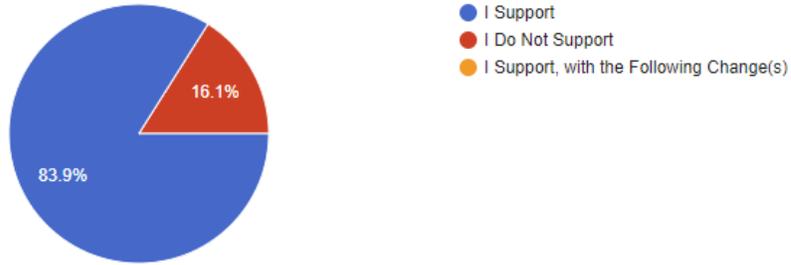
53 Total

Proposal #2 is accepted for the purposes of this process.

Text 2: St. Francis in Milwaukee

56 responses

 Copy



Text #3: A New Ministry

That before the Provincial Chapter of 2026, the Provincial Council establish a new provincial ministry in a geographic area of the province in which we currently have no provincial ministry.

Counting all votes

30 support
24 do not support
2 could support with changes

56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

28 support
23 do not support
2 could support with changes

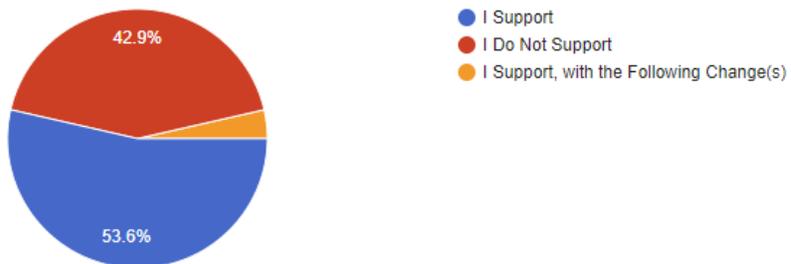
53 Total

Proposal #3 is accepted for the purposes of this process.

Text #3: A New Ministry

56 responses

 Copy



Texts ## 4 + 5 combined: Engaging Secularization as a Value

The Province will engage in ongoing reflection and dialog on the impacts of secularization on our fraternal life and ministries, with a focus on discerning, engaging, and integrating those trends and other elements of secularization that are consistent with the life and mission of the Church and the Province. Beginning at Provincial Chapter 2023 or shortly thereafter, friars gather in small groups to share what each one has taken from secularization as a value in their lives and how it fits with our Capuchin values.

Counting all votes

29 support
26 do not support
1 could support with changes

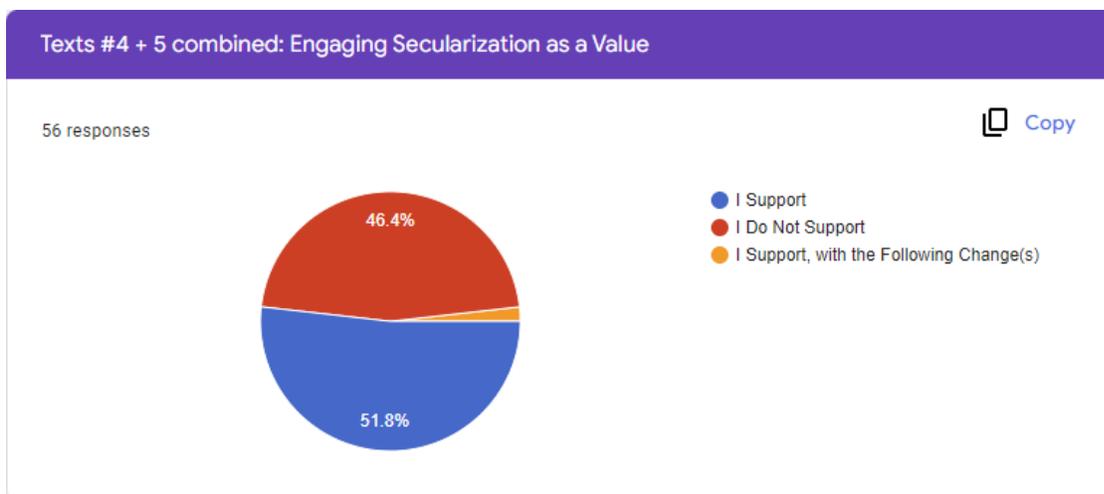
56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

27 support
25 do not support
1 could support with changes

53 Total

The combined Proposal #4+5 is accepted for the purposes of this process.



Text #6: YouFra

Set up a Capuchin Franciscan spirituality, formative & vocation(al) trajectory covering the ages from High School up to Adulthood. (YouFra)

Counting all votes

37 support
15 do not support
4 could support with changes

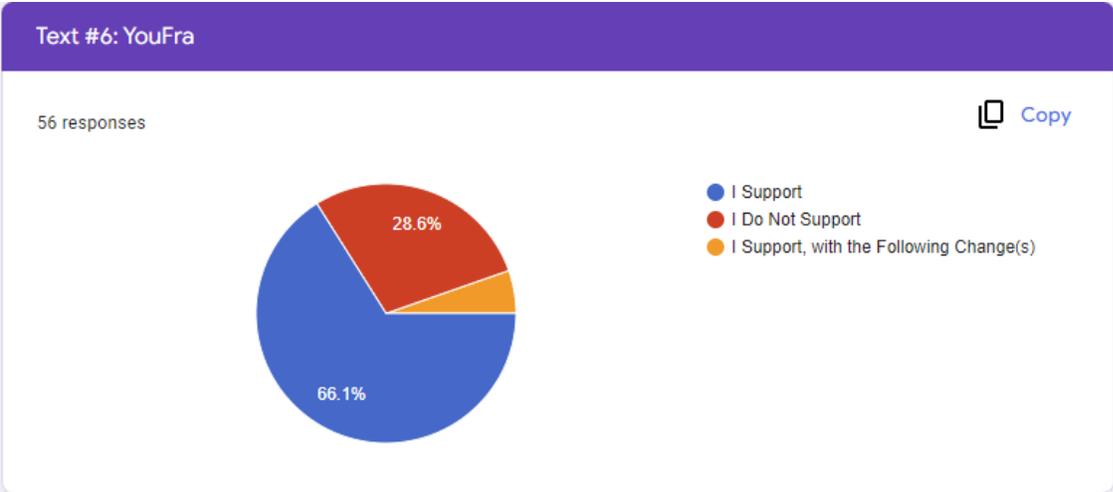
56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

35 support
14 do not support
4 could support with changes

53 Total

Proposal #6 is accepted for the purposes of this process.



Text #7: Montana Ministries

That during the first two years of the next provincial triennium, the Provincial Council facilitates a process through which the provincial membership engages in a reflective evaluation of its ministries on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana, leading to a discerning choice at the Provincial Chapter of 2026 to continue, change or discontinue these provincial ministries.

Counting all votes

42 support
 8 do not support
6 could support with changes

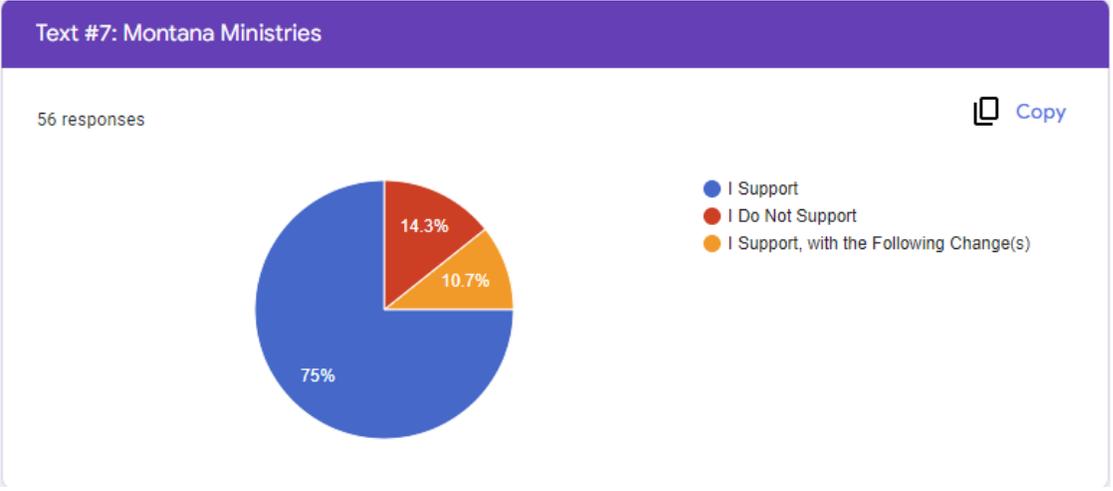
56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

40 support
 7 do not support
6 could support with changes

53 Total

Proposal #7 is accepted for the purposes of this process.



Text #8: Chapter Reports

That henceforward, the chapter reports of all provincial ministries and provincial offices so designated by the Provincial Council include a list of Capuchin and other church vocations impacted by the ministry or office during the past triennium. That the same ministries and offices describe their efforts over the past triennium to promote vocations.

Counting all votes

33 support
23 do not support
0 could support with changes

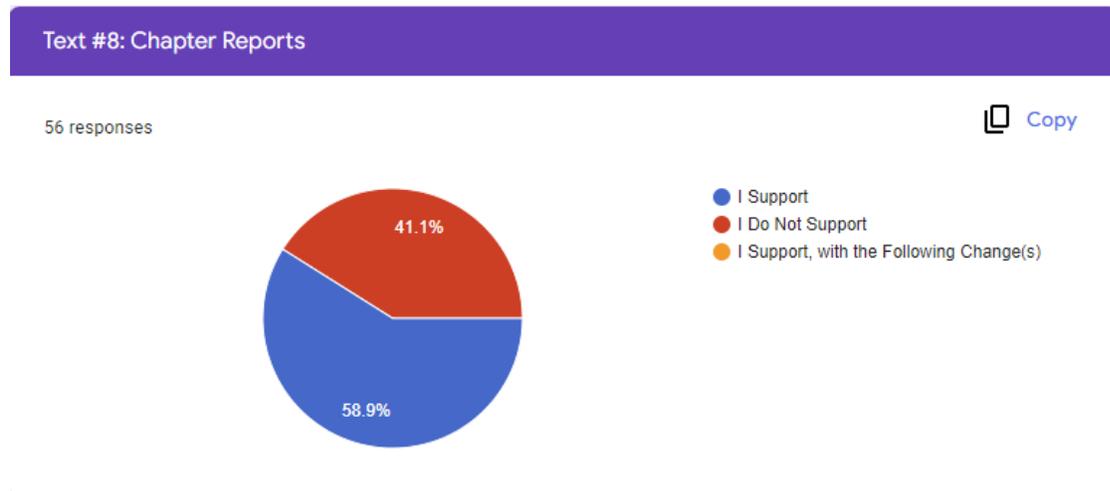
56 Total

Excluding 3 questionable votes

31 support
22 do not support
0 could support with changes

53 Total

Proposal #8 is accepted for the purposes of this process.



Text #9: Non-violence and guns

That we make it clear on our websites, social media platforms and other provincial media that we promote and stand for a non-violent society and, therefore, say no to guns.

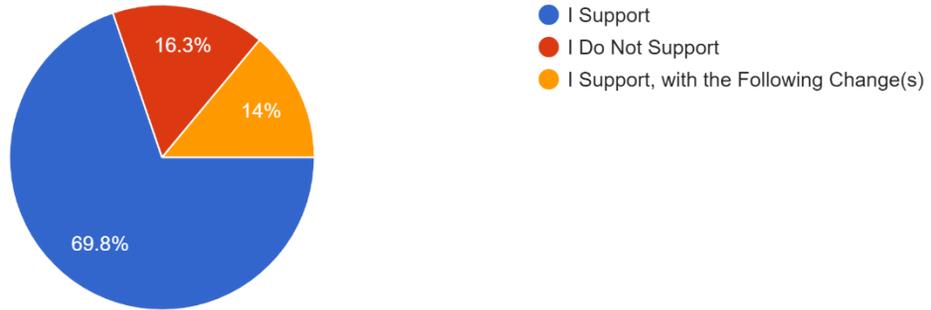
30 support
7 do not support
6 could support with changes

43 Total

Proposal # 8 is accepted for the purposes of this process.

Text #9: Non-violence and guns

43 responses



Text #10: Release young friars to work with youth

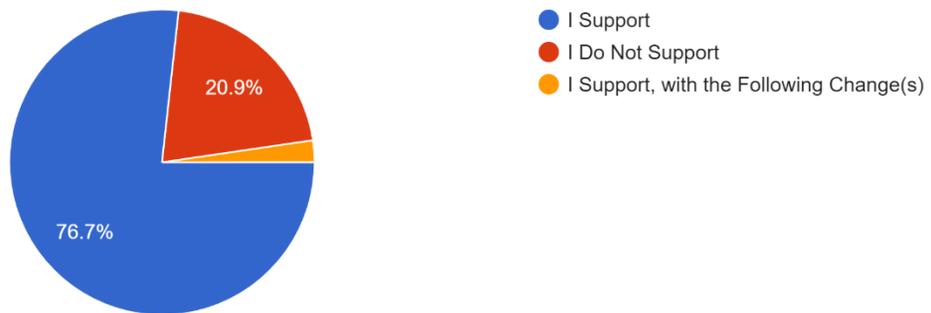
That we equip and devote our young capable friars who have an aptitude for it, to engage in ministering to the youth, transmitting Franciscan ideals that are in resonance with the secularized society, allowing to evolve nonconventional structures conducive for the effective operation of the ministry.

33 support
9 do not support
1 could support with changes

43 Total
Proposal # 8 is accepted for the purposes of this process.

Text #10: Release young friars to work with youth

43 responses



Test # 11: Evaluation of Provincial Sponsored Ministries

Whereas there is a notable concern in the Province for the aging and decrease in membership and the need to evaluate some current and historical ministries in the Province as to their future viability, the Provincial and Council should initiate a process of spiritual and prayerful discernment of where the Holy Spirit is moving us and inspiring us with regards to future choices. This process should lead to a discerning choice at the Provincial Chapter of 2026 to what Ministries we want to end or strengthen and continue over the next 12 years.

35 support

8 do not support

0 could support with changes

43 Total

Proposal #11 is accepted for the purposes of this process.

Test # 11: Evaluation of Provincial Sponsored Ministries

43 responses

