

***The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity
2023 Annual Report to the Member Orders***

To the Minister General and Chapter of the Order of Lutheran Franciscans (OLF), the Minister Provincial and Chapter of the Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF), Province of the Americas, the International Governing Body and Chapter of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, and the National Minister and Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order USA (OFS)

August 12, 2023

Sisters, brothers, and siblings, in the way of Sts. Francis and Clare,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.

As members of the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity, we offer you heartfelt greetings. We are grateful for your witness to the gospel of peace and reconciliation made known through the example of our forebears, St. Francis and St. Clare. On behalf of the Joint Committee, we offer this report on the work God has given us to do since our last report in June 2022.

It has been a time of transition for the Joint Committee, as we welcomed three new members: Ron Lacey, OFS (incoming Chair of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee), Linda R. Barley, OEF, and Verleah Kosloske, TSSF. We are grateful for their commitment to serve and the new perspectives they bring to our work together. They step into positions previously filled by Marie Bianca, OFS; Debra Snider-Scott, OEF; and Masud Ibn Syedullah, TSSF.

Following the profound disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Joint Committee shifted our focus a bit, leaning into the use of remote meeting technology and offering the first four sessions in what will be a five-part series of mini-conferences around the Elements of Franciscan Unity adopted by the Joint Committee in 2004. These mini-conferences were held on the following dates via Zoom:

- 1) Baptism Mini-Conference – September 2022
- 2) Vocation Mini-Conference – January 2023
- 3) Charism Mini-Conference – April 2023
- 4) Christ-Centered Spirituality Mini-Conference – July 2023
- 5) Prophetic Voice Mini-Conference – *to be held in January 2024*

The interest in these online mini-conferences has been spirit-filled, with thirty to sixty participants in each session. We intend to continue offering these types of opportunities to discuss the work we share as Franciscans, and are looking at topics which reach

beyond the Elements of Franciscan Unity and how they relate to our daily lives and shared charism.

We have also been preparing for our first in-person Mini-Conference on the Elements of Franciscan Unity since 2019, which will be held November 10-11, 2023, at the Capuchin Retreat Center in Washington Township, Michigan. It is our hope, as we have many times in years past, to bring together people from the region surrounding the conference center from our various orders to meet, worship, fellowship, and discuss the things that bind us together as Franciscans across ecclesial and other potential dividing lines, so that the work of rebuilding and renewing the church to which Francis and Clare devoted their lives might be made done again in our own time.

You may be interested to know that in our various meetings, we have also noticed something of a throughline that connects our Orders in a more urgent way. Each of our Franciscan communities has found ourselves drawn more deeply into the work of querying our histories, our churches, our orders, and the ways that racism, white supremacy, and colonization have damaged us and the communities affected by our life and witness. This includes communities in the United States (where our current Joint Committee members reside) and throughout the world. In keeping with that focus, each Order has taken some concrete step toward making anti-racism a focus of their identity and on-going formation, whether through changes to their foundational documents, intensive work spent in dialogue, changing formation materials, or making public statements that acknowledge and offer commitments to tangible action. The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity recognizes and embraces this work as an important part of our Franciscan witness, and we commit ourselves to it.

Preparations are underway for an in-person retreat to be held sometime in the fall of 2024 or the spring of 2025, depending on the availability of space at retreat venues. We have committed to holding this retreat in the Western United States; we have not held a retreat west of the Missouri River since 2014. More details about this event will be shared with our member orders as they become available.

Finally, we give thanks for the faithful work of the Rev. Masud Ibn Syedullah, TSSF, one of the founding members of the Joint Committee. Masud has completed his most recent term on the Joint Committee, and is now transitioning to focus on other vital ministries. We are grateful for his twenty-plus years of service to the cause of Franciscan unity. We will miss his presence and leadership among us, and we offer our prayers supporting his continuing work. May God continue to bless his efforts to rebuild Christ's church.

Respectfully submitted,

Br. Mark Molter, OLF, and Br. Andrew Chavanak, n/OLF
Co-Conveners, Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity